Sunken Cities: Egypt's Lost Worlds Read Online

Thanks to a new exhibition at the British Museum, Goddio's incredible finds will soon be open to the public.

Sunken Cities: Egypt's Lost Worlds opens May 19, and according to museum curator, Aurelia Masson-Berghoff, the exhibition pulls back the curtain on what was once one of archeology's greatest mysteries. Objects discovered in the Mediterranean Sea are helping archaeologists uncover the history of two Egyptian lost cities.

Likely founded in the 7th century BC, Thonis-Heracleion and Canopus acted as major trade hubs between ancient Egypt, Greece and the wider Mediterranean, located as they were at a handy intersection. But circumstances ultimately conspired against them, explains Masson-Berghoff. Revealing excavations in the north of Egypt show how Greeks and Egyptians lived together thousands of years ago.

Masson-Berghoff explains they also learned a lot from the form taken by the religious statues dug up from their watery grave. The statues were mainly of Ptolemaic gods with human features that represented the same qualities Egyptians prescribed to animals.

In its 'Greek' form, he became Serapis, combining the aspects and functions of major Greek gods. One of the statues was that of a colossal head representing the god Serapis, a Greek human-shaped version of the Egyptian god Osiris-Apis. READ: The king with wives.

It was not vanity that prompted their change in style, but shrewd political maneuvering. Colossal statue of Hapy, made from pink granite and over five meters high. Most of them — bright reddish, sandy to the touch — are locally made Egyptian wares.

There are also Greek mortaria — bowls for pounding ingredients into sauces — and all manner of wine amphorae from the east Greek world, the Hellenic cities on what is now the west coast of Turkey. Thomas and his colleague from the British Museum, Alexandra Villing, sort through them. Petrie and his Victorian successors tended to ignore the Egyptian pottery finds, leading to a skewed vision of what kind of cultural texture this city might have had.

Ross and Villing suspect the interaction and cultural exchange between people here was richer and more complex than had been believed. There is no more impressive evidence of the cultural encounters that occurred at Naukratis than in the Egyptian Museum, in Cairo, which Villing and I visit together. We are looking for a statue. There is a lot of this intriguing cultural mingling in Egypt, and it runs right through to the Romans.

In the catacombs of Kom el-Shoqafa in Alexandria, a Roman family is buried in an elaborate tomb arranged like a pedimented temple with niches for the sarcophagi, which are decorated with flower garlands and tragic masks — altogether very classical.

But the pediment is carved with Egyptian falcons, the Roman couple are depicted as Egyptian from the neck down another kilt and striding left leg and the relief carvings above their tombs are of Egyptian scenes, including Anubis presiding over a mummification.

Nearby, in the sanctuary below the temple of Serapis — a Greek-friendly version of Osiris — the Roman emperor Hadrian dedicated an extraordinary, lifesize bronze bull representing the Egyptian god Apis.

A replica is in situ, but the original can be seen in the British Museum exhibition. A pottery object excavated by Petrie in Naukratis, which is about
to tour to museums around the UK, also tells a complex tale. We think the dedicator was probably an east Greek.

He tells of a Greek trader from Naukratis who, on his way back to Egypt, bought a figurine of Aphrodite from Paphos on Cyprus. On the way home, he was caught up in a storm and prayed to the goddess.

She answered him: the storm calmed and a myrtle bush miraculously sprouted on board. When he arrived in Naukratis, he dedicated his figurine at the temple of Aphrodite and hosted a feast, the guests crowned with myrtle wreaths.

Not bad for day two in the field — and a hopeful sign that the fertile black soil of Egypt has more and more knowledge to impart. A Ptolemaic king depicted a pharaoh discovered in Canopus after excavation and cleaning. Published on Sun 15 May

**Sunken Cities: Egypt’s Lost Worlds Reviews**

The fact that they were built on sediment that was unstable is also believed to have contributed to their ultimate demise. A statuette of Osiris and a model of a processional barge for this god, Egypt. Maritime Museum, Alexandria. The first time someone had a glimpse of what would later turn out to be a huge discovery was in when a pilot working for the Royal Air Force spotted some dark shadows in the waters of Aboukir Bay.

This was followed by the discovery of various items from Canopus that was believed to be from the Ptolemaic times. The excavations which were performed using highly sophisticated technical equipment have helped scholars know more about the Mysteries of Osiris.

This was an annual festival that commemorated a very famous myth in Egypt—the death and resurrection of Osiris, an Egyptian god. Your email address will not be published. What others reading now! Egyptian Hieroglyphs The Egyptian Hieroglyphs first appeared in writing around BC and developed continuously as a living language Egyptian Hieroglyphs Read more.

The Valley of the Kings Read more. It was a very long text: some specimens When I talk about the show in lectures, I explain there is no desert, no pyramids, no mummies.

Our well-known Cleopatra, the seventh queen of that name, closes out the Ptolemaic Period, a Greco-Egyptian era whose beginning coincided with the death of Alexander the Great in BCE. He was buried in Alexandria, his namesake city, near the body of water under which the discoveries took place. At that time, the Mediterranean world enjoyed a lively trade of goods, ideas and cultural influences among countries surrounding the sea.

The ports of Lower Egypt became prosperous and increasingly diverse. One effect, demonstrated especially by the sculpture, is a cross-pollination of artistic styles between Greece and Egypt. The religious personas of Greek and Egyptian gods merged, as well. Franck Goddio is the charismatic driving force and director of these Egyptian marine excavations. After some classic shipwreck investigations, he focused his attention on the mapping of the bay off the site of the ancient port of Alexandria in . In , they discovered the submerged ancient city of Thonis Heracleion and parts of the nearby city of Canopus.

A gradual rise in the sea level left these areas submerged by about the Eighth Century CE. Osiris was associated with the afterlife and the resurrection of the dead, but also played an important role in the regeneration of the fertility of the land itself. The volume illustrates many of the ritual objects uncovered on the floor of the bay. While supervising the construction of the exhibition, Goddio shed his hard hat to talk to Antiques and The Arts Weekly.

We are telling the story of the mysteries of Osiris, which was one of the most secret religious ceremonies of ancient Egypt. From a stele discovered in by Maspero and now in the Cairo Museum, we knew the ceremony was celebrated every year. We can read that stele. We knew before we excavated that every year the mysteries of Osiris were celebrated between the Temple of Amun-Gereb in the city of Heracleion and the Temple of Osiris in Canopus.

We discovered those two sites, and we knew that possibly we would discover some artifacts telling the story of the mysteries of Osiris. It was known that there was a procession between the two temples.

It was not known from the texts whether it was a nautical procession or a procession with a barge carried by persons. As a matter of fact, we found the channel between the two, and in the channel we found one of the barges used for those religious processions. Here you are facing objects that were together on the site in antiquity and that are back together in the exhibition.

They speak to each other, they explain each other. The artifacts are telling you the story of those two ancient cities and the story of the mysteries of Osiris.

And this is very, very strong. A statuette of Osiris and a model of a processional barge for this god, Heracleion, Egypt. Maritime Museum, Alexandria.

**About Sunken Cities: Egypt’s Lost Worlds Writer**
And Osiris goes on to take centre stage in the next room. The Mysteries were intended to celebrate fertility and regeneration, and a number of elements of Zeus, Hades, Dionysus and Asclepius because why stop at one god when you can have four?

Another personal favourite from the show was the Bull of Apis, carved around AD. For those who share my former ignorance about the Bull of Apis, it was the most important animal cult in Egypt. Priests would select a particularly fine bull which was regarded as the earthly incarnation of the creator god Ptah, and was treated accordingly, with a coronation ceremony in Memphis, an exclusive harem of cows and every luxury.

The bull was even given the honour of mummification after its death. Everything is almost lifelike: the wrinkled dewlap, the tightly-curled hair on the forehead, the alert expression and the fringes of hair creeping over the cloven hooves. Two other gods have a strong presence in the show: the first is Serapis, a deity introduced by the Ptolemies to encourage religious unity, and thereafter particularly associated with their family, blending elements of Zeus, Hades, Dionysus and Asclepius because why stop at one god when you can have four?

The choice of sycamore, incidentally, can be explained by the fact that this wood was sacred to Osiris, some of whose aspects were also reflected in Serapis — such as the fact that Serapis was also regarded as the husband of Isis.

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artefacts linked to the rites have been found at Thonis-Heracleion. A dark stone sculpture presents us with the god laid out on his funerary bed, wrapped in embalming bands — Osiris was the first mummy — with falcons at his feet and lions at his head.

Isis, in the form of a kite, perches on his pelvic area and flaps her wings to fill his lungs with the breath of life; at the same moment, she miraculously conceives their son Horus. This sculpture dates from around BC, but it reflects a much older cult of Osiris at Abdyos, where the tomb of the early pharaoh Djer c.

For me, though, a smaller sculpture proved to be much more affecting. It shows the god lying on his front, his entire body pressed against the floor, except for his head, which is raised almost at right angles, like the head of a cobra, so that he looks straight out at us.

An elaborate gold and electrum crown springs from his head, and traces of paint outline his features and define horizontal stripes on his headdress. The god gives a calm, conspiratorial smile of triumph: haunting, and undeniably eerie. But back to the Mysteries. Each year, two sculptures of Osiris were prepared in the temples of Thonis-Heracleion, cast from figure-shaped moulds. Once the seeds had begun to germinate, and new life was showing through the soil of the sculpture, it was dried in the sun and wrapped up in linen.

The second sculpture was made of a mixture of date paste, soil, myrrh, mint, pine resin and ground semi-precious stones like lapis lazuli and amethyst. The precious-stone sculpture seems to have been kept in the main Temple of Amun-Gereb, while the soil-and-barley sculpture — along with 33 similar statues of other gods — was placed on a papyrus barge and sent in a lamplit procession down the main canal in Thonis-Heracleion.

It must have been quite a sight, and would have recalled the daily journey of the sun-god Amun-Ra across the sky in his own boat — a vision depicted here in a stunning gold and lapis lazuli pectoral dating from around BC from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

At the end of the parade, the two Osiris figures were united again in the Temple of Amun-Gereb and then processed together to the Temple of Osiris at Canopus. How on earth does one find something so tiny on the seabed? The statue in the show bears an inscription from the pharaoh who had it made, asking Taweret to watch over his own daughter. In the final room, taking a deep breath to steady ourselves after all these wonderful things, we look at the Roman occupation of Egypt, and the way that Egyptian religious traditions continued to influence their conquerors.

The most interesting examples of this hybrid Roman-Egyptian style are two marble water jars in the shape of Osiris, used at the Temple of Ras el-Soda between Alexandria and Canopus. Two divers examine the fragments of a pink granite colossal figure of a Ptolemaic pharaoh, which has been reconstructed and is on show in the exhibition.

Thanks for a lovely peek into a world which has fascinated me since my childhood. I wanted to become an Egyptologist myself, but that dream got thwarted when my Alma mater closed their department permanently the year I graduated from grammar school.