

STEFANO CANEVA

PTOLEMY I AS THEOS SOTER AND THE
HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE DECREE *I.PROSE 62*
FROM PTOLEMAIS HERMIU

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VOLUME LXXIII/2018 FASCICOLO II

STEFANO CANEVA, <i>Ptolemy I as Theos Soter and the historical context of the decree I.Prose 62 from Ptolemais Hermiou</i>	Pag.	239
ISAÍAS ARRAYÁS MORALES, <i>Emigración romano-itálica y violencia peregrina en la Anatolia occidental entre el conflicto mitridático y la época julio-claudia</i>	»	255
FRANCESCO SIRANO, <i>Gli dei di Capua e il sistema del sacro: testimonianze di età romana</i>	»	301
LORENZO RONCHINI, <i>Cicerone, Galeno e un frammento euripideo</i> . .	»	317

NOTE CRITICHE E FILOLOGICHE

ANTONIO RIGO, <i>La prima redazione del I Antirretico contro Niceforo Gregoras di Gregorio Palamas e la Risposta sul Contro Eunomio di Basilio di Cesarea</i>	»	343
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TESTI E MONUMENTI

VINCENZO BELLELLI, <i>Ischia, le anfore etrusche di Nocera e il vino 'amineo'</i>	»	359
SERENA DE CARO, <i>Le tombe dipinte dalla valle del Sarno</i>	»	431
RAIMON GRAELLS I FABREGAT – LUIGI VECCHIO, <i>Tra caduceo e preda di guerra. A proposito del sauroter iscritto da Roccagloriosa</i>	»	449

(segue in 3^a di coperta)

STEFANO CANEVA

PTOLEMY I AS THEOS SOTER
AND THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT
OF THE DECREE *I.PROSE* 62 FROM PTOLEMAIS HERMIUO

The two lives of a decree

In 1960, P.M. Fraser published a fragmentary decree of the city of Ptolemais Hermiou inscribed by an elegant hand of the 2nd cent. AD on a very unusual support (an alabaster stela).¹ The editor recognized the text, of which only the beginning is preserved, as the Imperial copy of a Hellenistic honorific decree in favor of a Ptolemy. Lines 1-2, which constitute the beginning of the decree, are fragmentary, but clearly refer to Ptolemy I as the founder of the city. However, the precise formulary of this passage is disputed. At the end of line 1, Fraser published [ἐπειδὴ – – ὁ], whereas A. Bernand (*I.Prose* 62) integrated [ἐπειδὴ ὁ βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος], which he considered as a necessary complement of the following θεὸς Σωτήρ at the beginning of line 2.

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¹ See FRASER 1959/60, p. 124 on the exceptional use of this material for inscriptions and on the location of its quarries in Egypt; pp. 124-125 on the provenance of the inscription from Ptolemais; 125-126 on paleography. The current location of the stone is Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, Inv. No. AN198756. For the text, see FRASER 1959/60, p. 131, with the observations by J. BINGEN, «CdÉ», XXXVI, 1961, p. 225; cf. «JEA», XLII, 1968, p. 142, no. 8; SEG XX 665; SB VIII 9820. *I.Prose* (= A. BERNAND, *La Prose sur pierre dans l'Égypte hellénistique et romaine*, Paris, CNRS 1992), no. 62 provides a text that partly differs from the *editio princeps*. PFEIFFER 2015, pp. 24-26, no. 3 combines Fraser's text with the integration of line 1 by Bernand, but aptly puts a question mark after the royal title. KAYSER 2017, p. 47 follows Fraser without his integration ἐποίκουσ ('supplementary settlers') at line 4, even though he accepts the historical interpretation associated with this term (see below). The inscription has number 5983 in the Trismegistos database (www.trismegistos.org/text/5983).

I publish here the photo of the stone together with a minimalist edition of the text. Some hypothetical restorations originally proposed by Fraser are not reproduced:



ἔδοξε τῆι βουλῆι καὶ τῶι δήμῳι --- (?)² ἐπειδὴ --- ὁ]
 θεὸς Σωτήρ πόλιν Ἑλληνίδα ἐν [(τῆι) Θηβαΐδι ἔκτισε --- (?) τὴν ἐπωνυ]-
 μίαν ποιησάμενος Πτολεμαΐδα --- προσ(?)]-
 τασίαν· εἰς ἣν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀπέστειλεν ---]
 [5] καὶ ἐξ Ἄργους καὶ ἐκ ..³ [---]
 νος καὶ ἐκ τῆς Θετταλίας(?) ---]
 δεδόχθαι τ[---]
 κατὰ τὸν τ[ῆς πόλεως νόμον(?)]

It was decided by the Council and the D[emos: because ... the] Savior god [founded] a Greek polis in [the Thebaid] naming it Ptolemais [after himself ..., giving to it its fa]vor; there the king se[nt ...] and from Argos and from [...] and from The[ssaly(?) ...]. It has been decided to [...] following [the civic norms(?)] [...].

² The average length of the line is hypothetical and depends on whether we assume that a formula concerning the proposer of the decree appeared before ἐπειδή; see FRASER 1959/60, p. 131.

³ For discussion of the partially visible letters at the edge of the stone, see FRASER 1959/60, pp. 130-131.

The premises of the decree plausibly refer to the fact that settlers from various parts of the Greek world were sent to the site of Ptolemais on royal initiative to populate the city (lines 4-6). The name of Argos is preserved (and possibly the beginning of Thessaly), while other place names are in lacuna and their restoration remains hypothetical.⁴ The last partially legible lines (7-8) contain the beginning of the deliberative section of the decree, but the content of the honors bestowed upon the king are entirely lost.

Since the original honorific purpose of the decree was out of date in the mid-Imperial period, when the text was re-published (perhaps after centuries of oblivion), S. Pfeiffer and F. Kayser have suggested that the Hellenistic text was relevant for its new public because it provided an authoritative narrative of the origins of Ptolemais Hermiou. More precisely, this initiative might have been triggered by a spirit of competition against the rise of Antinoupolis, Hadrian's foundation which had interrupted Ptolemais' centuries-long privilege of being the only Greek *polis* in Egypt south of the Nile Delta.⁵ Self-celebratory re-publications of Hellenistic documents highlighting the prestige and antiquity of a city or of aspects of its social life were common in the Imperial period.⁶ Moreover, the Greek origins of the city were certainly felt as an important reason of pride by the citizens of Imperial Ptolemais, as shown by a contemporaneous dedication made by one of them at Philae, describing the city as «my sweet fatherland Ptolemais, founded by Soter, Nile-born sanctuary of the Greeks».⁷ The dedication from Philae shares all the topics that made *I.Prose* 62 ideologically relevant to the citizens of 2nd-cent. AD Ptolemais: the royal origins of the city, its antiquity, its Greekness.⁸ The symbolic

⁴ See on this point KAYSER 2017, pp. 49-50.

⁵ PFEIFFER 2015, pp. 25-26; KAYSER 2017, pp. 50-51.

⁶ See, for instance, *I.Mag.* 215 (JACCOTTET 2003, II, no. 146), probably the Imperial copy (2nd century AD) of a Hellenistic text narrating the foundation of the cult of Dionysos in Magnesia on the Meander. The oracle of Delphi ordered to transfer three Theban priestesses of the god to Magnesia, from whom the three *thiasoi* of the city had taken their origins.

⁷ *I.Philae* II 166; PFEIFFER 2015, pp. 311-313, no. 72. Lines 4-5: πάτρης γλυκερῆς Πτολεμαΐδος, ἦν ἐπόλισ|σεν Σωτήρ, Ἑλλήνων νιλογενὲς τέμενος.

⁸ These elements may indeed corroborate the hypothesis of rivalry between Ptolemais and Antinoupolis, an imperial foundation of 'new Greeks' (cf. *I.Portes* 12; PFEIFFER 2015, pp. 323-325, no. 77), in contrast to which the inhabitants of Ptolemais could boast a pedigree of Greekness of almost half a millennium. On the formula

prestige of this piece of local history embedded in an ancient decree could also explain why the text was posted on such an unusual and precious support. To sum up, while Roman Alexandria celebrated its link with Alexander to boast its prominent position as a metropolis in the Roman Mediterranean,⁹ the more provincial Ptolemais did the same with its founder Ptolemy I to compete for primacy in the Egypt *chōra*.

Starting from these premises about the two lives of this honorific decree, in this paper I will try to better understand the historical context and purpose of the first publication of the text in the Hellenistic period. I will argue that the decree pinpoints a moment of primary importance in the construction of the memory of Ptolemy I as city founder, and might actually constitute the act of establishment of Ptolemy I's oecist's cult in Ptolemais. I carry out my discussion in two steps. First, I review the scholarly debate on the date of the text, proposing an early date under Ptolemy I or Ptolemy II on textual and historical grounds. Second, I provide a detailed analysis of the development of Ptolemy I's royal formula in order to narrow down the chronological limits of the publication of the inscription.

The Hellenistic decree

According to the first editor, Fraser, the Hellenistic decree issued by the institutions of Ptolemais mentioned Ptolemy I at lines 1-2 as the city founder of Ptolemais, yet the king honored in line 4 for sending (new?) colonists to populate the city would be a later Ptolemy, probably acting in response to a demographic crisis, which the city might have gone through in the 2nd century BC. Fraser's argument was based on the opposition between θεὸς Σωτήρ at line 2 (according to him, the dead and deified Ptolemy I) and ὁ βασιλεύς at line 4 (the living king).¹⁰ Kayser has recently developed Fraser's interpretation by tentatively linking the initiative of a later Ptolemy with the aftermath of the revolt of Thebaid: this would imply that the honored

πόλις Ἑλληνίς in relation to Hellenistic foundations in non-Greek regions, see also COHEN 2013, pp. 360-377.

⁹ On the central place of Alexander in the identity of Imperial Alexandria at both cultic and narrative levels, see CANEVA 2016, pp. 199-216.

¹⁰ FRASER 1959/60, pp. 127, 130-133.

king was Ptolemy V or Ptolemy VI, and that the royal initiative was meant to counter the loss of population caused by war and political turmoil during the period 206-186.¹¹

However, Fraser's interpretation has failed to convince all scholars. A. Bernand in *I.Prose* 62 and S. Pfeiffer identify the honored king of line 4 with the same Ptolemy I evoked at the beginning of the text.¹² I think this thesis must be preferred on the ground of two arguments. First, since the preserved text is the beginning of the decree, the identity of another king should have been specified, whereas the expression ὁ βασιλεὺς must refer to a previously mentioned sovereign.¹³ Admittedly, a small margin of incertitude remains if we assume that the institutions of Ptolemais cut a part of the Hellenistic decree while copying it in the Imperial period. However, this seems an unnecessary hypothesis considering that nothing in the phrasing of the decree can be taken *per se* as a sign that the Hellenistic text was changed at the moment of its re-publication.¹⁴ Second, Fraser's

¹¹ KAYSER 2017, pp. 48-50.

¹² Note, however, that Bernand's argument against Fraser (*I.Prose* II 163) is wrong: «Le surnom de *Théos* n'implique nullement que le roi est mort, puisqu'il devenait dieu en devenant pharaon». In addition to relying on an approximate understanding of the relationship between kingship and the divine sphere in the Egyptian tradition, this argument fails to recognize that here we are dealing with the formula and honorific logics of the institutions of a Greek *polis*.

¹³ This observation allows us to rule out the hypothesis that the king named as Theos Soter was Ptolemy IX Soter II, who usually bore this epithet (cfr. below) but could by no means be considered as the founder of Ptolemais. Other arguments against a low date of the decree can be proposed. Firstly, the text contains a deliberative clause which is only paralleled by decrees from 3rd-cent. Ptolemais (see following note), whereas later documents shed light on the direct influence of royal administration via local officials. It is possible that, just as Alexandria, Ptolemais progressively lost part of the autonomous institutions of Greek *poleis* from the 2nd century BC onwards: see PLAUMANN 1910, pp. 30-39, and BOWMAN – RATHBONE 1992, pp. 108-109, with previous refs. Secondly, as pointed out, among others, by VEISSE 2004, the 2nd and 1st-cent. evidence concerning the re-establishment of royal control after major indigenous revolts in Upper Egypt reveals that the contemporaneous Ptolemaic policy did not focus on cities, but on royal officials and their personal bonds with the court and with the local Egyptian temples as promoters of pacification and loyalty in the region. The most plausible context for a reference to the arrival of settlers in Ptolemais therefore remains the city foundation under Ptolemy I.

¹⁴ The deliberative clause ἔδοξε τῆι βουλῆι καὶ τοῖσι δήμοις is paralleled by two decrees which can be dated to the reigns of Ptolemy II or Ptolemy III: *I.Prose* 2 and 4; see KAYSER 2017, p. 40. See also FRASER 1959/60, p. 128, n. 17 on civic institutions in Roman Ptolemais.

treatment of the royal formulary of the decree can hardly be seen as conclusive. A detailed analysis of Ptolemaic royal titular suggests that, unlike 2nd-cent. BC Attalids,¹⁵ the Ptolemies never developed the practice of adding the epithet Theos to the name of a sovereign in order to mark the fact that he was dead.¹⁶ Accordingly, we cannot draw from the presence of the epithet Theos an inference about the relative chronology between the decree and the death of Ptolemy I in 283/2. As we shall see below, the denomination of Ptolemy I can help us better contextualize the decree only once we compare it with the broader trends of Ptolemaic royal formulary in the first half of the 3rd century BC.

These premises having been discussed, we must now leave temporarily aside the wording of the text to consider the possibility of an early date of the decree from a historical point of view. Hellenistic cities issuing honorific decrees in favor of a monarch did so as part of a negotiation process which implied a relation of *do-ut-des* between two autonomous (although interrelated) parties. This is probably also the reason why so few civic decrees concerning honors for Ptolemaic kings have survived from Hellenistic Egypt, where *poleis* enjoyed limited political autonomy and agency in comparison with other regions of the Hellenistic world.¹⁷ Against this background, the assumption that the foundation of Ptolemais would trigger an immediate honorific response by the newly constituted community towards its royal founder is, to my knowledge, unparalleled in the Hellenistic documentation and fails to provide a convincing explanation of the intentions of the institutions of Ptolemais. I therefore see it more probable that the honorific decree was not issued immediately after the foun-

¹⁵ See, for comparison, CANEVA 2020a, p. 135.

¹⁶ *Contra* FRASER 1956, pp. 50-51, and, with more nuances, FRASER 1972, II 367-368, n. 229; PFEIFFER 2008a, p. 66 and 2008b, p. 400; KAYSER 2017, p. 48. MUCCIOLI 2013, pp. 83-84 more prudently observes that the plural epithet usually appears without Theoi, but accepts the high chronology of the private dedication *I. Varsovie* 50 during the reign of Ptolemy I and Berenike I. This would suggest an early use of the epithet Theoi Soteres, but as observed by the editor of *I. Varsovie*, the paleographic analysis rather points to a date of the inscription at the end of the 2nd century or in the early 1st century BC.

¹⁷ On this point, see CANEVA 2018, pp. 110-112 on the reign of Ptolemy I. Two Oxyrhynchus papyri (*P.Oxy.* XXVII 2465, fr. 2 and *SB VI* 8993) shed light on Alexandrian civic decrees regulating divine honors for later Ptolemaic rulers, respectively for Arsinoe Philadelphos (after 270) and for Ptolemy VI with Kleopatra II (175/4 BC).

dation of the city. At this point of my discussion, I shall leave two hypotheses open:

1) As suggested by Fraser, the text was issued under the reign of Ptolemy I to praise and honor the king in response to the arrival of new settlers. In principle, this explanation is not impossible. As a term of comparison, one may recall that in the decades following its foundation, the population of Alexandria was increased at various stages under the initiative of Kleomenes first, and later of Ptolemy.¹⁸ Conversely, for the reasons seen above, we can already reject the late date proposed by Fraser;

2) The text was issued after the death of Ptolemy I to praise his initiative and possibly to establish/augment his cultic honors as oecist. From this perspective, the civic initiative would fulfill the goal of commemorating the origins of Ptolemais and of honoring the royal house by celebrating at once, through the figure of Ptolemy I, the founder of the city and of the dynasty.

In the next section, I will argue that a refined analysis of the royal formulary used in the decree suggests that we should prefer this second option and contextualize the issue of the decree during the reign of Ptolemy II.

Ptolemy Theos Soter

We may now consider once again the denomination of Ptolemy I employed in the decree to try to narrow down the chronological limits of its original publication. In what follows, I cautiously avoid commenting upon the royal title integrated by Bernand in the lacuna of line 1. I will rather focus on the formula *Theos Soter* that surely defines Ptolemy I in the preserved text. In this respect, we must start by pointing out what may appear at first sight as a surprising detail: while scholars generally consider *Theos Soter* as a standard title of the first Ptolemaic king, this compound denomination is in fact unparalleled in the Hellenistic evidence, his personal name being generally associated with the epithets ‘*basileus*’, ‘*Soter*’, or ‘*Theos*’ when he is mentioned alone, and by ‘*Soterēs*’ (or more rarely ‘*Theoi Soterēs*’) when referred to as a member of the first dy-

¹⁸ On the early stages of development of Alexandria, see GRIEB 2014.

nastic couple.¹⁹ In the other cases where Theos Soter accompanies the name of a Ptolemy, this always refers to Ptolemy IX Soter II.²⁰

In trying to explain the uniqueness of the royal formulary of *I.Prose* 62, I will explore three possible hypotheses:

1) The epithet reflects a formulary in use in Roman Ptolemais and should accordingly be considered as an addition made to the Hellenistic text at the time of the re-publication of the decree. As observed above, however, nothing suggests that the institutions of 2nd cent. AD Ptolemais decided to rephrase the decree. Moreover, the aforementioned dedication of a citizen of Ptolemais in Philae attests to the use of the simple epithet Soter. There is, therefore, no reason to assume that Theos Soter represented in any way the standard denomination of Ptolemy I in Roman Ptolemais more than in the Hellenistic period;

2) The epithet reflects the standard denomination of Ptolemy I in Hellenistic Ptolemais, which might have been different from the formulary used in other regions of the kingdom; accordingly, its uniqueness in the Hellenistic documentation only depends on the loss of the relevant evidence. This hypothesis must be rejected on the ground of a comparative analysis of the name of the eponymous priest of Ptolemy I in Ptolemais. Between 215/4 (under Ptolemy IV) and 116 BC (end of the reign of Ptolemy VIII), Ptolemais had an eponymous priest of the city-founder Ptolemy which was regularly mentioned in demotic papyri written in Upper Egypt. It is probable that, following ancestral Greek traditions of colonization, an oecist's cult of Ptolemy existed since an early stage in the history of Ptolemais, but gained new prestige, testified by the fact of becoming the eponymous charge of the city, under the auspices of Ptolemy IV. Approximately in the same years, this king reformed the eponymous

¹⁹ See the lengthier discussion provided in CANEVA 2020a and 2020b.

²⁰ This statement is comforted by a research of the compound epithet Theos Soter in all the possible cases in the database of the Packard Humanities Institute (<https://inscriptions.packhum.org>) and in the Papyri.info portal (<https://papyri.info/search>), both accessed on 08/10/2019. Other occurrences of the formula refer to traditional deities; this is the case of some inscriptions and papyri gathered by FRASER 1959/60, pp. 128-129, and erroneously interpreted by this scholar as possible occurrences of the denomination Theos Soter for Ptolemy I, whose personal name, however, does not appear in these documents (this interpretation is followed by É. Bernand in *I.Philae* II 162, but without the nuances expressed by Fraser). Against the identification of the king honored in *I.Prose* 62 with Ptolemy IX, see above, n. 13.

cult in Alexandria and built there a new dynastic mausoleum, where the members of the ruling house and their ancestors would share in the honors of the city founder Alexander.²¹ Even if the name of the eponymous priest in Ptolemais was expressed in the Egyptian language, one may reasonably assume that the denomination used in the dating formula of the demotic documents closely reflected the official Greek name of the priesthood in Ptolemais. This assumption is supported by a comparison with the titulary of the priests of the Alexandrian eponymous cult, which in the form preserved by the demotic texts from Thebaid perfectly reflects the denomination in use in the dating formulae of documents from other parts of Egypt.

Remarkably, the compound denomination Theos Soter never appears in the demotic papyri mentioning the eponymous priest of Ptolemy I in Ptolemais. In a first phase, which corresponds to the reign of Ptolemy IV, the formula 'priest of Ptolemy, *the god* (*p3 ntr*)', was in use, even though a few documents from Edfu have *p3 ntr* replaced by the epithet '*nḥd.t*, the 'ever-living'. Later documents named this civic official the 'priest of Ptolemy Soter'. In these texts, Soter was rendered either with the Egyptian formula *ntj nḥm* ('the one who saves') or with the transliteration of the Greek epiclesis, *P3 Swtr*, but in any case without the epithet *ntr* ('god').²² The absence of the title Theos Soter in the Hellenistic documentation from Upper Egypt is even more striking when we consider that, in the same documents, the epithet *ntr* (or the plural *ntr.w*) accompanies the personal title of all the other members of the royal house, whether they are mentioned alone or as royal couples. The epithet *ntr.w* also appears when the first dynastic pair is referred to in documents from Ptolemais mentioning the titulary of the eponymous priest of Alexandria, thus matching the Greek epiclesis *Theoi Soteres*.²³

3) The compound epithet Theos Soter attests to a phase of experimentation concerning the denomination of Ptolemy I, which can be traced through the epigraphic documentation, both institutional (decrees, civic dedications) and individual (private dedications),

²¹ On the reform of the Alexandrian eponymous priesthood of Alexander and the dynastic couples, which occurred in two steps in 216/5 and 215/4, see CLARYSSE – VAN DER VEKEN 1983, pp. 16-17; MINAS 2000, pp. 107-114. On the mausoleum, ADRIANI 2000, pp. 9, 13-22.

²² MINAS 2000, pp. 115-116.

²³ MINAS 2000, pp. 115, 136-137.

from the Aegean (in particular the cities of the Nesiotic League) and Western Asia Minor in the years 280s-260s. This period, which can be seen as a laboratory for the construction of the dynastic memory of Ptolemy I, predates and precludes the affirmation of the denomination 'Ptolemy Soter' as the standard title of the dynastic founder across the kingdom. This process of standardization, which occurred under the auspices of Ptolemy II, seems to have been achieved around 260 BC, in the geo-political scenario of the end of the Chremonidean war and of the beginning of the 2nd Syrian war.²⁴ Within this framework, one may notice that the only partial parallel to the royal formula used in the Ptolemais decree is provided by a honorific decree of Miletus for Ptolemy II, which was appended to a letter of the same king to the city in the inscription *I.Milet* I.3 139 (262/1 BC). Here, Ptolemy I is twice referred to as 'god and savior': at lines 24-25, where talk is of the positive relationship between the city and Ptolemy II's father; and at lines 53-54, which stipulate the erection of the decree on a stele that shall be placed near an existing portrait of Ptolemy I, in the sanctuary of Apollo Didymaios.²⁵ However, this text offers only an approximate parallel to the denomination *Theos Soter* in use in *I.Prose* 62, since in the Milesian decree the conjunction *καί* establishes a different semantic link between the two words.

Following this third hypothesis, we may propose to date the decree *I.Prose* 62 to the late years of Ptolemy I or, in my opinion more plausibly, during the first half of the reign of his son Ptolemy II. First, the use of the title *basileus* for Ptolemy I in the Nikouria decree (is-

²⁴ See the detailed discussion in CANEVA 2020a, with previous refs. Here I will limit myself to mentioning the following dates: in 262/1, Ptolemy II renovated his silver tetradrachms with the portrait of Ptolemy I by introducing the new legend ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ in place of the traditional ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ, thus virtually inscribing the Ptolemaic monetary authority within the legacy of the founder of the dynasty (on the introduction of this legend and its historical context, see now LORBER 2007); in 259/8, after the end of the co-regency with Ptolemy the Son, the king changed the dating formula of documents, which would be based on the regnal years 'of king Ptolemy, (son) of Ptolemy Soter'.

²⁵ In my view, there is no doubt that the royal formulary used in this decree sheds light on the situation at the time of the diplomatic interactions between Ptolemy II and Miletus at the end of the Chremonidean war, rather than on the late years of Ptolemy I, to which part of the decree refers *a posteriori*. I therefore share the opinion of BAGNALL 1976, p. 173, n. 46; *contra* HABICHT 2017³, pp. 83-84, no. 45 (= 1970², pp. 114-115), followed by MUCCIOLI 2013, p. 83 and BENCIVENNI 2013, p. 299, n. 2.

sued by the Nesiotic League after his death, c. 280)²⁶ shows that the deceased Ptolemy I could exceptionally still be referred to as *basileus* after his death in a text evoking his actions as a living king. The Nikouria decree offers a plausible parallel to a posthumous evocation of Ptolemy I's euergetic activity towards Ptolemais under the reign of his son. Second, this late chronology seems preferable on the ground of the presence of the epithet Theos accompanying Soter. As seen above, the chronological implications of this epithet should not be assessed in relation to the date of death of Ptolemy I, but rather against the background of the contemporaneous developments in the Ptolemaic system of royal denominations.

In this respect, one may observe that *I.Prose* 62 possibly provides the first attestation of the singular compound epithet Theos Soter across the whole Hellenistic world. When the denomination Soter (or the plural Soteres) is used of royal benefactors in the early Hellenistic period, it always appears alone, without the qualification Theos/Theoi.²⁷ To find the earliest attestations of a royal cultic epiclesis pre-

²⁶ SIG³ 390, lines 10-11: ὁ [B]ασιλεὺς καὶ Σωτὴρ Πτολεμαῖος, in a passage referring to Ptolemy I's past benefactions towards the members of the League. Another possibly posthumous use of the royal title for Ptolemy I may be attested in a bilingual statue base from Egypt: see OGIS 19 for the Greek text; VLEEMING 2011, I 68-69, no. 98 A-B for the demotic, with discussion in CANEVA 2019.

²⁷ For the singular Soter, see the honors for Seleukos I in Lemnos, mentioned in Athen. VI 254F-255A (Phylarch., *FGrHist* 81 F 29; 281/0 BC). The earliest document attesting Antiochos I's title Soter comes from Antiocheia in Persis (OGIS 233; 205 BC). According to App., *Syr.* LXV 343-344, the king received his epithet after defeating the Celts, an event to be identified with the so-called 'Battle of the Elephants' (275 or 269/8 BC). However, this denomination does not appear in the evidence of Antiochos I's reign and its importance may have grown under his successors: see MUCCIOLI 2013, pp. 119-121. For the plural, see the case of Antigonos and Demetrios honored as Soteres in Athens. The absence of the epithet Theoi is confirmed by the formulary of the decree Agora XVI 114 (304/3 or 303/2), mentioning sacrificial offerings 'to the Soteres'. An 'altar of the Soteres' was dedicated by the Athenians through a decree proposed by Stratokles in 307/6 (Diod. XX 46, 2 with the same formula without Theoi). Plut., *Demetr.* XIII 2 also quotes *verbatim* a section of a decree proposed by Dromokleides in 291/0, by which the Athenians elected an ambassador who should approach the Soter (i.e. Demetrios) by performing a sacrifice with good omens. On Stratokles and Dromokleides, see PASCHIDIS 2008, pp. 78-79, 130. On the basis of the agreement between the decrees and the formula used by Diodorus, we must conclude that Plut., *Demetr.* X 3-6 is wrong when he reports that the Athenians called Antigonos and Demetrios Theoi Soteres; note that, in the same passage, the priest in charge of their cult is referred to as 'priest of the Soteres', which must be the correct name. Finally, see also the case of Seleukos I and Antiochos I in Aigai

senting the pattern ‘Theos + epithet’, we must wait for the title Theoi Adelphoi, created for the ruling couple of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II and first attested in 272/1 BC. The probable reason why the term Theoi was added to Adelphoi and not to Soteris is that the first did not possess *per se* the religious connotation of the second.²⁸ After the death of Arsinoe in 270 BC, the epithet Theos/Theoi became once again of secondary importance in terms of productivity of new royal formulae: I can count only four occurrences of the Greek epicleris ‘Arsinoe Thea Philadelphos’ against more than fifty texts (especially dedications) for ‘Arsinoe Philadelphos’;²⁹ similarly, the compound epithet Theoi Soteris is largely outnumbered by the simple Soteris, since it only appears in few inscriptions and in a limited number of papyri containing the formula of the Ptolemaic royal oath.³⁰ Within this ideological and chronological framework, I suggest that the singular compound epithet Theos Soter may have been created after the model of the plural denomination Theoi Soteris. However, it never gained broad success because of the affirmation of the standard denomination ‘Ptolemy Soter’, which, as seen above, was propagated by more authoritative media such as the legend of numismatic issues (since 262/1) and the dating formulae of documents (since 259/8).

To conclude with, *I.Prose* 62 was plausibly issued in the period during the joint reign of the Theoi Adelphoi (c. 276-270), or during the sole reign of the widowed Ptolemy II (270-246) – most probably c. 272-260 BC. While principally celebrating the deceased founder of the city, it also testifies to the adherence of the civic institutions of Ptolemais to Ptolemy II’s contemporaneous logic of promoting the political memory of his father as the founder of a powerful and legitimate dynasty. The extant text does not speak against this interpretation, since the honors decreed by Ptolemais may well have been related to the memory of Ptolemy I – perhaps by means of the establishment of a statue, and/or of a cult space – rather than to the living

(CGRN 137; SEG LIX 1406; CANEVA 2020c; 281/0 BC), honored as Soteris, once again without Theoi. As seen above, n. 16, the Ptolemaic dedication *I.Varsovie* 50 is late and therefore not relevant to the present discussion.

²⁸ CANEVA 2020a, pp. 146-147.

²⁹ CANEVA 2014, p. 95 and 2020d, p. 26, n. 12.

³⁰ CANEVA 2020a, pp. 145-146; CANEVA – BRICAULT 2019, pp. 8-9. All the papyri preserving the royal oath in use during the reign of Ptolemy II are dated or datable to the period 260-246 BC.

king, just as was the case for the Nikouria decree. Even though this final hypothesis must remain unproven, it is tempting to suggest that *I.Prose 62* may in fact have constituted, or accompanied, the act of foundation of the oecist's cult of Ptolemy I in Ptolemais.

ABSTRACT – This paper reassesses the historical context of an Hellenistic decree from Ptolemais Hermiou in Upper Egypt, known from a copy of the Imperial period. Special attention is paid to the date of publication of the Hellenistic original and to its ideological meaning in relation to the construction of the figure of Ptolemy I as both civic and dynastic founder. Aspects of the formulary of the text together with an analysis of the institutional history of Ptolemais suggest that the decree was most probably issued during the reign of Ptolemy II. It is tempting to see this fragmentary document as closely related to the establishment of an oecist's cult of Ptolemy I in Ptolemais, even though this cult only became eponymous under Ptolemy IV.

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I collaboratori del volume LXXIII/2018 » 479

Indice del volume LXXIII/2018 » 481

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