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CHAPTER

The Ptolemies: Hellenistic Kingship in Egypt

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Abstract

This article explores the character(s) of Ptolemaic kingship in Egypt. A special focus is placed on the legitimation of kingship and the different forms of (self-) representation of the king. After remarks on the king's court and principles of state organization, the concept of the Hellenistic *basileus* is explained by using Ptolemy III as a model of the Ptolemaic king. This is followed by a discussion of the Egyptian side of Ptolemaic kingship, which also can best be explained by the representation of Ptolemy III. In the last section of this essay the question of mixed forms of Ptolemaic representation and self-conception is discussed.

Keywords: Ptolemaic kingship, rule legitimation, rule representation, victorious king, court, poetry, tryphe, pharaoh, ruler cult, dynastic cult

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The Ptolemaic Dynasty

In 306, when Antigonus Monophtalmus and Demetrius Polioketes already had declared themselves kings, Ptolemy, the satrap of Egypt, followed their precedents and took the diadem and the purple, the newly created symbols of Macedonian kingship (see Figure 1; cf. Diod. 31.15.2; Haake 2012).

Figure 1:

Silver octadrachm of Ptolemy I with royal diadema

(courtesy of Wikipedia);

Ptolemy established a dynasty of fifteen kings who all bore the name Ptolemy (an overview of the history of the dynasty is to be found in Huß 2001 and Hölbl 2001). The members of the dynasty are also called Lagides, which refers to Lagos, the father of Ptolemy I.

One of the most important characteristics that distinguishes the Ptolemies from other monarchies of antiquity is that the queen had a very important position in the representation and self-conception of the dynasty (Hazzard 2000; Carney 2013; Clayman 2014). From the second century BC onward some of these queens could even rule alone, as in the case of Cleopatra II, Cleopatra III, and Cleopatra VII, and the history of the dynasty ended in 30 BC with the death of one of these queens, Cleopatra VII, who ruled together with her underage son, Ptolemy Caesar XV, also called Caesarion. After having lost the war against Octavianus and following the suicide of Marc Antony, the queen committed suicide, and her son was executed by order of Octavianus, the later Augustus. From then on Egypt was a Roman province.

In examining the character of Ptolemaic kingship, one should first note that there was not *one* concept of Ptolemaic kingship. The specific ideological basics, as well as the self-definition of the kingship, changed due to various geopolitical and social parameters that the kings and queens had to deal with. Despite the great political changes, wars, domestic insurrections, defeats, and political dependency of Rome, it is nevertheless possible to establish basic characteristics shared by every Ptolemaic king and found in a common practice of representation and perception of the Ptolemies (Heinen 1978), as well as to describe the core of Ptolemaic *basileia* in a synchronic perspective (cf. Mooren 1983; Samuel 1993; Koenen 1993).

The King and His Court

The royal family had its residence in Alexandria (Fraser 1972, I:93–131; Weber 2007, 99–117), where an enormous royal quarter, the *basileia*, in the northeast part of Alexandria, took up according to Strabo (17.1.9) one-quarter of the whole city as well as half of the eastern harbor (cf. Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 5.2.62–63). The court (*aule*) consisted of the royal family, the household, and the so-called friends (*philoi*) of the king, his personal advisers (Weber 1997, Strootman 2014, 166). These *philoi* performed all important functions in the administration as well as in the army, as functionaries, generals, and ambassadors. The king held meetings with his *philoi* in the *synedrion*, the crown council (cf. Diod. 17.16.1–2; Hatzopoulos 1996, 323–359). Although they were the leading persons of the empire, the *philoi* should not be considered as a homogenous group but rather constantly struggling for recognition in the eyes of the king, who could give them prestige in the form of land (*doreai*), important positions, or even aulic ranks. This aulic titulature developed into a system of titles, which from the second century BC were assigned to special functions in the administration of the country and were no longer clear markers of proximity to the king (Mooren 1975; for the oldest example of an aulic title, from the end of the third century, see Abd el-Fattah, Abd el-Maksoud, and Carrez-Maratray 2014, 153f.).

To what extent Egyptian subjects could become *philoi* of the king is still a question of debate (e.g., Rajak 2008, 40–45; pace Herman 1997) and should be investigated in more detail. The main problem in identifying Egyptians at court is the fact that they could choose a Greek name at the time that they entered court society (cf. Moyer 2011), so not every "Greek" was a "Greek" in ethnic terms.

A Personal Monarchy

The concept of Hellenistic kingship was that of a personal monarch (Virgilio 2003, 129; Mooren 1983)—"the king is the state"—even though the concept of "state" as we know it did not exist then. The states that were the business, personal matters, and property of the king all are referred to in Greek by the plural *ta pragmata*. A Ptolemaic king would never have called himself "king of Egypt"; he was a king without a special people or territory, like, for example, Macedonia or Egypt. Despite his military and political power, the Ptolemaic king was not an absolute monarch, but rather bound into several networks of dependencies. He had to comply with a multitude of different role expectations, which were attributed to him by his Macedonian, Greek, and non-Greek soldiers; the dependent and formal independent Greek city states of his empire; the local elites of the Ptolemaic possessions outside Egypt; and last but not least, the Egyptian subjects and their priests as well. This explains why we find two major forms of monarchical self-representation: every king was first and most important a Hellenistic *basileus*, who represented himself the Greek way, and second he was an Egyptian pharaoh, who was represented in traditional Egyptian forms of royal appearance. In scholarly research the Ptolemaic monarchy is called a *monarchie bicephale* (Peremans 1987) or a Janus-headed monarchy (Koenen 1993), terms which, as we will see, provide a good but at the same time also very superficial key to the understanding of Ptolemaic kingship.

The Ptolemies as Hellenistic Kings

Although the Romans sometimes called the Ptolemies "Alexandrinian kings" and defamed Cleopatra VII as "Egyptian" (cf. Sonnabend 1986, 57–58), the Ptolemies considered themselves Macedonians (Bearzot 1992, 39–53) and did everything to promote their Macedonian heritage, especially when they were active in the Greek world. Pausanias, for example, refers to a victory list of Delphic games as follows: "The victor proclaimed … was Ptolemy the Macedonian. For the kings of Egypt liked to be called Macedonians, as in fact they were" (10.7.8; cf. 6.3.1). This literary evidence can be corroborated by inscriptions. A temple inventory from Delos mentions a *kylix* made of gold and the statement: "Dedication of Ptolemy, son of Lagos, Macedonian, for Aphrodite" (IG XI [2] 161 B 26–27) and a *Statuengruppe* dedicated by the league of the Aitolians in Thermos gave every member of the Ptolemaic family the ethnic label "Macedonian" (IG IX I^2, 56), which shows that the self-definition of the Ptolemies as Macedonians was taken over by the Greeks. This "being Macedonian" did not exclude the Ptolemies' also considering themselves Greeks, and they had no problem taking part in Greek games. Like the family of Alexander the Great, who had a Greek origin as well, the Ptolemies had Heracles as their ancestor (cf. infra), and with such a Greek hero in his family tree, one was Greek.

In Egypt itself, on the other hand, the Macedonian heritage of the dynasty was seldom mentioned. The Ptolemies almost always referred to their dynastic and/or divine ancestors (cf. infra) and not to their *ethnikon*. However, the poets at the court in Alexandria, especially Theocritus (Hymn to Delos 5.167) and Posidippus (AB 78, 82, 87, 88; Stephens 2004), referred to the "Macedonicity" of the dynasty.

Founding a New Dynasty and the Quest for Legitimation

Ptolemy was a self-crowned king and had no traditions he could lean on to legitimate his kingship to his Macedonian and Greek subjects. It nevertheless was highly important that these two groups accepted his leadership, because the greatest part of his army was recruited from them, and the army was the base of his power. In trying to establish new forms of legitimation, Ptolemy I therefore had to consider two problems. First, his Greek soldiers from the city states knew the concept of monarchy only from Homeric times or the barbarian world. They had followed Alexander because of his personal charisma or because he promised them a big haul or forced them to come with him. Second, for the Macedonian soldiers, in contrast to their Greek colleagues, kingship was bound to the dynasty of the Argeads, and thus Ptolemy was lacking royal blood. So at the beginning both groups of soldiers followed the king because he was victorious due to his military ability, which means that he had charisma (Gehrke 2013). As Ptolemy could establish a secure power base in Egypt and the surrounding countries up to Syria, his claim was accepted also by the peer group of *diadochi* (cf. Arr. succ. fr. 1.34); the land was his spear-won property (*doriktetos chora* or *ge*). He further bought the loyalty and support of his soldiers with the gold and grain of Egypt, by giving the soldiers booty and, more important, land in Egypt as *kleruchoi*, holders of land by military tenure. The former mercenaries were now bound to Egypt and were, like their king, strangers in a strange land, which means that the fates of both soldiers and kings were firmly bound together (Scheuble-Reiter 2012; Fischer-Bovet 2014).

The Ptolemies as Greek Gods

One of the main cult places of Alexandria was the tomb of Alexander the Great, the Sema, where Ptolemy I has established an empire-wide cult of Alexander. Since the times of Ptolemy II this cult had extended into a cult of the royal dynasty. The ruling couple were associated with the cult of Alexander by their own cult titles, which were included in the titulary of the priest of Alexander. This ruler cult had its roots in Greek perceptions of the godlike ruler (Habicht 1970, 3–10; Fraser 1972, I:214). The priesthood, which could only be occupied by persons of highest position at court, changed every year. Following Greek habits of so-called eponymous dating traditions, the names of the priests were used to date deeds and official documents. In addition to the priesthood of Alexander and the dynasty, and as a proof of the importance of the queens for the legitimation of the dynasty, an eponymous female priesthood for the queen was established under nearly every Ptolemaic king, starting with the *kanephore* ("basket bearer") of Arsinoe II in the time of Ptolemy II and the *athlophore* ("prize bearer") of Berenice II in the time of Ptolemy III (Ijsewijn 1961; Pestman 1967, 132–163; Minas-Nerpel 2000, 81–171).

Besides the dynastic cult and the cult for queens, cults for each ruling couple were established, and both were venerated in sacred precincts or temples (McKenzie 2007, 51–52). The only known in situ record of such a precinct is an altar of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II at the same place where a generation later Ptolemy III built the temple of Sarapis (Sabottka 2008, 50–64). How a ruler's cult precinct in Alexandria may have looked may be imagined from the archaeological finds in Hermopolis Magna, where such a temple was erected in the time of Ptolemy III (Pfeiffer 2008a, 53–54).

Because of the different possibilities for venerating the king as a living god, one should distinguish between dynastic cult on the one hand and ruler cult on the other hand in the Greek representation and perception of the dynasty (Pfeiffer 2008a). These Greek cults for the living gods found their expression in gigantic festivals and processions like the *Ptolemaia* (Athen. 5.25–35, 196A–203B; Rice 1983; Thompson 2000)), *basileia*, or *theadelpheia*, in which the rulers were celebrated as gods, and they displayed their enormous Dionysiac wealth and their victoriousness.

Ptolemy III: The Paradigm of the Hellenistic *Basileus*

An inscription of Ptolemy III shows every important aspect of Ptolemaic kingship in its Greco-Macedonian appearance. It commemorates the beginning of the Third Syrian War (246–241 BC), which the king had launched against the Seleucid empire. Many scholars think that in this inscription Ptolemy emulates the deeds of great pharaohs like Thutmosis III (cf., e.g., Tuplin 2014, 257). However, as we will see, this is incorrect. The text reads as follows (OGIS 54 = Austin 2006, no. 266):

> Great King Ptolemy, son of King Ptolemy and Queen Arsinoe, the Brother–Sister Gods, children of King Ptolemy and Queen Berenice the Savior Gods, descended on his father's side from Heracles son of Zeus and on his mother's side from Dionysus son of Zeus, having taken over from his father the kingdom of Egypt, Libya, Syria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, Lycia, Caria and the Cyclades islands, marched out into Asia with a force of infantry and cavalry, a fleet and elephants from the Troglodytes and Ethiopia, which his father and he himself were the first to hunt from these places, and (which) they brought to Egypt and equipped for use in war. Having secured control of all the territory within (i.e. to the west of) the Euphrates and of Cilicia, Pamphylia, Ionia, the Hellespont, Thrace, and of all the forces in those places and of the Indian elephants, and having reduced to his obedience all the rulers in the provinces, he crossed the river Euphrates, and having subdued Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Susiana, Persis, Media and all the remaining territory as far as Bactria, and having sought out all the sacred objects that were removed from Egypt by the Persians and having brought them back to Egypt together with the rest of the treasure from the provinces, he sent his forces across the canals … (the rest of the inscription is lost).

The Victorious King

By calling himself Great King (*basileus megas*), Ptolemy has taken over the title of the Persian king and presents himself as the righteous lord of Asia and Egypt. This claim to rule the world was short-lived, because a few months later great parts of Asia were lost again, and Ptolemy abstained from using the title. Besides Ptolemy III (cf. PSI V, 541) the title in Hellenistic Egypt is only attested for Ptolemy IV (SEG 20.467; cf. Pfeiffer forthcoming), Ptolemy VIII (Stud. Pal. IV 54; col. I.5–7; P. Lond. III 879, 10–12), and Ptolemy XII (SEG 39, 1705). At no time does the title seem to have been part of the official titulary of the king.

The inscription shows how important it was for Ptolemy III, having ascended the throne, to prove his victoriousness, which in turn guaranteed legitimation of his rule. Nevertheless, he refused to refer to concrete deeds of victory, such as battles won or cities seized, which is interesting, because one would have expected some Homeric heroic exploits or the mention of battles won, in which the king himself slew his enemies. A second document of Ptolemy III explains why such heroic deeds in the context of the conquest of Syria were not fitting for the picture of Ptolemaic kingship in its Greco-Macedonian appearance: Ptolemy wanted to be perceived, like Alexander the Great, as a liberator and savior who was welcomed in great joy by the inhabitants of the cities, who did not even have to be conquered but opened the gates in relief (W. Chr. 1 col. II–III; Austin 2006, no. 266). Consent and acceptance were much more important than actual military performance.

The King and His Army

The importance of the Ptolemaic army can be seen in the fact that Ptolemy mentions all branches of the service that came with him: infantry, cavalry, fleet, and elephants. The king alone was not the conqueror; he was successful with and because of the braveness of his soldiers. After the conquest he not only integrated the Indian elephants, which Ptolemy was very proud to have won, into the army, but also took over the soldiers of the new territories and made them soldiers of the Ptolemaic army. This was rational and had been the practice since Ptolemy I, who did the same after the battle of Gaza in 312 BC (Diod. 19.85.4).

The King and His Mythological Background

Ptolemy promoted the idea that Dionysus and Heracles were his mythological ancestors, which meant that Zeus himself was the divine forefather of the dynasty (cf. Theocritus 17.27; Satyros F. Gr. Hist. 631, F 1). One important son of Zeus was Dionysus, who, according to sources from Hellenistic times, had conducted a triumphal campaign against Asia (Diod. 4.3–1.4; Eurip. Bakch. 1–20). By describing the territories he had conquered, Ptolemy implied that he had done the same deeds as his forefather, Dionysus. He even came home with the same spoils as Dionysus. Thus Ptolemy was a new Dionysus, a claim that was also taken over by portraits of the king showing him with the sprouting bulls' horns and the mitra-head band of this god (Queyrel 2002).

The importance of Heracles, another son of Zeus, who also was a victor over Asia, can be seen in the fact that the attributes—exuvia and club—were used in Ptolemaic iconography (Bailey 1990; Heilmeyer 1997). Ptolemy II introduced these emulations of Dionysus and Heracles into the Ptolemaic iconography (on Ptolemaic portraits and attributes, see Kyrieleis 1975; Svenson 1995).

The King's Ancestry

The inscription of Adulis is a very good example of the importance of dynastic continuity, which every successor of Ptolemy I wanted to express. The dynastic forefathers were the focal point of Ptolemaic legitimation. Their names were mentioned in every dating formula of contracts and deeds alongside the actual king. The Ptolemies minted coins that depicted their ancestors, like the *mnaia*-gold coins that show on the one side Ptolemy I and Berenice I and on the other Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II. Ptolemy III continued to mint exactly these coins as well as others showing his ancestors (cf. Lorber 2012). It was so important to be of royal blood that even in times when only children were in the line of succession, as in the case of Ptolemy V, it was unthinkable for members of the court elite to usurp kingship.

Embedded into the importance of family and ancestry was the concept of sibling marriage, which was established by Ptolemy II, who married his sister, Arsinoe II. He may have promoted this marriage officially as following the model of the marriage of his forefather Zeus and his sister Hera. The Egyptians, on the other hand, could see an analogy with the marriage of Osiris and Isis (Müller 2009, 85–155). In the following generations the Ptolemies either married their sisters or called their wives sisters, even if they were not. Ptolemy V, for example, married the daughter of the Seleucid king Antiochus III, and the queen was called sister of the king (Huß 2001, n27).

The King as Hunter

Ptolemy in his inscription points out that he has hunted elephants together with his father (cf. Diod. 3.36.3–5). In the Macedonian view hunting was a royal privilege (Carney 2002), and naturally Alexander the Great was a renowned hunter (cf. Collins Reilly 1993). He followed the example of Heracles, who hunted the lion or the boar (Apollodor 2.5.1, 2.5.4). Ptolemy I continued this Macedonian habit (Strootman 2014, 199–202) and ordered a painting showing himself as Meleager together with Dionysus hunting the Calydonian boar (Donderer 1988; Seyer 2007, 135–137). Like the sibling marriage, which could be interpreted the Egyptian way, the ideal of hunting also had roots in oriental, especially Egyptian, ideas of kingship. This was especially the case during the New Kingdom, when Thutmosis I (Urk. IV, 103–105) and Thutmosis III (Gebel Barkal stela: Urk. IV 1233–1234 and TT 85: Urk. IV, 893–894) hunted elephants in Syria. It is nevertheless unlikely that the Ptolemaic ideal of the king as hunter was deliberately related to the pharaoh as hunter, as we do not even know if the magnificent hunts of the Thutmosides were known 1,000 years later, and because the royal hunt had direct Macedonian precedents, excluding the necessity of a direct example of Egyptian concepts.

The Luxurious King

Like his role model Dionysus, Ptolemy III managed to conduct a successful "Indian" campaign and came back in a triumphal procession with rich spoils. Leaving aside the concept of simplicity, which Ptolemy I was fond of (at least according to Plut. Mor. 181F; Ael. VH 13.13; Curt. 9.8.23), Ptolemy II had previously alluded to this Dionysian campaign when he celebrated his penteterical feast of the *Ptolemaia* (cf. above) and showed the overflowing wealth and the Dionysian opulence of his kingship (cf. Phylarchus: F. Gr. Hist. 81, F 40), which were called in Greek *tryphe* . This tryphe became a symbolic marker of the Ptolemaic dynasty (Heinen 1983; Tondriau 1946; Müller 2009, 159–172). In consequence the Ptolemies took over the attributes of Dionysus, and Ptolemy XII actually called himself *neos Dionysos*. The cornucopia as an attribute of the Ptolemaic queens, and especially the double cornucopia (*dikeras*) of Arsinoe II, symbolized this wealth, which was displayed to the subjects and linked the fertility of Egypt with the queens. This ostentatious presentation of luxury and wealth even led to Ptolemies' being proud of being fat. The obesity of the king was picked up by the unofficial sobriquet or nickname "the luxurious" (*tryphon*) or "pot belly" (*phykon*) for Ptolemy III, IV, VIII, and IX (Trog. Prol. 27; 30; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 7.208; Iust. 39.1.3; Ael. VH 14,31). The Romans especially detested this form of self-representation, because *luxuria* contradicted the ideal of Roman *virtus* (cf. Iust. 38.8.9–11; Diod. 33.28a, 2; Heinen 1978, 188–192; 1983).

The King as Savior and Benefactor

It is likely that Ptolemy distributed part of the spoils he took from Asia among his subjects because being a benefactor was an integral aspect of Hellenistic kingship (Bringmann 1993; Gauthier 1985) and consequently Ptolemy chose the epithet Euergetes. Ptolemy furthermore attached importance to the fact that he brought back sacred objects to Egypt, which refers to a *topos* of Egyptian priestly inscriptions that praise the first four Ptolemies for bringing back the statues of Egyptian gods that were stolen once upon a time by the Persians (cf. Winnicki 1994). To conquer the hearts of his non-Greek subjects by *euergetism* was a remedy that Isocrates had proposed to Philipp II (Isocr. or. Philip. 121.2). Such beneficence is closely related to *soteria*, which had the double meaning of preservation and salvation: The king had to be a *soter kai euergetes*—a savior and benefactor. A coin minted in Tarsos shortly after Ptolemy III had "liberated" the city during his campaign consequently calls the king *soter* (Kyrieleis 1975, 26).

The two ideals of Hellenistic kingship can be found not only in honorary inscriptions about the king but also in numerous petitions (*enteuxeis*), which subjects of every ethnic background sent to the king, asking him to be benevolent or a philanthrope or their savior (Schubert 1937; Guéraud 1931).

The Ptolemies as Pharaohs

According to the literary sources, the satrap Ptolemy, later king Ptolemy I, considered it impossible to achieve a firm rule over Egypt without the help of the Egyptians and thought that it could be defended against the other diadochs only with their help. He thus "had secured the favour of the Egyptians by his extraordinary prudence" (Iust. 13.6; cf. Diod. 18.14). Although it is highly likely that this is correct and that Ptolemy I tried to achieve acceptance as the legitimate ruler by the Egyptian priests, which were multiplicators toward his Egyptian people, in modern scholarship there is an opinion that it was not until the reign of Ptolemy II that the king was interested in the priestly elites and that Ptolemy I had only a punctilious interest in temple relations (Gorre 2009a, 487, 624; 2013, 101–105). A clue for this comes from some Egyptian priests from the time of the nominal pharaoh Philipp Arrhidaios (323–317 BCE). These priests praised themselves, for example, for dislodging soldiers who dwelled inside the temple precincts by building them new homes outside the temples or for re-erecting destroyed temple structures, which would normally be the duty of the pharaoh (Gorre 2009a, no. 41 = Thiers 1995, doc. 5: Hor; Gorre 2009a, no. 70 = Thiers 1995, doc 4: Teos; Gorre 2009a, no. 39 = Thiers 1995, doc. 7: Petosiris, dating insecure; most probably he was high priest from the time of Artaxerxes III to the time of Arrhidaios). The billeting of soldiers inside temples posed a great threat to acceptance of the new rule, and thus it was Ptolemy himself, shortly after taking the title pharaoh in 304 BC, who ended this practice by law and prohibited it in future by imposing high fines (SB 16.12519 = C. Ord. Ptol. 40, with Hagedorn 1986; Rigsby 1988). The king's interest in the well-being of the Egyptian priests is also shown by the so-called Satrap-stela of 311 BC. The priests praised Ptolemy for donating land to their temple in Buto, which during the Persian dominion was secularized. That this temple-friendly policy of Ptolemy I was not only lip service or purley punctal interest in temple relations is demonstrated by the fact that the royal ordinance (*prostagma*) of 304 BC prohibited the sale of holy precincts and temples and ordered that official functionaries were not allowed to take levies from the temple income. The priests from Buto furthermore praised Ptolemy for bringing back the statues of Egyptian gods that had been carried away in Persian times (Schäfer 2011, 74–83; cf. supra "the king as saviour and benefactor"), which provides further evidence of an Egyptian-wide interest of Ptolemy in good relations with the priests from at least from 311 onward. Last but not least, after a nearly total abolition of building projects in temples during the Persian period, there was a powerful reset of temple building under the Ptolemies. From the time of Ptolemy I onward the priests had the financial means to start new building and decoration programs, only made possible by their being granted enough income by the rulers (Swinnen 1973; Chauveau and Thiers 2006; Minas-Nerpel forthcoming). Besides this support of the priestly elites, some priests also seem to have had access to the court, as suggested by the example of Manetho, a priest from Sebennytos, who wrote books on Egyptian history and Egyptian religion in Greek for the king (Dillery 2003, 2013; pace Hornung et al. 2006, 35).

The precedents set by Alexander and Ptolemy I set the outlines for the following Ptolemaic kings. They all pursued a religious policy that was oriented to the benefit of their Egyptian priests and that led to enormous building and decoration activities by the Egyptian priests (cf. Lanciers 1986, 1987; Minas-Nerpel 1996, 1997; Caßor-Pfeiffer 2008a, 2008b). Although the temples, as in Persian times, had to pay taxes, their rights and privileges were extended or given back to them (Manning 2003, 161–164), so that they became an important economic power in the Ptolemaic empire (Johnson 1983, 71), and in addition to the army and administration, were established as the third base of Ptolemaic rule (Heinen 2006, 21). The crux of this interplay between ruler and priests was the high priests of Ptah in Memphis, who were loyal followers of the Ptolemies until the end of their rule (Thompson ^{2}2012, 99–117; Manning 2010, 92–93).

The Religious Function of Pharaoh

The most important religious function of every pharaoh was to maintain world order, in Egyptian called Maat, which was done by performing the temple rituals (Derchain 1962). Even rulers who did not reside in Egypt, like the Persian kings, had to be represented in temple reliefs as pharaohs, because the fiction of continued ritual in Egypt had to be kept up (Baines 1994, 43). Since many temples were built and/or decorated in Ptolemaic times, it is obvious that thousands of reliefs showed the Ptolemaic king as pharaoh performing rituals for the Egyptian gods. But one major feature was different from earlier periods: the queen in many reliefs was represented together with the king and assisted him, and some reliefs even show the queen alone performing minor rituals (Hölbl 2003; Minas-Nerpel 2005). There is some pharaonic precedence for this (e.g. in the time of the god's wife of Amun), but in its multiplicity it was new and can be explained only by the important position that the queen had in Ptolemaic policy and legitimation. Since the priests were the third base of Ptolemaic rule, one may think that the kings fostered their pharaonic representation (cf. Manning 2010, 94). They may even have tried to achieve indigenous legitimation by tracing themselves back to the Nectanebid dynasty (Gorre 2009b; Savvopoulos 2011) and followed a religious policy that was developed as a negation of the Persian period (Assmann 1996, 412–415). The Persians carried away the images of the gods; the Ptolemies brought them back. The Persians destroyed the Egyptian temples; the Ptolemies built them up again. The Persians killed the sacred animals (e.g., Cambyses, who killed the Apis bull); the Ptolemies promoted Egyptian animal cults to the extent that they achieved a central position in Egyptian religion.

Despite this pro-Egyptian policy of the Ptolemies, scholarly research disputes whether the first kings of the dynasty or even the Ptolemies were crowned as pharaohs at all (Stadler 2012). An Egyptian coronation is at least attested for Ptolemy V (in the decree of Rosette; OGIS 90, 28), Ptolemy VIII (Diod. 33.13), and Ptolemy XII (see below), and because of this and the positive effects of the legitimation of his rule, one should not doubt that Ptolemy I was crowned pharaoh (cf. Koenen 1977, 58–86; Hölbl 2001, 32 n47). The high priest of Ptah in Memphis performed the rites of coronation, as we learn from the so-called Harris stela (London, BM inv. EA 886), on which the priest relates: "I am the one who placed the Uraeus upon the head of the king, on the day of Uniting the Two Lands, and who performed for him the rituals in the Sed Festival chapels" (Klotz 2013, 26; cf. Reymond 1981, no 18; Panov 2012). Further rites are described by the Roman author Nigidius Figulus (De sphaera 98, ed. Swoboda; cf. Thompson ^{2}2012, 136–137).

Ptolemy III: The Paradigm of the Egyptian Pharaoh

The Egyptian priesthood was not a monolithic bloc (Huß 1994, 182–183). Although we do not have any specific information, different interests should be presupposed for rich and poor priests, big and small temples and especially for temples in the north, near Alexandria (like the Ptah temple of Memphis), and temples in the Theban region (especially the Amun temple of Karnak) and on the Egyptian frontier with Nubia (especially the Isis temple of Philae). The official promulgations of the Egyptian priests nevertheless promote a single and uniform perception of the non-Egyptian pharaoh. Allegedly all priests met regularly in Alexandria or Memphis to discuss matters of the temples as well as to negotiate with the king. During some of these synods the priests passed honorific decrees for the Ptolemaic king (a list can be found in Clarysse 1999, 42–43; recently a new decree was published by el-Masry et al. 2012). Taking over Greek precedence in the structure of Hellenistic honorific decrees, they were published not only in Greek but also in demotic and hieroglyphs on Egyptian-style stela, which were erected in every Egyptian temple. Of special interest for the representation of the monarchy are the extensive and sterotyped praises of the kings' good deeds for Egypt: his taking care of and his donations to the temples, his bringing back the images of the gods; and the good deeds he performed for the Egyptian subjects, such as reductions of taxes, amnesties, and so forth. Besides these overall good deeds, in every decree special accomplishments are also described, and one may assume that these special deeds were the main cause for the honorific decree. The first known such decree comes from 243 BC and was passed by the priests because of the victories of Ptolemy III during the Third Syrian War (cf. above Ptolemy III: The Paradigm of the Hellenistic Basileus). The hieroglyphic text states (el-Masry et al. 2012):

> His Majesty slew [... countries ...] which were in the possession of his enemies; he collected tributes (consisting of) perfect, wonderful, and numerous elephants and the ships of the enemies, because His Majesty was victorious in battle, he brought them all to Egypt as captives. His Majesty made [many benefits? for those] who are in Egypt, His Majesty himself took care for the gods which had

> been taken away from the places in the temples in Egypt to Retenu, Syria, Cilicia, Babylonia, Susa at the time when the vile Asiatics of persia did harm to the temples. He went around through all the foreign countries seeking them; His Majesty brought (them) to Egypt with great festivity, supplying the offering tables before them.... he preserved Egypt from insurrections at all times; he fought for it in a distant valley. (l. 7–9)

As one can easily see, the focus of the description is on Egypt: for the priests it was most important that Ptolemy slew his enemies; was victorious in battle; brought rich booty and the stolen images of the gods back to Egypt; and last but not least, fought in "a distant valley" to keep Egypt safe. With the exception of bringing back the images of the gods and the booty, the priests had a totally different focus in their description of the king's victory than did the king in his inscription from Adulis and his memorandum, which was found on a papyrus (cf. supra), in which he had emphasized the conquering of foreign countries and the great joy over his appearance among his new subjects. The difference between the priestly view and the king's view can easily be explained by the fact that the priests tried to fit Ptolemy into their own cultural and religious symbol system. For them the foreign king acted like an Egyptian pharaoh, who by smiting the enemies of Egypt reenacted a 3,000-year-old pharaonic ritual, which is also shown on "porte d'Evertète" in the temple of Karnak (Clère 1961, pl. 62, cf. Figure 2), in which Ptolemy III is depicted smiting the head of an Asian enemy with a mace in front of Osiris and Isis. The king declares: "I reach out my arm with the mace of killing after having seized the evil one who is tied with the cord. I massacre him, I decapitate him, I cut his lung into pieces, I take away the breathing from his nose, I tear out his heart from his left side." For this very non-Greek exclamation of strength and brutality, Osiris lauds the king: "I praise your smiting of the enemy. You are my heir who follows me on the throne. I give you my position as ruler over the two lands, may your life be eternal." And Isis adds: "I give you the position of my son Horus for you may rule legitimate on his throne" (translations by D. von Recklinghausen).

Figure 2:

Karank, porte d'Evergete, detail

(photo: S. Caßor-Pfeiffer).

Normally such depictions and descriptions of rituals were performative: the extermination of the enemy happened because it was shown, and depictions did not give descriptions of reality but rather produced reality (Assmann 2011). Ptolemy III was in contrast a pharaoh who in reality performed the ritual of smiting the enemy—at least according to the priests who issued the decree. Comparable to the depictions and texts on temple reliefs, and following the principle of Egyptian cult as a *do ut des* practice, the priests state in their honorific decree: "In return for these things it has been given to them (i.e. the king and his queen) by the gods a kingship, effective and great, being established with them forever" (el-Masry et al. 2012, l. 13).

As we have seen, the concept of Egyptian kingship differs fundamentally from the concept of the victorious Greek *basileus*: pharaoh need not be a conqueror, but rather a ruler who protects and saves Egypt in ritual and real deeds from its enemies by smiting them and guaranteeing peace for the two lands.

Some years later the priests issued a second decree in honor of Ptolemy III, meeting in the town of Canopus near Alexandria (Pfeiffer 2004). Besides specific achievements of Ptolemy, a lot of *topoi* are mentioned, which are to be found also in honorific decrees of Hellenistic poleis for their benefactors, but in their combination reveal interesting insights into the priests' modeling of the Ptolemaic pharaoh:

> Whereas King Ptolemy ... and Queen Berenice his sister and his wife, the Beneficent Gods, are wont to grant many benefits to the temples of Egypt at all times, and greatly to increase the honours of the gods; and also at all times to care for what concerns Apis and Mnevis and the rest of the sacred animals which are honoured in Egypt; .... and (they are also wont) to cause that justice be done for everyone in Egypt and the other people who are subject to their rule .... in return for which the gods have granted them their kingdom peacefully established and will give them all the other good things for all time. (Bagnall and Derow 2004, no. 164)

In summary, Ptolemy cared for the gods and brought justice to the inhabitants of Egypt, and in return, as stated in the first decree from 243 BC, the gods guaranteed his rule. The benefactions appear to be typical for Greek honorific decrees, but if one takes a look at the Egyptian versions of the decree and relates them to Egyptian conceptions of kingship, one is able to see that the pharaoh is represented according to the ideal of an old cult-theological tractate on the pharaoh as sun priest, which says: "Re has placed King N in the land of the living for eternity and all time; for judging men, for making the gods content, for creating Truth, for destroying evil" (Parkinson 1991, 38, 40; Assmann 1995, 30–37).

Ptolemy, by his dedication to the gods and his support of the cults, indeed made the gods content and established social order for the Egyptians. The only difference is that the priests presented the stability of kingship as a gift in return for the deeds of Ptolemy, and the sun king received his eternal kingship from the gods to perform good deeds for gods and humankind.

The priests managed to establish a double act of communication: the first addressees of the honorific decrees were the foreign rulers. By using the Hellenistic form of honorific decrees and Greek language, the priests communicated on an equal level. Like a Hellenistic polis, they wanted to show Ptolemy that they accepted him as benefactor and savior; they surely did this with the intention of *captatio benevolentiae*. The second group of addressees was the Egyptians, for whom the priests set up the stelae in the most visible place in every temple and used an Egyptian form of round-topped stela and Egyptian language and a form of presentation of the king that established him as an indigenous pharaoh, who was not a stranger anymore.

The Ptolemies as Egyptian Gods

As previously mentioned, the priests recounted the good deeds of pharaoh Ptolemy performed for the gods of Egypt and the land itself. This praise gave the priests the legitimation for establishing the living king and queen as gods of every Egyptian temple, where they henceforward participated in the cult of the main god. As this cult was established for every single Ptolemy and his wife, it led to priestly titulatures, which quote not only the main god but the cult title of every Ptolemaic couple until the actual king and queen one (cf. I. Thèbes 302). As this form of Egyptian dynastic cult was taken over from the precedence of the Greek cult in Alexandria, we can see that in this conception the main god of the temple had taken over the position of Alexander the Great in the Greek dynastic cult of Alexandria. This is also an explanation for the fact that Alexander the Great played no role in the Egyptian legitimation of the Ptolemaic dynasty, which was based on the gods of Egypt.

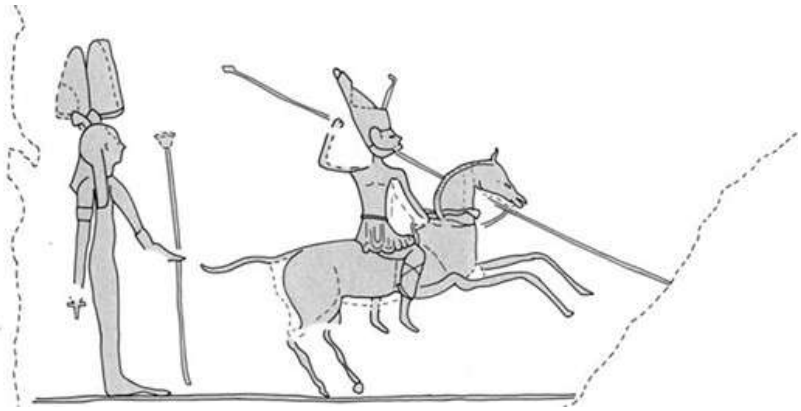
The establishment of the living pharaoh and his wife as gods was a novelty for Egyptian religion, as pharaoh was not a god but only had a divine office or could take over the position of a god in some special situations. There was no cult for pharaoh in the temples in the way the sacerdotal decrees describe it. Only the superpersonal Ka of the pharaoh was worshipped in pharaonic times (Pfeiffer 2008a, 2009). The first attestation of the inclusion of the foreign gods in the temple is the establishing of the dead queen Arsinoe II as a temple-sharing goddess in the reign of Ptolemy II: "His majesty ordered to erect her soul [i.e., her effigy] in all temples" as it is reported in the Mendes stela (Urk. II 28–54, l. 13; cf. Schäfer 2011, 239–273). At the latest a generation later, as evidenced by the cited decrees of Alexandria and Canopus (see above), the living ruler and his queen shared the same honor in every Egyptian temple. We do not know whether this fundamental change in the Egyptian conception of the pharaoh was an octroy of the crown (Winter 1978) or the priests imitated the Greek forms of ruler cult and adapted them to their temple religion of their own will with the intention to gain further support from the crown.

The decrees also inform us about the arrangement of the ruler cult. There were statues of the king and queen, which were put into special cult shrines (*naoi*) that were set up in the sanctum of the temple. There also were processions of these cult shrines, which were held on important dates of the Egyptian year. The procession of Ptolemy III and Berenice II, for example, was held yearly at the same time when the Sothis-star was visible after two months of invisibility, and by this announced the Nile flood (OGIS 56, 39–40). The procession of Ptolemy V was on the 1st of Thoth, the beginning of the year (OGIS 90, 49–50). These processions were something like a counterpart to the great Ptolemaic festivals in Alexandria, and their aim was to make it possible for every Egyptian subject to perceive that the well-being of Egypt—for example, the coming of the Nile flood—was closely related to the worship of the ruling couple; by celebrating these festivals, having free time, and being happy due to consumption of wine, they formed an emotional bond with the foreign ruler, who was not foreign anymore.

The Question of Eclecticism

The Ptolemaic king was the Hellenistic *basileus* and Egyptian pharaoh, and these two representations had different ideals (such as the king being welcomed in joy by the newly conquered peoples, in contrast to pharaoh, who smites his enemies). At the same time, some ideals of sole rule were and still are universal and can be found transcending time with nearly every sole ruler, like a king and a pharaoh being a victor, having divine ancestry, accentuating his piety, taking paternal care of his subjects, and being a good hunter (cf. nowadays representation e.g. of Vladimir Putin). The Egyptian priests were able to render the Hellenistic ideals of kingship *modo Aegyptiaco* and combined them with special Egyptian needs for how the pharaoh was to behave. How deeply the Greek representation of the *basileus* in some cases could penetrate Egyptian representation is shown by the depictions of two Egyptian stelae that bear the so-called Raphia decree (see Figures 3 and 4) of the Egyptian priests in honor of Ptolemy IV in 217 BC (Thissen 1966). A new motif is represented in a traditional Egyptian manner: a horse-riding pharaoh who is at the same time performing the ritual of slaying the enemy with his spear (see above).

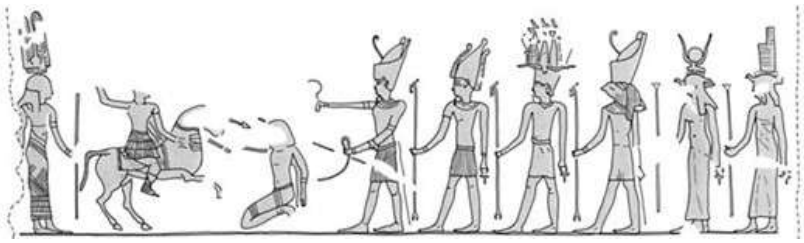
Figure 3:



Decree of Raphia; CG 31088

(drawing by Ulrike Denis).

Figure 4:



Decree of Raphia; CG 50048

(drawing by Ulrike Denis).

Some scholars think that the ideological contact between Greek and Egyptian representation also functioned in the opposite manner and postulate that the Ptolemies took over pharaonic concepts of kingship (Koenen 1983, 1993). This is especially disputed with the help of so-called court poetry from the times of the early Ptolemies. According to many scholars, the poets Theocritus of Syracuse, Apollonius of Rhodos, Posidippus of Pella, and Callimachus of Cyrene took over the Egyptian ideology of kingship and rendered it in the Greek way (Stephens 2003, 2004; Hunter 2003; Heerink 2010). This would be comparable to the Egyptian priests, who did the same thing the other way around. The problem with this apparently convincing thesis is that the ideals of kingship are only rarely attested in the bulk of the poetry, and one always has to bear in mind that correlation, the pairing of two things that are similar, does not presuppose a causal link between them. It was not important for the poets to praise the king and his deeds, and one should keep in mind that the term *court poetry* itself is problematic, as the poets were surely not an arm of the kings' propaganda apparatus (Weber 1993, 415). The term *propaganda* itself should not even be used. There is no clue at all that the poets "systematically incorporated Egyptian ideas and narrative motifs in a set of poems constructed to explore the dimensions of Ptolemaic kingship" (Stephens 2003). The parallels can be explained better as anthropological features of kingship or myths (Asper 2004, 18–19; Weber 2011, 133–135).

It is rather in another field of the kings' representation in Alexandria that we can clearly detect the adaptation of pharaonic forms of representation by the king himself: Coming to Alexandria, every sailor, visitor, merchant, and ambassador had to pass the lighthouse of Pharos, a masterwork of Greek architecture. The underwater excavations carried out by the Centre d'Études Alexandrines (CEAlex) in the 90th of the last century nevertheless found colossal statues of Ptolemaic kings and queens dressed as an Egyptian pharaoh and Isis, which should originally have been erected at the front of the lighthouse facing the harbor (Hairy 2006; Queyrel 2009; Guimier-Sorbets 2007). The same combination of Greek and Egyptian elements is found at the Serapeum built by Ptolemy III. The god and temple appeared Greek, but the Egyptian roots of the god and Egyptian elements of cult found at the Serapeum (Isis as consort of Sarapis, underground galleries, a nilometer, Egyptian sculptors) show that the founder of the temple wanted to integrate Egyptian religion into his self-representation because the Graeco-Egyptian Sarapis and Isis were two of the main dynastic gods, which also had to be mentioned in the king's oath (Pfeiffer 2008b). The importance of Egyptian gods for the self-representation of the Ptolemies can furthermore be underlined by the fact that the wife of Ptolemy III, Berenice II, built a temple for Artemis-Bastet, called Bubastis, in the midst of Alexandria (el-Maksoud et al. 2012; Carrez 2014).

The allegedly pure Greek city of Alexandria thus in reality housed a mixture of Greek and Egyptian religions because the rulers themselves considered the Egyptian religion and representation important for their self-representation and thereby formed an invented tradition of tracing back their kingship to pharaonic times: They used the artistic and religious dictions of their pharaonic predecessors because they wanted to give their new and constantly contested kingship a traditional legitimation and sacral aura. However, there is an important fact that shows how the new Egyptian-looking king was something other than his old Egyptian counterpart: Sarapis, Isis, and Bubastis were Graeco-Egyptian gods, who were something new not only in their Greek appearance but also in their religious conceptualization. Even the statues of the Ptolemies at the Pharos were not purely Egyptian in style. The pharaoh had locks that protrude underneath his nemes-headscarf (see Figure 5; cf. Smith 1996), and the Isis-queen had a so-called Isisknot between her breasts to hold her garment, which arguably was developed in third-century Alexandria (Albersmeier 2002, 99–103; contra Bianchi 1980). It was a decidedly Ptolemaic picture of Egyptian representation and religion that was offered to the strangers coming to and living in Egypt, which was adapted to the visional habits of the Greek world and thus must have been quite strange for the Egyptians.

Figure 5:

Monumental statue of a Ptolemaic king found during the underwater excavations at Kait Bey, today erected in front of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

(photo: St. Pfeiffer).

Conclusions

Ptolemaic kingship is often described as a *monarchie bicephale*. This is correct to a certain point, as there were two main forms of representation of the king: *basileus* on the one hand and pharaoh on the other. However, as this was not the core of Ptolemaic representation, it is in my view much better to set aside such binary definitions and to speak of a multiheaded kingship (cf. Samuel 1993): a Ptolemaic king had a multiplicity of *personae*, which were adjusted to the multiplicity of subjects and addressees. He could appear as a victorious king like Alexander the Great, or as strong and muscular Heracles, who wrestles down an adversary; he could be represented as pharaoh who slays his enemy, and also as a fat Dionysus in feminine transparent dresses; furthermore, he could be a citizen of Athens (cf. SEG XLI III, 32–33) and a winner of the Olympian games, and he was a present god for the Greek cities and his Graeco-Macedonian subjects—at least they called him god—as well as an Egyptian god in Egyptian appearance for his Egyptian subjects. Most interesting are the mixed forms of representation, which show him as Egyptian pharaoh but at the same time give hints of his Hellenistic background (cf. supra figs. 3–5). Complementary forms of representation, which show a Ptolemaic king in Hellenistic appearance with Egyptian attributes, were also distributed, as we can conclude from a signet ring carrying an image of Ptolemy VI. The king is represented with the typical realistic Greek styling of his face, also having a whisker, which was unknown to Egyptian forms of representation, but he wears an Egyptian double crown on his head, which shows that he is pharaoh. Nevertheless, even underneath the double crown one can see the most important symbol of Hellenistic kingship: the two protruding *taeniae* of the diadem.

An open question, which needs further research, is whether there was a growing Egyptianization/Orientalization of kingship during the Ptolemaic period (cf., e.g., Thompson [2]2012, 101), or

the Egyptian forms of representation were from the first generations of rule an integral part of the Ptolemaic self-conception (Manning 2010, 92). In my view, the archaeological finds in Alexandria from the third century point to the latter conclusion.

The multiple forms of self-representation and presentation of the Ptolemaic king show that it is impossible to speak of an ideology of Ptolemaic kingship, distributed to the subjects by coordinated propaganda of the court. The ideology of Ptolemaic kingship, if we really want to use such a term at all, was lacking a clearly structured ideology. Rule based on a flexible mode of self-representation, it was a dialogue and a process of negotiation with the subjects of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, which likewise used specific representations of the king to communicate their desires and expectations to him.

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