Aimee Hinds, "Entry on: Barbie® Dolls of the World® — The Princess Collection (Series): Barbie® Doll as Princess of the Nile™ by Mattel, Inc. ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1126. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Mattel, Inc.

Barbie® Dolls of the World® — The Princess Collection (Series): Barbie® Doll as Princess of the Nile™

United States of America (2001)

TAGS: Cleopatra VII Egypt





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Barbie® Dolls of the World® — The Princess Collection (Series): Barbie® Doll as Princess of the Nile™
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2001
First Edition Details	Mattel, *Barbie® Doll as Princess of the Nile*, 2001.
Official Website	barbie.mattel.com (accessed: September 22, 2020).
Genre	Collectables*, Dolls*
Target Audience	Young adults (on the box Mattel suggest that this doll is for adult collectors, which they define as those aged 14 and up)
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Logo retrieved from Wikipedia, public domain (accessed: January 11, 2022).

Mattel, Inc. (Company)

Mattel Barbie

Originally launched in 1959, Barbie was founded by businesswoman, inventor, and co-owner of Mattel, Ruth Handler as an opportunity for girls to play with dolls that allowed them a wider range of imaginative roles, in line with the range of toys available to boys at the time. From the early 1960s, Barbie has had over 200 careers to date.

Source:

barbie.mattel.com (accessed: January 27, 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

This collector's edition doll depicts Barbie as an ancient Egyptian princess (distinct from the similar dolls which depict Elizabeth Taylor in Cleopatra (2000), the 2010 Barbie as Cleopatra doll and the 1994 Egyptian Queen doll). The doll is part of the Dolls of the World Princess Collection, which also includes a Princess of Ancient Greece doll. The doll wears a gold, pleated shift under a white overdress. Her hair is styled in shoulder-length braids and is suggestive of ancient Egyptian wigs. On her feet she wears simple gold sandals. She wears gold and gem-style adornments, including a wide collar, a diadem, and arm cuffs.

The text on the box reads describes the morning beauty routine of the character of the doll, including details of her cosmetics. It is contextualised by information about ancient Egypt, specifying a date of "over 3000 years ago. The doll's character is described a princess who may one day be pharaoh.

The box is also illustrated with painted images, one depicting a sphinx and the other presumably depicting the garden and pool referred to in the text.

Analysis

Unlike the comparable Barbie as Cleopatra doll, this doll is provided with a wealth of information on the box as historical context (this is also the case with the earlier Egyptian Queen doll, also surveyed on this database). As Kristina Milnor points out, the information is at odds with that provided for other historical dolls from more recent periods, giving a factual, historical flavour rather than a fantastical one, despite being focused almost solely on clothing and cosmetics (Milnor 2005: 229).

A specific historical figure is not cited for this doll, although the time period given by the blurb ("Over 3000 years ago…") suggests that the identity of the "princess of the Nile" is likely to be Nefertiti (although the earlier Hapshetsut was pharaoh in her own right, the visual imagery of her during her reign is unlike this doll, making her an unlikely candidate for visual inspiration; the doll also reflects Cleopatra VII in popular imagination, discussed further below). As a generic, non-specific princess there is for wider scope for role-play, a

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fundamental aspect of Barbie's creation as a toy (About Barbie, accessed: September 22, 2020). Unlike the later Cleopatra doll, she is not Barbie in a costume, but as a collector's item, she is equally not to be played with. Instead, the doll is representative of the history created for her by Mattel, asp rovided on the box (Milnor 2005: 223): a window into the (non-specific) world of the Princess of the Nile. So, the probable identification with Nefertiti - which is visible through the doll's conspicuously brown skin tone, thick jewelled collar and gold diadem, which echo the famous Nefertiti Bust – allows Mattel to tap into a historical precedent, without providing specifics which may limit the imagination of the doll's owner, or be proved wrong by later historical revelations.

The lack of specifics also allows Mattel to teach the consumer something, whatever their level of knowledge: it is impossible to be an expert in a history created exclusively for Barbie to inhabit. Whilst the doll is not intended to be educational to children in the way that the non-collectible dolls are, like the Great Era dolls (the series from which the earlier Egyptian Queen doll is drawn), historicity is important here (as indicated by the wording on the box), as a way of marketing the educational possibilities of Barbie to adults (Milnor, 2005: 218). Ultimately Barbie is produced for profit, and thus the educational element may be a way of adding value to the product for the intended young adult or adult buyer. That there is a serious attempt to educate is evinced by the constant explanations of the meanings of specific terms in the box text, including terms such as "henna", "sphinx" and "pharaoh", which is in contrast to the earlier version of this doll, and is a little confusing given that the doll is marketed to adults, who are unlikely to need definitions of terms such as "pyramids". Significantly, the date provided for the Princess of the Nile (similar to that of the Egyptian Queen) rules out Cleopatra VII as her identity, indicating that Mattel's objective was to genuinely engage with history rather than to create a version of a historical figure informed by pop-culture (as with the Barbie as Cleopatra doll).

The lack of engagement with pop-culture is also perhaps responsible for this doll's - and that of others in the series - demure presentation, which is at odds with some of the more fashion-focused dolls. While Barbie's slim profile is ever-present, the doll's make-up is justified through its historical explanation on the box. Unlike the earlier Egyptian Queen doll, the Princess of the Nile's features are not the same as the standard Barbie; she has almond-shaped eyes (more similar to the 1997 Chinese Empress doll than the Egyptian Queen),

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fuller lips and a slightly wider, flatter nose than most Barbies. The doll's conspicuously (light) brown skin demonstrates Mattel's awareness of racial difference; in contrast to the light-skinned Egyptian Queen doll, it reflects Mattel's commodification of diversity (Milnor, 2005: 232), and suggests a deliberate attempt to market this doll to a wide audience. Although the date rules out Cleopatra VII, arguably the presentation of the "African" Egyptian princess capitalises on discussions about Cleopatra's ethnicity to make the doll recognisable as Egyptian.

The doll's hair is especially interesting; while it reflects ancient Egyptian wigs from the period, it is perhaps even more reminiscent of microbraids, a hairstyle particularly popular amongst Black women in the 1990s and further popularised by white celebrities into the early 2000s, around the same time this doll was designed. Thus, while this doll moves away from a recognisable white femininity in some ways, those same elements are often recognisably tied back in to Barbie's brand of femininity through their appropriation by public figures whose images are also consumed by Barbie's target consumer (for example, celebrities such as Christina Aguilera). This is reflected in aspects of the doll that are ambiguous and can be emulated by people of several ethnicities, despite the clear attempt to mark her as "African" - her skin tone, while brown, is barely darker than tanned skin; her hair, although braided, is still texturally closer to European than Afro hair; and her features are easily replicated via the modern versions of the same cosmetics which are so important in her historical contextualisation. The result of this for children and young people is that Barbie's hyperfeminine image is not in question, and as a collectors' doll she remains a model of femininity for a wide variety of people, in terms of both gender and race.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Cleopatra VII Egypt
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant	Femininity Gender Gender expectations/construction Gender, female Girls Historical figures History Identity Society

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for Children and Youth Culture

Further Reading

Barbie, *About Barbie*, avaiable at barbie.mattel.com (accessed: January 27, 2020).

Barbie, *Princess of the Nile Barbie doll*, avaiable at barbie.mattel.com (accessed: August 12, 2020).

Milnor, Kristina, "Barbie® as Grecian Goddess™ and Egyptian Queen™: Ancient Women's History by Mattel®", *Helios* 32.2 (2005): 215–233.

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