



## The Provincial Royal Cult in The City of Ptolemais: The Southern Twin of Alexandria during the Greco Roman period

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### ABSTRACT

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The city of Ptolemais was an important religious center during the Graeco-Roman period. The city had its system of cults, directed toward either many deities or the defied members of the royal family. This research aims to study the royal cult in the city during the Graeco-Roman period. It explains the official Greek local cult, centered in the city and addressed to Ptolemy I “Soter” and the Ptolemaic kings in addition to the cult of the Roman emperors. The paper also analyzes the origins of the cult and its development. It illustrates the role of the city to supervise the temples of Soter outside of the city. A historical and analytical methodology is used. The results reveal that there was an official Greek local cult centered in the city, dedicated to Ptolemy I and the other rulers of the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt.

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### Introduction

Ptolemais was the third Greek city established in Egypt after the Macedonian conquest. It was founded by Ptolemy I Soter.<sup>1</sup> It was built near the Nile, on the ruins of an Egyptian city called *Psoi*. Thus the Egyptians called it “*Psoi/Ptolemais*,” meaning “*Psoi established by Ptolemy*.” The city's name was attested in Greek Papyri as Πτολεμαίς τῆς Θηβαΐδος<sup>2</sup> and Πτολεμαίς ἡ ἐν Θηβαΐδος<sup>3</sup>, the ethnic as Πτολεμαΐσεων τῶν ἐν Θηβαΐδι.<sup>4</sup> In the Roman period, the toponym Πτολεμαίς ἡ Ἑρμείου (Ptolemais Hermeiou)<sup>5</sup> is also found. Today, it is the city of El-Mansha in Sohag Governorate and is located where the ancient city used to be,<sup>6</sup> about ten kilometers to the south of the city of Sohag- aside from the site of Ptolemais, of which the landmarks have completely disappeared. It was a part of the Thinites, the 8<sup>th</sup> Upper Egyptian nome. Despite the fact that its quarries got significant attention in the late 4th century, the site has never been excavated.<sup>7</sup> It is very likely that the architects of Ptolemy I built this new city on the example of Alexandria, as Ptolemy wanted it to follow the

<sup>1</sup> Ptolemy, *Geography* 4.5.66; Bagnall (1998), 1093.

<sup>2</sup> *BGU* VI.1249.6, (148/7 BC).

<sup>3</sup> *P.Oxy.* XXXIV. 2723.3, (third century AD).

<sup>4</sup> *P.Fouad I* inv.211, II.10–11, (160 AD).

<sup>5</sup> *P.Oxy.* II. 268.2, (58 AD).

<sup>6</sup> Bernand (1969), 161-62 and no.13.

<sup>7</sup> Bagnall (1998), 1093.

Alexandrine style, but in Thebes in Upper Egypt.<sup>8</sup> Ptolemy I founded this city in order to control the Thebaid in Upper Egypt which stretched of the Nile valley from Aswan to roughly Abydos. This part was controlled through the new regional capital of Ptolemais and by newly established officials based in the city.<sup>9</sup>

Starbo described the city as the largest in the Thebaid, equivalent in size to Memphis, according to Strabo.<sup>10</sup> The city of Ptolemais enjoyed all the autonomy and privileges of the Greek free cities. It was able to amend its constitution. It had a boule council and another that consisted of its free people as well as the *demos*.<sup>11</sup> These councils enabled the city to run its affairs freely, and the king communicated with it through his ambassadors and delegates.<sup>12</sup> A local cult was established in the city of Ptolemais for members of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Official documents in Ptolemais and Thebes were dated by the names of its priesthood, while the documents in all other regions of Egypt were chronicled by the names of the priests of the general Greek cult, which was based in Alexandria.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Deification and worship of Kings in the Graeco-Roman Era**

The Royal/imperial cult is a form of state religion in which a king, an emperor, or a dynasty of rulers is deified as demigods or full deities. The royal cult of the Ptolemaic kings began when Ptolemy I took the first step towards its constitution, when he made the cult of Alexander the Great an official religion in Egypt, thus beginning the practice of deifying the rulers of Egypt after their death. The Ptolemaic dynasty based its own legitimacy in the eyes of its Greek subjects on their association with, and incorporation into, the imperial cult of Alexander the Great. Ptolemy II took a decisive step in deifying the Ptolemies when he first elevated his parents Ptolemy I and Berenice to the ranks of gods.<sup>14</sup> Then he raised himself and his wife, Arsinoe II, to the rank of divinities and connected their worship to that of Alexander.<sup>15</sup> Ptolemy III developed a new tradition when he decreed that his predecessors, namely his two deified brothers, would keep their divinity after their death and continue to be worshipped with Alexander. Following the footsteps of his father, he raised himself and his wife to the ranks of gods and combined their worship with that of their ancestors and Alexander the Great. This was the first time that the cult of the ruling king and his wife were merged into the cult of their ancestors and Alexander.<sup>16</sup>

Thereafter, the rule became that each Ptolemy and his wife who came to the throne would be deified and preserve their divinity after their deaths. In addition, their worship in life and death was associated with the cult of their ancestors and the cult of

<sup>8</sup> Manning (2005). 7.

<sup>9</sup> Manning (2003), 65, 97.

<sup>10</sup> Strabo 17.1.42; Cohen (2006), 350.

<sup>11</sup> On the tribes and demes of Ptolemais see Plaumann, (1910), 20–25.

<sup>12</sup> For more information see: G. Plaumann, *Ptolemais in Oberagypten* (Leipzig, 1910), Scherer, *BIFAO* 41 (1942) 66–73; Noshy, *Arts*, 7–8.

<sup>13</sup> Bevan (1925). 107; *LÄ*. IV, 1183.

<sup>14</sup> نصحي (1995). 80-75.

<sup>15</sup> Bouche-Leclercq (1905). 38; Bevan (1925). 127.

<sup>16</sup> نصحي (1995). 84.

Alexander the Great. This royal cult was limited at first to those who were elevated to the ranks of gods after their death, such as Alexander, Ptolemy I, and his wife; later it included those who were deified in their lives and kept their divinity after death: the other Ptolemaic kings and their queens, starting with Ptolemy II and his wife.

In 217/216 BC, Ptolemy IV proclaimed himself and his wife to be deities in the name of the Theoi Philopatores (Father-loving gods), and were formally incorporated into the official public cult in the state.<sup>17</sup> In 215/214 BC, the cult of these two (Philopatores) became associated with the local cult in Thebes, and Ptolemy IV developed this cult completely and turned it into the cult of the whole Ptolemaic dynasty.<sup>18</sup> He did so by placing the two Soters, the founder of the dynasty and his wife, at the head of the series of deified Ptolemies whose cult was associated with that of Alexander. In this way, the official Greek cult that was originally constituted to deify Ptolemy I the founder of the Ptolemaic state, developed to include the ruler and his wife, and was then promoted until it became a dynastic cult.<sup>19</sup>

In view of the above, it can be seen that during the Ptolemaic period four different types of cults were developed:<sup>20</sup>

- 1- Their cult in the Egyptian temples resembled the official general Egyptian cult of the pharaohs, i.e., they were deified just like the ruling pharaoh, for whom statues were erected in temples and associated with the actual deities. The Greeks did not interfere with this cult, as they were ignorant of everything happening in the Egyptian temples and everything written in hieroglyphic. It seems that the kings were always keen on establishing closer relations with their subjects, so they used their Egyptian assistants to make the Egyptian priests establish rituals that would clearly express the loyalty of their Egyptian subjects in a way commensurate with their status.
2. General official Greek cult in Egypt which was an outgrowth of the official religion whose foundations were laid by Ptolemy I when he made the cult of Alexander the Great an official religion in Egypt, thus beginning the practice of deifying the rulers of Egypt after their death. Beginning with Ptolemy II, the Ptolemaic kings and queens were deified in their lifetimes, and retained their divinity after their death. They were also associated with the cult of Alexander. During the reign of Ptolemy IV, this cult reached its zenith to include all the Ptolemaic kings and queens, starting from Ptolemy I and his wife.
- 3- The local official cult – the case of our study- which was encouraged by the Greek cities in honor of the rulers, either in Egypt such as Ptolemais or outside Egypt, like the Island of Rhodes.
- 4- Unofficial Greek cults that existed alongside with the official ones, individuals and public groups performed and set their own rituals as they saw fit. Some of these

<sup>17</sup> Bevan (1925). 388.

<sup>18</sup> Revillout (1880). 135; *BGU*. VI.1264; 1275; 1276; *SB* III. 6283.

<sup>19</sup> نصحي (1995). 88.

<sup>20</sup> نصحي (1995). 124.

religious associations deified the king or queen, or one of the deities that the rulers worshipped. These included the Association of Artists of Dionysius and the two Adelpoi Gods in Ptolemais. Other people would set up a temple or an altar for the king or the queen, as the government granted many privileges to the religious establishments of the Ptolemaic dynasty.

The next section deals with the importance of the religious city of Ptolemais and its role as the center of the Ptolemies' official local cult.

### **The Greek official local cult centered in the city of Ptolemais**

An official Greek cult of the Ptolemaic rulers was promoted in the city of Ptolemais. It had eponymous priests, in whose names documents were dated.

### **The Cult of Ptolemy I “Soter” and the Ptolemaic Kings**

The city of Ptolemais was established by Ptolemy I in the province of Thebes, bearing his name and enjoying his protection: “*The Boule (polis council) and popular assembly decided that King Ptolemy, the god Soter, should found a Greek city in Thebes, to bear the name Ptolemais after his name, and to place it under his auspices (protection).*”<sup>21</sup>

Since Ptolemy I “Soter” is the founder of this city, he took precedence among the other deified Ptolemaic kings in the local official Greek cult in Ptolemais. This raises the question: When did this cult originate? How did it develop?

### **The origins of the royal cult in Ptolemais**

It was an official Greek cult of members of the royal family in the city of Ptolemais. While documents in all parts of Egypt were dated by the names of the eponymous priests of the official Greek public cult that was based in Alexandria, most of the documents of Ptolemais and all regions of Thebes were also dated by the names of the eponymous priests of the royal cult centered in Ptolemais.<sup>22</sup> The oldest of these protocols includes papyri written in demotic script dating back to the eighth year of the reign of King Ptolemy IV Philopator (215/214 BC). Hence, it was necessary to<sup>23</sup> present the relevant opinions on this subject.

Bouche-Leclercq<sup>24</sup> states that this cult started in the city of Ptolemais to balance the influence of the eponymous priests in Thebes, and to provide honorary positions for the local aristocracy for their distraction. Otto<sup>25</sup> points out that Ptolemy I “Soter” was worshiped in Ptolemais as a founding deity of the city that was established by his son

<sup>21</sup> Bernard (1992). No. 62, 140-141= SEG XX. 665, Ptolemais, 117-138 AD, II. 1-4.

<sup>22</sup> نصحي (1995). 115.  
<sup>23</sup> الحمصاني (1984). 139-142;

*P. Lond. Demo. 10377 = Revillout (1880).135: “In the eighth year, in the month of Barmhat of the reign of Ptolemy, the son of Ptolemy and Berenice, the two benevolent deities, when Ptolemy, the son of Ptolemy, the son of Sosikrates, was a priest of Alexander and the two deities Soter, the two siblings, the two Benefactor Gods, and the two gods Philopatores, when Arsinoe, the daughter of Sosibius, was a priestess to Arsinoe Philadelphus, when Nikandros, the son of Bakias, was a priest in the region of Thebes to Ptolemy and the two Philopatores deities.”*

<sup>24</sup> Bouche-Leclercq (1905). 63.

<sup>25</sup> Otto (1905). 160-163.

Ptolemy II when raising his father to the ranks of the gods after his death. This worship is not mentioned in the documents before the eighth year of the reign of Ptolemy IV (215/214 BC). This may be due to the scribes' neglect and to the fact that dating the events according to the names of this cult's priests was limited to the region of Thebes. Otto also believes that if many documents were excavated from Thebes from the times of Ptolemy II and III without mentioning this worship, then it can be concluded that dating documents in Thebes according to the priests of this cult started at a time later than that of the establishment of the cult itself. He maintains that if the documents recorded that the members of the Ptolemaic dynasty, starting with Ptolemy IV, were also worshiped along with Ptolemy I, then it is more probably that Ptolemy II and Ptolemy III joined Ptolemy I in their deification before the reign of Philopator.

However, Plaumann's<sup>26</sup> view differs completely. He believes that the city had two cults. The first belonged to Ptolemy I "Soter" or the supreme deity Soter as the founder of this city. This worship emerged during his life because some cities outside Egypt, such as the islands of Greece, recognized his grace and worshiped him while he was still alive. It is evident that the city that he founded which bears his name recognized his deeds, since the worship of city founders was common among the Greeks in the Hellenistic era. The second cult was a local one, to Ptolemy I and other Ptolemaic kings. The origins of this cult is attributed to Ptolemy IV, because it is not mentioned in any documents before the time of this king, who showed special interest in the cult of Ptolemy I. Plaumann believes that it is not certain whether these two separate cults continued later despite the amendments made by Ptolemy IV, or whether they were merged into one cult.

Scherer<sup>27</sup> believes that there is a difference between the cult of Ptolemy I as the founder of Ptolemais and his local official cult that combined him with other Ptolemaic kings. The local dynastic cult of Ptolemy I "Soter" ended with the arrival of the Romans, i.e., with the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty. His cult as the founder of the city continued until the time of the Roman period, as did the cult of Alexander as the founder of Alexandria. In support of this view, Scherer cites the titles of Ptolemy I during the Roman era, such as "The Supreme God Soter;"<sup>28</sup> the merging of the title of "Soter" with some other deities such as "Zeus Helios Soter"<sup>29</sup> and the titles of the two savior gods,<sup>30</sup> which were mentioned frequently in the Roman era; and the establishment of a temple for the rites of worshiping "Soter" in that era in Ptolemais and Qift.<sup>31</sup>

Oates<sup>32</sup> believes that promoting this worship provided a remarkable balance in religious life, especially in the face of the influence of the Egyptian priests in Thebes.

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<sup>26</sup> Plaumann (1910). 50 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Scherer (1942). 71-73.

<sup>28</sup> *P.Lond.* III.604B, 1. 115 (47 A.D); *P.Lond.* III.604B, 1. 118 (47 AD).

<sup>29</sup> *IGRR= Inscriptiones graecae ad res romanas pertinentes*, I.1153, Ptolemais, AD 50 – 99.

<sup>30</sup> *SB V.8805 = IGRR 1.1151*, Ptolemais, 81 AD.

<sup>31</sup> Scherer (1942). 71-73.

<sup>32</sup> Oates (1971). 55-72.

It provided the Greek population there with moral support for their worship of the dynasty's deified founder. However, in practice it did not fulfill this purpose, because dating the documents according to the priest of the general official Greek cult of Alexander, centered in Alexandria, was mandatory in all regions of Egypt. As a result, the documents of Thebes are often not dated according to the priest of the local official Greek cult who was based in Ptolemais and its main deity was Ptolemy I. On the other hand, some documents are dated according to both systems, which indicates that dating according to the priest of the local official cult was not obligatory even in Thebes.<sup>33</sup>

It is possible that after the founding of Ptolemais, a Greek cult of Ptolemy I as its founder was promoted there, but that the documents were not dated in this cult. It was Ptolemy IV who made this Greek cult official and allowed documents in Thebes to be dated by it, provided that the ruling king shared with the head of dynasty in this cult, suggesting that there was only one cult instead of two. This cult underwent several developments after the time of Ptolemy IV. This view is supported by the fact that all the relevant available documents mention only the cult in which the members of the Ptolemaic dynasty shared with the deity Ptolemy I, and none of them is earlier than the reign of Ptolemy IV.<sup>34</sup>

### **Evolution of the Cult**

The evolution of this cult took several steps after the reign of Ptolemy IV. One important step was the identification of Ptolemy IV and his wife Arsinoe III as the two gods "Philopators" with Ptolemy I "Soter" in the local Greek cult.<sup>35</sup> The priest of this cult was called "Priest of Ptolemy Soter,"<sup>36</sup> and the two gods were called "Philopators."<sup>37</sup> The documents of Thebes began to be dated after the eponymous priest of this cult in 215/214 BC. There are documents dated in this way from the eighth, twelfth and fifteenth years of the reign of this king (215/214, 211/210, 208/207 BC). The names of these priests were, Nikadrous, Nikanor and Ninus respectively.

During the reign of Ptolemy V "Epiphanes," this cult underwent some changes,<sup>38</sup> as its eponymous priest came to be called "The Priest of Ptolemy I Soter"<sup>39</sup> and the god Epiphanes Eucharistos.<sup>40</sup> There are documents dated as such from the seventh and twenty-third years of the reign of this king (198/197 and 182/181 BC) and before the twenty-third year (182/181). During the year of the reign of Ptolemy V, a priestess

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<sup>33</sup> Ijsewijn (1961). 122-125; Minas (1998). 43-60; Quaegebeur (1998). 73-108; Van Nuffelen (1998). 175-189; Cerfaux & Tondriau, (1957). 191.

<sup>34</sup> نصحي (1995). 117.

<sup>35</sup> Thompson (1932). 16-37; Bianchi & Clarysse & van der Veken (1986). 41.

<sup>36</sup> Proso.Ptole., III, 5206 (215-210 B.C)

<sup>37</sup> Proso.Ptole., III, 5134 (209-207 B.C)

<sup>38</sup> Lanciers (1986). 61-63.

<sup>39</sup> Proso.Ptole., III, 5173 (199-198 B.C)

<sup>40</sup> Proso.Ptole., III, 5173 (186-180 B.C)



whose title was Kanephoras<sup>41</sup> of Arsinoe Philadelphus (Arsinoe II) was added to this cult, and she was mentioned in documents after that time.<sup>42</sup>

In the third year of the reign of Ptolemy VI, the number of priests increased to three. One of them was for Ptolemy I and Ptolemy V:<sup>43</sup> *“To King Ptolemy, the god Philometor, for Hippalus, one of the first companions, the Epistrategos, the priest of Ptolemy Soter and Ptolemy Epiphanius.”*<sup>44</sup> The second was for Ptolemy VI and his mother Cleopatra I,<sup>45</sup> and the third for Kanephoras Arsinoe Philadelphus.<sup>46</sup> In the seventh year of Ptolemy VI’s reign the number of priests increased again to five.<sup>47</sup>

We can conclude that the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (180–145 BC) is characterized by four phenomena:

1- The priest of this cult, was known for several years in this era, as in the previous era, as “the priest of Ptolemy Soter and Ptolemy Epiphanes Eucharistos.” It is difficult to explain this phenomenon, especially when we know that despite the young age of Ptolemy VI when ascending the throne, his mother did not hesitate to deify him and to involve him in the official public Greek cult.<sup>48</sup>

Some demotic papyri,<sup>49</sup> some of which dated back to the sixth year of the reign of Ptolemy VI (176/175) BC, and one to the eleventh year of his reign (171/170 BC),<sup>50</sup> as well as a Greek inscription<sup>51</sup> from his reign, state that Hippalus, the ruler of Thebes, also held the position of the priest in the years to which these documents refer. This indicates that in the cult of Ptolemais, like the cult of Alexandria, one person could hold the office of priesthood several times.

2- A new priest appeared in the documents, called “Priest of King Ptolemy VI and Cleopatra the Mother,” in reference to the goddess Cleopatra Epiphanes, wife of the god Ptolemy V Epiphanes. This priest was mentioned after “the priest of Ptolemy Soter and the god Epiphanes Eucharistos” and before “the priestess of

<sup>41</sup> Bianchi & Clarysse & van der Veken (1986). 42 (185-182 B.C); Proso.Ptole., III, 5173 (183-182 B.C); Bianchi & Clarysse & van der Veken (1986). 42 (182- 181 B.C); The word Kanephoras means "carrier of the basket". She has been the girl who used to carry the basket in religious processions. She was chosen from the daughters of ancient and well-reputed families; Schelp, J. (1975). *Das Kanoun, der griechische Opferkorb. Beiträge zur Archäologie.*, p.15.

<sup>42</sup> Pestman, P. W. (1967). *Chronologie égyptienne d'après les textes démotiques: 332 av. J.-C.-453 ap. J.-C* (Vol. 15). Brill Archive., pp. 138-139; Quaegebeur, J. (1989). *The Egyptian clergy and the cult of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Ancient Society*, 20, pp. 93-116.; Ijsewijn (1961). 123; Bianchi & Clarysse & van der Veken (1986). 40-4

<sup>43</sup> Proso. Ptole., III, 5155.

<sup>44</sup> Bianchi & Clarysse & van der Veken (1986). 40-42; Herbert (1972). 22-24= *OGIS*. 103= *SB V.8876*, Ptolemais 180/179 BC, II. 1-6.

<sup>45</sup> Proso. Ptole., III, 5169.

<sup>46</sup> Proso. Ptole., III, 5282; Proso. Ptole., III, 5283.

<sup>47</sup> Thompson (1934). 67-71; P.dem. BM Siut 10594; Quaegebeur (1980). 259-261; Pestman (1967). 142; Bianchi & Clarysse & van der Veken (1986). 44-45.

<sup>48</sup> ابراهيم نصحي (2000)، ص. 118.

<sup>49</sup> *Dem.P.Berl.* 3111; 3141, in *cherst. Dem.*, pp. 134ff, and Spiegelberg, 'Dem P.Berl.', p. 8; *Dem.P.Louvre*, 3440.

<sup>50</sup> *Dem.P.Rev.Eg.* 1, p. 93.

<sup>51</sup> *OGIS* 103; *SB V.8876*

Arsinoe Philadelphus.” Thus, the cult of Ptolemais included two priests and a priestess. This can be deduced from documents dating to the third year,<sup>52</sup> the sixth year,<sup>53</sup> and the eleventh year<sup>54</sup> of this king's reign (179/178, 176/175, 171/170).

In the period between 193 and 170 BC, Egypt witnessed the joint rule of Ptolemy VI, his brother Ptolemy VIII, and Cleopatra II. As a result, the number of priests increased to six.<sup>55</sup>

- 3- In 163 BC the Ptolemaic kingdom was divided between the two kings. Egypt and Cyprus were ruled by Ptolemy VI, and Cyrenaica by Ptolemy VIII.<sup>56</sup> This made King Ptolemy VI the sole ruler of Egypt for a second time. From the twenty-first to the twenty-eighth years of his reign, Ptolemy VI developed a new system for the cult in the city of Ptolemais: each Ptolemaic king had his own priest. The list started with the priest of Ptolemy I, and continued with the priest of the ruling king (Ptolemy VI) and the priests of Ptolemy II, III, IV, V, and Ptolemy “Eupator”, until the number of priests became ten.<sup>57</sup>

This priestly system remained in force until the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II.<sup>58</sup> It is possible that it continued later, until the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty. However, there is no evidence of this, except that the papyrus scribes, wanting to abridge the list of kings and their priests, wrote: “There were priests, priestesses, and Kanephoras in the city of Ptolemais in the region of Thebes.”<sup>59</sup>

- 4- During the reign of Ptolemy VI, in addition to the priestess of Arsinoe Philadelphus, three other priestesses were assigned, one for Cleopatra the mother (Cleopatra I), the second for Queen Cleopatra (Cleopatra II), and the third for Cleopatra the daughter (later Cleopatra III). The first document in which the Priestess of Cleopatra I is mentioned dates to 154/153 BC,<sup>60</sup> that is, about twenty years after the death of this queen. The first document to mention the priestess of Cleopatra II dates to the year 161/160 BC.<sup>61</sup> As for the priestess of Cleopatra the Daughter is mentioned for the first time in two documents dating to the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Ptolemy VI (146/145 BC).<sup>62</sup> The two priests of Cleopatra II and her daughter, who were still alive, are mentioned first; then the priestess of Cleopatra I, who had died; and finally the priestess of Arsinoe.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Dem.P.Cairo.* 30968, p. 207 and 30783, pp. 162-163.

<sup>53</sup> *Dem.P.Berlin.* 3111 and 3141.

<sup>54</sup> *Dem.P.Rev.Eg.* I, p. 93.

<sup>55</sup> Sherk (1990). 249-288., p. 264; Bianchi & Clarysse & van der Veken (1986). 46-47.

<sup>56</sup> Hölbl (2000). 181-221.

<sup>57</sup> Sherk, R. K. (1990), p. 264; Bianchi & Clarysse & van der Veken (1986). 46-49; *SB. I.4637= P.Grenf. I.12*, Thebes, 148 BC, II. 6-13.

<sup>58</sup> *Dem.P.Berl.* 3090 and 3091, in *Nouv.Cherst. Dem.*, pp. 32 ff; *P.Grenf. I.12*; II. 15; *P.Amh. II. 45*.

<sup>59</sup> Otto (1905). 162; Pestman (1969). 129-157.

<sup>60</sup> *Dem.P.Berl.* 3097 and 3070, in *Revillout Nouv. Chrest. dem*, pp. 46 ff; *P.Grenf. I.12*; *P.Amh. II.45*; *P.Grenf. II.15*.

<sup>61</sup> *Dem.P.Berl.* 3090 and 3091, in *Revillout Nouv. Chrest. Dem*, pp. 32 ff; *P.Amh. II.45*.

<sup>62</sup> *Dem P.Biblioth. Nationale.* 218, in *Chrest dem.*, pp. 62 ff; *Dem.P.Strassb.* 21.

<sup>63</sup> *P.Grenf. I.24*; II. 15; *P. Amh. II. 45*.



During the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, a new priest was added to this cult. He was called “Priest of Ptolemy VIII” or “Priest of the Golden Throne of the god King Ptolemy Euergetes, the great King Eucharistus.” This priest was mentioned after the priest of Ptolemy Soter and the priest of Ptolemy VIII—that is, he ranked third. This priest is mentioned in documents dating to the year 139,<sup>64</sup> the year 127/126, and the year 123 BC.<sup>65</sup> He also assigned two priestesses each to Cleopatra III (Spouse) and Cleopatra IV (Daughter), which brought the number of priests to thirteen.

It can be concluded that the royal cult in Ptolemais was more complicated than the public official Greek cult based in Alexandria. It is interesting to note that, in the Alexandrian cult, if the priestesses of the queens were excluded, there would be only one priest to perform the rites of Alexander the Great and the other deified kings. In addition, the transition of sovereignty from one king to another required only adding a new couple to the series of gods. In the Ptolemais cult, by contrast, it seems that from the middle of the reign of Ptolemy VI, each king had his own priest.<sup>66</sup>

Even so, the Ptolemais cult could not have been as important as the public official cult, because dating the documents after the priests of the Ptolemais cult was not obligatory, even in Thebes itself. None of the scribes or editors outside that region followed this method of dating, even though Ptolemais was the capital of the Greeks in Upper Egypt. It should be recalled that this cult was possibly established in Ptolemais to balance the influence of the Egyptian priests in Thebes, and to find honorary positions to distract the local aristocracy.<sup>67</sup> It was possible to combine these honorary positions with other privileged positions; as we have already seen, a person called Hippalos held the office of “priest of Ptolemy I (Soter) and Ptolemy Epiphanes (Eucharistos)” for several years during the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor. At the same time this person was a general epistrategos, that is, a general governor.<sup>68</sup>

With the Roman conquest of Egypt, the local cult of Ptolemaic kings in Ptolemais draws to an end, but the cult of Ptolemy I “Soter” as founder of the city continued in the Roman era.<sup>69</sup> It is clear that the Romans respected the cult of Alexander the Great as the founder of Alexandria, and they also respected the cult of Ptolemy I as the founder of Ptolemais. Hence, both cults lasted for a long time in the Roman period. The continuation of the cult of Ptolemy I Soter is evidenced by an inscription referring to a person called Heraclius son of Lysis, nicknamed Heroboios, who is the superintendent of religious life in the city, who built a temple at his own expense for the two saviors (Ptolemy I and his wife) in the city of Ptolemais. It reads as follows:

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<sup>64</sup> *P.Grenf.* II.15.

<sup>65</sup> *P.Lond.* III. Pp. 6-7.

<sup>66</sup> Bouché-Leclercq (1905). 62-63.

<sup>67</sup> Bouché-Leclercq (1905). 63.

<sup>68</sup> Strack (1897). 250, n. 94.

<sup>69</sup> *P.Lond.* III.604B.115, 118 (p. 80; 47 AD.); *IGR* 1:1153; *SB* IV.7396 (from Edfu) and *SB* VIII.9820 (see below, n. 4; second cent. b.c.); *P.Fouad I.* inv. 211 = Scherer (1942), 46–48. *I. Philae*, p. 162; and Fraser, *Berytus* 13.2 (1960) 128–29 and n. 18.

*“The third year (of the reign) of Titus Caesar and to the two savoir gods, Heraclius, the son of Lysis, head of the boule council and the high priest, founded a temple to the two savior gods at his own expense, on the third of Epip.”<sup>70</sup>*

### **Supervision of Ptolemais on the temples of Soter outside the city**

Under Roman rule, Ptolemais extended its rule and its influence outside its borders. It had the undisputed right to supervise and manage the cult of the founder of the city “Ptolemy I Soter.” It also had the right to supervise the financial, administrative, and religious matters on the temples of this cult, even in other territories. There is a papyrus stating that the local authorities in Qift claimed for themselves the authority to supervise the Temple of Soter in Qift and to collect its revenues. However, the authorities in Ptolemais rejected this claim on the basis that the affairs of the Temple of Soter fell indisputably within the realm of the authorities in Ptolemais. It seems that the whole situation was referred to one of the judicial officials specialized in the affairs of temples and priests. The title of this official is mentioned in this papyrus—for the first time—as “the chief assistant or deputy of the High Priest.” A judicial session was held in the governor’s court in the Thinite nome, perhaps in the presence of the above-mentioned chief religious official.<sup>71</sup> Although there are large gaps in the lines of the papyrus (in the first column), the general meaning is mostly clear, especially from the second column, which contains the edict of the chief assistant of the high priest in favor of Ptolemais, has survived completely intact.<sup>72</sup>

In this judicial session, the head of the boule council of Ptolemais defended the city’s claim to the full supervision of Soter’s temples by citing previous edicts of another prefect and another senior official in the Roman administration in Egypt, namely the idiologos, which settled the right of Ptolemais in relation to this issue. He cited an edict issued by the prefect Vergilius Capito in a session of the governor’s court held in the city of Ptolemais on March 27, AD 48. This edict established the right of the boule council in the city of Ptolemais, according to its custom, to appoint employees, clerks, custodians, and other officials of the same rank:

*“A copy of official minutes.... from Vergilius Capito, in the year 8 of the reign of Emperor Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus and on the first day of the month of Paremhat, it occurred in the city of Ptolemais that Apollonius son of Philip declared that the (followed) tradition was that the boule council appoints the officials, clerks, sacristans, and those of the same rank, and it demands (observance of this) tradition and preservation of that from the beginning....Capito.”<sup>73</sup>*

This dispute came to the surface once again in the form of an official report. It included the facts that emerged in a session held under the chairmanship of Lysimachus, the official in charge of the idiologos, on the fourth of Mecheir in year 2 of the reign of Emperor Servius Galba (AD 19). In this context, Idiologos Lysimachus confirmed the right of the boule council members in Ptolemais to sell the position of

<sup>70</sup> SB V.8805, Ptolemais, 81 AD., II. 1-4.

<sup>71</sup> Scherer (1942). 43-59= SB VI. 9016, Koptos, 160 AD., Col. 1, II. 1-4.

<sup>72</sup> Abd-El-Ghani (2001). 30-33.

<sup>73</sup> SB V1.9016, Koptos, 160 AD., Col. 1, 11. 5-9

custodian according to the royal decrees (from the Ptolemies' days) and the decrees of the Roman prefects:

*"A copy of the official minutes (from the session) of Lysimachus the Idiologos, in year 2 of the reign of Emperor Servius Galba Augustus, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of the month of Mecheir. It contained a report of accusations.... which was recited to give the boule council members of Ptolemais city the right of selling the position of Neokoros or the temple sacristan (for obtaining) 4 talents. After reading (the accusations), Lysimachus wrote his reply on a tablet and commanded it to be announced. It reads: By royal commands which were often (and necessarily) carried out in the administration (which is under my supervision) based on the rulings (which were issued) by the governors, I see that the boule council (has the right) to confer such positions (according to) the decisions that may be issued by the council) ...."*<sup>74</sup>

The same Idiologos issued this same legal opinion in the year AD 88 at the prefect's court in Memphis at the session devoted to the affairs of the Thinite nome.<sup>75</sup> This second edict of Idiologos Lysimachus expressly stated this right for the members of the boule council in the city of Ptolemais. It gave them the right to supervise and control these temples in Ptolemais and other provinces based on the decrees and decisions of the Ptolemaic kings and Roman prefects:

*"In the year 20: (during the session held) at the court of the governor of Thenite province in Memphis, in the year 20 of the reign of the deified Vespasian, 4 Meshir, (there is) a comment made by Lysimachus.... concerning the subject of sold custody (and a number of functions) of supervisors.... in the city of Ptolemais and other provinces. Lysimachus (confessed) that: according to the royal ordinance observed by kings and governors, it becomes clear that members of the boule council have the right to (issue) the decision (relevant to the tasks assigned to) the supervisors and custodians they choose for these tasks."*<sup>76</sup>

Considering this evidence and the legal precedents that support the right of Ptolemais to fully supervise the temples of Soter, a "deputy archiereus" named "Alpius Serenianus" issued his instructions regarding the temple of Soter. He stated that the Epistrategos had to collect the revenues and clear the accounts every two months, and inspect the register and offerings:

*"A copy of the clarification of His Excellency the Deputy High Priest (regarding) the temple of Soter, the specified (taxes) must be received, the accounting process (must be accomplished), and the (necessary) registration must be done within a period of two months, with the process of examining the movables and offerings, through the eminence of the Epistrategos."*<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> SB V1.9016, Koptos, 160 AD., Col. 1, 11. 9-16

<sup>75</sup> Ptolemais became the metropolis of the Thinite nome during the Roman Period: *Ptolemy, Geography*, 4.5.66; there is a papyrus confirm that Ptolemais became the metropolis of the Thinite nome during the Roman Period: *P.Oxy. XLIV.3198*, Ptolemais 146/145 AD, II. 1-2.

<sup>76</sup> SB V1.9016, Koptos, 160 AD., Col. 1, 11. 19-23.

<sup>77</sup> SB V1.9016, Koptos, 160 AD., Col. II, 11. 1-5.

Then the “deputy archiereus” issued the edict to the *strategos* and the royal clerk in the province of Qift, along with the protest of the officers of the city of Ptolemais, the boule council, and the people of Ptolemais against the attempt of the province of Qift to confiscate the rights of Ptolemais to supervise the temple of Soter in Qift, because this supervision is an inherent right of the city. They call for preserving this right according to the custom since ancient times:

*A copy of his letter: Ulpius Serenianus, the deputy of the high priest to the epistrategos and royal (scribe) of the city of Qift ... after the greetings ... here (enclosed with this) a copy of the letter written to the chiefs, the council of boule, and the people of the Ptolemais city in Thebes, whereas (the status quo), according to them, is that the function of neokoros (the temple sacristan) in the temple of Soter in the city of Qift belongs to their city (Ptolemais), (it) has become necessary to preserve this tradition from the beginning. I wish you good health, in the year 23<sup>rd</sup> of the reign of Antonius Caesar (AD 160), the 8<sup>th</sup> of the month of Parmouti.”*<sup>78</sup>

The repeated references to this case on many occasions during the first and second centuries shows that the senior Roman officials in Egypt were equitable and just to the Ptolemais city and its council of boule. They insisted that the city be permitted to exercise the powers, privileges, and rights granted to it by the Ptolemaic kings to the fullest, at least in this religious field. The Roman governors were eager to preserve the prestige, the legislative institutions, and the freedom of action of the city in a way that did not conflict with the Roman administrative systems. This great interest in the city and its privileges with respect to the temples of Soter both inside and outside it—the latter being the most important—can be seen clearly when we note that the peopled who handle this case and established the rights of the city were always the state’s senior officials, such as the prefect, the Idiologos, the Epistrategos, and the deputy high priest.<sup>79</sup> These are imperial and not local officials. The same privilege was also enjoyed by the other Greek cities in Egypt, all of whom had the right to conduct their affairs directly with imperial officials without the involvement of the local authorities (such as the royal scribe and strategos in Qift).<sup>80</sup>

### **Imperial cult in Ptolemais**

After the fall of the Ptolemaic kingdom and the Roman seizure of Egypt in 30 BC, the cult of the emperor appeared in Egypt. Augustus established the imperial cult for the living emperor, a tradition which was taken over by his successors. Roman imperial cult had political implications.<sup>81</sup> Augustus needed to create such a religion in order to maintain balance throughout the empire since he was entering a new political era (the imperial period) and needed to strike a balance between the various interests of the people, the senatus, and the army. Meanwhile, he had to preserve peace, stability, and oversee a vast empire populated by people of various ethnicities. The easiest way to

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<sup>78</sup> SB V1.9016, Koptos, 160 AD., Col. II, 11. 6-16.

<sup>79</sup> Scherer (1942). 59-66.

<sup>80</sup> Preaux (1947). 50-152.

<sup>81</sup> De Jong, (2006), 64.

cope with all of these issues is to build a cult that is considered divine and noble by the empire's many classes.<sup>82</sup>

As a result, in Egypt, the cult was organised in both the capital and the metropolises.<sup>83</sup> It was organised under Roman supervision. This cult was presented in many physical places like altars and temples. These temples were found not only in the capitals but also in small villages.<sup>84</sup> The high priest was in charge of the provincial imperial cult;<sup>85</sup> as a result, all temples in Egypt, whether Greek or Egyptian, were required to pay respect and present offerings to the divine emperor.<sup>86</sup> We know little about this cult in Egypt.

In Egypt, Temples were built in his honor, and Emperor Augustus bestowed on himself the title and the divine qualities of "*Soter*" savior and *benefactor* as well as the epithets of the Ptolemaic kings.<sup>87</sup> This cult was practiced in the city of Ptolemais in the form of a dedication made by the gymnasium members to Emperor Nero in the seventh year of his reign:

*"To Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, the Emperor, Savior, and Benefactor of the Inhabited World, City of the Ptolemies."*<sup>88</sup>

### Conclusion

The city of Ptolemais played a major role in religion during the Graeco-Roman period. It was an important center for the cult directed towards many deities and to the royal family. During the Ptolemaic Period the Ptolemaic kings promoted four different cults. The first was their cult in the Egyptian temples in their capacity as pharaohs, as an official, general Egyptian cult. The second was a general, official Greek cult in Egypt. The third was the local official cult in honor of the rulers, encouraged by the Greek cities in Egypt like Ptolemais, the case study of our research. The fourth consisted of unofficial Greek cults in which individuals and groups performed their rituals as they saw fit.

In the city of Ptolemais an official local cult was established for Ptolemy I and the Ptolemaic kings. Official documents in Ptolemais and Thebes were dated by the names of its priesthood. These documents show that the cult dates to the eighth year of the reign of King Ptolemy IV Philopator. Scholars differ about the origins of this cult. One says that it was started by Ptolemy II, son of Ptolemy I Soter, when he raised his father to the ranks of the gods after his death. According to another scholar, there were two systems for the cult of Soter: the first was directed to him during his lifetime as the founder of the city, while the second was a local cult for him and the other Ptolemaic kings, established by Ptolemy IV. A third scholar believes that the

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<sup>82</sup> El-Kady (2018), 44.

<sup>83</sup> Pfeiffer (2012). 86.

<sup>84</sup> De Jong, (2006), 67.

<sup>85</sup> Longfellow (2011), 80.

<sup>86</sup> Dundas (1994), 12.

<sup>87</sup> *OGIS 657= SB V.8897= IGRR I.1294, Philae, 13/12 BC., II, 1-3; Cerfaux & Tondriau (1957). 318, 327; Bernand, (1982). 42; cf Fraser, P.M. (1972), Ptolemais Alexandria, II, 70, no. 160*

<sup>88</sup> *OGIS 668= IGRR I.1124, Ptolemais, 60/61 AD., II, 1-6.*

local cult of Soter together with the other Ptolemaic kings ended with Roman conquest of Egypt, while the cult of Soter individually as the founder of Ptolemais continued till the end of the Roman Era in Egypt.

According to the study, the local cult of Soter together with other Ptolemaic kings was established in Ptolemais for the purpose of providing a balance in religious life, especially in the face of the influence of the Egyptian priests in Thebes. It also provided the Greek population there with moral support for their worship of the dynasty's deified founder.

According to the documents discussed in the study, it was Ptolemy IV who made this Greek cult official and allowed documents in Thebes to be dated by it, provided that the ruling king shared with the head of the dynasty in this cult, suggesting that there was only one cult instead of two. This cult underwent several developments after the era of Ptolemy IV. During the reign of Ptolemy V, a priestess was added to it. During the reign of Ptolemy VI, the number of priests increased. The number of priests continued to increase throughout the years of the remaining Ptolemaic kings: one priest was known as the "priest of Ptolemy I," another as the "priest of Ptolemy II," and so on, with each new king adding a priest of his own. As the list of kings and their priests became inconveniently long, the papyrus scribes, wanting to abridge the list, wrote: "There were priests, priestesses, and Kanephoras in the city of Ptolemais in the region of Thebes."

With the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BC, the local cult of Ptolemaic kings in Ptolemais drew to an end, but the specific cult of Ptolemy I Soter as founder of the city continued in the Roman era. At this same time, the cult of the emperor appeared in Egypt, and this cult was also practiced in Ptolemais.

Under Roman rule, Ptolemais enjoyed the undisputed right to manage the cult of Ptolemy I Soter as the founder of the city. It supervised the financial, administrative, and religious aspects of all the temples of this cult, even in territories outside of Ptolemais.

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## العبادة الملكية الإقليمية في مدينة بطلمية: التوأم الجنوبي للإسكندرية في العصر اليوناني الروماني

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### معلومات المقالة

#### الكلمات المفتاحية

اليوناني الروماني؛ بطلمية؛  
بطليموس؛ كهنة؛ عبادة.

### المخلص

لعبت مدينة بطلمية التي انشأها بطليموس الاول دورا هاما في الحياة الدينية في العصر اليوناني الروماني وانتشرت في تلك المدينة عبادة الالهة المختلفة بالإضافة الي عبادة الملوك والاباطرة، ويهدف هذا البحث للتعرف علي العبادة الملكية في مدينة بطلمية في العصر اليوناني الروماني، ، حيث انشأت عبادة يونانية رسمية محلية في مدينة بطلمية لأفراد الاسرة الملكية، وكان لها كهنة تؤرخ الوثائق بأسمائهم، وقد احتل بطليموس الاول بصفته مؤسس المدينة الصدارة بين ملوك البطالمة المؤهلين في العبادة اليونانية الرسمية المحلية في مدين بطلمية ويشرح هذا البحث نشأة هذه العبادة وتطورها خلال العصر البطلمي، وقد اختلفت الآراء حول تاريخ نشأة هذه العبادة، ويتضح من خلال اقدم بردية تذكر هذه العبادة انه وضع قواعدها الملك بطليموس الرابع، وان هذه العبادة انشأت في بادئ الامر لعبادة بطليموس الاول وتطورت بعد ذلك لتشمل كل ملوك البطالمة المؤهلين. حيث أصبح لكل ملك من ملوك البطالمة المؤهلين كاهن خاص به، تبدأ القائمة بكاهن بطليموس الاول ثم كاهن الملك الحاكم ثم كهنة بطليموس الثاني والثالث.. الخ. وانتهت عبادة ملوك البطالمة المحلية في مدينة بطلمية مع بداية دخول الرومان مصر، بينما استمرت عبادة بطليموس الاول بصفته مؤسس للمدينة. ويوضح هذا البحث ايضا دور مدينة بطلمية خلال العصر الروماني في الاشراف الديني والمالي والإداري على المعابد المخصصة لعبادة بطليموس الاول خارج حدودها، ويتطرق هذا البحث ايضا للحديث باختصار عن عبادة الاباطرة في تلك المدينة.

(JAAUTH)

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