

INNOVATIONS IN ANCIENT GARB?  
HIEROGLYPHIC TEXTS FROM THE TIME  
OF PTOLEMY PHILADELPHUS\*

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When, in the aftermath of the conquests of Alexander the Great, his generals divided the empire, Egypt fell to Ptolemy, son of Lagos. He and his successors<sup>1</sup> had to cope with the fact that they were a minority ruling in a populous country with an enormous indigenous cultural tradition. It was an obvious necessity to adapt to that cultural tradition. So it is logical that the involvement of the Greek dynasty with indigenous language and writing was considerably more intense in Egypt than elsewhere. This is evident in the enormous number of Egyptian-language official inscriptions in the Ptolemaic period.

For Ptolemy II, the case is remarkable. We have several highly important historical inscriptions of his time, stylised as official royal declarations, in purely hieroglyphic form, without any Greek version. This should be pointed out all the more because, from Ptolemy III onward, the high actions of the state were declared mostly in the synodal decrees, and these are mostly trilingual—hieroglyphic, demotic and Greek; sometimes, especially the later ones, only hieroglyphic and demotic. The language of the inscriptions in question strives for imitation of the classical Middle Egyptian language, even if often falling short of its goal and visibly influenced by the spoken idiom of the time.<sup>2</sup>

It is clearly not possible in this brief chapter to go into the details of every hieroglyphic inscription from this period. Quite a few, indeed, concern only the ordinary cultic activities. They present Ptolemy II in a way typical of an Egyptian pharaoh caring for the cult of the gods.<sup>3</sup> Although this is in itself a not unimportant fact, the historical value of

\* Kurt Sethe, *Hieroglyphische Urkunden der griechisch-römischen Zeit* (Leipzig, 1904) = *Urkunden*.

<sup>1</sup> For recent histories of their times see Hölbl 1994 and Huss 2001.

<sup>2</sup> For the language, see Engsheden 2003.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. George 1982, Sambin and Carlotti 1995, Sambin 1995, Thiers 1997, Vassilika 1989, 27–38.

any individual instance of this kind is very slight. The most important are probably those which show Ptolemy II in adoration before his divinised dead sister and wife, Arsinoe II.<sup>4</sup> Instead of listing all this in detail, I will go into the specific longer inscriptions which tend actually to describe historic events.

The first text I will discuss in detail is the famous and well-known stela of Mendes (*Urkunden* II, 28–54), so called after its find-spot.<sup>5</sup> It has a well-preserved lunette showing the king, the queen and the king's son before the actual living goat of Mendes, the child-god Harpokrates, the deity goat of Mendes, the goddess Hat-Mehit, and finally Arsinoe II as goddess.

The text proper starts with a eulogy of the king, who is declared to be beloved of the Ba of Mendes, a god in goat form. This takes about six of the twenty-eight lines of the main text. After this traditional and rather stereotyped introduction, we pass to actual narration. Unfortunately, the first date in the text is not preserved. We can suppose that it was to the very beginning of Philadelphus' reign, because it mentions that the king came to the sacred goat of Mendes in order to beg life and kingship from him. This encounter of king and sacred animal is told explicitly as being the first occasion on which the king encountered a sacred animal after ascending the throne. The text insists on the fact that the other gods came only afterwards, and that the action was in accordance with what kings had done before. It describes the ritual action in some detail and stresses that it was done according to traditional writings. The insistence on the ancient models makes it all the more surprising that we do not actually know of any older stela where an Egyptian king makes a similar pilgrimage to a sacred animal.

Afterwards, the king restores a temple building from damage done by rebellious foreign countries and establishes his rules for the cult in accordance with the writings of Thot. After returning to his residence Alexandria, the next fact narrated is that he married his sister Arsinoe; it is described how her titles are fixed. No new date is given, although the marriage took place at the earliest in 279 BC, about three years after the beginning of the sole reign of Philadelphus, and perhaps even as late as 274 BC.<sup>6</sup> Restoring monuments is, of course, a quintessential

<sup>4</sup> Quaegebeur 1971.

<sup>5</sup> Modern translations at Roeder 1959, 168–188, and de Meulenaere and MacKay 1976, 173–177 (lacking most of the last line of the text).

<sup>6</sup> See Huss 2001, 307 and Thiers, 'Le mariage divin'.

action of any Egyptian king. The actual description of the marriage within the framework of a stela, however, does not really seem very usual according to Egyptian norms. Even the well-known so-called marriage scarab of Amenhotep III and Queen Tiye<sup>7</sup> does not really describe the marriage: it only presents the fact of her being the queen, and her ancestry. The most pertinent parallels are probably the marriage-stelae of Ramses II<sup>8</sup> describing his marriages to two Hittite princesses, and that had been a relatively unusual constellation.

In our case, the quite problematic background of this marriage might have made it necessary to proclaim it a bit louder than usual, perhaps connected with the fact that the later divinisation of Arsinoe II plays a prominent role in the text. Here, a new date intervenes: regnal year fifteen, first month of summer, when the queen dies (270 BC). She gets a ceremonial opening of the mouth<sup>9</sup> according to Egyptian custom—but it is equally unusual to mention that on a historical stela. The proper place to document such a ceremony according to traditional Egyptian usage would have been in the decoration of a tomb. Perhaps it is most significant that the very instant of the Mendes stela was specifically cited in the seminal study of the ritual of the opening of the mouth, simply because it is such a rare case where the actual enactment and the duration of four days is given. Funerary rites of an Egyptian type are enacted for her, as for other male and female gods.

The king sets out a decree, which meets the approval of the priests, to the effect that, given the acts of Arsinoe towards gods and men, her statue should be made to appear in Mendes beside that of the local god, and also that cult images of her should be made in every nome of Egypt, with a cult name of “the one beloved of the goat, the goddess who loves her brother, Arsinoe”.

With this act, we enter in principle well-known Egyptian territory. Divinisation of human beings in gratitude for their extraordinary merits had been known for a long time, beginning about late Old Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> But most cases are not attested as being due to royal decree. The act of Philadelphus for his dead wife should not, of course, be seen in isolation. We know that he also deified his father, and that he had

<sup>7</sup> Blankenberg-Van Delden 1969, 4–7, 16 and 21–56.

<sup>8</sup> New edition KRI II 233, 5–257, 16 and 282, 1–284, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Otto 1960, II, 28.

<sup>10</sup> A global study by A. von Lieven is in preparation.

already decreed a cult of himself and his wife as *theoi adelphoi*, effectively laying the ground for a cult of reigning Ptolemaic rulers as gods.<sup>11</sup>

More problematic is the next item told to us. King Ptolemy selected Egyptian natives to act as recruits for his army. It is stressed in the text that the king loved Egypt more than any country serving him, and that he trusted the Egyptians. Obviously, such a note is only understandable in the new situation of the Macedonian conquest—it would be most surprising if any indigenous pharaoh had felt any necessity to stress his choice of Egyptian troops.<sup>12</sup> There is, however, a contrary interpretation, which prefers to see a reference not to indigenous Egyptians but to the recruitment simply of Greeks born in Egypt.<sup>13</sup> I, however, fail to see why such an act would be worth mentioning, especially in a text written in the Egyptian language.<sup>14</sup>

The following items concern tax reductions or exemptions. Specifically, the ferry toll and the bread tax<sup>15</sup> are cancelled for the region of the Mendesian nome. This is justified by some age-old custom—in the case of the bread tax, even by a decree issued by Thot at the order of Re for all future kings. This is nicely posed by introducing a citation from the much older *Hymn to the Inundation*.<sup>16</sup> For all of the country, the king decides to reduce the amount of taxes paid. The amount per year is given as more than six hundred thousand deben, at least 5460 kg. Such tax exemptions are quite frequent already in earlier times for specific temples, but I cannot see any reduction for the whole country being proclaimed this way.

The next measure narrated is the excavation of an artificial canal in order to protect the eastern border of Egypt. We will hear more about it in connection with the Pithom stela.

<sup>11</sup> Huss 2001, 325; Minas 2000.

<sup>12</sup> The case of Ramesses II who chides his troops after the battle of Kadesh and stresses that he had trusted them is, of course, of a quite different nature.

<sup>13</sup> Derchain 1986, 203–204.

<sup>14</sup> Lloyd 2002 amasses at 120–122 evidence that already in the third century Egyptians were participating in the Ptolemaic military.

<sup>15</sup> The expression  $\text{p}^3 \text{t}^{\text{m}} \text{n} \frac{1}{2}$  causes some difficulty in understanding. Earlier translators have understood it as “Hälfte des Einkommens” (Sethe, *Urkunden II*, p. 43), “Anteil der Abgaben” (Roeder 1959, 183) or “revenues alimentaires” (de Meulenaere 1976, 175). It can hardly be doubted that the first part is the masculine noun  $\text{p}^3 \text{t}^{\text{m}}$  “the tax”, for which see Erichsen 1954, 639. Unfortunately, there seems to be no demotic attestation of such a tax, and no Greek expression which could be a likely correspondent.

<sup>16</sup> Recognised by Peter Seibert (1967, 100 n. 102).

Finally, a new date—in this case, regnal year twenty-one introduces a new section. The restoration of the temple of the he-goat of Mendes is finished, and its inscription tells the name of the king as well as his father and the brother-loving queen Arsinoe. A great inauguration-festival is celebrated, and the god introduced into his house. The festival is directed by the son of the king. It is enacted country-wide. Afterwards, some class of people (probably mentioned in a lacuna) goes to the residence in order to pay homage to the king, and the prophets follow them, bringing wreaths and amulets to the king. He and his clothes are anointed, and the same happens for the king's children.

The next date is unfortunately not preserved in the text, but it can still be seen that it was precise at least to the month-indication. It is reported to the king that a living goat has been found and should be installed as god by the king. As is proposed, the king sends to all main temples of the land for the staff of the scriptorium. The competent Egyptian specialists recognise that the animal has the correct shape according to the traditional writings, so it is really recognised, enthroned and given a title. This is actually one of relatively few cases where an Egyptian text confirms what we know from Greek writers, namely that a sacred animal is recognised by specific bodily marks. Although we can suppose that recognising sacred animals had always been an official act, we have no pre-Ptolemaic text at all describing how the king was involved in such decisions. I will come back to this matter in my general discussion.

Furthermore, the king devises a plan which is introduced as not having been made by any king before him: he lets statues appear and be brought to the Mendesian nome by a delegation of prophets, priests, dignitaries and military leaders—unfortunately, the stela is broken exactly at this place, but what is still recognisable is that a statue of Arsinoe was part of the ensemble, and perhaps also one of the goat: at least, that would tally with the depiction in the lunette of the stela.

The exact date of arrival, the sixteenth day of the second month of spring, is indicated—and this is the occasion for a great festival. Perhaps it should be noted that nowhere in the text is the personal attendance of the king mentioned. Therefore his depiction in the lunette of the stela before the newly-found goat is as unreal as that of the long-dead Queen Arsinoe. He was present at Mendes only once, at the beginning of his reign, and his queen probably never. Ptolemy the Son who appears behind them was there for the inauguration of the restored temple, but for the introduction of the statues, none of the three seems to have

been present in person—only a high-ranking delegation of courtiers and priests. Compared to pharaonic precedents, that seems a bit like a devaluation of the Egyptian cult.

The text concludes with the idea that in return for his benefactions, the king may expect a long and stable rule, and the succession of his son(s) forever—a quite typical Egyptian idea. I will come back to some especially pertinent questions later, but already now some conclusions are appropriate. The inscription plays at the same time on two seemingly mutually exclusive ideas, to wit, the following of established traditional norms, and innovation by doing things which have never been done before. Strange as it might seem, both of these are well rooted in the traditional Egyptian phraseology.<sup>17</sup> Innovation is accepted, and even actually encouraged, if it can be presented as an improvement—especially one involving more piety towards the gods, or greater constructions of buildings. Still, the text has some innovations not marked as such, and even where ancient models are cited, we sometimes fail to corroborate them.

Probably more discussed in recent times is another stela of this period, the stela of Pithom (*Urkunden* II, 81–105), named after its find-spot in the eastern Delta.<sup>18</sup> The stela has a rather bad epigraphy, with many signs distorted or difficult to read, and this is responsible for some controversies about its interpretation. A lot of the discussion has centred on calendrical questions and problems of exact date.<sup>19</sup>

The lunette is divided in two parts. The right one shows the king offering Maat before five gods: Atum, Osiris, Horus, Isis and Queen Arsinoe II. The left one is in itself divided. On the outside, an Udjat-eye is presented before a god whose identity has been somewhat debated: probably it is Harsomtus.<sup>20</sup> In the inner area, the king presents wine before Atum and Isis. Like the Mendes stela, the inscription sets out with the titles and a stereotyped eulogy of the king. Here also, it takes about six of the twenty-eight lines of the main text, so that the proportions are quite similar to those of the Mendes stela.

The first event described takes place in regnal year six of the king, when the temple of Atum in Tjeku is completed. On the third day of

<sup>17</sup> Vernus 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Original publication Naville 1902–1903; see also Andersson and Sjöberg 1904. For recent discussions, see Thiers 1997, Minas 1994, Lorton 1971, Goedicke 1989. Full translation in Roeder 1959, 108–128. The new edition and study by Thiers ('Les prêtres d'Atoum de Tjékou') came too late to be used in this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Bingen 1943; Grzybek 1990, 69–112.

<sup>20</sup> Minas 1994, 205.

the third month of inundation, the king renders him to Tjeku, and the next morning, the building is completed, during a festival. The king also visits another place with a view to providing Atum with benefactions—in particular, a land grant seems to be intended.

Now we reach a passage which is in all probability connected with the first Syrian war.<sup>21</sup> It should, however, be critically remarked that we do not have a new date for this event indicated in the text, and that nothing is told of any battle—nor, indeed, are we told anything which would definitely force us to believe that Philadelphus ever left the area of the Ptolemaic possessions. It is stated that the king went to the regions of Asia—if the decipherment of the last word is correct.<sup>22</sup> A long discussion has taken place about this campaign of Philadelphus, whose specific aim is indicated in the hieroglyphic text as *prs*—and a group of two *t*-signs, a throw-stick, another *t* and the determinative of the foreign country. Some people have taken it to mean Palestine,<sup>23</sup> while others have even thought of Persia.<sup>24</sup> Personally, I think the equation with Palestine is highly dubious, to say the least.<sup>25</sup> The group of two *t*-signs and the determinative of the foreign country normally stand simply as a determinative without phonetic value, and besides, I see no convincing explanation of how the *n* could be omitted in the rendering at this time. Persia, even while geographically obviously wrong, would make sense insofar as the motive of deporting stelae from Egypt was connected with the Persian occupation.

In any case, the king found there images of the gods of Egypt, and he sent them back to Egypt where they were received with jubilation. There are some tricky details in the description of the voyage of those statues. If I understand it rightly, it says that the king was on board ship with them, and that they sailed from the canal/swamp of the east of Egypt till the harpoon nome (Pithom), and this is presented as something never before done in the land. The regaining of the statues is also connected with a royal decree issued on the tenth (?) day of the

<sup>21</sup> Winnicki 1990.

<sup>22</sup> This was at least confirmed by Winter (*apud* Winnicki 1990, 158), from a collation of the original.

<sup>23</sup> So Lorton 1971, 160–164; also Winnicki 1990, 161–163. Most recently Huss 2001, 267. So Thiers, 'Les prêtres d'Atoum de Tjékou', 40.

<sup>24</sup> So Sethe at *Urkunden* II, 91, and Roeder 1959, 119.

<sup>25</sup> It is normally based on an inscription of a royal messenger, last discussed by Schipper (1999, 193–196): the problematic question of dating (not all of Schipper's arguments are pertinent) impinges upon the problem of geographical interpretation.

fourth (?) month of winter, to the effect that priests from the temples of Egypt should come for them. This section is concluded in a way promising rule to the king and his son after him, which sounds as if he could conclude a composition.

The motive is well known for the early Ptolemaic period. In the inscriptions of Ptolemies I, II, III and IV reference is made to bringing back Egyptian cult images taken away by the Persians.<sup>26</sup> We also have this idea in a demotic literary text, the so-called *Prophecy of the Lamb*, and its reflections might even be seen in an unpublished tale about King Djoser looking in Nineveh for the body relics of Osiris.<sup>27</sup> I will not go into the factual veracity of those statements but it should be evident that they constitute innovations insofar as no Egyptian king of the pre-Assyrian time would have had much reason to look abroad for lost divine images.

A new section is introduced by a date, regnal year twelve, first month of inundation, day three. Then his majesty travels around Egypt, together with his queen Arsinoe, and they reach the harpoon nome. The couple thinks of protecting Egypt there against its neighbours. We could of course speculate whether this tour was in any way related to the royal marriage, even if that would mean setting it at about the latest possible date nowadays discussed by the specialists. In any case, the royal ideas seem to have taken some years to come to fruition, because only for regnal year sixteen is it narrated how the king actually has a canal excavated, leading from Heliopolis to the Lake of Scorpions, intended to drive off invaders. Here follow several lists of royal benefactions by the king for Atum. Mainly they concern victuals, but also clothes, and besides, a quarter of the caravan tax. Such lists are quite well known also from earlier periods.

Then the king sets out to found a new city, named after the daughter of King Ptolemy. What exactly her name was seems a bit doubtful, since it is not directly given in hieroglyphs. Sethe, in his edition, proposed Ptolemais, whereas Roeder assumes Arsinoe. Perhaps the best solution is that it was Berenike Hormos.<sup>28</sup> Then a fleet of high-sea ships is sent out to sail the Red Sea, and there, a city is founded, named after the king—so obviously to be identified as Ptolemais Theron. This is presented as something never before done, and it is clearly stated that

<sup>26</sup> Winnicki 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Quack 2005, 27 and 153.

<sup>28</sup> Huss 2001, 289 n. 284.



the goal was to capture elephants—which, again, is unprecedented. Furthermore, the sacred bulls, Apis, Mnevis and the speckled bull were distinguished: probably their stables were built anew.<sup>29</sup> In any case, king and queen were present, and this is recorded as not having been done before by any king of Egypt. Further benefactions of the king for the temples in general, and specifically in the one of Per-Kerehet, are enumerated. There are quite considerable amounts of precious metal, especially silver, but unfortunately without indication of the basis for the count. Perhaps staters were intended, since the word ‘silver’ is directly followed by a number. It is told that they were engraved on a stela in the dromos of the temple of Tjeku when he appeared as a king and inaugurated the temple, and there was a festival in the city. The stela concludes with the usual blessings for the king, the force of his rule and the submission of foreign countries.

In general, the Pithom stela has a visible stress on the new achievements never before accomplished by any king. Still, in its form and structure it stays quite close to earlier models, perhaps more so than the Mendes stela. What are new are the actual achievements—and that is the act of positive surpassing which was always considered appropriate in Egypt.

In recent times, a fairly fragmentary monument has been able to be reconstructed to some degree, thanks mainly to the efforts of Christophe Thiers.<sup>30</sup> It was originally inscribed for the Delta city of Sais, but later transported to Rome, where it was placed in the Gardens of Sallust. Today, some of its fragments are still preserved in the Museum of Naples and in the Louvre, but for other parts we are dependent on a renaissance sketch made without knowledge of hieroglyphs. The sketch was, however, done so carefully that most is safely legible nowadays. And yet the lack of the original seems highly important to me, in view of one specific question: Is the text quite complete as it stands? Is the last preserved line really the last one of the text? Thiers seems to suppose without further discussion that it is, but I disagree. One factor speaks in favour of completeness, namely the somewhat larger spacing of the column-divider after the last preserved line. There are, however, two other indications militating against such a solution. The offering-scene in the top part has only

<sup>29</sup> Roeder assumes in his translation that they visited one another, but that should be  $r\dot{c}i.n=f shn=sn$ , not  $iri.n=f shn=sn$ .

<sup>30</sup> Thiers 1999 and 2001.

some feet of the participants preserved in the renaissance drawings, but the composition seems highly unbalanced as it stands now. We have two persons on each side: behind those to the right (who are more probably the ruling couple, offering something), there is quite a bit of space; those to the left (probably divinities) appear squeezed against the end, with no space left. In principle, the lower part of a sceptre visible between the two couples should mark the very centre of the original stela. Calculating like that, we should conclude that four additional columns of hieroglyphs come after the last preserved one.

While being less conclusive as to the absolute amount missing, another indication points in the same direction. While most of the text is in vertical columns, there is one horizontal line on the top containing the royal protocol. This cannot be complete as it stands. It gives the throne-name of Ptolemy II, Userkarê beloved of Amun. Behind that, we would expect his personal name Ptolemy rendered in hieroglyphs, and after that most likely a blessing formula such as 'given life in eternity', perhaps even with the addition of 'beloved of Neith' (or some other god or goddess). So this shows again that we have to reckon with more text written on the stela.

This does not immediately help us with understanding, because that text is irremediably lost, but it helps to get a more balanced view of the composition of the text. Among the preserved parts, the first six and a half lines of the text are simply an elaborate eulogy of the king, derived from traditional stock phrases. It is only with the second part of the seventh line that actual narration of facts and actions is initiated. In the reconstruction given by Thiers, that would make the second part definitely the shorter one, with only four and a half lines; and it would end in quite an awkward way, with the description of a royal appearance at the end of the last preserved column. My new proposal for the overall restitution would not only make the factual narrative longer than the eulogy—now with probably eight and a half lines—but also provide space for a more fitting end, with some decision taken and put in place by royal edict.

Now, what is preserved in the text? The first date given at the very beginning is year twenty-two of Ptolemy II, and then we have the eulogy describing his valour in battle as well as his actions for Neith and the gods of Sais. The second part begins with another date, this time regnal year twenty, and the king is speaking to his courtiers. He orders them to assemble all the provincial governors of Upper and Lower Egypt. When the text resumes after a lacuna, he declares his

intention to let a statue of Isis-Arsinoe appear, and to embellish the city. The courtiers concur. Afterwards, we have a new date in regnal year twenty-one. The king arrives at Sais and is greeted by the prophets and god's fathers of the temple. They wish to show the place of the gods to the king. Now we have a new date, but this time without a new indication of a year, only giving the fourth month of the season of spring, and then the day-date is lost. A great number of chariots and cavalry are supposed to follow the king, who appears and proceeds to the temple—and then the text breaks off. We can suppose that the priests granted the wish of the king to put up a statue of his dead queen and to give her divine honours, and especially to include her in the offering-cult. As a reward, Philadelphus would stick to his promise and embellish Sais with new cult-buildings, and probably also establish a material basis for the cult in the form of land-grants or tax-exemption.

Now for some general remarks. Philadelphus was certainly not the first actually to appropriate the form of hieroglyphic stelae for promoting his achievements. Already before him, we have the so-called Satrap stela (*Urkunden* II, 11–22) dating from before Ptolemy I officially took the title of king. That is quite similar to the inscriptions discussed here, and most specifically in one remarkable point which I would like to stress: all these texts have a tendency to be episodic, that is, they tell about a lot of different events, often years apart, and sometimes with a very loose internal coherence. Although not unheard-of, this is not the most usual way earlier pharaonic stelae were organised. Most of them focused on one of only few historical events or they gave overviews of building programmes in one area. Perhaps it is noticeable that there are some Egyptian texts which came rather close to the Ptolemaic stelae by also narrating long chains of events, often intermixed with narrations of spoils and donations. But the best cases, like the annals of Thutmosis III<sup>31</sup> or the chronicle of Prince Osorkon,<sup>32</sup> are not stelae: they are long texts written on temple walls. We should ask ourselves whether the Ptolemies were influenced by such models or if they had any other reasons for proceeding as they did. Here it would be interesting to hear the opinion of a specialist in Greek history, comparing how historical facts are presented in inscriptions in the Greek context. At least there are

<sup>31</sup> New study and edition, Redford 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Caminos 1958.

some Late Period royal inscriptions which record events over a number of years, although mostly with a clear thematic focus.<sup>33</sup> There are, for example, stelae of Taharqa (twenty-fifth dynasty) enumerating his donations to the temple from years two to eight<sup>34</sup> and years eight to ten.<sup>35</sup> Besides, the genre of inscriptions summing up different and not closely related events was alive in the Meroitic region, e.g. in the inscription (on the temple wall, not on a stela) of Anlamani at Kawa,<sup>36</sup> the fragmentary stelae of Ary,<sup>37</sup> or the long stelae of Harsiotef and Nastasen.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps those examples indicate that it might be a general trend of the later first millennium to change the scope of royal inscriptions; in any case, the Philadelphus inscriptions owe more to recent development than to old traditions in this respect.

In the Mendes stela, the Egyptian worship of animals figures quite prominently, and in the Pithom stela, it is mentioned as well. The tradition of the Ptolemies to style themselves as protectors and patrons of sacred animals is amazingly rich. Also in the decrees of Canopus and Memphis, care for them, especially Apis and Mnevis, comes into play. Even the Raphia decree, although mainly concerned with bellicose activities, does not neglect to mention that Ptolemy IV looked after the sacred animals in the Asiatic provinces which had been maltreated by the Seleucid troops. The stress on such actions definitely surpasses what is known for the indigenous pharaohs. For examples, in the great Papyrus Harris, where he recounts all the important deeds of his reign, Ramesses III speaks quite briefly about the cows of the Apis and Mnevis bulls, without even enumerating anything he did for the bulls themselves.

Two different kinds of explanation offer themselves. One would be that, as foreign invaders, the Ptolemies had a greater need to get connected with Egyptian religion in order to make their rule acceptable. The second would be that we are facing a global trend towards greater veneration of animals, which took place perhaps around 700 BC when large-scale necropoleis of animals begin to appear. For the pre-Ptolemaic rulers of the first millennium BC, we have only a fairly limited record of preserved inscriptions, and it is possible that it was really

<sup>33</sup> See also Gozzoli, 2003, who is not concerned with the points I am analysing here.

<sup>34</sup> Macadam 1948, 4–14 and plates 5–6.

<sup>35</sup> Macadam 1948, 32–41 and plates 11–12.

<sup>36</sup> Macadam 1948, 50–67 and plates 17–26.

<sup>37</sup> Macadam 1948, 76–81 and plates 32–34.

<sup>38</sup> Both republished and studied in Peust 1999; see also Quack 2002.

then when the behavioural models were set which the Greek dynasty followed.

Now it is time to speak of a specific Ptolemaic institution, namely the priestly synods and their decrees.<sup>39</sup> Huss has tried to establish the meetings of priests at Sais (266/5?) and Mendes (between 264/3 and 259) as the earliest attested cases. He considers the inscriptions of the Mendes stela and the Sais text as examples of such decrees. I see difficulties in following such reasoning because the formal structuring of those two inscriptions is utterly different from the later, more assured synodal decrees. Nowhere is the text stylised as a decision taken by the priests.<sup>40</sup> It is always the king who acts, and the most the priests do is to agree with him. Still, in the Sais inscription the king really orders the governors and prophets of the temples of Upper and Lower Egypt to come to his court, and this can be considered as a forerunner of the true synod—the development would be to grant more power of decision, at least nominally, to the priests, who can take the initiative and propose measures to honour the king and his family on their own.

In terms of the development of the relations between the Egyptians and their Macedonian king, this should be considered as a fairly decisive factor, in the long term, and it means a serious change from all earlier models. Before, the standard situation is what Egyptologists frequently call the 'king's novel'.<sup>41</sup> I do not intend to discuss whether this is justified as a term of literary analysis, but the way political decision-making is presented to the public should be evident. The pharaoh proposes some action. Either his courtiers acclaim this immediately, or in the rare cases where they have some doubts, the pharaoh overcomes them and is always justified by the outcome. Philadelphus still follows that ancient model in his historical inscriptions—he takes the lead, and the priests and courtiers agree. With the inauguration of the genre of the synodal decree, a far-reaching change in the official presentation of decision-making is reached. It might be possible to read it in two diametrically opposite ways. On the one hand, it might be interpreted as granting more power to the indigenous element against the foreign rulers; and normally scholars see the internal development of those decrees as showing growing Egyptian influence in content, although

<sup>39</sup> See for them Huss 1991, Kügler 1994 and Pfeiffer 2004, 9–12.

<sup>40</sup> Pfeiffer (2004, 9) expresses doubts whether they can be taken as a real synod.

<sup>41</sup> For this, see most recently Hofmann 2004.

this can be somewhat doubted.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, as an Egyptologist I cannot totally overcome the impression that the new stylisation of decisions might be due to the prevailing Hellenic model of popular assemblies voting for public honours being given to some person.<sup>43</sup> Normally, people see no pharaonic antecedents for such assemblies of priests in one place to take decisions. I might propose at least some hints, although they contain more problems than solutions.<sup>44</sup>

First, I know of an unpublished text preserved in at least three hieratic papyri, all dating to the Roman period. They purport to be copies of royal decrees or early rulers. Neferkasokar, Djoser and Kheops are explicitly named in the preserved parts. The main topic is a complete renovation and restoration of the cult buildings, and one section (of which fairly extensive remnants are preserved) seems to be an official order to the specific priests and priestesses of all individual nomes of Egypt to come to the residence. The formulations have some similarity to the way the Sais inscription runs. Unfortunately, I have no way of ascertaining the real date of these royal decrees, so that proposing them as the forerunners of these synods is not without difficulties—they might also be totally pseudepigraphic compositions modelled after an already existing system. Perhaps future research will bring more clarity in this matter. Another passage, also preserved in papyri of the Roman period, concerns related problems. In this case, I am speaking of the equally unpublished *Book of the Temple*, whose edition I am currently preparing. Of specific interest for us is a passage in the instruction for the governor and overseer of the prophets. Unfortunately, it is quite fragmentary, but I would like to present a translation in its entirety. Of the governors and overseer of the prophets, it is told:

It is they who receive the decrees of the king which come from the residence, and who hear the words which come about them, in order to command [... repo]rt thereof to the majesty of the palace [...] proceed to the residence together with [...] thrice a year, the senior governor at the new year's festival and the feast of [...] sed-festival together with [...]

The many lacunae in the text make any precise interpretation difficult, but it seems at least likely that the highest ranks should assemble at the royal palace from time to time when it came to important

<sup>42</sup> Pfeiffer 2004, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Kügler (1994, 56–58) already goes in this direction.

<sup>44</sup> See the brief presentation of both of them in Quack 2000.

political decision, or also routinely from time to time. Again, I have only Roman-period manuscripts, and cannot yet give a definite answer for questions of dating the archetype; but at least it must be older than the decree of Canopus (238 BC), because the text always operates with a system of four phylae—and one of the most important measures of the decree of Canopus was to create a fifth phyle. So I cannot simply say that I have evidence for an earlier tradition of priestly assemblies, but at least there seems some probability for it.

One of the salient features and the never finally resolved (or resolvable) problems of Ptolemaic history is sibling marriage. It all started ca. 278 BC with the return of Arsinoë II to Egypt,<sup>1</sup> after an adventurous queenship first beside Lysimachos of Thrace and then Ptolemy Ceraunus, her half-brother, in Macedonia. Ptolemy II then married his full sister and subsequently acquired the official by-name *Phoinadelphos* ('brother-loving').<sup>2</sup> The ancient tradition does refer to that act as limited. The only contemporary literary evidence for the new royal marriage is an eulogy by the court poet Theocritus and a metaphorical invective by Sotades. Theocritus refers to it in sublime verses of his *Encomium to Ptolemy*.<sup>3</sup> He emphasizes the unique love of Arsinoë II for her brother and isolated *ἰσοστυπέρων τε ἀδελφῶν τε* and skillfully compares the pair's relation to the sacred marriage (*ἁγὸς γάμος*) of the established divine sibling royalty on Olympus (*βροτῶν Ὀλύμπου*), Zeus and Hera, the common bed of whom Iris prepared with myrthed hands.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Sotades was executed in an exemplary way

<sup>1</sup> On the probable temporal context of Arsinoë II's return to Egypt and marriage with Ptolemy II (between 279 and 274 cf. recently Hoff 2001:307 n. 22, who offers a useful summary of the relevant problems and views.

<sup>2</sup> Criscuolo 1996 was right in emphasizing the wider use of this epithet, that is not restricted to sibling marriages and eventually denoting more generally the fact of excellent relations between royal children of the same parent(s), inside the Ptolemaic dynasty and the rest Hellenistic world. However, its first dynamic application in the case of Arsinoë II cannot be separated from the exact character of her relation to her brother and the need to exalt the fact of their marriage (cf. Fraser 1972: L217). A similar relation was certainly implied in all further cases of royal brothers and sisters called together *phoinadelphoi*; Criscuolo's effort (91 with n. 24) e.g. to disprove such a content in the use of the epithet for Mithridates IV and Laodice of Pontus simply cannot convince.

<sup>3</sup> Theoc., *Id.* 17, 128ff. Theocritus' case cannot have been isolated, of course: cf. n. 7 below. Callimachus also wrote an *epithalamion* for that royal sibling wedding (frg. 393 Pfeiffer), and it seems quite probable that he used a similar imagery to conciliate Greek opinion with offending court developments.

<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy that Theocritus wisely places the mention of the sibling marriage