

'THE EGYPTIAN PRIESTS AND THE PTOLEMAIC DYNASTY'

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

The topic "priest and king" in ancient Egypt has to be seen from different view points. Ideologically we have to state that the king himself was the only true priest who carried out rituals, sacrificed for and communicated with the gods and by means of this he maintained the order of the world. From the viewpoint of the Egyptian ideology or concept of kingship the priests are only delegates of the king who represent him in all religious and cultural aspects. The king for example cannot celebrate the morning ritual or the new year festivities in all temples at the same time and so on which is quite understandable. But as it is principally the Egyptian pharaoh who as the priest of Egypt gets in and maintains the contact with the gods, normally only the king can be seen in the ritual scenes of Egyptian temple reliefs.

In the reality of the Egyptian life - socially, economically and administrationwise - the big priesthoods of the country represent the strongest power besides the king. They also represent the mental elite of the nation and they are the carriers and preservers of the cultural, scientific and civilizing achievements par excellence.

Therefore in ancient Egypt the king and the priesthoods faced each other with regard to their power and influence, not always in peaceful and harmonic teamwork as you know from the Amarna period. After the age of Amarna it was no longer possible to restore the religious conditions of the early 18th dynasty.² A continuously increasing and during the course of time changing field of tensions between king and priests remained. Under Ramesses II the most important priesthoods of Egypt - which means the ones of Thebes, Heliopolis and Memphis were unified in the Ramesside triad Amun, Re and Ptah. The king expresses his immense power through an exaggerated courtlife as well as through - what must be called - a wild building mania. The king himself claims a highest degree of divinity

¹ Conference held by the author at Cairo, 'Ain Shams University, Faculty of Letters, 23rd April 1996 and at Alexandria, University, Faculty of Letters, 24th April 1996. For the subject as a whole see G. Hölbl, *Geschichte des Ptolemäerreiches. Politik, Ideologie und religiöse Kultur von Alexander dem Großen bis zur römischen Eroberung*, Darmstadt 1994 (with bibliography). See further W. Huss, *Der makedonische König und die ägyptischen Priester. Studien zur Geschichte des ptolemäischen Ägypten*, Stuttgart 1994.

² J. Assmann, *Re und Amun. Die Krise des polytheistischen Weltbildes in Ägypten der 18.-20. Dynastie*, Freiburg/CH 1983 (= OBO 51).

and, in the sanctuary of Abu Simbel, he is placed in an equal line with the great gods of the state.

After Ramesses II the king's power gradually declines. The enormous foundations given to the temples which especially Ramesses III was famous for cannot be continued. Signs of decline within the Egyptian realm become evident in the strikes of the Theban tombworkers and the tomb robberies at the end of the 20th dynasty. It is still in the time of Ramesses XI that the high priest of Amun comes to power in the south where he founds the theocratic state of Amun. In contrast to the time of Ramesses II the situation is now reverse: now the Egyptian priesthood triumphs over the pharao and the high priest of Amun, who carries out essentially royal duties in his function as priest, is only too willing to accept royal titles.

I have outlined the development from the late New Kingdom to the so-called Third Intermediate Period in order to illustrate the wide field of tension between the king and the priests. Later there are also certain Egyptian kings from the 22nd Libyan and the 25th Nubian dynasty, who - by the way - are never seen as foreign rulers despite their foreign origin and who reigned as pharaos in a firmly established state system. In the times of decline and disorder - we only have to think of the Late Libyan Period with its many independent chiefdoms or of the Assyrian period in Egypt - in such times the Egyptian priesthoods were the only body in charge of cult and temple activities and they also had to keep up (by force) a fictitious system of pharaonic kingship. Because it was still the figure of pharao who was at the centre of the Egyptian religion and who remained a necessity to ensure the continuation of the anient Egyptian world order. The Persian conquest of 525 B.C. faced Egypt for the first time with a long lasting powerful foreign ruler. This forced the Egyptian priests to find an arrangement with the Persian King and to recognize him as pharao, even if they disliked him personally or endowed him with a criminal reputation as we know they did in the case of the Persian King Cambyses. By the way sensible rulers always tried to take over the pharaonic kingship and were anxious to reach a compromise with the Egyptian clergy. It was particularly Dareios the Great, Alexander the Great and the Ptolemies, but also the emperor Augustus and other Roman emperors who achieved that. History had taught that without considering the religious conditions of the country and the priests it would be impossible to exercise a satisfactory rule over Egypt.

II. THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN PRIESTS AND THE PTOLEMIES

1. The family of the high priest of Ptah

In the course of the Egyptian Late Period the emphasis of the religious organisation had moved to the north of the country, particularly to Memphis. Since Alexander the Great had made sacrifices to the gods of Heliopolis and Memphis and since (according to tradition) he had ascended to the throne of Ptah in Memphis, he and his successors were surrounded by the typically memphite version of the concept of kingship, at the centre of which stood Ptah as the primeval and creator god, the „Lord of Maat“, the „Father of all gods“ and so on. The Ptolemies followed Alexander's example and were crowned in Memphis. This ensured from the very beginning a co-operative relationship between the Memphite priesthood and the Ptolemaic dynasty. The high priest of the Ptah who carried out coronation represented the Egyptian priesthoods in general. It was no doubt this close cooperation between the Ptah priest and the Ptolemaic king which caused that the office of the Memphite high priest could be kept for more than three centuries within one and the same family. This was for about ten generations reaching into the Augustan period.³

Result of this cooperation between Egyptian priests and the dynasty was that the Macedonian pharaohs very soon got incorporated into the ancient Egyptian festivals. In Memphis we know about this since Ptolemy II.⁴ Here the high priest of Ptah carried out the appropriate rituals on the royal statues. After the king's death his ritual apotheosis took place in accordance with old traditions in the funerary temples. Within the Memphite Serapeum this was the east temple, which had been built under Nectanebo II at the east end of the dromos opposite the Apis vaults.⁵ So from Ptolemy II onwards, next to the statue of the living Apis and other gods there were the statues of the divine Ptolemies.

A significant event in the development of the relationship between the Egyptian priests and the Ptolemaic dynasty was the deification of Arsinoe II after her death in 270 B.C. The most important testimony of this event is the so-called Mendes stela, whose

³ On the family of the high priests of Ptah in the Ptolemaic period see J. Quaegebeur, *Genealogy of the Memphite High Priest family in the Hellenistic period*, in: D. J. Crawford and G. Griffiths, *Studies on Ptolemaic Memphis*, Lovanii 1980, 43-81; D. J. Thompson, *Memphis under the Ptolemies*, Princeton 1988, 128f.

⁴ D. Kessler, *Die heiligen Tiere und der König*, I, Wiesbaden 1989, 126 (= ÄAT 16).

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, fig. 5, no 1 (after p. 58; = map of A. Mariette, also in: J. Ph. Lauer, *Ch. Picard, Les statues ptolémaïques du Sarapieion de Memphis*, Paris 1955, pl. 26); for the function of the statues see D. Kessler, 126-130.

⁶ On the death of Arsinoe II in 270 B.C. (and not in 268 B.C. as advanced by E. Grzybel) see G. Hölbl, *calendrier macédonien au calendrier ptolémaïque*, Basel 1990, 103-112) cf. G. Hölbl, *Bemerkungen zur frühptolemäischen Chronologie*, *Tyche* 7 (1992), 120f.

important fragments were found near the old town of Mendes in 1871 and which today is kept in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (fig. 1)⁷. In the upper part of the stela we see on the left side the royal family of Ptolemy II, Arsinoe II - already dead since years at the time of the production of the stela - and the crown prince 'Ptolemy', all together making sacrifices to the newly enthroned ram of Mendes, to Harpokrates, to the previous, that is the dead ram of Mendes (of anthropomorphic shape with a ram's head), Hatmehit (the goddess of Mendes) and, last not least, to the new goddess Arsinoe II. You see Arsinoe II brings a fictitious sacrifice to herself as goddess. The hieroglyphic text clearly says⁸ that Ptolemy II by decree had raised his deceased sister-wife in the rank of goddess and that from now on in all Egyptian temples she has to be venerated as templesharing goddess besides the main god, for example in Memphis she was venerated at the side of Ptah, in the Fayum besides Sobek and so on.

However, I do not want to talk now about Arsinoe II as goddess but I would like to illustrate how the Egyptian priests especially the Path priests of Memphis reacted. We have to bear in mind that the religious and political decision of the deification of the deceased Arsinoe II was not entirely against the ancient Egyptian traditions despite the rather spectacular procedure. The Mendes stela explicitly states that the erection of the Arsinoe statues in the temples presented no problems for the priests.⁹ Particularly in Ptolemaic Memphis we have a series of cults for deceased pharaohs with their own priests, examples being Menes, Snofru, Ramesses II, Merenptah, Amasis and above all „Nectanebo, the Falcon“.¹⁰ So one could carry on this tradition and the high priest of Ptah Nesisty II (first half of the 3rd century B.C.) united among his many functions those of a „prophet ... in the shrine of Ramesses II“ and of a „prophet of Arsinoe II“.¹¹

In Memphis a temple of Arsinoe was erected in close connection with the Ptah temple. During the third century the function of the priest for Arsinoe was carried out by the high priest of Ptah himself, thus uniting the Egyptian priesthoods and the divine Ptolemaic dynasty.

I would now like to take the opportunity to mention three funerary stelae (fig. 2) of such high priests of Ptah, which were bought in Egypt together with many other Egyptian antiquities in 1821 at the request of the Austrian emperor and which are now on exhibition in our Egyptian collection. The stela in the middle and to the right¹² belonged to the two sons

⁷ For the bibliography of the stela cf. Hölbl, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 297, n. 23; Grzybek, *op.cit.*, 103-112.

⁸ Line 13; cf. H. De Meulenaere, *Mendes, II*, Warminster 1976, 175.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Thompson, *op.cit.*, 127 with n. 116.

¹¹ *Prosopographia Ptolemaica* IX, 5361.

¹² Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, ÄS 125 (= Reymond, *op.cit.*, no 8 [92-94]), 162 (= Reymond, *op.cit.*, no 7 [87-91]); for inv. no 125 see also H. Satzinger, *Das Kunsthistorische Museum in Wien*, Mainz 1994, 29 with fig. 15.

of the high priest Anemhor II, whose stela is on the left of the slide (fig. 3).¹³ Let's look this stela of Anemhor in more detail. He was the son and successor of the previously mentioned Nesisty II. Anemhor II became high priest around the middle of the third century and died on June the 8th 217 BC. This date is interesting because it lies before the Ptolemaic victory at Raphia [22nd of June 217] during the fourth Syrian War against Antiochus. You can read the name of Anemhor in the two columns in the uppermost part of the stela: „Osiris, God's Father *hm*-priest, *sm*-priest, *ʿn-m-Hr*, the justified". Among all these priestly titles which Anemhor holds we find those particularly interesting which make him a priest of the cult for the Ptolemaic family. Already in the second line you can read: *hm ntrwjt mnt* *hm ntrwjt mrjw jt* "Priest of the Benefactor Gods [and] Priest of the Father-loving god that is priest of the third and fourth Ptolemaic couple.

Let me stay here a little longer. Beforehand I would like to say that Ptolemy I founded a Greek cult for the deified Alexander the Great, onto which - since Ptolemy II - the following Ptolemaic couples were added, resulting in the so-called Ptolemaic Alexandrian dynastic cult. The priest of this cult was called: „Priest of Alexander, (of the Theoi Soterai,) of the Theoi Adelphoi, of the Theoi Euergetai and so on". On principle this cult had nothing to do with the Egyptian priests. But in the priestly decree of Canopus from 238 under Ptolemy III the assembled Egyptian priests decided to make all so-called *ntrwjt* priests carry the title "priest of the Theoi Euergetai respectively of the Benefactor Gods" meaning that they would have to exercise the Egyptian royal cult for the reigning Ptolemaic couple. Later priestly decrees ordered the addition of the living royal pair so that titles analogous to that of the Alexander priest came into existence. Sometimes the second Ptolemaic pair was inserted later on. So we can find Egyptian priestly titles such as „priest of the second Ptolemaic pair, of the third Ptolemaic pair, of the fourth Ptolemaic pair and so on". The Ptolemaic couples are always mentioned with their Greek cult titles, but they were translated into Egyptian. We can find here the phenomenon of the native Egyptian dynastic cult which surely was developed by analogy with the Alexandrian dynastic cult, which also shows significant differences. The Alexandrian dynastic cult is a Greek cult whereas the Egyptian priests occupied with the Ptolemaic ruler cult carry out the Egyptian statue cult of the Ptolemaic kings and their wives in their proper Egyptian temples. The Alexandrian dynastic cult is only carried out at the tomb of Alexander the Great in Alexandria and it is a further development of the Alexander cult - whereas the Egyptian Ptolemaic cult is carried out theoretically in all Egyptian temples - where the Ptolemies have become Synntrwjt that is temple-sharing gods of the local Egyptian gods; herein Alexander the Great was not accepted as god.

¹³ Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, ÄS 153. E. A. E. Reymond, *From the records of a priestly family from Memphis*, Wiesbaden 1981, no 4 (71-77), pl. II.

¹⁴ On the decree of Canopus and the subject of the indigenous dynastic cult see Hölbl, *op. cit.* (1), 99-105.

And now back to Anemhor II. We have read before on the stela that the high priest of Ptah in Memphis also participated in such a native dynastic cult and in this case with the high priestly title *hm* „prophet“ of the third and fourth Ptolemaic couple. Anemhor took over the cult for the fourth Ptolemaic couple, the Theoi Philopatores/the Father-loving gods, these are Ptolemy IV and his sister-wife Arsinoe III before June 217, because on 8th of June he died. In addition to this we know that the Egyptian cult for the fourth Ptolemaic pair is documented in the titles of the *w**b***-priests - as already mentioned - from autumn 220 BC. But in Alexandria, on the contrary, these Theoi Philopatores were added to the cult of Alexander after the priestly meeting in Memphis of 15th of November 217, celebrating the victory at Raphia. So we can see by this evidence that the Egyptian priests included the Ptolemaic royal couples in their cult quite independent of the Alexandrian dynastic cult. The best example of this is the high priest of Ptah in Memphis himself.

Now let's look at line four of the stela of Anemhor: „*hm*-priest of the King's daughter, King's sister, King's wife, mistress of the Two Lands Arsinoe, the Brother-loving Goddess, in the temple of Arsinoe, which is in this country...“. This means, the high priest of Ptah is at the same time the „prophet of Arsinoe“ in the Egyptian temple of Arsinoe in Memphis.¹⁵

From the advanced 2nd century BC onwards the Egyptian element gained more and more importance both at the Ptolemaic court and within the state administration. This went hand in hand with a tightening of the family of the high priest of the Ptah and the royal family. And in 122 the Memphite high priest Psenptah II, a great-great grandchild of Anemhor II, married a 'Berenike', who was probably a relative of the Ptolemaic family and had close connections with them.¹⁶ This was during the reign of Ptolemy VIII.

Two generations later, in the year 80 BC the Alexandrians had a Ptolemaic prince succeed to the throne, and this one, Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos, became father of the famous Cleopatra. Ptolemy XII, a son of Ptolemy IX, was according to Greek tradition, of illegitimate birth. In cases where we don't know the mother, there is the possibility that such princes and princesses were the offsprings of an Egyptian marriage of their father with a lady of noble rank, for instance a member of the Memphite high priest family.

In 76 BC Ptolemy XII appointed the fourteen-year old son of the then deceased Ptah priest of Memphis to his father's successor. This young high priest Psenptah III, was the grandchild of the previously mentioned Berenike, who was a noble lady of the Ptolemaic court. In the same year Psenptah III crowned the twelfth Ptolemy as pharaoh in Memphis; because of his young age Psenptah was, of course, entirely dependent on the king.

¹⁵ On the Egyptian temple of Arsinoe at Memphis cf. J. Quaegebeur, *Documents concerning a cult of Arsinoe Philadelphos at Memphis*, JNES 30 (1971), 262-270.

¹⁶ Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, ÄS 82, line 9; Reymond, *op.cit.*, no 17 (funerary stela of the son of Psenptah II); W. Huss, *Die Herkunft der Kleopatra Philopator*, *Aegyptus* 70 (1990), 199-202.

We are well informed about the events around this last ancient Egyptian coronation through the funerary stela of Psenptah III (fig. 4),¹⁷ which today is kept in the British Museum. This monument is also known as Harris stela, because it was part of the former Harris collection. Anthony Charles Harris was an English merchant and official in Alexandria in the 19th century. In the uppermost part of the stela, on the left, the deceased man is depicted wearing the traditional dress of the High priests of Ptah. Opposite him a train of deities is to be found; these are: Osiris, Apis, Isis, Nephthys, Horus, Anubis, Imhotep and the Goddess of the Necropolis. Psenptah tells that first he crowned the pharaoh Ptolemy XII and then he travelled to the royal residence in Alexandria. A little later the pharaoh crowned the fourteen-year old high priest and appointed him „his prophet“, which meant that the young high priest became in an extraordinary manner priest for the living pharaoh Ptolemy XII within the Memphite Egyptian cult.

The Ptolemaic pharaoh also endowed Psenptah with the incomes of other temples in Egypt; you can see the king did not hesitate to withdraw income from other temples in Egypt in order to present it to his favourite priest. We can also read in the Harris stela that Ptolemy XII visited Memphis frequently where he stayed in the royal palace of the serapeum district.¹⁸ All this illustrates that connections between the Ptolemaic King and the most important priestly family of Egypt became closer and closer. For both sides this was political necessity.

Psenptah III died in 41 BC, and this was - as stated in his stela - in the reign of Cleopatra and her son Kaisar, the well known Kaisarion. Cleopatra and her sister and her brothers were according to the Greek point of view also of illegitimate birth. They could very well have had an Egyptian mother, who herself might have been a member of the high priestly family of Memphis - this even more so since Cleopatra is said to have been familiar with the Egyptian language.

Concluding this topic regarding the Memphite priests I would like to underline again that at the end of the Ptolemaic history the high priest of Ptah represented side by side with the king the head of state. It is therefore easy to understand that after the conquest of Alexandria, Octavian, the later Augustus, was rather dubious to reinstate this office representing the entire Egyptian priesthoods as well as the old Ptolemaic regime. As compromise he appointed, finally, a high priest of Ptah in the third year of his reign (28/27)¹⁹ thus continuing the old pharaonic kingship in the embodiment of the Roman

¹⁷ Reymond, *op.cit.*, no 18 (136-150), tav. X; E. Bresciani, *Letteratura e poesia dell'antico Egitto*, 2nd ed., Torino 1990, 672-675. For an interpretation of the coronation text: I. Bergman, *Ich bin Isis. Studie zum memphitischen Hintergrund der griechischen Isisaretalogien*, Uppsala 1968, 112-120 (= Act. Universitatis Upsaliensis, Historia Religionum, 3).

¹⁸ Cf. the map in Kessler, *op.cit.* (n. 4), fig. 5 (after p. 58).

¹⁹ Of the appointment of the last high priest of Ptah we are informed by the funerary stela of his mother Tnepheros, line 11: Reymond, *op.cit.* (n. 12), no 29 (223-230).

emperor.²⁰ This high priest called Psenamun became - together with his mother Tnepheros - 'prophet of Caesar' in the Memphite royal cult.²¹ After the death of Psenamun the Roman administration found it however no longer necessary to appoint a new high priest of Ptah. And about 20 BC the history of this priestly office and of the family which had held it for more than 300 years came to an end.

2. Priestly decrees

Regarding the relationship of the Ptolemaic dynasty and the Egyptian priests the so-called priestly decrees are particularly revealing. By these decrees the decisions of the priestly synods are published in Hieroglyphic, Demotic and Greek. This was a new ptolemaic introduction in Egypt, taking as models the honorific decrees of the Greek cities and following also their structure. We have evidence of the priestly decrees in the period running from the second to the sixth Ptolemy.²²

In the 2nd half of the 3rd century highranking Egyptian priests from all over the country had to take part in an assembly at the royal court once a year. The dates were fixed according to specific events, such as the coronation of the king, his birthday, the celebration of a victory, or a festival of a more than regional importance. These meetings primarily dealt with questions of the cult and the organisation of the temples, and - with the growing importance of the Egyptian element within the Ptolemaic state - there were discussed also financial problems as well as rights and privileges of the priests, whereby all these meetings had to fulfil certain courtly duties; these were mostly to decide festivities and other rather excessive cultic honors for the royal couple within the frame of the existing Egyptian royal cult.

We can see that (particularly in the early phase) the Ptolemies used the authority of the Egyptian clergy for their policy and that the king tried to demonstrate publicly the loyalty of the priests in order to support the rule of the foreign dynasty and to counteract all resentments the natives might have had. This tendency is fully obvious in the Canopus decree of 238²³ (fig. 5). At that time a powerful hellenistic king Ptolemy III confronted the

²⁰ On the problems concerning the formation of the „Roman Pharaoh“ see G. Hölbl, *Ideologische Fragen bei der Ausbildung des römischen Pharaos*, in: *Wege öffnen*. Festschrift für Rolf Gundlach zum 65. Geburtstag; hrsg. v. M. Schade-Busch (Wiesbaden 1996) 98-109.

²¹ On the two persons, mother and son, see: *Prosopographia Ptolemaica* IX, 5375a, 5843b.

²² W. Huss, *Die in ptolemaischer Zeit verfaßten Synodal-Dekrete der ägyptischen Priester*, ZPE 88 (1991) 55-60; Hölbl, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 99-105, 144-150, 161.

²³ Translations: Bresciani, *op.cit.* (n. 17), 642-647; W. Spiegelberg, *Der demotische Text der Priesterdekrete von Kanopus und Memphis (Rosettana) ...* (Heidelberg 1922); G. Roeder, *Kulte, Orakel und Naturverehrung im alten Ägypten* (Zürich 1960) 142-166; A bibliographical survey on the texts and fragments survived see in Hölbl, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 305, n. 187. On the royal ideology contained in the decrees of 238 and 196 see Chr. Onasch, *Zur Königsideologie der Ptolemäer in den Dekreten von Kanopus und Memphis (Rosettana)*, AIP 24-25 (1976), 137-155.

Egyptian priests. By decree a new *phylē* (or tribe) of priests was created, which consisted only of *w'b*-priests, who had taken up office or would do so during the time of Ptolemy III Evergetes.²⁴ With the help of such a class of newly appointed priests, whose loyalty the Ptolemaic court could be sure of, the king's power and influence within the Egyptian clergy should increase.

As already mentioned the Egyptian priests assembled on November 15th 217 in Memphis to celebrate the victory over Antiochus III at Raphia (in southern Palestine). The resulting resolutions are documented in the so-called Raphia decree²⁵ (fig. 6). It depicts Ptolemy IV on horseback pointing his lance at Antiochus III who has already fallen to the ground; in the copy of Memphis, the representation of the defeated Antiochus is destroyed (fig. 6b); to the left in the back there is Arsinoe III. It is interesting to see how the supreme power of the Hellenistic king as we know it from the Canopus decree of 238 has shifted and given way in the Raphia decree to a more balanced relationship between king and clergy. After the victory king Ptolemy IV, according to old tradition, showed his gratitude to the gods of Egypt with generous gifts made to the temples. He founded additional incomes for the temples, gave rich presents such as gold and jewels and temple utensils and renovated old cult statues.²⁶ In the Raphia decree all these things are explicitly stated as gifts from the king to the priests and in return they laid down excessive cultic honors within the Egyptian royal cult for him as 'Ptolemy Horus'.²⁷

When the Egyptian priests assembled again in Memphis on March 27th 196 in order to pass a decree the day after the coronation of Ptolemy V Epiphanes, more than 20 years had passed since the Raphia decree and the Ptolemaic power had severely suffered both at home and abroad. A few years before (200 B.C.) the Ptolemaic provinces in Syria, Palestine, Anatolia and Thrace had been lost; there was rebellion in the south, that is, the Thebaid was ruled by a native Egyptian pharaoh. It must have been a question of the right of existence for the Alexandrian government - which was in a state of continuous crisis - to finally be able to present a recognized king as head of state. The cooperation of the Egyptian clergy was needed more than ever before, because now it was not a victorious king who was given religious honours for all his benefactions, but it was up to a boy of fourteen to end the cultic „chaos“ of a period of eight years and to re-establish „order“. So in 196 it was not a reciprocal relationship any longer which had been so fruitful to both sides, but the young king through the coronation gained the status of an old Egyptian pharaoh especially regarding his role as a cultic figure and he was endowed with all aspects of the concept of

²⁴ *Urk.* II, 134-136; W. Spiegelberg, *op.cit.*, 69f.; A. Bernard, *Le Delta égyptien d'après les textes grecs*, I: *Les confins libyques*, Le Caire 1970, 991, 994 (II. 19-22).

²⁵ Bibliography in Hölbl, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 314, n. 23.

²⁶ W. Spiegelberg, *Die demotischen Denkmäler*, I, Leipzig 1904, no 31088, II. 14-15 (p. 17f.) (= stela of Memphis); III, Berlin 1932, no 50048, II. 28-29 (p. 24) (= stela of Tell el-Maskhuta).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, no 31088, I. 28 (p. 18); III, no 50048, I. 32 (p. 25).

kingship and coronation propagated at that time. The priests of the royal cult institutions secured for themselves a series of privileges in return, which were subsumed as royal benefactions. We can see again that in the third and early second centuries the prevailing political situation of the empire and the dynasty determined the relationship between the king and the priesthoods, which is clearly reflected in the priestly decrees of 238, 217, and 196.

The priestly decree of 196 has remained on the so-called Rosetta stone (fig. 7) and some other fragments.²⁸ The Rosetta stone, the famous stone which was deciphered by Jean-François Champollion in 1822,²⁹ stands at the beginning of modern Egyptology. What the priests decided to their advantage in 196 was on the one hand confirmation of their income and on the other hand a reduction of their duties towards the royal family. I must say that the priests of the royal cult institutions had to pay several kinds of taxes to the crown.³⁰ But now they could cancel their debts, they could reduce certain taxes by two thirds, or they could abolish all kinds of payment from temple land.³¹ In this phase of weakness the Alexandrian government, represented by a king who was still a boy, had no other choice than to agree. The boy Epiphanes was totally enwrapped by the old pharaonic concept; the priests made him their pharaoh; and at that time Ptolemy V had nothing retained from a hellenistic king.

When talking about the priestly decrees we mustn't forget the legal aspect. On the one hand, as we already know, these decrees were a new introduction of the Ptolemaic era in Egypt by analogy to the honorific decrees of the Greek cities, on the other hand it is obvious that the Egyptian priests - by their decrees which were relevant for entire Egypt - presented themselves as an independent part within the inneregyptian legal system and as an official representative of legal decisions besides the king. So you have on the one side the *προστάγματα* and *διαγράμματα* of the kings (that are the orders and laws issued by the king), and on the other side you have the priestly decrees.³² Although the king and the royal couple respectively were always endowed with great honours by the members of the clergy, these priestly decrees manifested the field of tension between the king and the priesthoods, which had a history of many hundreds of years, and that the Ptolemaic attempt and ambition to be accepted had only be successful on the surface. Having traced the development from the Canopus decree to the Raphia decree and to the Rosetta stone we have now seen how this field of tension underwent a change.

²⁸ Translatio: Bresciani, *op.cit.* (n. 17), 653-658; Spiegelberg, *op.cit.* (n. 23); S. Quirke, C. Andrews, *The Rosetta Stone* (London 1988) For a bibliographical survey see Hölbl, *op.cit.* (n. 1) 315. n. 38.

²⁹ J.-F. Champollion, *Lettre à M. Dacier* ..., Paris 1822.

³⁰ On the royal cult institutions (*r-prw*) (being besides the *ht-nfr* within the *pr* of a god) and on the *w'p*-priests, who fulfilled their service there, see Kessler, *op.cit.* (n. 4), 46-56, 149f. and *passim*.

³¹ *Urk.* II, 176,2-178,1; 183,9-184,6.

³² In this connection they are mentioned likewise by E. Seidl, *Ptolemäische Rechtsgeschichte*. 2nd ed., Glückstadt 1962, 15.

II. THE PRIESTLY OPPOSITION

From what we have heard so far we can see that the priesthoods in the north of the country, especially that of Memphis had always been in close contact to the royal family and the Ptolemaic kings often visited the religious capital Memphis.

The priesthoods of the south, however, not only kept a geographical distance but also retained a higher degree of independence. This must not lead us to think that the Ptolemaic kings did not care about the south in their religious policy. Quite the opposite was the case. It was precisely there that they had to try to be accepted as good and legitimate pharaohs. When we think of the enormous temple projects of Philae, Edfu, Kom Ombo, Esna (there the Ptolemaic temple was destroyed, only the big Roman hall is still standing) and also Dendera or Dakke in Nubia then we must realize that without the help and support of the dynasty these buildings would not have been possible. The Ptolemies also made foundations in the South.

The most famous one is without doubt the donation of the so-called Dodecaschoenus, the land of the twelve schoenoi, the lower Nubian region between Aswan and the Wadi 'Allaqi, which was given to Isis of Philae. This donation, which can only have taken place under Ptolemy II, is recorded on the so-called Dodecaschoenus stela³³ carved into the rock at the base of the second pylon of the Philae temple (fig. 8). In the text on the stela Ptolemy VI Philometor confirms in 157 the assignment of the taxes from the land of the twelve schoenoi to the temple of Isis in Philae. The reliefs on the stela (fig. 9) show a double-scene with Ptolemy VI Philometor and his sister wife Cleopatra II standing before different gods.

The privileges of the Isis priests of Philae met with opposition from the Khnum priests of Elephantine, evidence of this is the so-called Famine stela,³⁴ (fig. 10) a rock inscription on the island of Sehel, which usually is dated somewhere in the last years of reign of Ptolemy V. We can read about a famine at the time of king Djoser (3rd dynasty) lasting seven years. The stela states that Djoser assigned to the Khnum temple on the island Elephantine the land of the twelve schoenoi, that is to say the agricultural income, a tenth of the hunted animals and other things. The Khnum priests claimed the entire income of the Dodecaschoenus for themselves on the grounds of an ancient foundation. But their claims remained without success because the following Ptolemies confirmed the donation of the land of the twelve schoenoi to the Isis priests of Philae.

When talking about priestly opposition to the Ptolemaic regime we also must talk about the uprisings against these regime. It goes without saying that the rebellions in the Delta during the reigns of Ptolemy III, IV, and V were carried by the poor mass of the

³³ Cf. A. Giammarusti, A. Roccati, *File, storia e vita di un santuario egizio*, Novara 1980. 104f.

³⁴ P. Barguet, *La stèle de la famine à Sehel*, Le Caire 1953; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, III, Berkeley 1980. 94-102.

population, which was exploited by the Ptolemaic kings in order to finance their costly foreign policy and their even more costly life style at court. The Ptolemaic administration, which was totally unjust with regard to the peasants, provoked these socially motivated uprisings, - the victims of which included Egyptian priests - because it is obvious that the poor wretches looted whatever they found, also robbing temples.

But we know that there had been also a national Egyptian priestly opposition against the Persian rule, which continued in Ptolemaic period and gained impetus at certain times. This opposition is responsible for a variety of national Egyptian propaganda literature, for instance the so-called Demotic Chronicle.³⁵ This tract reflects the anti-Persian tendency of fourth century BC but predicts in the version, which came to us, a native king from Herakleopolis, who will put an end to the Greek kings. This shows an attitude of opposition within a certain group of the Egyptian upper class whose intention it was to abolish the Ptolemaic dynasty.

This happened indeed - if only partly - in 206 BC when Herwennefer, the leader of Egyptian rebels, took over power in the Thebaid and was made pharaoh by his people; the demotic documents of the Thebaid are dated according to Herwennefer; the Ptolemaic troops were soon driven out of their Thebaid headquarters. We cannot deal here with the great Upper Egyptian revolt against the Ptolemaic regime in the times from 206 until 186 BC.³⁶ It is however important for us to know that the two Egyptians, who reigned as pharaohs, Herwennefer and his successor Anchwennefer, referred in their titles not only to Isis but also to Amun-Re of Thebes. The king of the gods, Amun-Re of Thebes, was of course the patron of the Egyptian pharaohs reigning in Thebes. This reflects also an ideological opposition to Ptah of Memphis, whose high priest cooperated closely with the Ptolemaic family. Herwennefer and Anchwennefer were thus officially recognized by the Amun priests in Thebes, and maybe even crowned there.

When Anchwennefer was defeated in 186 BC, Ptolemy V called a meeting of priests in Alexandria, which is documented by the 2nd decree of Philae,³⁷ engraved there on the East wall of the birth house. Anchwennefer was declared enemy of the gods - according to the concept of kingship as it was adopted for the Ptolemies. The clergy, however, tried to bring about a compromise: they brought in a petition to pardon Anchwennefer and this was granted by Ptolemy V.

³⁵ W. Spiegelberg, *Die sogenannte demotische Chronik des Pap. 215 der Bibliothèque Nationale zu Paris nebst den auf der Rückseite des Papyrus stehenden Texten*, Leipzig 1914; Translation in Bresciani, *op.cit.* (n. 17), 803-814. I follow the opinion of J. H. Johnson, *Is the Demotic Chronicle an Anti-Greek tract?*, in: *Grammata Demotica*, FS E. Lüddeckens, Würzburg 1984, 107-124.

³⁶ On the few historical events we know about see Hölbl, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 135-140 (including bibliography).

³⁷ *Urk.* II, 214-230; K. Sethe, *Die historische Bedeutung des 2. Philä-Dekrets aus der Zeit des Ptolemaios Epiphanes*, ZÄS 53 (1917), 35-49.

The liquidation of the upper Egyptian revolt was not the end of the Theban opposition. During the reign of Ptolemy VIII, which was a period full of crises another Egyptian, named Harsiēsis, tried his luck as pharao.³⁸ In 131 he succeeded to come to power for a short time in Thebes. Harsiēsis is only interesting for us in as much as he was the last old Egyptian to hold the title 'pharao', that is according to our sources. He himself may have come from priestly circles. But the Amun priests of Thebes supported him financially, which again documents their opposition towards the Ptolemaic dynasty.

III. CONCLUSION

Let us now come to a short conclusion of the relationship between the Egyptian priests and the Ptolemaic dynasty!

In the past we used to believe that the Egyptian priests were principally opposed to the Ptolemaic dynasty. The native revolts against the Ptolemies were quoted to prove this: these revolts were seen as nationalist uprisings against the foreign dynasty. Nowadays we have a far more complex view.

For some years or rather decades we have become more and more aware of the fact that the Ptolemies were very successful in their religious policy, which not only aimed at presenting themselves as legitimate pharaohs³⁹ but was also based on a wide cooperation with the high priests, especially in the north of Egypt with the center in Memphis. And it was the high priest of Ptah himself, who was responsible first for the pharaonization of Alexander and then for the pharaonization of the Ptolemies as well.

Many papyrological and epigraphic sources, particularly the priestly decrees, document the acceptance of the Ptolemies into the ancient Egyptian royal cult as well as the creation of native dynastic cults in Egyptian temples. These cults were carried out for the living and the deceased Ptolemaic couples at the same time, which meant for the Ptolemaic family as a whole, thus expressing a belief in a kind of family charisma, which was handed down hereditarily from one Ptolemy to the next. This happened analogically to the Alexandrian dynastic cult, which had begun with the imperial god Alexander and which always remained closely connected with him. It is, however, quite remarkable that the native Egyptian dynastic cults could be extended to the reigning Ptolemaic couple earlier than was the case with the Greek dynastic cult in Alexandria. An example of this is the high priest Anemhor II (see fig. 3) and who within his Memphite area anticipated this cult for the fourth Ptolemaic couple, before they were joined with the Alexander cult in Alexandria: this means that in Memphis the Ptolemaic couple was worshipped earlier than in Alexandria.

³⁸ On the rebellion of Harsiese cf. Hölbl, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 176f.

³⁹ G. Hölbl, *Zur Legitimation der Ptolemäer als Pharaonen*, in: Akten des Symposiums zur Ägyptischen Königsideologie, Mainz 16.-17. June 1995, ed.: R. Gundlach (Wiesbaden: in print).

This fact, and in later times the family relation between the high priest of Memphis and the Ptolemaic family demonstrate clearly the cooperation between the representatives of the Egyptian clergy and the king. The best example of this at the end of the Ptolemaic period is the young high priest Psenpah III, who crowned Ptolemy XII pharaoh in 76 BC. (see fig. 4).

There was of course in the south of Egypt, especially in Thebes, a strong national opposition among the clergy, who wanted to get rid of the Ptolemies. Exponents of their short success history are the native pharaohs Herwennefer and Anchwennefer and later on Hersiēsis in 130.

All in all the development of the relationship between the Egyptian priests and the Ptolemaic dynasty is not at all as straight and simple as we sometimes would like to have it. There was for example another revolt from 90 to 88 in Thebes, but the city of Pathyris (south of Thebes on the west bank) remained loyal to the Ptolemaic government. And the city's resistance against the revolt in the Thebaid was led by an Egyptian and by Egyptian priests.⁴⁰

But it remains a fact that with the Roman conquest of Egypt the Egyptian priests had to face totally new and far more difficult problems. Once again they were faced with the problem in 30 BC of saving their religious world with the pharaoh at its centre and carrying it into a new world. But the Roman empire was no longer so much dependent on the Egyptian priests as former foreign rulers had been. Which consequences followed, however, is not our topic.

⁴⁰ Hölbl, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 190.

CAPTIONS UNDER THE PICTURES

- Fig. 1: Upper part of the Mendes stela; Cairo, Egyptian Museum, Cat. Gén. 22181; taken from G. Roeder, *Die ägyptische Götterwelt*, Stuttgart 1959, 172 (drawing without hieroglyphic inscriptions).
- Fig. 2: Funerary stelae of members of the high priest family of Memphis; exhibited in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Egyptian Collection; from left to right: Anemhor II (ÄS 153); Djedhor, his eldest son and successor (ÄS 162); Horemachet, brother and successor of the latter (ÄS 125).
- Fig. 3: Funerary stela of Anemhor II (ÄS 153).
- Fig. 4: Funerary stela of Psenptah III, high priest of Ptah 76-41 BC, so-called Harris-Stela, British Museum, EA 886; photograph taken from E. A. E. Reymond, *From the records of a priestly family from Memphis*, 1 (Wiesbaden 1981) pl. X.
- Fig. 5: Canopus decree, stela from Kom el-Hisn; Cairo, Egyptian Museum, Cat. Gén. 22186.
- Fig. 6: Raphia decree; stela from Memphis; Cairo, Egyptian Museum, Cat. Gén. 31088.
- Fig. 7: Rosetta stone, as exhibited in the British Museum.
- Fig. 8: Second pylon of the Isis temple on Philae with Dodecaschoenus stela on the right below.
- Fig. 9: Dodecaschoenus stela.
- Fig. 10: Famine stela on the island of Sehel.

The Egyptian Priests and the Ptolemaic Dynasty

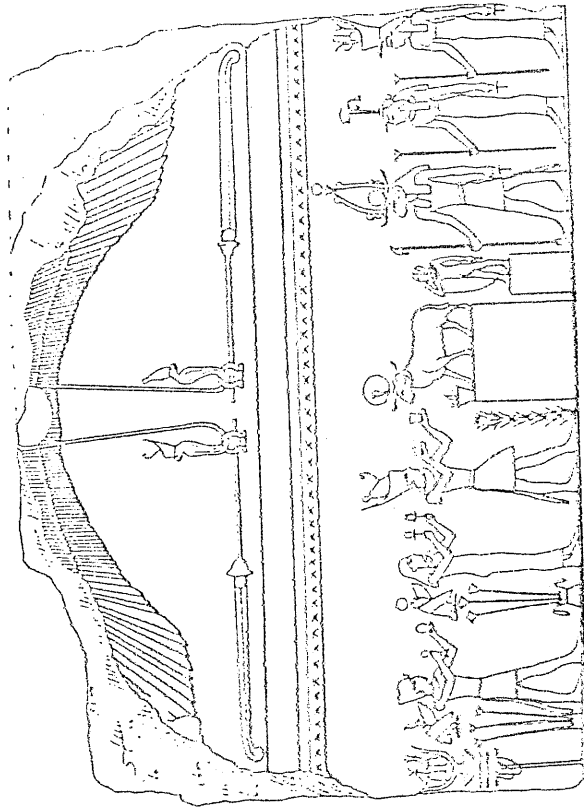


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Fig. 2: Funerary stelae of members of the high priest family of Memphis; exhibited in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Egyptian Collection; from left to right: Anemhor II (ÄS 153); Djedhor, his eldest son and successor (ÄS 162); Horemachet, brother and successor of the latter (ÄS 125).



Fig. 3: Funerary stela of Anemhor II (AS 153).

The Egyptian Priests and the Ptolemaic Dynasty

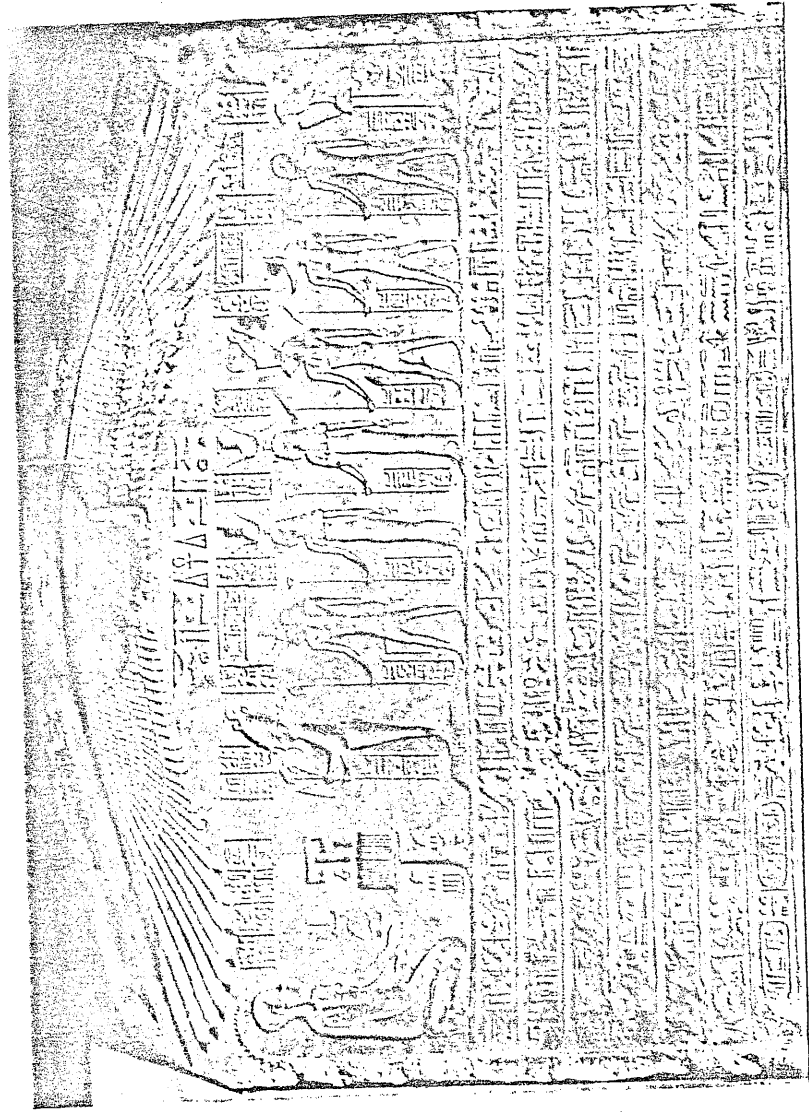


Fig. 4. Funerary stela of Psenptah III, high priest of Ptah 76-41 BC, so-called Harris-Stela, British Museum, EA 896, photograph taken from E.A.E. Reymond, *From the records of a priestly family from Memphis*, I (Wiesbaden 1981) pl. X.

The Egyptian Priests and the Ptolemaic Dynasty

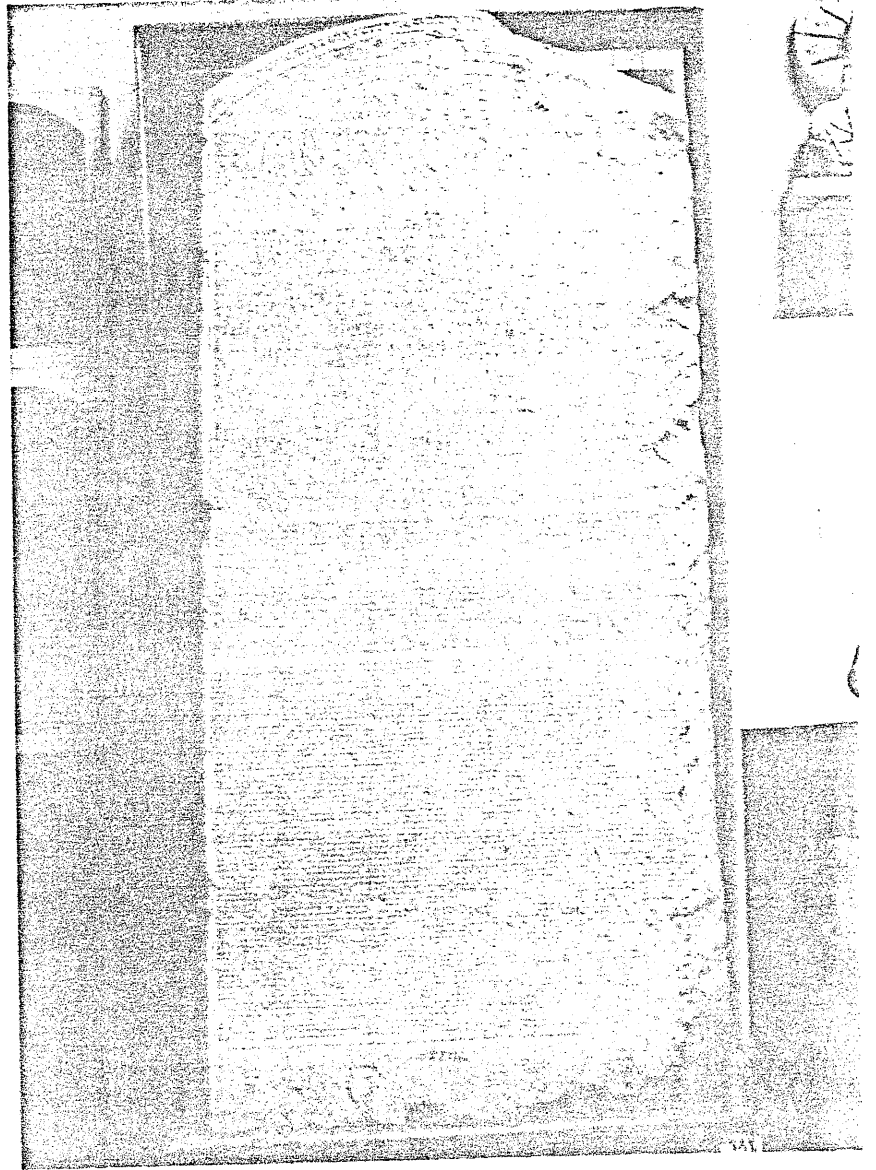


Fig. 5: Canopus decree, stela from Kom el-Hisn; Cairo Egyptian Museum.
Cat. Gén. 22186.

The Egyptian Priests and the Ptolemaic Dynasty

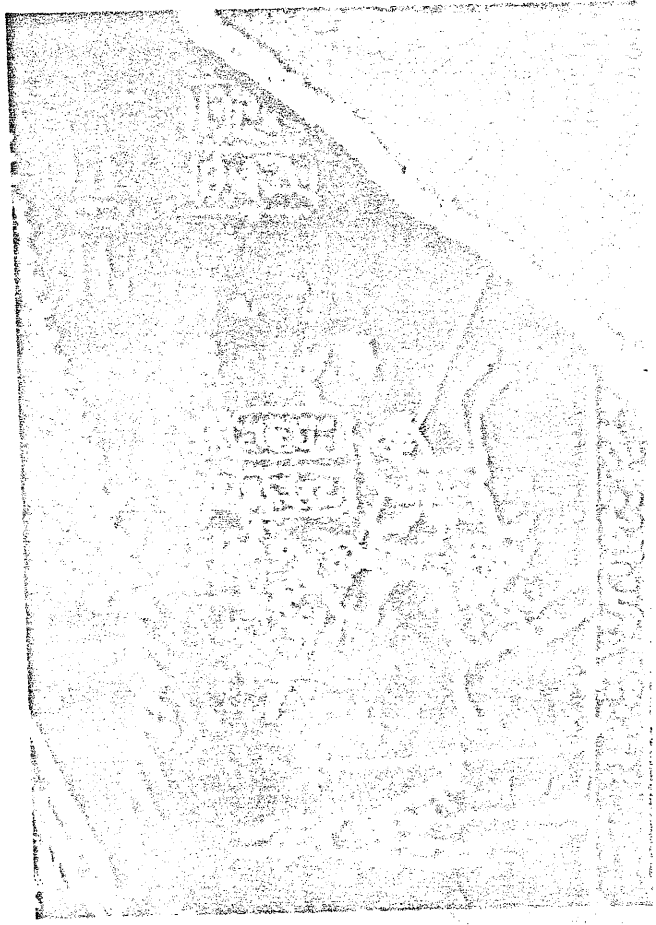
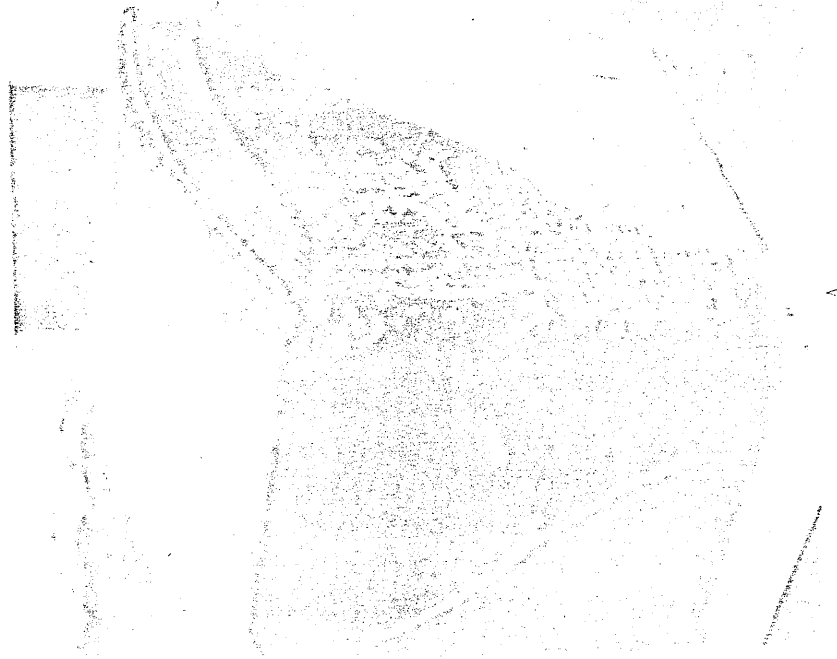


Fig. 5: Raphia decree; stela from Memphis; Cairo, Egyptian Museum.
Cat. Gén. 31093.

The Egyptian Priests and the Ptolemaic Dynasty

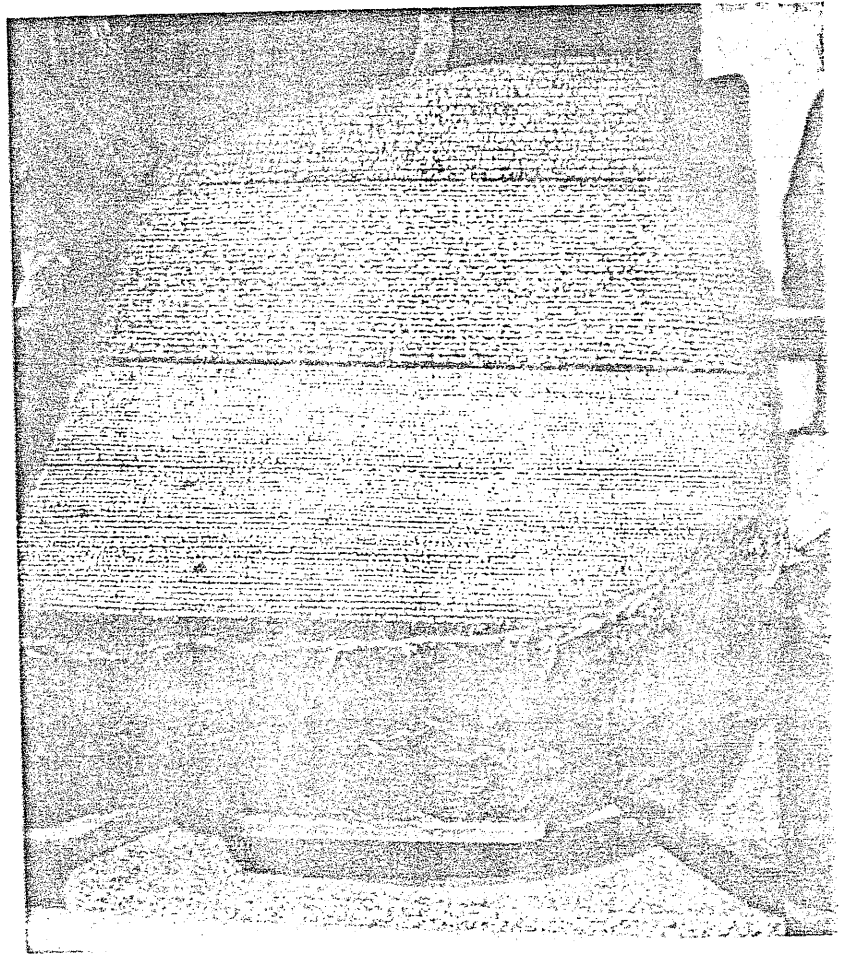


Fig. 7: Rosetta stone, as exhibited in the British Museum.

The Egyptian Priests and the Ptolemaic Dynasty

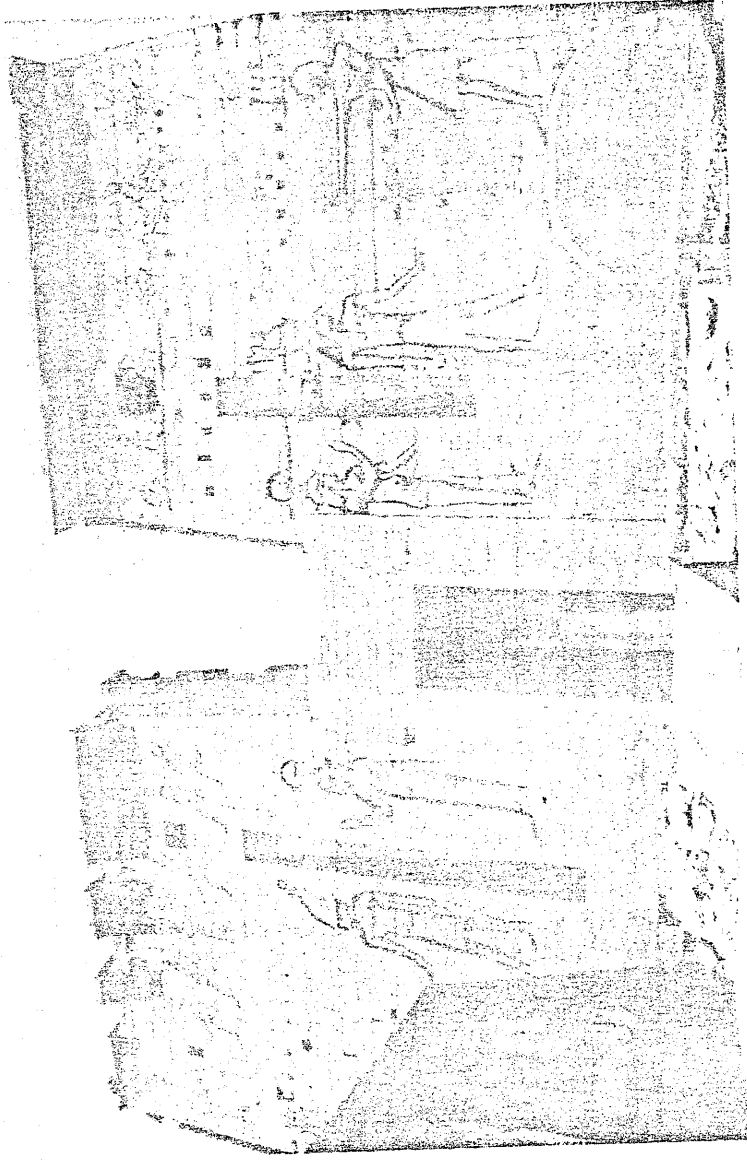


Fig. 8: Second pylon of the Isis temple on Philae with Dodecaschoenus stela on the right below.

The Egyptian Priests and the Ptolemaic Dynasty

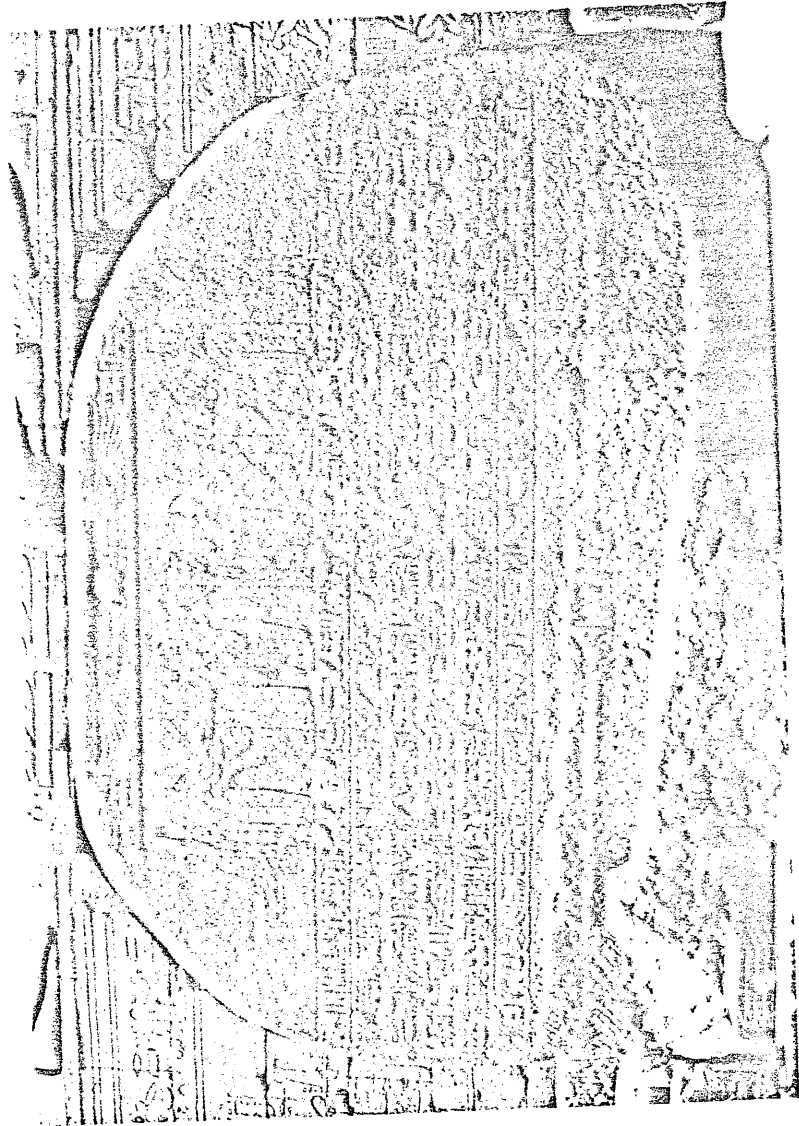


Fig. 9: Dodecaschoenus stela.

The Egyptian Priests and the Ptolemaic Dynasty

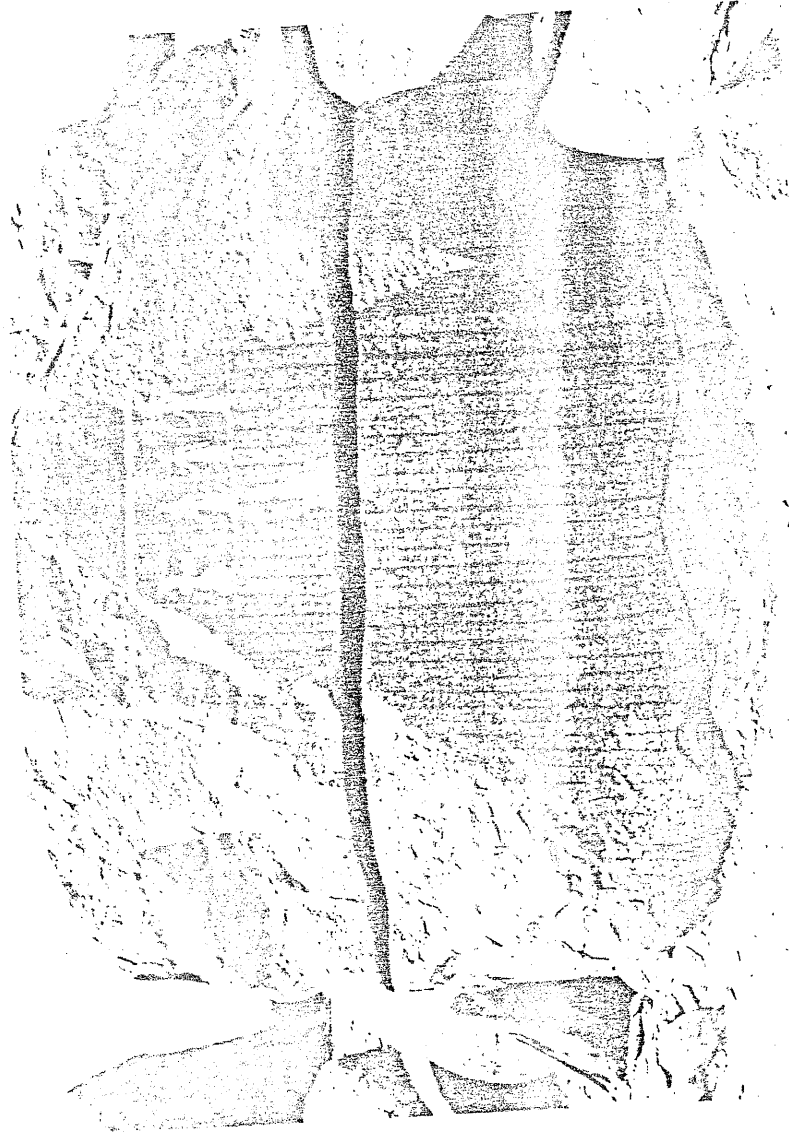


Fig. 10: Famine stela on the island of Sehel.