

Tresses and Tradition: Egyptian Wigs as Portrayed on Ptolemaic Coins

The study of dress is relatively new in the field of Classics. While Romanists have embraced the study of dress, few Hellenists have approached the topic. Similarly, little to no scholarship has adequately treated hair and dress in Ptolemaic Egypt. The period's visual record, however, showcases detailed examples of dress, revealing variation and maintenance of indigenous clothing practices. These aspects are readily identifiable in the coin portraits of early Ptolemaic queens, who fashioned themselves in local dress, wigs, and accessories.

In this study, I examine the coin portraits of Berenice II, Cleopatra I, II, and III. Former analyses of these queens' portraits have been from a predominantly Hellenistic perspective, resulting in their partial interpretation. Art historians and numismatists view the Egyptian iconography of these portraits as generic and representative of the goddess Isis. Various art historical sources, particularly sculptural and painted, are compared to reassess the underlying meaning of the incorporation of Egyptian stylistic features in numismatic portraiture. The study uses relevant sources from the Pharaonic and Ptolemaic periods. In incorporating material beyond the discipline's traditional lines of evidence and contextualizing the appearance of Egyptian dress as it appears in the numismatic record, this study demonstrates that wigs on Ptolemaic coins acted in the same vein as the Greek veil. The queen's modesty and position as royal matron were readily communicated to the local Egyptian population.

Altogether, the poster will consist of five sections: introduction and research method, background, visual sources of evidence, literary sources of evidence, and conclusion.