

The Statue of Liberty and its Ties to Egypt

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Towering over the entrance to New York harbor, Frédéric Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty is generally acknowledged to evoke both the symbolism and harbor-side placement of the ancient Colossus of Rhodes. Created by Chares of Lindos between 292 to 280 BC, that Hellenistic image of the Greek solar deity Helios rose more than 107 feet high and faced ships entering the harbor of Rhodes. Further, both the ancient and modern statues were monuments dedicated to independence and liberty. The dedication text of the colossus survives in anthologies of Greek poetry:

To you, o Sun, the people of Dorian Rhodes set up this bronze statue reaching to Olympus, when they had pacified the waves of war and crowned their city with the spoils taken from the enemy. Not only over the seas but also on land did they kindle the lovely torch of freedom and independence. For to the descendants of Herakles belongs dominion over sea and land.

Less well-known, however, is the direct Egyptian connection between the colossus and the New York statue. The independence that Rhodes celebrated with the erection of the colossus had been gained only by the critical intervention in 304 BC of ships belonging to Ptolemy I, a former general of Alexander the Great and founder of the Egyptian dynasty that would last until the death of Cleopatra (VII) the Great. Ptolemy's forces dispersed the siege of Rhodes begun in 305 BC by armies loyal to Antigonos I, a rival, former general of Alexander. Following the withdrawal of the enemy troops, Rhodes seized and sold their abandoned weapons and thus financed the harbor monument.

Although it is the torch of liberty that is highlighted in both Greek and English dedication texts, the numerous green foam crowns sold to New York tourists indicate clearly that the most iconic aspect of the Statue of Liberty is her crown of solar rays, a feature typically restored in images of the lost colossus as well. Here again there is a direct Egyptian connection, as Ptolemaic kings represented themselves as Helios on earth. In antiquity, the crown given to Liberty in New York was worn more prominently by

Ptolemy III on his official coinage. Bartholdi's statue had been intended originally for Port Said beside the Suez Canal. The placement in Egypt would have been quite logical.



Ptolemy III as Helios.