

THE CONCEPT OF THE HALO: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN GRAECO-ROMAN AND BYZANTINE EGYPT

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ABSTRACT

The halo has been employed since the ancient times in the art of different cultures with several variations as a distinctive feature of religious iconography. The concept of the halo may have been originated in ancient Egypt. It was primarily placed over the head of the divinities; as time progressed, it was also shown in the depictions of the kings and divine/holy figures. In Egypt, it took various forms throughout the successive civilizations (e.g., circular disc, radiate crown, crucified halo, and square halo) and was referred to by various names (e.g., *nimbus* and *Aureola*); each period had its distinctive shape and name. This study aims to trace the usage of the halo concept in Egypt until the end of the Byzantine era. Its usage in Islamic paintings was only restricted to certain cultures, of which few references were made to clarify the difference, in addition to highlighting the revival of the halo usage in modern art.

KEYWORDS

Halo – Egypt – Ptolemaic – Roman – Byzantine – Christian Art – Radiate Crown – Helios – *Aureola*.

INTRODUCTION

The earliest depiction of the halo concept may have been attested in ancient Egypt, which is linked with the myth of the creation of the universe: primeval ocean, mound, which may have been shaped as pyramidion “*benben* stone of Heliopolis”, lotus blossom, from which the sun rose illuminating the dark space and setting the beginning of life on earth.¹ The

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¹ PINCH 2002, 180; Stucky 2012, 1.

sun symbolizes the supreme god in the ancient Egyptian mythology, the god Re, who is mostly depicted as a falcon with a sun-disk over the head, encircled with a cobra that probably symbolizes the power of the god.² Khepri and Atum were other aspects for the solar deity: Khepri in the morning, Re at noon, and Atum in the evening;³ whereas Amun was another aspect, that is the hidden one.⁴ Such powerful solar deities were all associated with the god Re.⁵ The sun-disk is also shown as a headdress of certain deities in the form of a sole disk or a disk enclosed by two horns over the head.⁶ On a smaller scale, it can be part of royal crowns or headdresses like the Double Feather (*Shwty*) and other composite crowns.⁷ Yet, starting from the 18th dynasty, the sun-disk in full size, usually augmented by two uraei, is always shown above the king as an indication of a full divinization of the king.⁸ The only change in the depiction of the sun disk was under king Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten), who replaced the whole traditional Egyptian pantheon with only one god named ‘Aten’, also known as the ‘Religion of Light’, in which the god was never depicted as a figure, but rather symbolized by a sun-disk with rays ending with hands.⁹

HELLENISTIC PERIOD

During the time of Alexander the Great, the solar cult was prominent. Following his victory over the Indian king Porus, Alexander made a sacrificial offering to the god Helios. Plutarch described the lands that

² WILKINSON 2003, 208; REMLER 2010, 163.

³ WILKINSON 2003, 230.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 205-206.

⁶ COETZEE 2017, 61.

⁷ GOEBS 2015, 11, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹ MCARTHUR 2013, 3, 21. For more details on that topic, see HORNUNG 2001.

Alexander did not conquer as remaining sunless. Attributed to Alexander the Great are two sculptures with holes drilled around the head that should have had spikes of rays, which was an attribute of Helios.¹⁰

As descendants of Alexander the Great, the Ptolemies followed his steps as regards retaining the Egyptian traditions; thus, the kings continued to be depicted upon the walls of the temples as if they were native pharaohs, making sacrifices and offerings to the Egyptian deities, and the sun-disk continued to be depicted above the Ptolemaic king;¹¹ some instances show the disk very close to the head (fig. 1).¹² Yet, apart from the traditional places of royal depictions of the ancient Egyptians, i.e., cult and mortuary temples, tombs, cult chambers...*etc.*, the Ptolemies initiated Hellenized iconography in different media serving the same purpose as in ancient Egyptian art including coins, gems, terracottas, seals, and ceramics.

The founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty, Ptolemy I Soter, introduced the cult of a Graeco-Egyptian deity, named Serapis, as the principal kingdom's god.¹³ Subsequently, Soter's son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, initiated a cult for the monarch and his spouse, who were both deified.¹⁴ He officially started with his deceased parents; then he, as a living monarch, associated himself and his spouse, Arsinoe II, with Alexander the Great's cult as '*Theoi Adelphoi*', which means sibling gods. Thus, the priest of Alexander the Great became theirs as well. As a further step forward, Ptolemy II

¹⁰ STEYN 2012-13, 55.

¹¹ BOTHMER 1953, 6, fig. 5; Relief of Ptolemy IV making an offering, Temple of Deir El-Medina, see PERALES 2019, 181, fig. 6.

¹² Relief from the cult chamber of Thot, Tuna El-Gabal, Reign of Ptolemy I Soter, Roemer-und Pelizaeus-Museum, Hildesheim, Germany, see MINAS-NERPEL 2018, 152, fig. 5.9.

¹³ PFEIFFER 2008, 387-388, 391.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 388.

separated the sibling gods' cult from that of Alexander III by having their own precinct in Alexandria.¹⁵ A part of floor discovered under Serapis temple, built by Ptolemy III, showed an inscription: “(Altar) of King Ptolemy and Arsinoe Philadelphos, (descendants) of the saviour gods”. Later, colossal statues for the royal couple started to be placed in the temple beside those of Serapis; thus, they became temple-sharing gods of Serapis.¹⁶ Accordingly, the ruler cult became closely linked with Serapis cult.

Serapis was identified with several gods: Osiris, Apis bull, Zeus, Pluto, Aion, and Helios.¹⁷ According to Marcobius's *Santurnalia*, “Serapis and the Sun (represented by Helios) are of one and individual nature”.¹⁸ Serapis has some examples linked with Helios (figs. 2b, 2c), i.e., with radiate fillet on the head.¹⁹ An iconography of the Ptolemies on the coins shows them with divine attributes (aegis “shaped as chlamys” of Zeus, trident of Poseidon, and the radiate crown of Helios); thus transferring the image of the king as a god, or as a king with god-like abilities.²⁰

The supposed head of Ptolemy I Soter with three-quarter face – if not of the god Helios – is represented in high relief on the bottom of a bowl

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 398.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 400-401.

¹⁷ STAMBAUGH 1972, 2, 4.

¹⁸ MARCOBIL, *Santurnalia* I, XX.

¹⁹ A bronze seated figurine, *cf.* British Museum, “Figure”, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1772-0302-172, accessed on Jan. 3, 2023; WALTERS 1899, 173, no. 939; A pottery lamp with discus decorated with two busts: Helios embracing Serapis (fig. 2a), *cf.* British Museum, “Lamp”, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA49647, accessed on Jan. 3, 2023; WALTERS 1914, 143, no. 946, fig. 188.

²⁰ JOHNSON 1999, 50, 52.

ornamented by short leaves-like rays.²¹ Ptolemy III Euergetes is portrayed on number of gold coins²² wearing the radiate crown, aegis like a chlamys, trident over the far shoulder with the central prong decorated with lotus bud; these coins were issued posthumously by his son Ptolemy IV Philopator (fig. 3).²³ The head of Ptolemy III with a radiate crown is also sculpted in high relief on a plaster emblem wearing a chlamys.²⁴ Ptolemy IV, on the other hand, has a terracotta head crowned by a diadem, in which the holes indicate a radiate crown.²⁵ King Ptolemy V Epiphanes is portrayed on number of gold coins²⁶ with the radiate diadem, mostly with alternating rays (the ornamented ray shows a row of pellets),²⁷ wearing a chlamys, and a spear is usually shown over the far shoulder. A number of silver coins show Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II with the radiate crown and wearing the chlamys.²⁸ A seal shows a Ptolemaic king's head – uncertainly identified as Ptolemy IX Soter II – wearing the radiate crown.²⁹ Another seal portrays head of unidentified Ptolemy – of a later date than Euergetes I – wearing the radiate crown.³⁰

In the above-mentioned examples, the sun-disk, which was shown in reliefs above the head of the king starting from the New Kingdom onwards, was replaced by the radiate crown, with which the head of the god Helios started

²¹ KYRIELEIS 1975, 9, pl. 7,4; LOSSIF & LORBER 2012, 198-199.

²² POOLE 1888, xliv, pl. xii,3-5; KYRIELEIS 1975, pl. 17,1 (Boston), pl. 17,2-,3 (London), pl. 17,4 (Athens); SMITH 1998, 91, pl. 75,9.

²³ LOSSIF & LORBER 2012, 198.

²⁴ THOMPSON 1973, 96, pl. LXXII, c.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 96-97, pl. LXXII, e; BARRETT 2009, 315.

²⁶ POOLE 1888, lviii, pl. xvii,1-2; KYRIELEIS 1975, pl. 40,4; SMITH 1998, 91, pl. 75,11.

²⁷ KYRIELEIS 1975, 201. The author also clarified that there are other issues showing the radiate crown with the ornament as a spiral. *Loc.cit.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pl. 52,1; LOSSIF & LORBER 2012, 198, 199 (fig. 4); SMITH 1998, 94, pl. 75,17.

²⁹ KYRIELEIS 1975, pl. 54,5; LOSSIF & LORBER 2012, 198, n. 3.

³⁰ MILNE 1916, 93, 99, pl. V, no. 161.

to be portrayed on coins in the 4th century BC in three-quarter face and in profile.³¹ It is also noted that coins with the radiate crown is always linked with radiate cornucopia on the reverse with an ear of grain/corn among its contents, which most probably assimilates the represented king with the god Serapis, who is identified with Osiris, and thus linked with productiveness and fertility.³² Another small detail shown on the reverse of the coin is that the lotus flower at the bottom end of the cornucopia as if this attribute is rising from the lotus like the sun-god in the myth of the creation of the universe.³³ Thus both sides of the coins are linked with the solar gods.

The intelligence of the Ptolemies is mirrored in the way of utilizing ancient Egyptian concepts to be translated within a Hellenized context – i.e., to represent the solar character of the Egyptian monarch – that would be then appealing to both Greek and Egyptian audience.³⁴ It seems that idea of the divinity of the king shown on the coins of the Ptolemies urged the Seleucids to follow the same example; it is not a coincidence that the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, introduced the radiate crown iconography on his coins around the same time of his campaign in Egypt. This new iconography in the Seleucid Kingdom was only followed by Antiochus IV's direct line of descent.³⁵ Thus, the Ptolemies, followed by

³¹ HEAD 1897, cv, pl. XXXVI, 12, 13, pl. XXXVII, 3, 8.

³² POOLE 1888, lviii. Worthy of note is that the Cornucopia or the horn of the She-goat Amaltheia, who suckled the infant Zeus, was originally an attribute of deities and then started to be included in the royal iconography by the Ptolemies. Before the royal iconography of Ptolemy III, it was linked with Arsinoe II and Berenice II. The cornucopia of the latter queen included an ear of grain among other contents. *cf.* LOSSIF & LORBER 2012, 208-209.

³³ LOSSIF & LORBER 2012, 211.

³⁴ BARRETT 2009, 315, 317.

³⁵ WRIGHT 2005, 74.

the Seleucids, imitated their predecessor, the founder of the Macedonian Empire, Alexander the Great; they put their portraits on coins and adopted divine attributes.³⁶

ROMAN PERIOD

The first direct contact between Egypt and Italy dates back to the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (c. 273 BC) with an Egyptian delegation sent to Rome, which paved the way for the transfer of Hellenistic manners and cults of Alexandria.³⁷ The radiate crown was sporadically shown on the coins of Republican Rome representing the head of Sol/Helios.³⁸ The first evidence of a Roman general awarded the radiate crown was Julius Caesar. Ancient historians gave an account stating that he had been elevated to a divine status: “they accordingly voted that his golden chair and his crown set with precious gems and overlaid with gold should be carried into the theatres in the same manner as those of the gods... And finally they ordered a temple to be consecrated to him”.³⁹ Florus stated that following Julius Caesar’s war with Pompey, “all kinds of honours were conferred on him as the sole governor of the state; as statues in the temples, a radiant

³⁶ BALDWIN 1921, 43, no. 6.

³⁷ WALTERS 1899, lvii.

³⁸ SMART 1995, 22. For examples of the head of the god Sol in side view, a number of which is stated by Smart, see *Ibid.*, 22, n. 72: CRAWFORD 1974, 303/1 dating to 110-109 BC: <http://davy.potdevin.free.fr/Site/crawford4.html>; 390/1 dating to 74 BC: <http://davy.potdevin.free.fr/Site/crawford4-2.html>; 474/5 dating to 45 BC, 494/20A, 494/21 dating to 42 BC, 496/3 dating to 42 BC (the head of Mark Antony on the obverse): <http://davy.potdevin.free.fr/Site/crawford5-2.html>: accessed on Jan. 10, 2023. Another example, cf. GÄZDAC et al. 2006, 67, pl. XIII, no. 263 dating to 109-108 BC.

³⁹ CASSIUS DIO, *Roman History* XLIV,6.3-4:

https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/44*.html, accessed on Jan. 10, 2023.

crown to wear in the theatre”.⁴⁰ Augustus Octavius was not shown wearing a radiate crown during his lifetime, yet his adopted son, Tiberius, had coins struck in 15 AD with the image of Augustus wearing that diadem after being deified by the Senate. Thus, this attribute became included within the Roman Imperial headdress.⁴¹ Tiberius was not portrayed with a radiate crown.⁴² Caligula was the first living emperor to be depicted radiate⁴³ on certain coin issues of the Greek East that matched the honorific inscriptions written for him by cities such as Assos and Kyzikos calling him “Deity most Manifest . . . The New Sun” (Epiphanestatos Theos . . . Neos Helios).⁴⁴ Ancient writers stated that he was seeking recognition of his divinity.⁴⁵ Claudius was not depicted radiate on his coinage.⁴⁶ Nero is the first living emperor to be frequently portrayed radiate on the coins, whether those minted at Rome or elsewhere,⁴⁷ yet his earliest radiate coins were minted at Alexandria in 56-57 AD.⁴⁸ It was hypothesized that he sought

⁴⁰ FLORUS, *Epitome of Roman History*, Book II. 13:

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Epitome_of_Roman_History/Book_2#13, accessed on Jan. 12, 2023.

⁴¹ SMART 1995, 37.

⁴² DE KLERK 2020, 37.

⁴³ SMART 1995, 23-24.

⁴⁴ LEVY 1988, 105-106.

⁴⁵ SMART 1995, 24 and n. 80; Suetonius Tranquillus, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars. The Life of Caligula*, 22.2-3; CASSIUS DIO, *Roman History* LIX,26.5-6. Cassius Dio described Caligula as the rising sun, *cf.* CASSIUS DIO, *Roman History* LVIII,28.4, https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/e/roman/texts/cassius_dio/58*.html, accessed on Jan. 13, 2023.

⁴⁶ SMART 1995, 24.

⁴⁷ *Loc. cit.*; for examples of coins minted at Rome, *cf.* SYDENHAM 1916, 33-34, pl. II. 2 and 4. For an example from Alexandria, Egypt, there is a coin kept at the Art Institute of Chicago since 1979, *cf.* Art Institute Chicago, “Tetradrachm (Coin) Portraying Emperor Nero”, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/142277/tetradrachm-coin-portraying-emperor-nero>, accessed on Jan. 14, 2023. For other examples, *cf.* HIESINGER 1975, pl. 18, fig. 19-21.

⁴⁸ SMART 1995, 24.

assimilation to the god Helios⁴⁹ or Apollo,⁵⁰ and that he followed the example of the Hellenistic sovereigns. Thus, these coins were produced to reflect the emperor's living divinization;⁵¹ it was also interpreted as an imitation of the divine Augustus.⁵² Following Nero, his successors continued to be portrayed radiate beyond the reign of Constantine.⁵³ Several studies had been made regarding radiate crown on Roman coins, and various interpretations had been presented: the emperor portrays himself in the guise of Helios, thus seeking a divine status following the example of the Ptolemies and Seleucids, or else the emperors were associating themselves with Augustus, considering the radiate crown as an honorary symbol recalling the Actian Games, which were established to commemorate Augustus's victory in the battle of Actium and were dedicated to the god Apollo, in which the winners were awarded spiky wreaths resembling the radiate crowns.⁵⁴

CHRISTIAN ERA

The ancient Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans used the halo, which varied in name and form, in order to emphasize the power of their religious characters, and later on, their rulers and political figures. The halo was attested in the early Christian art around the 4th century AD and was only limited to the scenes of Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ In general terms, prior to baptism,

⁴⁹ *Loc.cit.*

⁵⁰ HIESINGER 1975, 121.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵² DE KLERK 2020, 37-38.

⁵³ STEYN 2012-13, 55.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 55, 57-58.

⁵⁵ *Cf.* The depiction of Jesus Christ in St. Bishoy Monastery at Wadi El-Natron dating to the 4th century AD: Christ is shown as a youth with the halo around the head including the cross, of which three bars appears and the fourth is hidden behind the head. EL.SAWY 2010, 521-22.

Christ was not always portrayed with the halo, which was used as a reference to his divine nature. In Egypt, however, the case was different as according to the Orthodox Church, his divinity was long before being baptized by Saint John;⁵⁶ thus, there were no depictions for Christ without the halo. In the 5th century AD, the halo started to be used for angels' depictions, whereas the 6th century AD witnessed its usage for the Holy Virgin Mary and the saints.⁵⁷

The halo has different types in the Christian art depending on the figure, with whom it was used. The crucified halo refers to the circle shape around the head with a cross in the middle. This type was only limited to Jesus Christ in all his representations. This undoubtedly helped to identify the images of Jesus even if the facial features disappeared or destroyed. As for other figures whether the saints, Virgin Mary, and others, the halo was plain, and the colours varied from one period to another based on the style of art of the period and the influence of other cultures on Coptic Art.⁵⁸

In Christian art in Egypt, the halo appeared in Old Testament scenes in different churches and monasteries. A good example is the illustration of the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in paradise as part of the last judgment scene that is a rare subject matter in Coptic art: the three patriarchs' depiction from the Church of the Virgin in the Monastery of Al-Surian and the Monastery of Saint Anthony. Al-Surian painting, which was uncovered in 1996, is dated to the end of the 9th century AD; thus, it is the

⁵⁶ SCHILLER 1971, 135.

⁵⁷ EL.SAWY 2010, 528.

⁵⁸ SCHILLER 1971, 35-38, figs. 20–22.

earliest example of that theme (fig. 4),⁵⁹ whereas Saint Anthony's painting dates to the 13th century AD (fig. 5).⁶⁰ The paintings of both monasteries are similar in composition, yet the style is different. The composition shows the three patriarchs enthroned in paradise in a frontal view, with the same facial features, their heads surrounded by the holy *nimbus*, and dressed in the Greek tunic and the *Pallium*. In the earlier painting from Al-Surian, there are a representation of a group of naked small figures on the left arms of the three fathers while elongating their hands to receive the red fruits that are introduced to them from the hands of the patriarchs, and there is another depiction of two figures on their laps eating the fruits; in the background another three small persons climbing the tree picking the fruits with their right hands and they are portrayed in an oval shape.⁶¹ The second example from the Monastery of Saint Anthony has slight differences: the three fathers have their names inscribed on a decorative band next to the right side of their heads,⁶² and the children are dressed in short and long tunics not naked like the previous one.⁶³ The haloes in both scenes can be easily recognised as plain haloes with the same round style and similar colours.

There is another example from the monastery of Al-Surian that depicts the falling asleep of the Holy Virgin Mary (fig. 6) dating to the 11th century AD. It represents the Holy Virgin Mary laying on her bed, her hands with open palms crossed over her chest. The hand gestures of the Apostles in

⁵⁹ The painting was previously dated to the 11th century AD, *cf.* INNEMÉE 1998, 292. For the more recent dating, *cf.* INNEMÉE et al. 2015, 157.

⁶⁰ INNEMÉE et al. 2015, 148.

⁶¹ VAN LOON 1999, 206-207.

⁶² NASSAR 2016, 288-289.

⁶³ VAN LOON 2003, 75-78.

this scene are raised to their heads showing their sorrow and deep sadness for the death of the Holy Virgin. There is a clear difference between the halo of Jesus Christ and that of the Virgin Mary and the accompanying figures.⁶⁴

In Rome, another distinct type of haloes was introduced, i.e., the square halo, ever since the 1st and 2nd centuries AD with rays emerging from the halo. It usually surrounded the heads of the figures accompanying the saints in different scenes; those figures were living characters during the time of building or decorating the monument. This was not only limited to the nobles or the aristocrats who might have been financial supporters to the building, but also it extended to Popes and others as can be seen in the mosaics of Rome. One of the surviving examples is the Episcopa Theodora head of the mother of the Pope of the day (end of the eighth – beginning of the ninth century).⁶⁵ In the ninth century, there is an example of Pope Gregory the Great with the square halo, which was painted during his lifetime.⁶⁶

In Egypt, the same concept of using the square halo was adopted with a clear scholars' interpretation for its usage, that is, the round halo was used for biblical figures while the square halo was typical for distinguished characters.⁶⁷ One of the early examples of the square halo is a mural painting discovered in chapel LI at the Monastery of Anba Apollo at Bawit (fig. 7). This scene of the nativity is depicted on the northern wall; it is

⁶⁴ LEORY 1982, 139.

⁶⁵ DODWELL 1993, 170

⁶⁶ HALL 1983, 100 and 93 (photo).

⁶⁷ VAN LOON 2006, 99.

placed within a series of scenes depicting the life cycle of the Virgin Mary: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Journey to Bethlehem and the Nativity. Salomé is the one depicted with the square halo while the Virgin Mary is depicted to the left with a head cover reaching her shoulder and disappearing in her black garment, which covers her body from neck to toes. She is reclining on an elongated circular bed with a double rim; some interlaced lines are running behind her head and foot. She is presented in a three quarter position with her head turned toward the viewer; giving a direct gaze.⁶⁸

There is another different type, that is, ‘the mandorla’, which is a frame surrounding the whole figure, defined as an almond-shaped *aureola*. It often surrounds Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in a traditional Christian representation. It is the shape generally used for mediaeval seals, secular seals generally being round.⁶⁹ The mandorla in Coptic Art has significant characteristics compared to other cultures. These characteristics can be concluded from the scene in chapel XLII in Bawit representing the Coptic Ascension of the 6th and 7th centuries AD (fig. 8). The bearded Christ is enthroned raising his right hand in a gesture of benediction, while he is holding a book with his left hand. At the mandorla’s each corner are wings filled with eyes. The heads of an eagle and a man are in the upper wings, while an ox and a lion are in the lower wings. Underneath the lower wings are two wheels. The sun and moon appear in medallions either above or below the mandorla, on either side of which there is an angel in

⁶⁸ ISMAIL & MAHMOUD 2018, 6-7.

⁶⁹ LIUNGMAN 1991, 287.

adoration bearing a crown. There is a narrow band separating the upper and lower portions.⁷⁰

ISLAMIC ERA

The halo was also attested in Islamic iconography. The first illustrated books in the Islamic world appeared under the Seljuks;⁷¹ the halo with the traditional round shape was shown around the heads of the main characters of the paintings, who were local persons: not symbolizing holiness. A good example from the Book of *Varka* and *Gülşah* (Early 13th century AD) that is kept in the Topkapi Palace Museum Library (fig. 9).⁷² However, in later periods, the halo, mainly in Persian and Turkish miniatures (e.g., *Mi'raj Nameh* [15th century] and *Siyer-i Nebi* [16th century]), became mostly limited to prophets, their family (e.g., Fatma; Khadija) as well as Imams (e.g., Ali).⁷³ Its shape witnessed a major change that was characteristic to Islamic paintings: Candlelight-like shape, fire-like shape (fig. 10), halo dispersed into the environment like clouds, in addition to the classical round shape. Halo was either emanating from the head or the body of the holy figures. The golden colour was the main colour used for the halo, even when another colour is employed (e.g., white or blue), the ring colour of the halo was usually the golden.⁷⁴ The fire-like halo of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is usually larger than those of the other prophets; there is an example showing the prophet of Islam (PBUH) as Imam of the

⁷⁰ DEWALD 1915, 288-290. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/497387>, accessed on Jan. 20, 2023.

⁷¹ DEVECI 2017, 363.

⁷² DARTAR & KAPLANOĞLU 2021, 522-523.

⁷³ DEVECI 2017, 364. For examples of the halo around the head of Imam Ali and Lady Fatma, see ELASSAL & HOSNY 2022, 137-139. For an example of Lady Khadija, see BAYRAMZADEH & OLIAEI 2016, fig. 14.

⁷⁴ DEVECI 2017, 367-368.

other prophets who was the only one with the head surrounded by the fire-like halo.⁷⁵ Angels (e.g., Gabriel) were either shown with or without a halo; the absence of halo was always attested in the presence of the other prophets, for a clearer identification of the prophets and showing the superior rank of humans to angels.⁷⁶ As for sultans, the Iranian and Ottoman paintings – except for the early periods – did not show them with halos, yet other parts of Islamic world like the Indian-related paintings show examples with halos (e.g., the Mughal emperors of India: Aurangzeb; Bahadir Shah II).⁷⁷ The Egyptian National Library keeps illustrated manuscripts (e.g., *Hadiqat Al-Soa'daa* dating to the 16th century AD and *Haydar Nameh* dating to the 17th century AD) showing the fire-like halo around the head or in the case of *Haydar Nameh*, the halo is also shown replacing the whole body.⁷⁸

MODERN ERA

In modern time, the radiate crown is worn on the head of the iconic Statue of Liberty that is hallmarking the entrance to New York harbour in the USA. Noteworthily, the idea of its construction – with some modifications in the design – had been originated for Egypt; yet, this was denied by the designer who said that the similarity was a coincidence!⁷⁹ The story started in the mid-19th century AD in 1855, when the French sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi first visited Egypt and soon developed a passion for the “larger-than-life-size” sculptures⁸⁰ through the large scaled monuments

⁷⁵ RAMEZANMAHI & GHEHI 2012, 20-21 and fig. 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁷ DEVECI 2017, 366, 367, fig. 24-25.

⁷⁸ ELASSAL & HOSNY 2022, 127-128, 132, 142 (pl.2).

⁷⁹ KREISER 1997, 106; BARTHOLDI 1885, 52.

⁸⁰ KHAN 2010, p. 51; For Bartholdi's admiration for the ancient Egyptian art and the influence on his design, see BARTHOLDI 1885, 35.

remained from ancient Egypt. In 1867, when Khedive Ismail visited Paris, Bartholdi approached him to get a commission to design a monumental lighthouse for the occasion of the Suez Canal opening⁸¹ to be placed at its entrance. His design – entitled “Egypt (or Progress) Bringing Light to Asia” or “Egypt Enlightening the Orient” – was a colossal female figure uplifting her arm with a torch in her hand (figs. 11 a, b). In 1869, he headed to Egypt with the drawings and a clay model, which were of interest to the Khedive; yet, the project was declined due to its high cost amid the large number of expensive projects that the Egyptian government had recently carried out.⁸² Then, the monumental beacon was redesigned to be a gift from France to the USA on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.⁸³ The statue shows a female figure standing upon a pedestal and dressed in classical costumes with its characteristic drapery. The right arm is uplifted grasping a torch in the hand, whereas the left arm is holding a tablet against the body, on which “4th July, 1776” is inscribed. The head is surmounted by a radiate crown with seven rays representing a halo. The sculptural work is entitled “Liberty enlightening the World”⁸⁴ and was installed in New York harbour and officially unveiled on October 28, 1886 in a grand ceremony.⁸⁵ It was initially designed to serve as a lighthouse by night.⁸⁶ Bartholdi’s design of the New York Liberty Statue was greatly inspired by the ancient Helios Colossus of

⁸¹ KREISER 1997, 106.

⁸² KHAN 2010, 54; FANDEL 2005, 22.

⁸³ OTERO 2017, 93.

⁸⁴ Inns of Court, “United States Patent Office”,

<https://inns.innsocourt.org/media/74497/2.pdf>; Google APIs, “Design. Bartholdi. Statue”,

<https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/9c/b2/8e/bf8be790df1c64/USD11023.pdf>, accessed on Jan. 15, 2023.

⁸⁵ KHAN 2010, 176.

⁸⁶ VIANO 2018, 343.

Rhodes,⁸⁷ with which Ptolemaic Egypt is linked.⁸⁸ firstly, the reason for the construction of Rhodes Colossus was celebrating the independence of Rhodes after Demetrius's siege (305-304 BC) had been ended, which was a Rhodian victory mainly gained by Ptolemy I's military intervention (financing the construction of the counted on selling the war machines left by the besieger);⁸⁹ secondly, Ptolemaic kings were sporadically wearing the Radiate crown of Helios that had been associated with the Egyptian sun-god to assure their divine descent; thirdly, Ptolemy III's offer to pay for the re-construction of Rhodes Colossus⁹⁰ shows its big value to the Ptolemies. On the other hand, Bartholdi's New York Colossus undoubtedly has a close resemblance to his rejected project of Egypt in terms of the setting, the form, the function, and even the title: as regards the setting, both colossi were intended to be surrounded by water; the form of both projects consisted of a lady uplifting her arm and holding a torch (the difference is in the outfit and some attributes); as for the function, both projects were intended to serve as lighthouses; and the title of both included the word 'enlightenment'. As a matter of fact, only by adding the radiate crown to Bartholdi's Egyptian model, such colossus – if had been constructed – could have brought ancient ties between Egypt and Greece into the modern era in a perfect composition!

⁸⁷ BABCOCK 1987, 404.

⁸⁸ The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, "The Statue of Liberty and its Ties to the Middle East" (PDF), https://isac.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/shared/docs/danh_vo_labels.pdf, accessed on Jan. 15, 2023.

⁸⁹ VAN DESSEL & HAUBEN 1977, 338-339.

⁹⁰ SØRENSEN 2019, 16-17.

CONCLUSIONS

The halo had been employed in different cultures; each had its own interpretation and served its own purpose. In Egypt, however, the halo had a coherent sequence along its various successive eras; in the ancient Egyptian era, it was related to the sun cult and was depicted as a round disk surmounting the head of the deities, and as time went on, it was also shown above the head of the royal figures; the halo was then passed on to the Graeco-Roman era, in which the Ptolemies depicted themselves within a similar concept inspired by their own mythology, that is wearing the radiate crown of the god Helios, thus reflecting the idea of the divinity of the king in a Hellenized context and on different media (e.g., coins). The Christian art also employed the halo with different types signifying the holiness of the figures (Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, and saints); a Christian motif was added, i.e., the cross in the Crucified Halo that was limited to the Christ. Certain Islamic cultures – not in Egypt – adopted the same idea using a distinct shape that is the fire-like halo surrounding the heads of the prophets, their families, and Imams; examples of such illustrated manuscripts are kept in the Egyptian National Library. In fact, the halo should be perceived as an excellent example that shows the interaction among different cultures despite their religious or cultural beliefs.

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Fig. 1

**Tuna El-Gabal, Cult Chapel of Ptolemy I Soter
(currently kept at Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim)**

MINAS-NERPEL 2018, 152, fig. 5.9.

Available at: https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/propylaeumdok/5035/1/Minas-Nerpel_Pharaoh_and_Temple_Building_2018.pdf



Fig. 2 a
Helios embracing
Serapis



Fig. 2 b
Serapis with the rays of
Helios in high relief



Fig. 2 c
Serapis with the rays of
Helios in sculpture in the
round

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA49647
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1929-0419-1
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1772-0302-172

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Fig. 3

Issued under Ptolemy IV (Svoronos 1117)

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_G-4565

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Fig. 4

Church of the Holy Virgin (south wall), Deir al-Surian, the Three Old Testament Patriarchs in Paradise.

INNEMÉE *et al.* 2015, 185, fig. 1.



Fig. 5
The three patriarchs enthroned in paradise from the Monastery of Saint Anthony
GABRA *et al.* 2007, 215.



Fig. 6
The Falling Asleep of the Holy Virgin Mary, Al-Surian Monastery
CAPUANI *et al.* 1999, 55.



Fig. 7
The Virgin Mary and the Midwife Salomé, Chapel LI, north wall, Monastery of
Apa Apollo in Bawit
VAN LOON 2006, 88, pl. 8.



Fig. 8
Cupola Decoration by Early Christian Painter – 6th century – Coptic Museum,
Cairo
https://www.wga.hu/html_m/zearly/1/5coptic/painting/1bawit1.html, accessed on Jan.
22, 2023



Fig. 9
Varka and Gülşah
DARTAR & KAPLANOĞLU 2021, 523, fig. 3.



Fig. 10
Imam Ali fighting demons
DEVECI 2017, 366, fig. 21.



Fig. 11a
Bartholdi's design for the entrance of Suez Canal (1869) – watercolour glued on paper kept at Musée Bartholdi, Colmar
GRIGSBY 2008, 43, fig. 2.3.



Fig. 11b
Bartholdi's design "Egypt Carrying the Light to Asia" – Lighthouse Project – Photo kept at Musée Bartholdi, Colmar
KREISER 1997, 106, fig. 6.