

Defining a Dynasty: Consolidation of Ptolemaic Power in Egypt

Upon Alexander the Great's death in 323 BC, the provinces ruled by Macedonia were split among Alexander's comrades in a tumultuous settlement. To Ptolemy I Soter came the lands of Egypt, Libya, and the adjacent parts of Arabia. Despite being Macedonian, and not Egyptian, Ptolemy was able to solidify Macedonian control over these lands, setting the foundations for a dynasty that would span approximately three centuries, ending with Cleopatra VII's suicide in 30 BC. By the time Ptolemy II Philadelphus came fully into rule in 283 BC, Ptolemy I Soter had already made large movements towards consolidating Macedonian and Egyptian views into a rule that was distinctively Macedonian, yet not repulsive to the Egyptians. Ptolemy II Philadelphus solidified this groundwork with the deification of Ptolemy I Soter and the juxtaposition of himself and his incestuous marriage with that of Greek and Egyptian deities. From Ptolemy II Philadelphus onward, the kingdom of the Ptolemy became markedly Egyptian, choosing incestuous primary marriages, adapting the visage of pharaoh in physical depictions, and becoming steeped in the language and culture of Egypt. Without this adaptation, it is unlikely that the Ptolemaic rule would have endured with such power, outlasting the other divisions of Alexander's territory in Asia and Greece.

This paper will analyze the unification of Egyptian culture and Macedonian rule under Ptolemy Philadelphus, beginning with his solidification of Macedonian rule in Egypt and his adaptation of pharaonic power, and focusing on a few chosen aspects of his reign. First, I will demonstrate how he was able to increase economic prosperity in Egypt by reopening the Nile-Red Sea canal and constructing several significant port cities, as well as building infrastructure that aided in creating a trade route from Ethiopia to Europe. Second, the paper will detail his defensive and militaristic ventures, including opening up and greatly expanding the military from

the size during the rule of Ptolemy I Soter as well as greatly increasing the number of Egyptians serving in the standing army by studying details in contemporary sources regarding the lending of troops to Pyrrhus (Hammond 412). The focus will then be brought to Ptolemy Philadelphus's adaptation of Egyptian society, including taking on characteristics of a pharaoh in portrayal in sculpture and taking his sister as his wife. At this point, it will be necessary to highlight the adaptation of Sarapis worship into Macedonian and Egyptian society (Welles 271), as well as the adaptation of the cult of Isis into Greek society initiated by Ptolemy I Soter (Ellis 30), which will provide an impetus for the postmortem deification of Ptolemy I Soter and the portrayal of Arsinoe, Philadelphus's wife and sister, alongside Isis in material culture (Ager 171); the deified father and the incestuous relationship, mirroring that of Isis and Osiris, allowed Philadelphus to effectively claim the 'living God' status of the pharaohs. Finally, the paper will demonstrate that the second Ptolemy greatly improved the status of Egypt by greatly expanding the library at Alexandria, starting a minor library at Serapeium, and becoming a generous patron of the arts and of literature, including a history of Egypt written by an Egyptian priest, Manetho. Overall, these points, when studied together rather than as separate entries, will create a deeper understanding of the reign of the Ptolemies as well as the processes involved with the imposition of rulers over a separate country with dissimilar customs.

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