

## UNPUBLISHED MARBLE HEAD OF SERAPIS KEPT IN THE GRAND EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

**Khaled Essam Ismail**

Archaeologist at the Grand Egyptian Museum, Giza, Egypt

[Khaledessamismail@gmail.com](mailto:Khaledessamismail@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

This paper deals with a marble head of Serapis, kept in the Grand Egyptian Museum (Gem.34206). The head was found in Diospolis Magna (modern Luxor); its height is about 46cm, while the width is 32cm. The head is well-preserved. It is carved in marble. The head is broken off from the bottom part of the neck, which indicates that the head probably belonged to a colossal statue of Serapis. The artistic treatment of the head, in particular the hairstyle above the forehead and also the beard, plus the lack of information concerning the find-spot of the head in Luxor which make it difficult to determine the exact date and archeological context.

All comparative examples presented in this paper indicate that this head probably represents a head of the god Serapis. The paper discusses the problem of the find-spot of the head. It suggests that the head was probably found in the site of the Roman camp.

### KEYWORDS

Luxor, Serapis, Anastole, Hadrian, Roman period

### INTRODUCTION:

The subject of this article is an unpublished marble head kept in the collection of The Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM.34206). It was recently moved to the Museum from the Abu El-Goud storerooms in Luxor. According to the registers of the Abu El-Goud

### المخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية دراسة رأس رخامية غير منشور للمعبود سيرابيس، محفوظ في مخازن المتحف المصري الكبير تحت رقم سجل Gem.34206. لقد عثر على هذا الرأس في مدينة ديوس بوليس ماجنا (الأقصر)، ارتفاعها حوالي ٤٦سم، وعرضها حوالي ٣٢سم. تبدو الرأس في حالة جيدة من الحفظ، بالرغم من وجود كسر واضح عند الجزء السفلي من العنق ما يشير الى انها كانت جزء من تمثال كامل للمعبود سيرابيس. إن المعالجة الفنية التي استخدمت في نحت هذا الرأس وبالأخص في اسلوب معالجة خصلات الشعر فوق الجبهة، وكذلك شعر اللحية تعد تحديا كبيرا عند محاولة وضع تأريخ دقيق لهذا الرأس، علاوة على قلة المعلومات فيما يخص مكان العثور على الرأس في الاقصر والذي يمثل اشكالية اخرى عند محاولة تحديد سياقها الاثرى والعصر الذي ينتمي اليه.

اثبتت الدراسة من خلال مقارنة هذا الراس بالنماذج المماثلة أن الراس على الأرجح تخص الاله سيرابيس، كما ناقشت الدراسة اشكالية موقع الاكتشاف، وتقتوح أنه من المحتمل تكون الرأس قد عثر عليها في موقع المعسكر الروماني.

### الكلمات الدالة

الاقصر، سيرابيس، اناستولي، هادريان، العصر الروماني

storeroom, the head is said to have been found close to the chapels of Mut and Khonsou at Luxor temple. The object probably represents a head of Serapis based on the facial features and the pattern of hairstyle and beard-addressing.

The head is well-preserved. It is carved in marble. It has a maximum height of 46 cm, and maximum width 32 cm. The head is broken off from the bottom part of the neck, which indicates that it was probably designed to be fitted into a large statue of the Sarapis. The portions of the hair and beard are slightly mutilated, particularly on both sides of the face and in the back. The tips of the strands of the beard are slightly damaged (figs. 1-3).

#### **THE DESCRIPTION OF THE HEAD:**

The head shows a mature man. The forehead and cheeks are modeled. The cheekbones are high and rounded in shape and have smoothly merged with the beard. The eyebrow is quite prominent and arched. The deity has a broad nose. The eyes are wide-open with prominent eyelids. The mouth is small and slightly opened with no teeth visible. The upper lip below the mustache is thin, and separated from the lower lip. The lower lip protrudes more than the upper lip. The heavy mustache is long and thick and protrudes in front of the cheeks. It falls down below the corners of the mouth and covers the upper lip completely, and passes below the middle of the nose.

The hair is parted in the center on the top of the forehead and slopes upward in linear strands, which are tight and drawn to the sides and backward, while the long wavy curls hang on the sides of the face. It seems that the hair on the back of the head is less modeled. The beard is divided into two halves. It is bushy and composed of small curls. The beard shows traces of hollowing and carved in high relief, but it is not carefully executed and in some cases it is terminated by drill holes in the middle. The beard was systematically carved on the lower part of the chin and connected to the hanging curls on both sides.

#### **SUBJECT AND ICONOGRAPHY:**

This object appears to represent a divine head, probably that of Serapis, although the *Kalathos* is missing. Nevertheless, the treatment of the hairstyle above the forehead with the strands of wavy curls dropping on the side of the face, in addition to the execution of mustache and beard-addressing, are consistent with a typical and carefully executed head of Serapis.

The distinguishing characteristic of this head is the treatment of the hairstyle above the forehead. Hornbostel divided the images of Serapis into two main types according to the hairstyle, the "*Anastoletypus*" and "*Fransentypus*" (Hornbostl 1973, 133f). It seems that our head belongs to the first type. The "*Anastoletypus*" is recognized by parted and upraised hair above the forehead towards the sides, which are frequently found in the Hellenistic cultic statues of Serapis in Alexandria (Hornbostl 1973, 81).

The head resembles the representation of the prototype of Zeus of Otricoli which was adopted by the sculptor Bryaxis in the late fourth B.C (Amelung 1903, 198). George Lippold noted the similarity between the representation of Zeus of Otricoli and Serapis in terms of the treatment of hairstyle (Lippold 1925, 123). It seems that the sculptors in Alexandria were inclined to represent Serapis in the tradition of the Hellenic images of Zeus, in a form which is basically derivative from his early canonical statues in Alexandria (Castiglione 1958, 30). This image was considered one of the cultic models for representing Serapis during the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Milleker 1958, 122).

The cultural context of the sloping hairstyle above the forehead in our head is closer to the Bryaxian patterns from the Hellenistic age. We can compare the Luxor head with other similar examples in terms of the standard of hair -style. The head of Zeus (Jupiter) of Otricoli from the Vatican museum (Amelung 1903, 203), the head of Zeus from the Naples Museum (fig.4) (Amelung 1903, 201), and the head of Mausolos from the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus kept in the British museum (fig.5) (Lippold 1925, 124) are good examples for this comparison.

These examples can be seen to have followed carefully the Bryaxian style and to show the same attributes in the form of the hairstyle. It is noteworthy that that the Greek "*Anastoletypus*" was a common style in the representation of Serapis during the Ptolemaic period and Roman period. It seems that that the sculptors reused this Alexandrian pattern during the second century AD, which indicates they borrowed the old canonical attributes of the Hellenistic Serapis during the Roman period (Stmabugh 1972, 25).

The Greek documents from Egypt point to the frequent use of the "*Anastoletypus*" by Alexandrian sculptors during the Roman period in forming the cult statues of Serapis (Malaise 1975, 385). The head of Serapis appears on Alexandrian coins under the reigns of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, and appear to the *Anastoletypus* where the hairstyle is raised upwards above the forehead to both sides under the *Kalathos* (Geissen 1978, 140, No.1150). It seems that sculptors adopted these images of Serapis during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

A huge number of Serapis representations have been collected and published in recent years (for more details about the published representations of Serapis, See: (Kater-Sibbes 1973). Hornbostel has published different materials of Serapis representations relevant to the *Anastole* type which date to the Roman era (Hornbostl 1973, 181-190, Taf.LXI-LXXV.). This vast number of copies demonstrates the existence of the *Anastoletypus* during this period.

Bergquist suggests that there are several representations of Serapis that show the standard iconography of the sloping hair above the forehead, symmetrical mustache, beard with mostly short curls, and vertical undifferentiated beard in the middle portion rather than carefully separating from the bottom (Bergquist 1978, 125). Amelung (Amelung 1903, 197), and Hill (Hill 1946, 63) linked the carving style of beard-dressing to the god Serapis.

Hornbostel remarked that in various materials used for the cult statues and heads of Serapis the heavy, short, thick, and curly beard in front of the neck is a distinguishing characteristic of Serapis's beard in objects that were mostly produced in Egypt during the second century AD (Hornbostl 1973, 82f).

The beard in Luxor head seems worn. It shows the drilled heavy, thick, very curly coils, and not a symmetrically parted beard, so that in profile there appear to be two layers of the beard, one upper and the other lower. It connects to the symmetrical arched mustache at both left and right ends.

A head of Serapis from Egypt kept in the Vatican Museum (fig.6) is similar to the Luxor head in terms of the execution of the hairstyle and beard. Another colossal head of Serapis housed in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Museum, dated to the second century, has the same features of hairstyle treatment and carving of the beard (Hornbostl 1973, 188-189, Taf. LXIX, 126) (fig.7).

Other related and interesting heads depict the same features as the Luxor head. There are two heads from Thessaloniki, Inv.897 (fig.8) and Inv.1017 (fig. 9). They were probably excavated in the Serapeum at Thessaloniki. The heads are datable to the end of the Antonine period (Mazurek 2016, 191-193, figs.42-43). Furthermore, there is a head in Stockholm (fig.10) (Hornbostl 1973, 191, Taf.LXXIII,130) that dates to the same period. This imagery has the same divine characteristic and features that we can see in the Luxor head and in other representations of the heads of Serapis in terms of long curling hair, a worn spiral-curl beard divided in half, drilled curls and waves, a broad nose, and clearly lidded eyes. They also bear tight snail curls carved with the drill and they are carving of far too low quality.

#### **TECHNICAL REMARKS:**

The upper part of the head and the strands of hair were carefully carved. The pattern of carving in the top part of this head resembles Alexandrian influences derived from the artistic school of the Greek sculptors Bryaxis and Lysippus.

The Luxor head of Serapis seems to have been carved in a local workshop at Luxor. It was carved in marble that had not well been polished and shows a humble level of sculptural work, particularly in the lower part. The upper part of the head shows somewhat higher quality carving. The different quality of carving in single sculptural work is interesting. Perhaps the head was reworked in antiquity.

The sculptor used the chisel to identify the sloping strands of the hair above the forehead, and also to identify eyebrows and the mustache. He also used the drill in the treatment of the wavy strands on the side of the face and the beard. The drill caused long deep channels in the beard and made some circle holes in the fringes of the curls of the beard. The channels introduced the *Chiaroscuro* effect within the hair masses, in particular in the wavy strands and beard. There is a deep cutting between the face and hair that causes the so-called light and shade effect, which is a typical indicator of the style of carving toward the end of the second century AD (Beer 1976, 21).

#### **CONTEXT AND FUNCTION:**

The registers in Abu El-Goud mention that the head of Serapis was found among a group of Greco-Roman statues close to the chapels of Mut and Khonsou. The actual find-spot of the Luxor head is, however, still much debated. Most likely the head was transferred from its original find-spot to the location of the chapels of Mut and Khonsou in modern times.

The architectural frame of the Luxor temple was remodeled between the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century AD (De Villard 1953, 100). The archaeological clues prove that the innovative Imperial cult chamber and the Amun sanctuary behind it were occupied by Roman garrison by the end of the third century AD (Kalavrezou-Maxeiner 1975, 230). This part of the temple was converted to the standard Roman camp during the period of Tetrarchy (Jones and McFadden 2015, 40). The major Roman innovations are visible mainly in the temple's antechamber, which was changed into a chapel dedicated to the Imperial cult (Vandorpe 1995, 221).

Raymond Johnson remarked that the architectural design of the rooms adjacent to the imperial cult chamber, which included the two barque sanctuary of Mut and Khonsou was not changed and still preserved the Pharaonic design of the old temple (Jones and McFadden 2015, 44). The archaeological evidence in these rooms indicates that no Roman alterations were added during this period.

The find-spot of the Serapis head in this part of the temple seems to me not sufficiently accurate. Since some years ago, the inspectors of Luxor temple used to collect the heads and statues which were found at Luxor temple in the area of the Barque sanctuary of Khonsu and Mut beyond the imperial cult chamber.

The inspectors seem to have used this part of the temple to keep these objects in modern times. This suggests that the head has been wrongly linked with the site of the sanctuary of Khonsu and Mut despite the lack of any firmly based archaeological context. Most likely the head of Serapis was found somewhere in the Luxor temple or in the vicinity of the temple. There is a possibility that this head was used in rituals related to the Roman camp. I suggest the head may have been remodeled and moved to be used for cultic purposes inside the shrines located in the *Tetrastylon* area during the period of the Tetrarchy.

#### **DATING:**

Despite the Hellenistic character of the hairstyle, the date of this head is probably Roman. It is possible to compare our head to several Serapis heads that date to the Roman period, particularly in the second century AD. The use of a drill in the treatment of wavy strands and beard-dressing and the phenomena of light-and-shade and features of idealized face with a worn beard refers to the weakness carving style during the latter part of the second century AD. The poor technical execution of the head and the frequent deeply drilled holes suggest the Antonine period, by comparison to the numerous heads of Serapis which are made during this period.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

To sum up, the sculptural treatment of the Luxor head is characterized by commonly recognized features of heads of Sarapis. The hairstyle and beard-addressing described above are associated with fairly numerous Serapis representations known from during the Roman Period.

The characteristics of the drill holes in the beard and the contrast in *chiaroscuro* in texture suggest an Antonine date for the head. This can confirm the possibility of the Egyptian origin of its provenance. It is probable that the head attached to a statute of Serapis found in Luxor temple or in the vicinity.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

I am grateful to my colleagues in the Grand Egyptian Museum for permission to publish this head and for taking the photographs for this object.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Amelung, Willy. "Le Sarapis de Bryaxis." *Revue Archéologique II* (1903): 177-204.
- Beer, Cecilia. "Head of Sarapis in Stockholm." *Medelhavsmuseet Bulletin*, 1976: 18-22.
- Bergquist, Birgitta. "A Head of Sarapis." In *From the Gus-tavianum Collections in Uppsala. 2. The Collection of Classical Antiquities. History and Studies of Selected Objects*, by St.Brunnsåker and T.Säve-Söderbergh, 87-137. *Boreas* 9, 1978.
- Castiglione, Ladislav. "La Statue de Culte Hellénistique du Sarapiedoin D'Alexandrie." *BMHBA*, 1958: 17-39.
- De Villard, Monneret. "The Temple of the Imperial Cult at Luxor." *Archaeologia*, 1953: 85-105.
- Geissen, Angelo. *Katalog Alexandrinischer Kaisermünzen der Sammlung des Instituts für Altertumskunde der Universität zu Köln*. Köln: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1978.
- Hill, Dorothy Kent. "Material on the Cult of sarapis." *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studeis at Athens*, 1946.
- Hornbostl, Wilhelm. *SARAPIS: Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschicht, den Erscheinungsformen und Wandlungen der Gestalt eines Gottes*. Vol. 32, by Hornbostel. Leiden: EBERO, 1973.
- Jones, Michael, and Susanna McFadden. *The Tetrarchic Architectural Renovation of Luxor Temple. Context, Significance, and the Amun Cult*. Cairo/ London: Yale University Press, 2015.
- Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, Ioli. "The Imperial Chamber at Luxor." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 1975: 225-251.
- Kater-Sibbes, G. J. F. *Preliminary catalogue of Sarapis Monuments*. Vol. 36. Leiden: EPRO, 1973.
- Lippold, Georg. "Sarapis und Bryxis." *Festschrift PUL ARNDT* (F.Bruckmann A. G. Verlag), 1925: 115-127.
- Malaise, Michel. "Problèmes soulevés par l'iconographie de Sérapis." *Latomus*, 1975: 383-391.
- Mazurek, Lindsey. *Globalizing the Sculptural Landscapes of the Sarapis and Isis Cults in Hellenistic and Roman Greece*, PhD diss. USA: Duke University, 2016.
- Milleker, Elizabeth. "Three Heads of Sarapis from Cornth." *Hesperia*, 1958: 121-135.
- Stmabugh, John. *Sarapis under the Early Ptolemies*. Leiden: Brill, 1972.
- Vandorpe, Katelijjn. "City of Many a Gate, Harbour for many a Rebel Historical and Topographical Outline of Greco-Roman Thebes." In *Hundred-Gated Thebes. Acts of Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban Area in Greco-Roman Period*, by S. P. Vleeming. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995.

PLATES

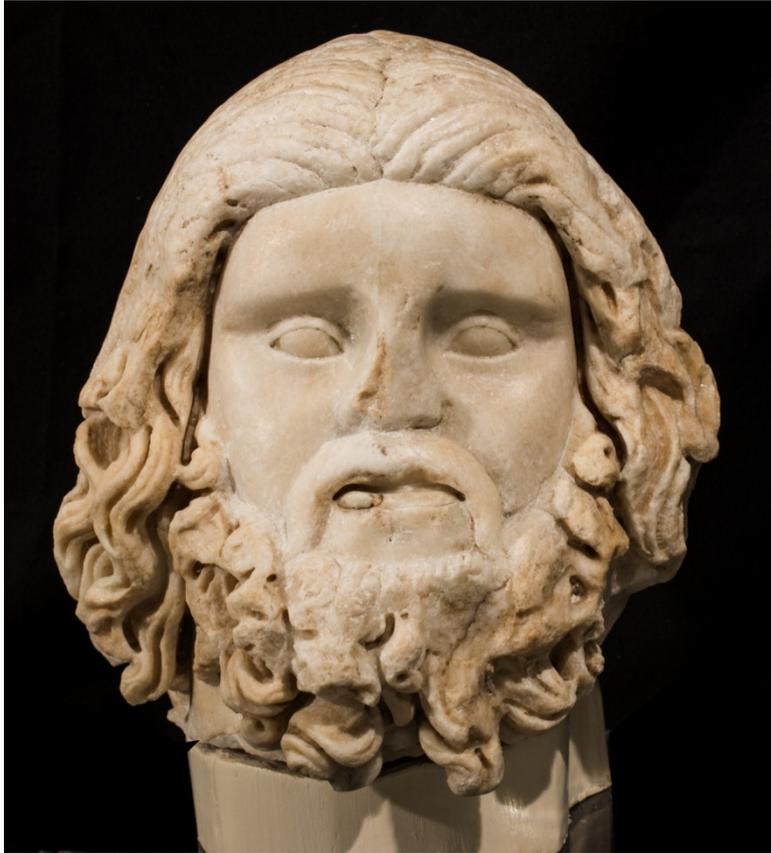


Fig.1:  
Head of Serapis (frontal pose)  
Taken by the Author

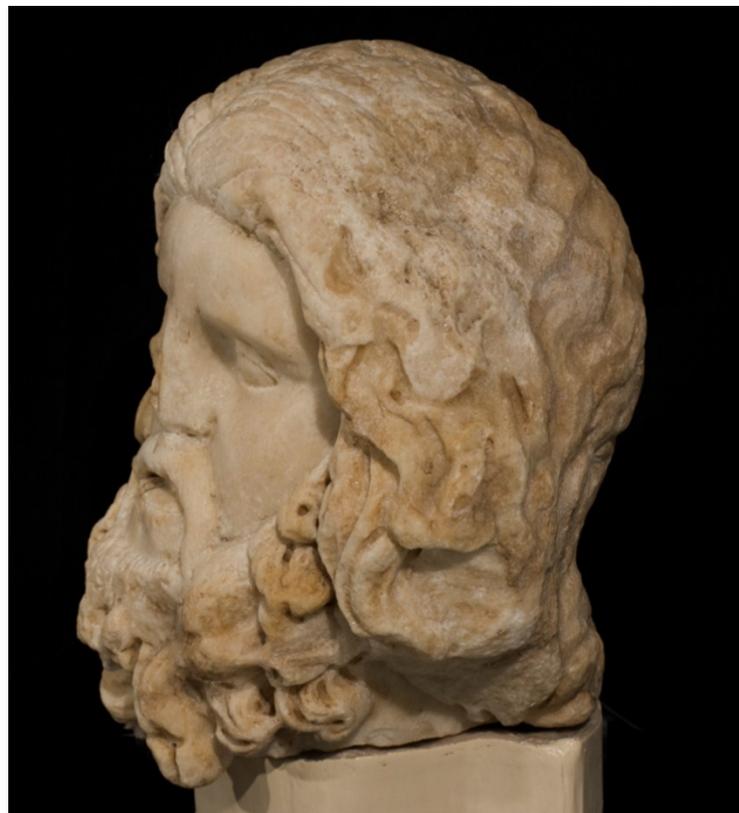


Fig.2  
Head of Serapis (profile pose)  
Taken by the Author

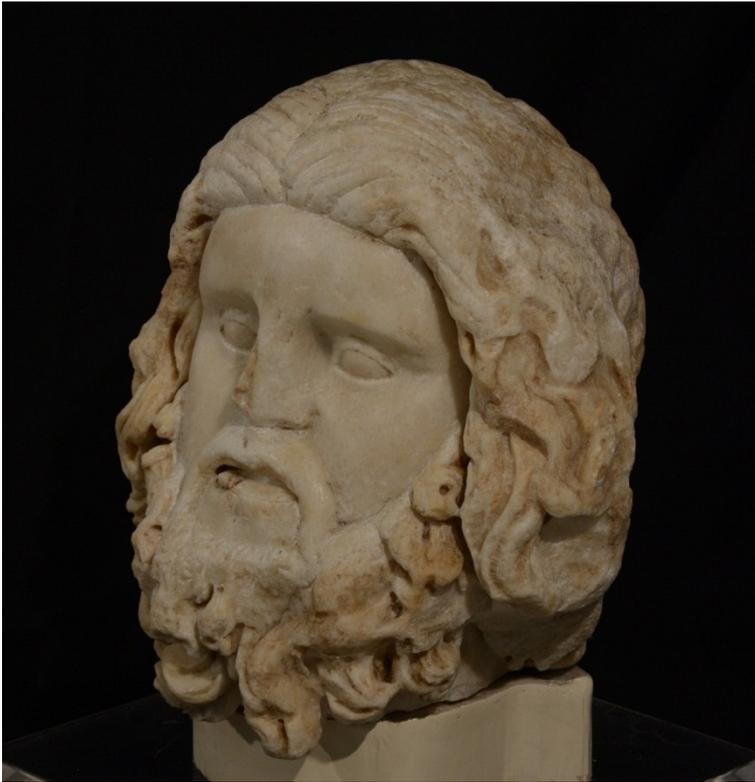


Fig.3  
Diagonal pose of the head  
Taken by the Author

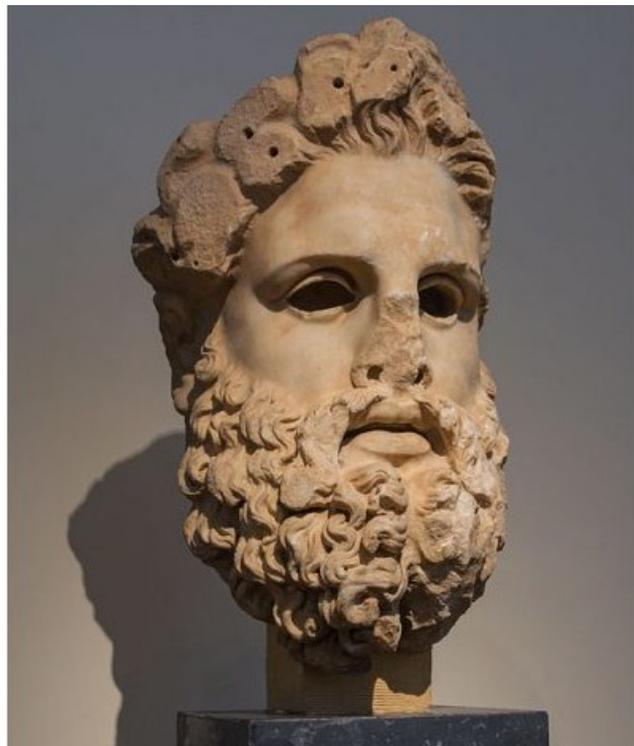


Fig.4  
Head of Zeus – Naples Museum  
After: <https://thedelphiguide.com/zeus-the-father-of-gods-and-men/>  
Accessed on 2.01.2021



Fig. 5  
Head of Mausolus – British Museum

After: <https://sequoia-forum-media.s3.amazonaws.com/prod.cirrostratus>.  
Accessed on 2.01.2021



Fig. 6  
Head of Serapis – Vatican Museum  
Hornbostel, W., Serapis, p.184, Taf.  
LXVI, no.122

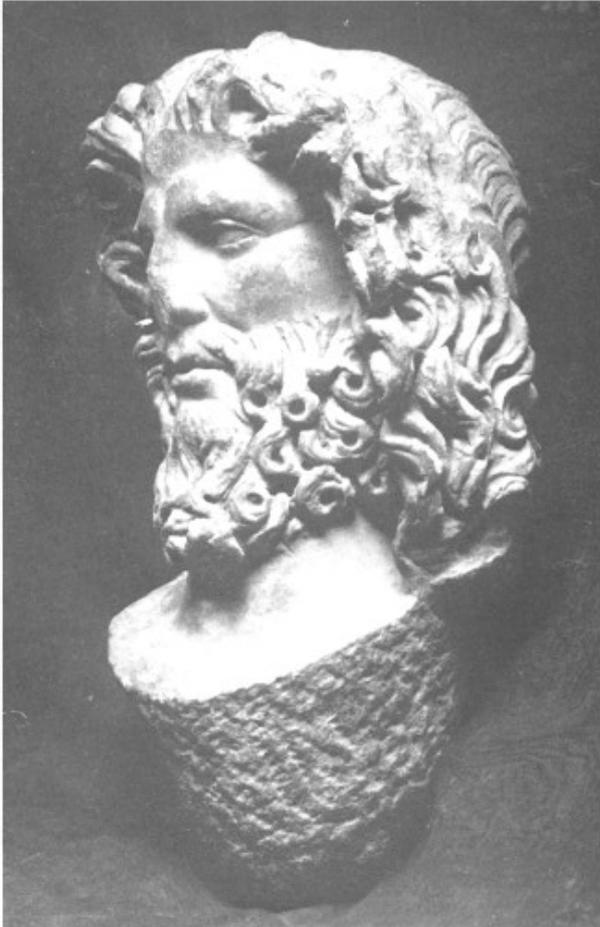
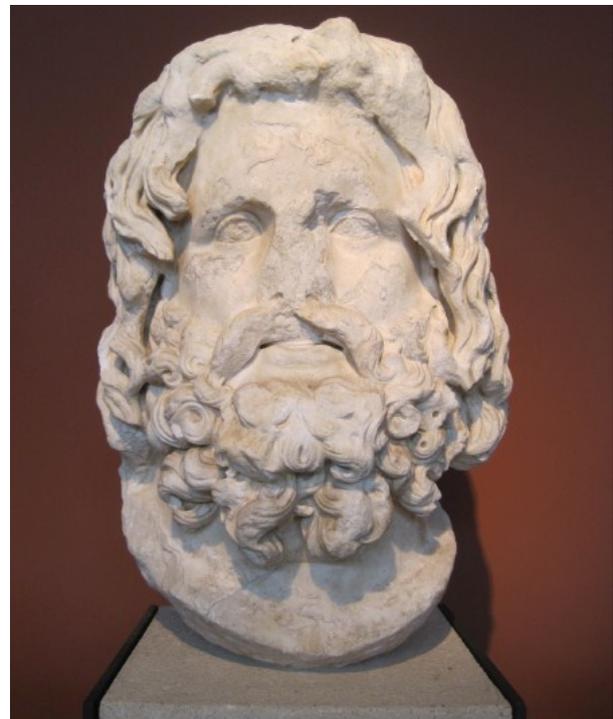


Fig. 7  
Head of Serapis - Ny  
Carlsberg Glyptotek Museum  
Hornbostel, W., Serapis, p. 188-  
189, Taf. LXIX, no 126.

Fig.8  
Head of Sarapis. Antonine period, Inv.897.  
Mazurek, L., Globalizing the Sculptural  
Landscapes of the Sarapis and Isis Cults in  
Hellenistic and Roman Greece, p.191, fig.42



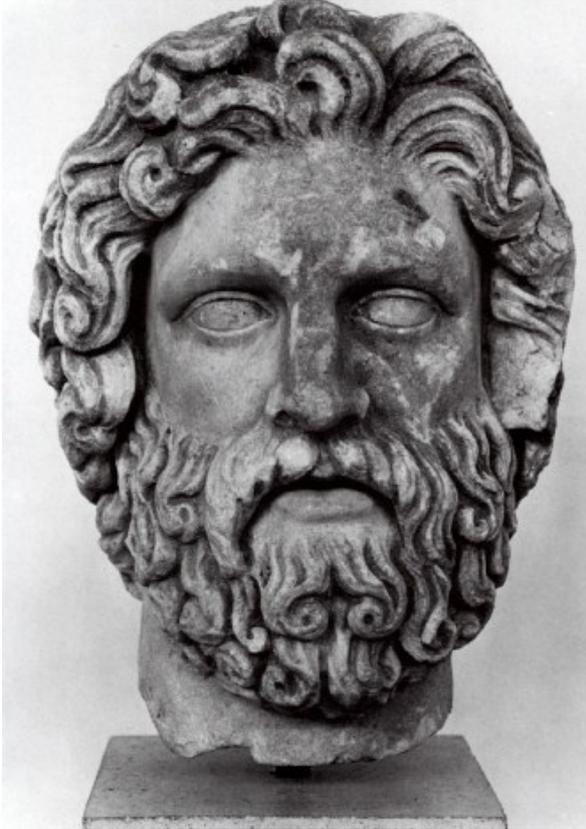


Fig.9  
Head of Sarapis, dates to Second century  
Mazurek, L., Globalizing the Sculptural  
Landscapes of the Sarapis and Isis Cults  
in Hellenistic and Roman Greece,  
p.193, fig.43



Fig.9  
Head of Serapis – Stockholm  
Beer, C., A Head of Serapis in Stockholm, 19.