

## PRESTIGE OR POWER? CLEOPATRA I, II, AND III

In our conference we've paid considerable attention to Olympias and the Argead women as the foundresses of Hellenistic queenship in an unstable political environment. These women displayed many different aspects of power and leadership. Second-century Ptolemaic queens operated in an established tradition that constrained their freedom of action, and their status derived principally from legitimacy. My approach was to examine the numerous primary sources relating to Cleopatra I, II, and III, in the hope of defining the nature of their power. As anticipated, I found inconsistencies in the sources concerning the status of the queens. The relation between prestige and actual power remains imprecise.

### A. Coins

Cleopatra I was the last Ptolemaic queen to have an explicitly identified coin portrait. A gold *mnasieion* pairs her portrait and title on the obverse with the portrait and title of the child Ptolemy VI on the reverse. The queen's portrait depicts her with attributes borrowed from the numismatic iconography of Arsinoe Philadelphus. This tends to mitigate Cleopatra's foreign birth by assimilating her to the Goddess Philadelphus, who by this time was generally considered as the founding mother of the Ptolemaic line.

Far more enigmatic is a small issue of Egyptian bronzes, known as Series 7A in current numismatic terminology. Each of its three denominations depicts a different deity on the obverse surrounded by a legend naming Queen Cleopatra in the genitive; the reverse legend names Ptolemy the King, also in the genitive. Formerly this coinage was assigned to the joint reign of Cleopatra I and Ptolemy VI, but that attribution is no longer tenable in light of recent work on the evolution of Ptolemaic bronze coinage. Series 7A must fall somewhere in the reign of Ptolemy VI. Thomas Faucher and I once suggested that the exceptional mention of Queen Cleopatra as issuing authority might reflect her status as full co-ruler with Ptolemy VI. However I'm no longer convinced she was more fully a co-ruler than any previous Ptolemaic wife. The mention of Queen Cleopatra as issuing authority still needs an explanation.

A later Egyptian bronze coinage, Series 8, has surprising implications. Exceptionally for Ptolemaic bronze coinage, it bears regnal dates, year 3 and year 4. These coins belong

to the reign of Cleopatra III and Ptolemy IX. In addition to regnal dates, they bear a *sigma-omega* monogram on the reverse, which Thomas Faucher plausibly identified as an abbreviation of the king's *epiklesis* Soter. Contemporary bronze coinage of Cyrene bears the same monogram, alternating with fuller inscriptions naming Ptolemy Soter. In Cyrene this conforms to a practice introduced by Ptolemy VIII as king of Cyrenaica. But there was no precedent in Egypt for personal identification of the issuing king on bronze coinage. On Series 8 there is also a marking on the obverse, a *kappa-rho* monogram or the letter *kappa*. While the *kappa* might be the initial of Cleopatra, it is difficult to connect the *kappa-rho* monogram with the queen. This coinage suggests that Ptolemy Soter had sole control over the Alexandria mint and used it to advertise his preeminence over his senior coregent. A possible implication is that he held the upper hand in their power relationship. Another aspect of Series 8 tends to confirm these suspicions. From the late third century through the reign of Ptolemy VIII the head of Isis-Demeter was regularly and prominently displayed on Egyptian bronze coinage. Yet it was excluded from the obverse types of Series 8. Since Ptolemaic queens were identified ideologically with Isis, this exclusion purged the coinage of any allusion to the queen. The subsequent bronze coinage made the exclusion permanent by eliminating all obverse types except for Zeus Ammon.

In contrast, the silver coinage of Alexandria explicitly recognized the joint rule of Cleopatra III and Ptolemy X by citing the regnal years of both, curiously without the year sign. The queen's date is in the upper position, the position of precedence. This is the first undoubted instance of double dating on Egyptian coinage, and it can be seen as an expression of the stronger authority of the third Cleopatra during her joint rule with Ptolemy X.

## **B. Legislation and administrative documents**

Egyptian administrative documents provide no evidence that Ptolemaic royal wives shared in formulating policy or supervising the state bureaucracy before the reign of Ptolemy VIII. However seals with royal portraits, which can be symbols of royal authority and must have accompanied many official communications, don't always match the testimony of the documents.

For the reign of Ptolemy V we have two *prostagmata* forbidding the sale of temples, a fragmentary amnesty promulgated at the end of the Great Revolt, and two administrative letters from the year 184/3. All were issued by the king alone, after his marriage to Cleopatra I.

For the reign of Ptolemy VI we have two administrative orders from the year 163, both signed by the king alone. Petitions and letters were often addressed to King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra. The resulting bureaucratic orders give no clues whether they were issued by the king and queen jointly, or by the king alone. The Walters Art Gallery possesses an official Egyptian seal of Ptolemy VI which associates him with the goddess Hathor but does not name his queen. Yet among the seal impressions from Edfu is at least one that clearly depicts the sixth Ptolemy together with his consort. It must have sealed a communication from the royal couple.

The first amnesty of Ptolemy VIII, decreed in 145/4 and published on Cyprus, was promulgated by the king alone. The protocol appears to have changed a few years later. In 140/39 the royal response to a petition about temple revenues was written in the plural. Subsequent communications—amnesty decrees and administrative letters—were consistently issued jointly by Ptolemy VIII and his queens. Against this documentary evidence for the administrative authority of the royal triad, the Edfu and Nea Paphos hoards of seal impressions contain very numerous impressions from seals depicting Ptolemy VIII alone. I know of no seal impressions showing a king with two queens. The implication would seem to be that the queens were not involved in the majority of official communications.

Documents indicate that the sharing of administrative power continued in the reign of Ptolemy IX. In regnal year 2 four administrative letters were sent to the priests of Khnum at Elephantine and inscribed in stone. The names of the rulers are damaged in all cases, but enough survives to see that the king comes second in the order of precedence. In regnal year 3 the sovereigns jointly issued a *prostagma* (βασιλέων προσταξάντων) concerning the judicial competence of the *dioiketes* over officials of the fiscal administration. This appears to contradict the implication of the Series 8 bronze coinage, also dated to regnal year 3, that Cleopatra III may have been excluded from authority over the Alexandria mint, for the mint was part of the fiscal administration. A few years

later, in 108/7, a *prostagma* to the Cyreneans was issued by Soter II and his wife Queen Cleopatra.

### **C. State cult**

For three generations preceding Cleopatra I, deceased Ptolemaic queens had been enrolled individually in the Alexandrian dynastic cult, each with her own dedicated priestess. This Alexandrian tradition ended with the first Cleopatra. Promptly after her death, however, she was inscribed in the dynastic cult at Ptolemais in the Thebaid. This was a newer dynastic cult, having been founded by Ptolemy IV in 215/4. Its priesthoods were cited in the dating protocols of documents from Upper Egypt. These attest a multiplication of priestesses for the queens and royal daughters of the mid-second century. We can reasonably assume that these priestesses celebrated public rites, but we don't know whether there were separate festivals in honor of any of the Cleopatras. After 137 the priesthoods of Ptolemais were cited only in abbreviated form, and after the reign of Ptolemy VIII they were no longer cited at all.

In 130, during the civil war between Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II, the king added a new priesthood to his version of the eponymous Alexandrian dynastic cult—the Hieros Polos of Isis the Great Goddess, Mother of the Gods. This is usually interpreted as an individual cult to Cleopatra III. I'm not so sure and I wonder if this is not the first and only case of a traditional deity being added to the cult.

Cleopatra III did eventually enjoy the distinction of being the only queen to have individual cults during her lifetime within the eponymous dynastic cult of Alexandria. In year 2 of Ptolemy IX three new priestesses of Cleopatra III were added to the eponymous cult. They were first named in April of 115 in dating protocols of demotic documents, immediately after the Hieros Polos of Isis, and before the Athlophoros of Berenice Euergetis, the Kanephoros of Arsinoe Philadelphos, and the priestess of Arsinoe Philopator. Yet the priestesses of Cleopatra III are not named in the dating protocols of the last synodal decree of the Ptolemaic era, published at Giza in October–November 112. In the Greek text, the title of the priest of Alexander and the deified Ptolemies is followed by the Hieros Polos of Isis, then the Athlophoros, the Kanephoros, and the priestess of Arsinoe Philopator. We can hardly claim scribal error in such an important public

document. The inclusion of the Hieros Polos together with the omission of the three eponymous priestesses of Cleopatra III tends to support my suspicion that the Hieros Polos was not a priesthood of Cleopatra III. Furthermore, the omission of her three priestesses recalls her absence from the bronze coinage of regnal years 3 and 4. It appears that Ptolemy IX reduced her public honors in more than one way.

In February 108 the three priestesses of Cleopatra III reappeared in the dating protocols of demotic documents from Memphis. This might seem to reflect another shift in the relations between the king and his nominally senior coregent. But regional patterns in dating protocols caution against drawing general conclusions from isolated examples. Even during the joint reign of Cleopatra III and Ptolemy X, when the queen's dominance is not in question, the priesthoods of Cleopatra III were omitted from the dating protocols of documents from Akoris.

After Ptolemy Alexander replaced Soter II, yet another priesthood was created for Cleopatra III, a priest for life. In 105 Cleopatra III assumed the priesthood of Alexander, which had always been filled by males and had recently been dominated by Ptolemy IX and then Ptolemy X. Cleopatra III thus claimed for herself a public honor strongly associated with the king.

#### **D. Temple decorations and the role of the queen in Egyptian royal ideology**

Upper Egyptian temple decorations on the whole confirm the primacy of the king in Egyptian royal ideology. But some temple decorations imply a rising status for the queens. We don't really know if temple personnel alone were responsible for these decorations, or if the administration ordered or influenced them. In view of the increasing penetration of the Egyptian priesthood by Ptolemaic agents, official influence seems likely. Most of the cases I'm about to discuss were very limited geographically, so they probably reflect the predilections of local officials rather than policies set by the central administration.

In certain temples Cleopatra I, II, and III were accorded female Horus names, an honor previously extended only to Berenice II. A female Horus name implied the queen's legitimacy as a pharaoh in her own right.

The female Horus name of Cleopatra I was conferred during her marriage to Ptolemy V, appearing in both of his inscriptions in the Edfu temple. It is much longer and more elaborate than the Horus name of the king. As in the case of Berenice II, the female Horus name of Cleopatra I was intended to legitimate a foreign-born princess, especially after she had given birth to a royal heir.

In the temple of Montu at El-Tod (ancient Touthion) the cartouches of Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II are preceded by two Horus falcons (*Hrwj* in the dual), and in one case they share a Horus name, Who Do What the Gods and Goddesses Will. Other royal titles are also expressed in the dual in this temple, implying the diarchy of the royal couple.

Numerous late second century inscriptions in Edfu temple refer to the female Horus, Mistress of the Two Lands, Cleopatra. In all cases her single cartouche precedes the cartouche or cartouches of the king. This precedence of the queen corresponds to practice in secular documents, but it was unprecedented in Egyptian temples. Nevertheless, Cleopatra III never received a full, five-part Egyptian Great Name, which remained the prerogative of pharaoh. Two inscriptions on the façade of the temple of Nekhbet at El Kab append the male epithet Mighty Bull to the female Horus title. This is presumed to celebrate the victory of Cleopatra III over Ptolemy IX, as implied by the association of his cartouches, some of them left empty.

Cleopatra II became the first Ptolemaic queen to be depicted in temple reliefs making a theologically significant offering to a deity. This was traditionally the prerogative of pharaoh. It symbolized his role in sustaining the gods and thereby preserving the cosmic order. The innovation implies a blurring of the religious and cosmic roles of king and queen. But we must acknowledge that such depictions are extremely rare. Only two exist for Cleopatra II, both in the temple of Isis at Philae. One dates from the second reign of Ptolemy VI, the other from the joint reign of Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III. In both cases the king stands in front, in the traditional order of precedence, and in the latter case the younger Cleopatra merely raises her hands in prayer.

It is probably not anodyne that these enhancements to the prestige of Cleopatra II occurred at Philae, in publicly accessible parts of the temple. The local garrison was housed in the temple precincts, as was common in Upper Egyptian temples, and officers and soldiers made Greek dedications to the rulers in the forecourt of the temple.

A famous example of the interpenetration of the military, the bureaucracy, and the Egyptian priesthood is Herodes son of Demophon, garrison commander of Syene and governor of the Dodekaschoinos. He also held important priestly offices in the temples of Elephantine, Philae, and Abaton. His dedications inform us that he organized a religious association of *basilistai* involving both Greeks and Egyptians. They met in the Satet temple on Sehel Island and performed cultic activities for Ptolemy VI, Cleopatra II, and their children, and later on behalf of Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra II, and their children. Other dedications from Philae and the First Cataract region, from both reigns, almost without exception include Cleopatra II. The respect in which she was held in this militarized zone may foreshadow the defection of the southern garrisons to her side in her revolt against Ptolemy VIII.

Although Cleopatra III eventually usurped the king's prerogatives in the Alexandrian dynastic cult, Egyptian offering scenes do not attest a parallel development. A relief from the temple of Hathor at Deir el-Medina, dating from the first reign of Ptolemy IX, shows a Cleopatra with the title female Horus, Mistress of the Two Lands, standing before her son and offering flowers to the Theban triad, while the king offers Maat. Despite the queen's precedence over the king, not only in the relief but in the accompanying inscription, her offering is not theologically significant but only a generic offering suitable to a female worshipper. On the exterior of the El Kab temple, where Cleopatra III is identified as female Horus, Mighty Bull, she is depicted alone offering two sistra, but once again this is merely a generic female offering. At Kom Ombo Ptolemy IX and Cleopatra III are depicted in separate, parallel panels, each making a theologically significant offering to Khonsu. This format implies the parity of the coregents.

### **E. Dedications and honorary inscriptions**

The dedications to and for the rulers from the First Cataract region have numerous counterparts from elsewhere in the Ptolemaic empire. These inscriptions express public support for the regime, especially by officials and military men. Such support may have enabled some instances of independent agency by the queens.

A quantitative analysis of dedications from the reigns of Ptolemies V through X yields several interesting results. First, the queens were more consistently included in

dedications offered in Egypt than in the external possessions. Second, Ptolemy VI was more frequently honored individually in Egypt than was Ptolemy VIII. This is a possible indication that Philometor was held in higher personal esteem by Greek-speaking elites, who expressed their loyalty to Euergetes II not as an individual but as a member of the royal family. Third, in the reign of Ptolemy VIII the queens attracted individual dedications, two of them offered by family members but one of them by a civic official of Alexandria who dared to omit the king from his dedication. Fourth, Egyptian dedications indicate, so far as we can tell, that the wife of Ptolemy IX was honored more than the senior monarch Cleopatra III, but the latter was more consistently honored during her joint reign with Ptolemy X.

#### **F. Agency and ability**

I now turn from kinds of evidence to aspects of power as outlined by Sheila Ager in the inaugural lecture of our conference. In particular I wish to discuss agency and ability.

The first example of agency by a second-century Ptolemaic queen was the reconciliation by Cleopatra II of her brothers after Ptolemy VI had been a hostage of their uncle Antiochus IV. Her success may bespeak good diplomatic skills, or possibly a strong personal influence over her brothers.

A seemingly remarkable example of agency by a Ptolemaic queen is the revolt of Cleopatra II against Ptolemy VIII. In fact, we have no information about the origins of the revolt. Did the queen conspire with military commanders and officials in Upper Egypt, or did the whole affair begin as a military revolt? In either case the second Cleopatra cannot be credited with any gifts as a military leader or strategist, since the king swiftly reconquered most of Egypt, apparently with little trouble. Cleopatra II also seems to have lacked ability as an administrator. Several serious fiscal irregularities occurred in the Theban region near the beginning of her revolt and it was only after the reconquest of Ptolemy VIII that the miscreants were held to account. Where the rebel queen did display shrewdness was in hostage taking. When she fled Alexandria in spring of 129 for the court of her son-in-law Demetrius II, she took the treasury with her. After Ptolemy VIII recovered Alexandria, his silver coin issues were minimal. I have to believe that

possession of the treasury gave the queen in exile a bargaining chip that allowed her to negotiate favorable terms for her return to power in 124.

A clearer example of independent agency is the response of Cleopatra IV to her dismissal by Ptolemy IX. According to Justin, she went to Cyprus and persuaded the garrison to join her, then offered it as her dowry to become the wife of the Seleucid claimant Antiochus IX. Cleopatra IV is not visible in our primary sources, and she apparently accomplished her daring feat without benefit of any special enhancements to her prestige. This is a reminder (if we needed reminding) that important factors are not accessible to us, such as force of personality, powers of persuasion, and personal networks.

Even more momentous was the deposal of Ptolemy IX by Cleopatra III. Literary sources give her all the credit, but we have almost no primary evidence to clarify the course of events. Julien Olivier has pointed to elevated tetradrachm production on Cyprus as a hint that Ptolemy X prepared for several years for an invasion of Egypt. I find this explanation plausible. Nothing in the primary sources suggests that Cleopatra III enjoyed sufficient prestige or power to depose the king without outside help.

Josephus represents Cleopatra III as commander of the Egyptian army during the War of Sceptres. The hieroglyphic inscription on the statue of the general Petimouthes son of Psenobastis in Torino seems to confirm this. The command authority of Ptolemy X is also attested by a demotic letter of Panobchounis to military colleagues in Pathyris, which mentions the summons of pharaoh, pharaoh's departure for Damascus, and the troop dispositions he left behind.

## **G. Conclusions**

It is an oversimplification to think of the second century as a period of powerful Ptolemaic queens. The situation changed over time, and not in a linear or cumulative fashion. The status of Cleopatra I as the first female head of the Ptolemaic state was exceptional. But after her death, the evidence for the institutional power of queens is not very impressive. Administrative documents from the reign of Ptolemy VIII imply that his queens shared in his authority from 140/39. Yet as we have seen, the vast majority of surviving seal impressions depict the king alone. I suspect that the king usually acted

unilaterally in administrative matters, but chose to associate the queens in issuing certain decrees. We cannot know whether the queens actually influenced the content of the decrees.

The rivalry between kings and queens reasserted itself after the death of Ptolemy VIII. But Cleopatra III was not the absolutely dominant figure portrayed in literary sources. Coinage, the synodal decree of 112, and dedications all imply that her status was diminished under Ptolemy IX. She was at the height of her prestige and actual power during her coregency with Ptolemy X. Her murder reduced the prospects for the queens of the first century—until Cleopatra VII.

Evidence for the prestige of the queens is abundant, but we still have to make large assumptions to tie it to power. The individual state cults of queens and royal daughters at Ptolemais and their citation in the dating protocols of Upper Egyptian documents promoted the prestige of royal women among the literate elites of the south. This could perhaps be connected with the Upper Egyptian genesis of the revolt of Cleopatra II. The presence of military garrisons in temples, religious associations mingling soldiers and officials, and the authority of officials in temple affairs may provide links between temple decorations and the involvement of the Upper Egyptian military in the revolt of Cleopatra II. The female Horus names of the late second century attest queenly eminence in Egyptian royal ideology even as other evidence suggests a diminished status for Cleopatra III during her joint reign with Ptolemy IX.

A major development with ideological implications is the abandonment, under Ptolemy VIII, of the norm of a ruling dyad in favor of a ruling triad in which the queens outnumbered the king. Dedications by subjects seem to reflect a certain shift in loyalty away from the person of the king to the whole royal family. This subtle change in public support may have opened the way for the revolt of Cleopatra II.

It is worth noting that the prestige of royal heirs rose more-or-less in tandem with the prestige of queens. Under Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VIII young princes served as priests of Alexander and the dynastic cult. Deceased heirs, like Ptolemy Eupator and Ptolemy Neos Philopator, were enrolled in the dynastic cult. The Edfu hoard of seal impressions includes a notable group of child portraits, with princes often distinguished as heirs by the presence of a kerykeion. In the context of Egyptian temples the construction of

mammisi or divine birth houses tended to balance the emphasis on legitimacy derived from ancestors by adding a new emphasis on legitimacy transmitted to the royal heir. At Edfu, there are even a few rare reliefs including the royal heir.

These developments, together with the recurrence of ruling triads, invite us to reassess the adage that Ptolemaic rule was based on the principle of male-female duality. It seems that in the second century legitimacy inhered in the entire royal family, and the preferred ruling configuration (when possible) was a group of adult family members, usually embracing more than one generation. Near the end of our period, precedence may have reflected seniority rather than authority.