

*La stèle de Ptolémée VIII Évergète II à Héracléion.* By CHRISTOPHE THIERS. Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology, Monograph 4. Pp. xxii + 115, pls 8. Oxford, Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology, 2009. ISBN 978 1 905905 05 8. Price £40.

In this important book, Christophe Thiers presents the monumental bilingual stela (hieroglyphic Egyptian and Greek) found in 2001 at the underwater site of Herakleion-Thonis off the Mediterranean coast of Egypt near Canopus. The text and commentary of what is the longest surviving hieroglyphic inscription on a stela from the Ptolemaic period constitute the heart of this volume. Additional short interpretative essays put the document in its historical, religious, and political context during the reign of Ptolemy VIII with his two wives, Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III.

The study begins with a brief introduction by Franck Goddio, summarising the discovery and the excavation context of the gigantic stela. Luc Tamborero then presents the purely technical data concerning the once monolithic gneiss stela, which is 617 cm high, 314 cm wide, and up to 38 cm deep, and broken into numerous parts. Altogether, seventeen fragments of the stela have been discovered, weighing around seventeen tons. Figure 4 on p. xii, and plate 1, present the re-assembled fragments. The lowest part of the stela, about 115–120 cm long, was intentionally left blank as it was embedded in the ground. Several parts of the monument are still missing, mainly from the lunette and the middle of the hieroglyphic text, but also from the uninscribed lower part. In addition, due to erosion underwater, the inscribed face is now quite deteriorated, so that the beginning of every hieroglyphic line has been lost. Of the Greek inscription, which followed the Egyptian one, only a few letters remain. According to Goddio (p. xv) the stela had not been reused, but tumbled down from its original location.

After the introduction (pp. ix–xxii), the volume is divided into six chapters, by Christophe Thiers. First is the general presentation of the stela (pp. 1–6), including the dating and the discussion of its lunette; second, the translation of the hieroglyphic text (pp. 7–24); third, the running commentary (pp. 25–37); fourth, the presentation of the almost entirely destroyed Greek inscription (p. 39); fifth, essays of interpretation (pp. 41–9); and sixth, the conclusion (pp. 51–5). Several useful tools are added: chapter seven presents a comprehensive overview of the hieroglyphic inscription and its translation as a running text (pp. 56–66). The volume concludes with extensive indices (Chapter 8, pp. 67–92), a wide-ranging bibliography (Chapter 9, pp. 93–105), as well as several plates of the stela—now in the Maritime Museum Alexandria (SCA 529)—and squeezes of it, which are now kept in Paris. Highly useful is the loose facsimile drawing inserted at the back cover. Altogether, the volume is well produced with fine plates and figures in clear print. The hieroglyphs are for the most part legibly printed, but occasionally they are partly cut, primarily in the notes (for example on pp. 15–16).

After a general description, Thiers' first chapter deals with the dating of the stela (pp. 2–3). Most of the stela's right half is destroyed, as is the first part of line 1 and with it the year date. This date can be narrowed down, however, since Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II is depicted with both his wives, his sister Cleopatra II and his niece Cleopatra III; the stela must therefore have been erected in the years after the wedding of Ptolemy VIII and his younger wife, Cleopatra III, either between 142<sup>1</sup> and 131, or 124 and 116. Following Werner Huss, Thiers dates this event to the year 140/141 (p. 2 n. 8). A further indication of the stela's *terminus post quem* is the presence of Ptolemy Neos Philopator as a royal ancestor on the left side of the lunette. He can be rather clearly identified by the only surviving word in his inscription (C 5, p. 7), *hnw* (neos). Neos Philopator was the son of Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II and is first attested in the ruler cult and thus in the titles of the eponymous priests only after the amnesty edict in 118. This dates the stela to the years 118–116.

The only problem with Neos Philopator's identification in the lunette is his position on the right, after the second, third, and fourth Ptolemaic couple, which places him in a position that is—chronologically speaking—rather unexpected. Due to the poor state of preservation, the Ptolemaic ancestors depicted in the lunette are not easy to identify. In addition, no comparable stela with ancestors survives from the reign of Ptolemy VIII, but Thiers presents a nuanced analysis, in which he reconstructs the almost entirely lost right half of the lunette. There, only the last human figure survives more or less complete, easily recognised by her crown: Arsinoe II. She is thus depicted twice on this stela, on either side of the lunette, perhaps due to the fact that she was specifically venerated at Zephyrion, located close to

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the date of the wedding, see M. Minas, *Die hieroglyphischen Ahnenreihen der ptolemäischen Könige: Ein Vergleich mit den Titeln der eponymen Priester in den griechischen und demotischen Papyri* (AegTrev 9; Mainz, 2000), 146.

Herakleion. Before the deified queen, only the lower halves of two figures now exist, presumably the fifth Ptolemaic couple. Thiers reconstructs before them Ptolemy Eupator and Ptolemy VI Philometor, who are placed directly behind Amun-Ra and Khonsu. Chronologically, one would have expected Neos Philopator before Philometor, but this might have put too much emphasis on him, since then he would have been placed at the start of the row of ancestors.

The identification and positioning of the ancestors is complicated by the fact that Neos Philopator is neither mentioned in the lists of dynastic ancestors in line 2, nor in line 24 (pp. 8 and 22). One can only pose the question why he was depicted in the lunette and not listed in the text. There is yet another inconsistency in the written record of the Ptolemaic dynasty members: one should note that in line 2 the Theoi Euergetai are correctly referred to in the plural (*ntr.w mnh.w*), whereas in line 24 only in the dual (*ntr.wj mnh.wj*), thus obviously omitting one wife. This seems a small enough mistake, but it seems to reflect the confusion that prevailed during the later Ptolemaic period with regard to the royal ruler cult and its attestation. This might help to explain why Neos Philopator was not introduced in the written form but included in the depiction. Could this point to a creation of the stela rather shortly after the *philanthropa* in 118, rather than nearer the death of Ptolemy VIII in 116?

In the second chapter, Thiers presents the inscription accurately line by line in computer-generated hieroglyphs and a translation, with short but useful philological notes. The hieroglyphic inscription amounts to thirty-three lines, of which the last eight (ll. 26–33) are almost completely destroyed. In addition, the beginning of each line is lost. One can only admire Thiers' ability to read and understand such a badly preserved and difficult text. It would have been helpful, however, to add the transliteration for such a demanding inscription.

The text is laid out in a traditional Ancient Egyptian way, starting with the royal protocol. Here, one specific fact deserves more attention, the designation of Cleopatra III as *hr.t* or female Horus, which Thiers equates with the Greek *basilissa* (p. 8, line 1, n. a). It is remarkable that only Cleopatra III bears this title, but not her mother Cleopatra II, Ptolemy's other wife. Mamdouh Eldamaty has discussed the designation *hr.t* for the Ptolemaic queens,<sup>2</sup> and argued that Cleopatra III was only granted this title under Ptolemy IX Soter II. This is now disproven, and we need to ask why on this stela only Cleopatra III but not her mother has been assigned this title, even though Cleopatra II was designated together with Ptolemy VIII as the 'two Horuses' (*hr.wj*), for example at Tod.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, our text provides fresh insight into the dynastic power struggle, which requires further analysis, as does the position of the two queens.

After the protocol in line 1, roughly one third of the inscription comprises the royal eulogy (ll. 2–11), which underlines in traditional Ancient Egyptian phraseology the ruler's qualities and good deeds, especially with regard to the native temples and their deities. In line 12, which appears to mark an end of the royal praise, the king's beneficence is once again emphasised and the stela's specific narrative starts. Lines 13–14 recount Amun-Ra's celebratory procession to 'Thebes of the North', a place that can presumably be identified with Tell el-Balamun or Diospolis Kato, the capital of the 17th Lower Egyptian nome. On his way, the god gives an oracle in the presence of the king. After further royal beneficences for the temples are mentioned, the ancient age and precise location of a temple at Herakleion is established in line 15. Further details of the region's cult topography are provided when the theology of Khonsu is explained in l. 16 and a new temple for Mut is reported (l. 17), probably founded during a royal visit in July/August 144. In the following line (l. 18) an old donation of land is re-established and a visit of Ptolemy IV Philopator is mentioned in this context. Line 19 refers to a conflict prior to the reign of Ptolemy VIII, when rebels seemed to have transgressed a decree promulgated by Ptolemy V Epiphanes, the reigning king's father. In line 20 we learn about an assembly of administrative officials of the entire country at Alexandria convened by the king, but the content of their discussions is not preserved. It was not a priestly synod, such as is attested by the

<sup>2</sup> M. Eldamaty, 'Die ptolemäische Königin als Weiblicher Horus', in A. Jördens and J. Quack (eds), *Ägypten zwischen innerem Zwist und äußerem Druck: Die Zeit Ptolemaios' VI. bis VIII. Internationales Symposium Heidelberg 16.–19. 9. 2007* (Philippika 45; Wiesbaden, 2011), 24–57. See also G. Hölbl, 'Ptolemäische Königin und weiblicher Pharao', in N. Bonacasa et al. (eds) *Faraoni come dei, Tolemei come faraoni: Atti del V Congresso Internazionale Italo-Egiziano, Torino, Archivio di Stato, 8–12 dicembre 2001* (Turin, 2003), 88–97.

<sup>3</sup> C. Thiers, *Tôd: Les inscriptions du temple ptolémaïque et romain*, II (FIFAO 18/2; Cairo, 2003), 224.1 (no. 285); cf. J.-C. Grenier, 'Ptolémée Evergète II et Cléopâtre II d'après les textes du temple de Tôd', in N. Bonacasa and A. Di Vita (eds), *Alessandria e il mondo Ellenistico-Romano: Studi in onore di Achille Adriani* (Roma, 1983), 33, 37.

trilingual decrees like the Rosetta Stone. Line 21 records the ownership of land, which goes back to Regnal Year 44 of Amasis (570–526 BC), that is, just before the first Persian invasion. The contract was deposited under Darius I in the temple at Heliopolis. By naming Amasis and Darius, Cambyses is condemned and the other kings, including Ptolemy VIII, and their attitudes to the native temples are praised. Line 22 reports again the *euergetism*, but also that the king has summoned his scribes in order to announce publicly all the deeds he has undertaken in the form of a decree, and also to validate an ancient right of asylum. Line 23 mentions a gift of money and a silver monument, perhaps a naos. Lines 23 and 24 are quite rudimentary, but a feast and the decree, presumably relating back to the asylum, are mentioned as well as the Ptolemaic ancestors. The rest is lost.

The Greek text is so badly destroyed that Thiers dedicates to it only two paragraphs (chapter 4, p. 39). The emphasis of the entire book is thus on the Egyptian inscription. In chapter 3 (the continuous commentary) and chapter 5 (the essays of interpretation), the author leads the reader through the context of the hieroglyphic inscription. Because of the gaps, many details remain obscure, but one should congratulate Christophe Thiers on writing such a fine analysis. The stela is monumental evidence of the good deeds of a ruler who showed his care for the native temples and their deities. Ptolemy VIII's claim to the throne and his rule were legitimised by his visit to Amun-Ra and Khonsu at Herakleion in the year following his coronation, and the stela is further proof of his legitimacy. His support of the indigenous temples is in line with his general attitude to the native population, on whom he based his rule. Granting Herakleion and its temples the income from old land donations, tax benefits, and the right of asylum emphasises this attitude.

With the erection of such a monumental stela, the native priests set out their claims unmistakably, recording for eternity in the sacred hieroglyphic script the right of asylum, and their financial benefits. At the same time, the Greek text, probably a translation, was added and inscribed at a height that would have been accessible for reading when standing in front of such a gigantic monument. The hieroglyphic text, which only priests could have read, was located far too high up in order to be legible.

The exact original location of the stela is unclear. Obviously it stood in the temple district of Herakleion, and we can only imagine from the size of the monument how huge the temple must have been. This is underlined by the fact that colossal statues of Hapi and a Ptolemaic couple have been found at the site of the temple of Amun of Gereb at Herakleion-Thonis, all between 540 and 490 cm high (see figure 8 on p. xvi of Thiers' book). Putting this into a wider context, it underscores the fact that the native temples of the north are almost all lost to us, and we therefore base our understanding of the Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period on those that are still survive, mainly from Athribis southwards, with Edfu and Dendera being the main examples. However, the cultural centre was in the north and the most creative regions were probably in the Delta and the Memphis area. Therefore, one could assume that Graeco-Roman temples there were probably even larger and more richly decorated than those in the south. The fact that almost all surviving buildings of the Ptolemaic and the Roman periods are in Upper Egypt presents a bias that gives rise to well-known problems of interpretation.

To conclude, Christophe Thiers has produced an important and well-illustrated edition of a highly important monument dating to the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II. As well as contributing to our understanding of the cult topography of the littoral region near Alexandria and Canopus and the Delta in general, this book also further illuminates the royal attitude to the native population and temples. This is mainly due to Thiers' careful and accurate reading of the inscription and his profound analysis of the entire context, demonstrating his wide knowledge of the Ptolemaic period.

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