

Iconic Objects: Bust of Cleopatra

Royal Ontario Museum

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[Podcast begins with music and a close-up of Toronto on a satellite map; rapid zoom out to show the entire spinning earth and zoom in on map of Egypt to focus on Cleopatra's Sunken Palace; animated white text and a red marker slides down the screen to indicate the exact location on the map; music is audible throughout the introduction]

Roberta Shaw: Hello, I'm Roberta Shaw from the Royal Ontario Museum *[cut to medium view of boats docked on the water of the Mediterranean]* and I'm here in Egypt *[cut to view of a group of women about to cross a busy street in the Egyptian city of Alexandria; pans to show cars in the street]* to tell you the story of the ROM's Bust of Cleopatra.

[Music becomes louder; cut to high angle view of the Alexandria's coastline; cut to high angle view of a busy city street at dusk]

Roberta: Here I am, standing on the site of the ancient lighthouse of Alexandria in Egypt. Behind me, across the water was where Cleopatra's palace complex was situated. It is now under water and it is from this area that the ROM's statue of Cleopatra very likely originated.

[Music]

Roberta: The ROM's statue of Cleopatra was purchased by the ROM's founder, C.T. Currelly while he was working in Egypt almost a hundred years ago. It is most likely that it came from the Great Palace area, which is situated behind me on the other side of this harbour.

The statue probably stood outside some important municipal building, perhaps a temple, perhaps even the famous Alexandrian library.

[Music]

Roberta: Recent research has suggested that the ROM's statue of Cleopatra forms a part of a pair. Our Cleopatra is dressed as an Egyptian queen, while the sister statue, which exists here, in Alexandria, is dressed as a goddess.

[Music]

Another interesting feature of this statue is the back pillar, which continues up the back and into the crown. There are only two other statues with this particular feature and both of those have been identified as Cleopatra.

What we have with the ROM's statue then, is a very early Cleopatra. The facial features are an idealized version of a very young queen beginning to assert her power over the whole country of Egypt.

So after a hundred years, we are able to say that the ROM possesses a statue of the great Cleopatra, the last pharaoh of Egypt.

[Music]