


A Possibly Unique Isis Head Bronze Coin of Cleopatra I (180-176 BC)

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Abstract. The Isis bronze coins of Ptolemaic Egypt, *SNG Cop.* 240 (Sv1154), 246 (Sv1233), 247 (Sv1234), - (Sv1235), 253 (Sv1237), 256 (Sv1238), 261 (Sv1240), 278 (Sv1382), 279 (Sv1384), and 332 (Sv1491), show on obverse a female head with corkscrew locks and a wreath of barley. Both features indicate the Egyptian-Greek goddess Isis-Demeter. A recently discovered example of an Isis coin with the obverse legend ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑΣ belongs to a group of coins (Sv1380-2 = *SNG Cop.* 276-7), all with  monogram and obverse legend for ‘Queen Cleopatra’, which were produced during the joint reign of Cleopatra I (180-176 BC) with her co-regent son Ptolemy VI, although this coin may have been produced in the reign of Cleopatra II with Ptolemy VI (176-145 BC). Various published views of the portraiture of Cleopatra I are reviewed but some uncertainty remains. However, the bronze Ptolemaic Isis coins of Alexandria represent Queen Cleopatra as Isis.

AN UNRECORDED² Ptolemaic bronze coin (Fig. 1, referred to hereafter as ISIS+QC) recently appeared on the market. It was incorrectly described as an example of a similar, and very common ‘Isis head’ coin (Fig. 2) produced in the time of Ptolemy VI (180-145 BC), and listed as no. 1384 in Svoronos’ standard catalogue of Ptolemaic coins.³ The important difference between these two coins is that ISIS+QC has an obverse legend ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑΣ referring to ‘Queen Cleopatra’. Ptolemy VI was associated with two queens, his mother (Cleopatra I, 180-176 BC) and his sister-wife (Cleopatra II, 176-145 BC). Before we consider which queen might be referenced, perhaps even portrayed, by the legend and image on ISIS+QC, the question arises whether or not ISIS+QC is an ‘Isis head’ coin, i.e., does the head portray Isis?

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³ J.N. Svoronos, *Τά νομίσματα του κράτους των Πτολεμαίων* (Athens, 1904, 1908), p. 226; German translation in vol. IV, *Die Münzen der Ptolemäer*. Svoronos lists 50 examples of 1384; *SNG Copenhagen* 279ff has 9. The new coin was offered in G. Hirsch Nachfolger (Munich), Auktion 236 (23 Sep. 2004), 2084, where it is described as ‘*SNG Cop.* 279ff’ = Sv1384 (Fig. 2). This cataloguing error arose from the obverse description of *SNG Cop.* 279ff, ‘*Obv.* As preceding’, which incorrectly indicates that *SNG Cop.* 279ff have the ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑΣ obverse legend of *SNG Cop.* 278 = Sv1382; see Fig. 5 below.



	
Fig. 1: 19.3 g, 30 mm (ISIS+QC) ³	Fig. 2: 16.2 g, 27 mm (Sv1384)
<i>Obv. legend:</i> ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑΣ	<i>Obv. legend:</i> None
Both with <i>Obv.</i> Female head right with long curls and wreath of barley; dotted border. <i>Rev.</i> Eagle left on thunderbolt, wings open; in left field, monogram [Α], ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ (of Ptolemy king); dotted border.	

	
Fig. 3: 15.8 g, 28 mm (Sv1234) ⁴	Fig. 4: 18.4 g, 26 mm (Sv1417) ⁵
<i>Obverse legend:</i> None	<i>Obverse legend:</i> None
<i>Obv.</i> Female head right with long curls and wreath of barley. <i>Rev.</i> Eagle l. on thunderbolt, wings open; ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ	<i>Obv.</i> Female head right with long curls and wreath of barley ending above in a symbol of Isis. <i>Rev.</i> Eagle r. on thunderbolt; ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ

Ptolemaic Isis head bronze coins

The editors of *SNG Copenhagen* (A. Kromann and O. Mørholm) describe the obverses of nine bronze coin types (or denominations) doubtfully as ‘Female head (Isis?)’.⁴ Le Rider and de Callataÿ go further in stating that the female heads on issues such as Svoronos 1232-1235, 1417, 1916, etc. (i.e., on coins such as Figs 1-4 here) are probably not Isis, for they have no attributes which allow them to be identified as such.⁵ However, the female heads on, for example, ISIS+QC, Sv1384, Sv1234 and Sv1417 (Figs 1-4), provide three types of evidence for the view that they do in fact represent Isis.

⁴ *SNG Cop.* 240 (Sv1154), 246 (Sv1233), 247 (Sv1234), none (Sv1235), 253 (Sv1237), 256 (Sv1238), 261 (Sv1240), 278 (Sv1382), 279 (Sv1384), and 332 (Sv1491); for Svoronos’ listings on the web see http://www.coin.com/images/dr/svoronos_book3.html.

⁵ G. Le Rider and F. de Callataÿ, *Les Séleucides et les Ptolémées* (Monaco, 2006), pp. 54 n.1, 58.

Characteristics of Isis



The female heads on Figs 1-4 each show a wreath of corn comprising a stalk (with leaves) of grain extending diagonally along the hairline and ending above the hair on the forehead (see example left, which has an unusually prominent wreath; on most coins of this general type the wreath is not as clear and is often worn down.). This wreath is similar to that on Greek coins that represent Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, whose symbol is a stalk of wheat or barley.⁶ Herodotus noted the relationship between the two goddesses: 'Isis, the Egyptian equivalent of Demeter' (Hist. 2.59), 'In Egyptian...Demeter is Isis' (2.156), and the wreath which appears on coins 1-4 was apparently transferred by the Ptolemaic Greeks to Egypt (and Syria).⁷ This distinctive wreath is present on all the female heads on coins that have been questioned by Kromann and Mørkholm. The wreath (and hairstyle, see below) has been taken as sufficient to indicate Isis in catalogues of such coins.⁸

The second informative feature of the above four coins is the hairstyle which is described as 'corkscrew locks' or as 'longues boucles'. This style is characteristic of Isis;⁹ on sculptures attributed to Ptolemaic queens the corkscrew style indicates assimilation to the goddess.¹⁰ Thus, like the wreath of corn, the corkscrew hairstyle appearing on Figs 1-4

⁶ See, e.g., C.M. Kraay and M. Hirmer, *Greek Coins* (New York, 1966), nos. 247, 249, 443, 444, 462, 463.

⁷ 'Les épis de blé, en particulier, apparaissent sur de nombreuses terres cuites isiaques et semblent faire partie intégrante du costume de la déesse', F. Dunand, *Le culte d'Isis dans le bassin oriental de la Méditerranée. Le culte d'Isis et les Ptolémées* (Leiden, 1973) vol. 1, p. 87. The Ptolemaic use of 'épis de blé' on seals to indicate a relationship of Isis and Demeter occurred before that use on coins Figs 1-4; the head of Berenike II (wife of Ptolemy III) is decorated with a wreath of wheat on several seals produced during 246-221 BC, P.A. Pantos, 'Bérénice II Démèter', *BCH* 111 (1987), p. 345.

⁸ Major catalogues since at least 1882 have accepted the wreath of grain (and distinctive hairstyle) as indicating Isis, e.g. R.S. Poole, *BMC Ptolemies* (London, 1882), pp. 78-9, 80, 93-4; Svoronos (1904, 1908); W. Weiser, *Katalog Ptolemäischer Bronzemünzen der Sammlung des Instituts für Altertumskunde der Universität zu Köln*, *Papyrologica Coloniensia* 23 (Opladen, 1995), nos 144, 147; H.-C. Noeske, *Die Münzen der Ptolemäer* (Frankfurt, 2000), nos 184-5, 201-7; R.A. Hazzard, *Ptolemaic Coins - An Introduction for Collectors* (Toronto, 1995), pp. 21, n. 25, 112.

⁹ For examples, see W. Needler, 'Some Ptolemaic sculpture in the Yale University Art Gallery', *Berytus* 9 (1949), pp. 138-9; V. Tran tam Tinh, *Essai sur le culte d'Isis à Pompéi* (Paris, 1964), pp. 70-1, gives extensive references to the Isis hairstyle on statues (stone, marble, bronze, silver), terracotta, gems, medallions, coins and lamps. E.J. Walters, 'Attic grave reliefs that represent women in the dress of Isis', *Hesperia* Suppl. 22 (1988), p. 12, reviews some examples of corkscrew locks. B.V. Bothmer in M.E. Cody (ed.), *Egyptian Art: Selected Writings of Bernard V. Bothmer* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 485-6, states that 'The use of corkscrew locks [on Ptolemaic Egyptian statuary] was thus perhaps inspired by a Greek prototype, but it was the Egyptian adaptation of the hairstyle that eventually pervaded the Hellenistic world'.

¹⁰ See S.-A. Ashton, *Ptolemaic Royal Sculpture from Egypt* (BAR Int. Ser. 923; Oxford, 2001), p. 45, no. 243 (with references to studies involving corkscrew locks and assimilation of Ptolemaic royal women to Isis), and D.B. Thompson, *Ptolemaic Oinochoai and Portraits in Faience* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 57-9. The evidence for assimilations of Ptolemaic queens to goddesses in written sources is reviewed by P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 236-46.


(and other Isis coins) is a well-recognized attribute of Isis (or Isis-Demeter),¹¹ though erroneous attempts have been made to identify some of the representations concerned as Libya.¹²

A third feature appears only on Fig. 4 (Sv1417), the coin of Antiochus IV of Syria related to his invasions of Egypt in 170-168 BC. It has a small *basileion* just above the top of the barley stalk on the forehead.¹³ This headdress is the most common symbol of Hellenistic

¹¹ C.G. Schwentzel, 'Les boucles d'Isis', in L. Bricault (éd.), *De Memphis à Rome, Actes du Ier Colloque international sur les études isiaques Poitiers – Futuroscope, 8-10 avril 1999* (Leiden 2000), p. 23-4, states that 'Dans les deux cas, la reine lagide est représentée en Isis, en raison des boucles, et en Déméter, grâce à la couronne d'épis de blé'. He treats these two characteristics (on coins Figs 2, 3 here) as representing 'Isis-Déméter'. For other such identifications of Isis-Demeter see G.S. Gasparro, *Sylloge Nummorum Religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae (SNRIS)* (Paris, 2008), pp. 176-7 (for an example of the coins involved see Gasparro, *De Memphis à Rome*, p. 44, Fig. 3a-b); see also M. Malaise, 'Le Problème de l'Hellénisation d'Isis', *De Memphis à Rome*, p. 7-8.

¹² 'Isis locks' and 'Libya locks' both have corkscrew curls but are distinctly different hairstyles. Le Rider and de Callatay, *Séleucides et Ptolémées*, p. 54 n. 1 state that 'On a parfois reconnu la tête d'Isis sur des bronzes (par ex., Svoronos, *Monnaies des Ptolémées* (1904), nos 1232-1235, 1417, 1916, etc.); les représentations n'ont aucun attribut qui permette de les identifier comme des images d'Isis; ce sont peut-être des représentations de la Libye, comme on l'a suggéré'. Le Rider 'Antiochos IV', p. 19 n. 8, commenting on some of the same issues of Alexandrian bronzes with the Isis hairdressing, states '... la tête dite d'Isis (sans *basileion* ni coiffure caractéristique) que portent plusieurs émissions de bronze d'Alexandrie, a été décrite aussi comme la tête de la Libye.' (Note, incidentally, that, although Svoronos labelled Sv1916 as an Isis coin, he regarded it as a barbarous imitation. Such coins have little or no relationship to Isis coins produced by the regular Egyptian mint; see Sv1916 on Pl. 64a, no. 6 at <http://www.coin.com/images/dr/svoronos/svc064p001p.html>). However, E.S.G. Robinson had settled the question in 1927 by showing that in Cyrenaica (the eastern coastal region of Libya) coins were produced with distinctly different hairstyles for Isis and for Libya: Cyrenian coins with corkscrew locks bound with a cord represented Libya (*BMC Cyrenaica*, pp. 80-4, nos 34-54, Pl. XXXI, nos 1-15 and p. ccl), while another Cyrenian coin type used a different corkscrew hairstyle and a wreath of corn-ears to depict an Isis similar to the image on coins produced in Egypt such as Sv1384 (*BMC Cyrenaica*, p. 57, no. 268, Pl. XXV, no. 4, pp. cxviii-cxix). Walters, 'Attic grave reliefs', pp. 18-19, no. 93, also noted the differences: 'The corkscrew locks of Isis have been called Libyan locks but the term is inappropriate, as the two types of locks differ in shape and arrangement. The locks of Isis are long, reaching the shoulders, while short ones frame the face and are often set in tiers. So-called Libyan locks are sharply pointed and of equal length arranged on a slope starting with the level of the chin (*BMC Ptolemies* p. 38, Pl. VI, no. 8)'; see also *BMC Cyrenaica*, Pl. XXX, nos 12-15. Thus, Isis and Libya can be distinguished by different hairstyles and by the presence or absence of a wreath of grain; the bronze coins of Alexandria (i.e., those in n. 4 above, including Figs 1-4) definitely represent Isis, not Libya. Unlike Isis, Libya was mainly a geographical personification. In myth she was the daughter of Epaphos, king of Egypt, and according to one source was the first woman to give her name to a country: M.-A. Zagdoun, *LIMC* (1992), VI 1, pp. 284-6.

¹³ A. Blasius (see below) accepts that coin types 2, 3, 4, and 5 show the characteristic 'Kopf der Isis' with the 'übliche Ährenkranz'. However, he contrasts the Egyptian Isis coins (Figs 2, 3, 5) with the Syrian Isis coin (Fig. 4) and he emphasizes the absence of the *basileion* on the former: while the Syrian coin 4 definitely shows (by the *basileion*, the Egyptian symbol of Isis) that Isis is indicated, the Egyptian coins 2, 3, 5 lack this definite indication of Isis, and show only a wreath of corn (i.e., 'griechischer Haarschmuck') which is a Greek symbol of Demeter. The implication seems to be that the wreath symbol on coins 2, 3, 5 (and, by extension, Isis+QC) indicates no more than Demeter. However, the absence of the *basileion* on an Isis head (that Blasius describes as 'Isis mit ihren typischen Korkenzieherlocken') does not show that the image is not Isis. Others (e.g., see n. 11) view the corkscrew coiffure of Isis with a wreath of corn as



Isis, and takes the form , consisting of two vertical plumes above a sun disk flanked by the horns of Hathor.

Thus the female heads whose identification as Isis was questioned or denied by Kromann/Mørkholm and Le Rider/de Callatay show widely recognized attributes of Isis. By their wreaths of grain, hairstyle, and (in one case) headdress, Figs 1-4 (ISIS+QC, Sv1384, Sv1233, Sv1417), together with all the other coins listed in n. 4, are undoubtedly 'Isis head' coins.¹⁴ In addition to representing Isis by a characteristic female head, coin ISIS+QC also has a legend that refers to a Queen Cleopatra. Which Cleopatra is this?

Dating / Attribution of ISIS+QC and other Isis head bronze coins











Fig. 5: 3.25 g, 17 mm

The coin most closely related to ISIS+QC is a small bronze which, like ISIS+QC, has on obverse an Isis head with the surrounding legend ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑΣ (Sv1382, Fig. 5, left). Like ISIS+QC, Fig. 5 has an eagle reverse with a  monogram, which appears in a number of variant forms on a wide variety of coins produced by Ptolemy VI and his co-regents.¹⁵ Fig. 5 has been universally attributed¹⁶ to Cleopatra I and the several similarities with ISIS+QC make it likely that ISIS+QC is also a coin of Cleopatra I during her co-regency (180-176 BC) with her very young son Ptolemy VI. Coin 2 (Fig. 2, Sv1384) is similarly related to ISIS+QC in that it has the same Isis-type head, the same reverse type of eagle, and the same 

indicating the Egyptian-Greek goddess Isis-Demeter, i.e., Isis (with her Egyptian hair style augmented by a wreath indicating a relationship to Demeter). For Blasius' view see pp. 6-7 of his pdf 'Die ägyptisierende Münzprägung Antiochos' IV. Epiphanes im Kontext des 6. Syrischen Krieges' found through Google using the words [Blasius pdf die ägyptisierende Münzprägung](#) or at the address

http://www.uni-giessen.de/cms/fbz/fb04/institute/altertum/philologie/dokumentationen/ikonotexte-duale-mediensituationen/ikonotexte_programm/die-ägyptisierende-münzprägung

¹⁴ However, L. Bricault, *SNRIS*, p. 85 and nos. 16, 17, puts aside the long 'boucles' that many others recognize as an indicator of Isis and he suggests that 'boucles libyques' identify Demeter. He prefers the view that the female image on coins Figs 2, 3, 5 show merely portraits of Cleopatras I, II, or III.

¹⁵ The usually form is , but , , , ,  also occur (see *BMC Ptolemies*, pp. 78, 89, 106). Weiser, *Katalog Ptolemäischer*, p. 90, suggests that it stands for ΠΙΠΙΑΛ(ος), Hippalos, the *epistrategos* (the Ptolemaic administrator in the chora) during 176-c.169 BC in the time of Ptolemy VI (and probably somewhat earlier); see J.D. Thomas, *The Epistrategos in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt* (Opladen, 1973), Part 1, pp. 26-8, 77, 81, 87-90. Svoronos IV, col. 293, suggested that the letters  on Sv1497 indicate Hippalos; Regling (col. 495) agreed. The use of  would resemble that of the initials **EYA** on some bronze coins (Sv1396-1402) of the same period. **EYA** is generally recognized as standing for Eulaios who not only controlled all Egypt c.176-169 BC, but also Ptolemy VI, aged about 10 at the death of his mother, Cleopatra I, in 176 BC; see, e.g., O. Mørkholm, 'Eulaios and Lenaios', *Classica et Mediaevalia* 22 (1961), p. 32, no. 5, pp. 37-8.

¹⁶ F. Feuardent, *Collection Giovanni di Demetrio, Égypte ancienne* (Paris, 1869), p. 70, no. 258; *BMC Ptolemies*, p. 78, no. 1; Svoronos IV, no. 1382; K. Regling in Svoronos IV, col. 491 (repr. from *ZfN* 25 (1906), pp. 344 ff.); *SNG Cop.* 278. A search of the ANS database using MANTIS at numismatics.org/search/ with the search term 'Sv.1382' yields four examples of Fig. 5 listed as 'Cleopatra regency' = Cleopatra I.

monogram. However, it lacks the QC legend. The absence of the legend, the poor quality of many examples of Fig. 2 coins, their generally reduced weight and their survival in great numbers, all suggest that they continued in production,¹⁷ without the QC legend, into the time of Cleopatra II, after the death of Cleopatra I in 176 BC.¹⁸

To judge from the relationships given above (and in n. 18 below), the first Isis head bronze coins were produced by Ptolemy V (204-180 BC), probably after his marriage in 194 to Cleopatra I, daughter of the Syrian king Antiochus III.¹⁹ They are Sv1233, 1234 (Fig. 3), 1235, 1237, 1238, and 1491 = (1234, Fig. 3). The unrecorded coin ISIS+QC (Fig. 1) and Sv1382 (Fig. 5) were probably produced by Cleopatra I during her co-regency with her son Ptolemy VI (180-176 BC).²⁰ Coins of type Sv1384 (Fig. 2) were then produced as a continuation of ISIS+QC (but without the QC legend) at least into the early part of the reign of Cleopatra II with Ptolemy VI (176-145 BC).

The presentation above indicates that coin ISIS+QC, probably of Cleopatra I, represents both a queen (from the obverse legend) and the goddess Isis (from the attributes of the female head).²¹ If ISIS+QC represents Cleopatra I, what does it mean when the goddess Isis is represented by the same image?

¹⁷ M. Thompson, 'A Ptolemaic bronze hoard from Corinth', *Hesperia* 20 (1951), p. 358, states that it is virtually certain that Fig. 2 coins (Sv1384) were produced by Cleopatra I or by her husband, Ptolemy V. Coins like Sv1384 with the **A** monogram have consistently been attributed to *after* the death of Ptolemy V, i.e., to Cleopatra I or II (see e.g., n. 16). For the occurrence of the monogram on some other coins of the period see <http://ptolemaic.net/coinex/1datingptolemaiccoins.htm>

¹⁸ There are also coins of Ptolemy VI in a larger/heavier denomination without the QC legend but with the same Isis obverse and same eagle reverse types as the Isis coin Fig. 5 with the QC legend. These coins (Sv1154, *SNG Cop.* 240-2) were attributed by Svoronos to Ptolemy IV (221-205 BC). However, M.J. Price, Appendix J, 'Coins', in *The Sacred Animal Necropolis at N. Saqqâra* (London, 1981), nos 98-113, p. 159, reattributed them to Ptolemy VI (i.e., after 180 BC). Another Isis coin (Sv1491) attributed to Ptolemy VIII by Svoronos has been reattributed by H.-Chr. Noeske, 'Gegenstempel auf Ptolemäischen bronzemünzen', *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo*, 51 (1995), p. 198, to Ptolemy V, and is identical in obverse and reverse type to Sv1233-4 (*SNG Cop.* 246-8; see Fig. 3 = Sv1234); Price, 'Saqqâra', pp. 158-9, also assigned Sv1491 before Ptolemy VI, i.e., to Ptolemy V. My inspection of coins labelled Sv1491 at Oxford (Ashmolean Museum) and London (BM) showed that they are type Sv1233-4, i.e., they either show sufficient parts of a wreath of grain (not a diadem as incorrectly given by *SNG Cop.* 332 = Sv1491) or are too worn to determine.

¹⁹ For the historical background see J. Whitehorne, *Cleopatras* (London, 1994), pp. 80-2, 205.

²⁰ The ISIS+QC coin joins a set of coins (Sv1380-2 = *SNG Cop.* 274-8) which all have the 'Queen Cleopatra' obverse legend, but some of which have a different obverse type: Zeus Ammon on Sv1380 (*SNG Cop.* 274-5) with a two-eagle reverse; deified Alexander in elephant headdress on Sv1381 (*SNG Cop.* 276-7) with a reverse identical to that of ISIS+QC. Although the obverses of these coins do not depict the queen, that does not of course mean that the female head on Fig. 5 (and on ISIS+QC) represents only Isis and not the queen; see the contrary comment of K. Jenkins about Fig. 5, reported by G.M.A. Richter, *The Portraits of the Greeks* (London, 1965), vol. 3, p. 265.

²¹ Although there is general agreement that corkscrew locks are an attribute of Isis (see n. 9), it has been suggested that this was true only in Roman imperial times, and not in second century Ptolemaic Egypt. S.-A. Ashton, *The Last Queens of Egypt* (London, 2003), pp. 88, 90, states that the '... corkscrew hairstyle in Egypt is commonly described as a representation of a queen that is associated with the goddess Isis. There is nothing, however, to indicate that this particular coiffure was associated with the goddess until the Roman

Cleopatra I as Isis

In his review of the assimilations of Ptolemaic queens to Isis, Fraser reported that there was no evidence for Cleopatra I's assimilation to Isis, on coins or elsewhere.²² However, this view was based mainly on the absence of textual evidence and on old numismatic references such as *BMC Ptolemies*, in which the dating of Isis head coins is uncertain. The currently accepted attributions of Isis coins are considerably different and are now well established; the prevailing view is that the combination of a wreath of grain, corkscrew locks and the QC legend on Fig. 5 (and, by extension, coin ISIS+QC), indicate a relationship of Cleopatra I with Isis.

The associations of Ptolemaic queens with Isis are well established from at least the time of Arsinoe II's elevation to a goddess (c.270 BC).²³ There is textual evidence that Cleopatra I's granddaughter, Cleopatra III (queen during 141-106 BC), was considered to be Isis as a living goddess; she apparently believed herself to be Isis.²⁴ With the previous assimilations of earlier queens and the total assimilation of later queens,²⁵ it seems that the mutual liking of Cleopatra I with her subjects would promote the honour of association with Isis.²⁶ It seems quite likely that, after her rapid deification as an Egyptian goddess, following her marriage in 194 BC to Ptolemy V, Cleopatra I was generally thought to be associated with Isis.²⁷


Since it would be generally accepted that the ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑΣ legend is associated with the female image on QC+ISIS and since the wreath of barley on the image is associated with Isis-Demeter, then an association of Queen Cleopatra I with Isis is established. What the association actually means is more subjective; is it simply a representation, likeness, a similarity, assimilation, or even identity? At least the description

period.'; see also Ashton, *Royal Sculpture*, pp. 51-3. Whether or not ISIS+QC indicates Cleopatra I or II, the correlation of the wreath of grain and corkscrew locks on the many Isis coins that began production shortly after 200 BC shows that this hairstyle was already an attribute of Isis by at least the early second century BC.

²² 'The portrait [on Fig. 5 and other Isis coins] may not be that of Cleopatra, the identification with Isis is also doubtful, and there is no further evidence of association [of Cleopatra I with Isis]': Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, pp. 243, 396, n. 431.

²³ For Arsinoe II, see G. Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (London and New York, 2001), p. 103; Thompson, *Oinochoai*, pp. 67, 74. For Berenike II, see Hölbl, *History*, p. 105; Thompson, *Oinochoai*, pp. 61-2, 165-6 n. 122.

²⁴ Hölbl, *History*, p. 287-8; Ashton, *Last Queens*, pp. 118-19.

²⁵ Cleopatra III (141-106 BC) was referred to by name as Isis, i.e., she claimed total assimilation as the living embodiment of Isis; see n. 24. Cleopatra VII (51-30 BC) was identified as Isis on coins as early as 47 BC when she was shown with the Isis symbol  on a silver drachm dated to her year 6: *BMC Ptolemies*, p. 122, 1, Pl. 30, 4; T.V. Buttrey, 'Thea Neotera on coins of Antony and Cleopatra', *ANSMN* 6 (1954), p. 99. Cleopatra VII dressed and acted as Isis at various times (Plutarch, 'Antony', 54) and was acknowledged to be Isis-Aphrodite and Isis-Regina: Hölbl, 'History', p. 290; Ashton, *Last Queens*, pp. 119-20.

²⁶ For this view see Whitehorne, *Cleopatras*, pp. 84-5.

²⁷ For her deification see W. Huß, *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit 332-30 v. Chr.* (Munich, 2001), pp. 529-30, n. 8.

of Isis coins given in early catalogues,²⁸ i.e., that they represent a ‘Queen Cleopatra as Isis’, seems to be appropriate for ISIS+QC and for all the other Egyptian Isis head coins Figs 2, 3, and 5 (and including others listed in n. 4).

None of the female image Isis bronze coins of Egypt, except ISIS+QC and Fig. 5, have an obverse legend that directly signifies a queen. Other than those exceptional coins, probably produced early in the reign of Cleopatra I, there was apparently no need to go to the effort of inscribing the name ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΙΑΤΡΑΣ on the dies because both the wreath of grain and the Isis locks were sufficient to represent a queen as Isis.

Coin Portraits of Cleopatra I

Before a unique gold coin appeared in 1978 (see below), the only known coin with a female head surrounded by a ‘Queen Cleopatra’ legend was the small bronze coin Fig. 5, which has been widely regarded as presenting a portrait of Cleopatra I (see n. 28). Even when the QC legend was absent, as with Figs 2 and 3, the female head has been taken to be a portrait of Cleopatra I.²⁹

The female image on coin 5 was said to have some portrait-like features³⁰ and has been used to date medallions, faience oinochoai (wine jugs) and a cameo showing female figures to the time of Cleopatra I.³¹ Others have maintained that the image shows no individualistic signs or iconographic traits.³² Although early catalogues state that the images on bronze Isis head coins (Figs 2, 3, and those in n. 4) show Cleopatra I, modern catalogues³³ do not mention Cleopatra and assign these images only to Isis.



With the discovery, in 1978, of the unique gold coin³⁴ with obverse legend ΚΛΕΟΠΙΑΤΡΑΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ, now in the British Museum (see left), coin 5 has apparently been relegated as a possible

²⁸ Feuarent, *Demetrio*, p. 70, n. 258; *BMC Ptolemies*, p. 78, no. 1; L. Forrer, *Portraits of Royal Ladies on Greek Coins* (Chicago, 1969), p. 26, reprinted from *NC* 1938. See also n. 31 below.

²⁹ For Sv1384 (Fig. 2) see Feuarent, *Demetrio*, p. 70, no. 267; Hazzard, *Ptolemaic Coins*, pp. 9-10, Fig. 21, p. 114, c1109. For Sv1233ff (Fig. 3) see Feuarent, *Demetrio*, p. 70, nos 259-66; *BMC Ptolemies*, pp. 93-4, nos 67-77; B.V. Head, *HN* (1887 edition), p. 716.

³⁰ Richter, *Portraits* (1965), p. 265.

³¹ Thompson, *Oinochoai*, pp. 61, 77, 166, 200-201. J. Charbonneau, ‘Sur la signification et la date de la tasse Farnèse’, *MMAI* 50 (1958), pp. 97-100, related the female image on coin 5 to a female image on the ‘Farnese cup’ in order to assign this large cameo to the time of Cleopatra I. For comments on these attributions see Whitehorne, *Cleopatras*, p. 218, no. 7-5 and Huß, *Ägypten*, p. 539, n. 13.

³² H. Kyrieleis, *Bildnisse der Ptolemäer* (Berlin, 1975), p. 114. R.R.R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (Oxford, 1988), p. 76.

³³ See the Isis head coins in Weiser, *Katalog Ptolemäischer*, nos 144, 147; Noeske, *Münzen Ptolemäer*, nos 184-5, 201-7. These collections contain no examples of the rare Fig. 5, so there was no discussion of portraiture on a coin showing the legend ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΙΑΤΡΑΣ.

³⁴ Bank Leu, Auktion 20, Zurich (25 Apr. 1978), 180; also illustrated, e.g., in S. Walker and P. Higgs (eds), *Cleopatra of Egypt* (London and Princeton, 2001), p. 84, no. 77, and in G.M.A. Richter, *The Portraits of the Greeks* (Oxford, 1984), p. 234, nos. 211, 212. The reverse shows her son, Ptolemy VI, with legend ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ and the Α monogram.

portrait of Cleopatra I; instead there has been unquestioned acceptance of the gold coin as giving a 'certain' portrait of Cleopatra I.³⁵ However, the female image on the obverse of this coin, a veiled head wearing a stephane, is a revival of the portrait style originally used for Arsinoe II (struck c.261-240 BC). It is a type identical to that on gold coins produced *after* the death of Cleopatra I (i.e., in the time of Ptolemy VI with Cleopatra II, 176-145 BC).³⁶ How can it be so certain that this gold coin was produced during the time of Cleopatra I (180-176 BC) and that it gives her portrait? The view that the female image on the BM coin is not just another stereotypical Arsinoe representation as produced in the time of Cleopatra II is based on the youthful quality of the female image (this seems to be the basis of the attribution in the Leu catalogue (n. 34)). Thus the attribution to Cleopatra I, who was about 28 at the time of her death,³⁷ is based mainly on a subjective view of portraiture. It is possible that the BM gold coin was produced in the time of Cleopatra II, after the death of Cleopatra I, and that it gives a portrait of Cleopatra II who was a young girl when her mother died and who was deified at about that time. It could, for example, commemorate the politically important marriage in 176 BC of Cleopatra II to her brother, Ptolemy VI, whose image is on the reverse; he was about 10 in 176 BC, and Cleopatra II was perhaps slightly older, although this is not clearly established.³⁸ Thus, an argument in favour of seeing Cleopatra I on the gold coin that is based solely on the youthfulness of the portrait could equally, if not better, apply to Cleopatra II. However, it is important to note that the best argument for identifying the female image on the gold coin as Cleopatra I has apparently not hitherto been made, namely that if the image represented Cleopatra II, her probably lower status would have caused her to be placed on the reverse rather than the obverse. In similar vein, one might note the importance and power of Cleopatra I, who was the first Ptolemaic queen to take precedence before a male king in the royal protocol, and who prevented a war with Syria that did occur after her death; this suggests, at least from a modern perspective, that she deserved the production of gold coins. Thus until and unless conclusive evidence for a date later than the death of Cleopatra I in 176 is found, the conventional attribution of the BM gold coin to Cleopatra I should stand.

³⁵ H. Kyrieleis, *Ein Bildnis des Königs Antiochos IV von Syrien* (Berlin, 1980), pp. 17-20; Whitehorne, *Cleopatras*, p. 83; Smith, *Royal Portraits*, pp. 76, 94, Pl. 75-16; Richter, *Portraits* (1984), p. 234; P.E. Stanwick, *Portraits of the Ptolemies* (Austin, 2002), pp. 59, 223, Fig. 228; Hazzard, *Ptolemaic Coins*, p. 9.

³⁶ The type of gold coins originally produced for Arsinoe II after her death c.270 BC was revived for several later queens; see, e.g., G.K. Jenkins, *Ancient Greek Coins* (London, 1972), pp. 236-9, Figs 564-6 (Arsinoe II) and 568 (Berenike II). The resemblance of the head on the BM gold coin to that on coins of Arsinoe II is mentioned in Walker and Higgs, *Cleopatra of Egypt*, p. 84. Such revivals for Cleopatras I or II are the undated coins Sv1241-2, 1374, and 1498-9 (K-marked coins); the coins specifically dated to the time of Cleopatra II are Sv1442, 1444, 1449, 1452, 1464, 1468, and 1470. These can be viewed at http://www.coin.com/images/dr/svoronos_text.html (by Sv number) and http://www.coin.com/images/dr/svoronos_plate.html (by plate numbers 40b, 47a, 49b, 50a).

³⁷ Cleopatra I was about 10 when she was married to Ptolemy V (aged 16) in 194/3 BC. At the time of his murder in 180 BC she was about 24 and she died in 176 BC aged about 28. For the historical background see Hölbl, *History*, pp. 140-3; Whitehorne, *Cleopatras*, pp. 85-90.

³⁸ See Whitehorne, *Cleopatras*, pp. 89 n. 1 and 90-1; Hölbl, *History*, pp. 142-3; Huß, *Ägypten*, p. 541.

With regard to portraiture on ISIS+QC, the general response of a modern viewer of this coin, when told that the legend is ‘Queen Cleopatra’ and that the coin was produced in the time of the first Cleopatra, would be that the image is meant to show her real features and is indeed a portrait. The response of an ancient viewer would probably have been the same. However, successful portraiture on an individual ancient coin depends on a series of factors unknown to us, i.e., the intent to produce a portrait rather than just a representation, sufficient knowledge of the queen’s features, and the skill of the die cutter. On this basis each of the three coins with a QC legend (ISIS+QC, Fig. 5, the BM gold coin) could represent Cleopatra I but none necessarily give her portrait.

However, my subjective view is that the female head shown on ISIS+QC has some individualistic signs expected of a portrait. If ISIS+QC and the gold coin each supply life-like portraits, and if the gold coin shows Cleopatra I, then ISIS+QC portrays a very different and older individual who could be Cleopatra II. If another example of ISIS+QC becomes known,³⁹ and if it is from a different obverse die yet with the same basic portrait, the consistency of imagery would tend to indicate a portrait of Cleopatra II. However, until this happens, the several characteristics shared by ISIS+QC and coins of Cleopatra I (as shown above) indicate that this bronze coin is a unique example of the ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑΣ coinage of Cleopatra I.

³⁹ Smith, *Royal Portraits*, p. 109, n. 2, cautions against conclusions drawn from ‘looking at single coin portraits’.