Ritual Intercession in the Ptolemaic Kingdom
A Survey of Grammar, Semantics and Agency [1]

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ABSTRACT – This paper explains dedications in the dative and with the *hyper* formula as bearing two distinct religious meanings and social implications, while also observing that they could be used in interaction in order to express specific conceptual and social messages. The dative ritually positions the honoured rulers at the same level as traditional gods, whereas the *hyper* formula expresses ritual intercession by the gods for a third party. Ritual agents using *hyper* intended to share the merit of performing a ritual – and the consequent divine benevolence – with a third, often absent party. Besides its religious significance, performing a religious act in the name of, and for the benefit of a person also has economic and social implications. Thus ritual agents making use of the *hyper* formula could stress their social standing as well as express their personal bonds with the benefiting party. The broad perspective of the study (global and Ptolemaic perspectives; institutional and individual initiative; inscriptions and papyri) enables an encompassing understanding of the implications of dedicatory habits on the definition of the religious figure of the sovereigns, the ritual expression of social hierarchy and the intercultural encounters between Greeks and non-Greeks.

KEYWORDS – Dedications, hierarchy, intercession, intercultural encounters, ritual communication, Simon Price, status, Thebaid. Comunicazione rituale, dediche, gerarchia, incontri interculturali, intercessione, Simon Price, status, Tebaide.

1. RITUAL COMMUNICATION IN AN INTER-MEDIAL APPROACH

This paper deals with the semantic difference and pragmatic combination of the dative and *hyper* + genitive formulae in cultic honours for Hellenistic rulers, with particular attention for the latter pattern as expressing ritual intercession for a third party in the Ptolemaic kingdom [2]. The challenge of

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[2] Major contributions to the subject, with a Ptolemaic focus, are given by Fraser 1972, 226-227; Iossif 2005 (with a large selection of relevant inscriptions); Gladić 2007;

reassessing an oft-debated issue has been taken up with a special focus on two major methodological problems: (1) the lack of studies comprehensively discussing the evidence of the *hyper* formula beyond one specific set of document types (private dedications)[3], support (inscriptions) and social context (interaction between individual donors and the kings); (2) the influence of scholarly interpretations of the relationship between human and divine power focusing on the ontological issue of status between men and gods rather than on the pragmatic perspectives of ritual communication and social interaction.

While providing a general overview of ritual honours for rulers across the Hellenistic world lies out of the remit of this contribution, its aim is to deal with the two outlined methodological issues through a selection of case studies, which will set the premises for a future extensive reassessment of the phenomenon. The main argument of the paper is that status ambiguity should leave place to pragmatic flexibility as the keyword in our attempt at understanding the semantics of Greek religious terminology and its applications in the Hellenistic world. The main focus on the efficacy of communication through ritual practice rather than on status allowed Hellenistic agents to dynamically adapt the syntactic system of Greek religious language to their concrete needs. Dedicatory habits provided a general canvass, which was developed in compliance with the social needs of different groups. This implies that we should attempt to reassess obscure or problematic passages in the evidence within the socio-cultural and political habits and agendas for which their message was conceived.

While revealing cases are selected from throughout the Hellenistic world, special attention is paid to Ptolemaic evidence as its richness and variety provides a suitable terrain for exploring dynamics between global and regional trends and for comparing the use of dedicatory formulae by Greeks and non-Greeks. The first section, in which Simon Price's analysis of dedicatory formulae in the Roman imperial cult is critically reassessed,

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Fassa 2015. For the meaning of the dative in the «grammar of honours» as expressed in dedications, see Habicht 1970[2], 142-143, and Ma 2013, 17-24, esp. 18-20. A survey by Jim 2014 provides the general framework for the present analysis of the *hyper* formula. Price 1984, although mainly dealing with imperial Asia Minor, has been particularly influential for the analysis of the Hellenistic documentation as well. His theses are discussed in detail below, in section 2. Moralee 2004 and Kajava 2011 respectively provide a catalogue of inscriptions from the Roman East and an updated overview of the grammar and semantics of dedications for Roman emperors.

[3] For an introductory discussion of «private» and «public», or to better say, «official» and «non-official» or «institutional» and «non-institutional» agency in dedications, see Caneva 2014, 91-93; cf. also Ma 2013, 155-159.

sets the methodological framework for the following three case studies. These deal with the role of religious intercession for a third party in Ptolemaic inscriptions and papyri, the sociological implications of the use of *hyper* and dative dedications in second-century Upper Egypt, and the use of the *hyper* formula in intercultural contexts.

2. Questioning status ambiguity

Simon Price's masterpiece *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* is one of the most influential studies of the role played by Greek religion in the representation of individual power in the Ancient Mediterranean world. Price's most durable merit is the combination of an extensive analysis of the epigraphic evidence with the contribution of the hermeneutic tools provided by contemporaneous anthropology. By drawing in particular on Clifford Geertz' symbolic anthropology[4], Price has paved the way to a new generation of cultural studies in ancient history, replacing the previously overriding role of literature with a new focus on documentary texts and interdisciplinary approaches[5]. Another merit to be ascribed to Price is his attention to the inherent risks of borrowing interpretative categories from Christian thinking[6] to study ritual honours for rulers in ancient polytheistic societies. This change of perspective implies first of all that we take distance from criticisms of cultic honours for human beings as (1) determined by hypocrisy, adulation and impiety, (2) responding to a crisis of the traditional civic religion, and (3) lacking the component of cognitive and emotional involvement which would assumedly be a feature of true religious belief[7]. Another methodological warning is related to the need of evaluating cultic honours for human beings with a focus on how cultural and political messages were constructed and com-

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[4] Price 1984, 7-8. See in particular Geertz 1973, 89, defining culture as «a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life».

[5] Price 1984, 6, draws attention to the limits inherent in literary sources as they focus on the «attitudes of members of the Roman elite», leaving the practicalities of imperial ritual unexplored.

[6] The major contributions to the study of Hellenistic ruler cults from a Christian perspective date to the '50s: Cerfaux - Tondriau 1957 framed ruler cult as a «concurrent du christianisme»; the phenomenological approach chosen by Taeger 1957 is engaged in explaining the polarity between deified humanity (ruler cults) and humanized divinity (Christianity).

[7] Price 1984, 10-19; concerning Hellenistic ruler cults, cf. Caneva 2012, 76-77.

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municated through ritual practice, rather than through theoretical specula-
tion [8].

Price's theoretical premises led him to pose the question of the theo-
retical underpinnings of rites: «If ritual is to be seen as an embodiment of
thinking, the question arises as to the sort of knowledge which is contained
in ritual» [9]. The specification of this question concerning cultic honours
for human beings is which status these honours ascribed to sovereigns in
relation to the divine sphere: «People might erect a statue of *theos Sebastos*
('god Augustus'). Do they mean that the emperor is literally a *theos*, or
is the phrase to be reinterpreted in some manner?». Face to the choice
between a literalist and a symbolic interpretation of the problem, Price
opts for the second, more precisely for a «theory of symbolical evocation»,
which allows us to accept that «people can mean what they say without
their statements being fully determinate» [10]. Following Price's approach,
the margins of freedom acknowledged to symbolic evocation are ensured
by the incomplete overlap between ritual performance and the theoretical,
linguistic definition of status [11]. In some relevant cases for our discussion,
however, Price's generalizing focus on the cognitive backgrounds of rites
has left aside their pragmatic purposes, i.e. the context-related needs lead-
ing some specific agents to choose a ritual solution rather than another
when defining their own representation of the religious figure of a sover-
eign. The question of whether the Greeks (in general) would have counted
their rulers among the gods, although of course legitimate, has therefore
prevented Price from decisively shifting the focus from belief to practice
in the evaluation of ruler cults. These limits, if forgivable in the pioneering
work of Price, need however to be reassessed in consideration of his great

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[8] On the importance of the category of ritual efficacy in the study of ancient poly-
theisms, see the methodological introduction by Scheid 2005; for the imperial cult, cf. also
Gradel 2002.

[9] Price 1984, 8.

[10] Price 1984, 9. According to Price, another sub-category of the symbolic inter-
pretation would imply that we «see peculiar beliefs as metaphorical rather than literal,
and so would suppose that the Greeks perhaps only meant that the emperor was *like* a
god» (Price 1984, 9). This thesis underlies the category of «mortal divinity» expressed by
Chaniotis 2003 and 2007 for Hellenistic ruler cults. Accordingly, Chaniotis makes *isotheoi
timai* a central element in the understanding of the status of honoured sovereigns, which
would be hierarchically positioned between humans and gods. However, this formula has
in fact a marginal role in Greek evidence, as pointed out by Iossif 2014, 130, 132. Expres-
sions stressing the correspondence between rituals for traditional gods and for kings (as
in the formulae ὡς/καθάπερ + name of the god) shows that adequacy in relation to ritual
efficacy rather than status was at stake in the definition of cultic honours for sovereigns.
See also the discussion below and in Paul in this volume.

[11] Cf. Price 1984, 212-213, with discussion below.

impact on later scholarship in the field. Thus reconsidering Price's conclusions is of great importance if we want to replace ontological status with the social pragmatics of ritual efficacy as the core of the discussion on the religious construction of pre-Christian kingship [12].

From the opening of his book, Price makes it clear that, in his view, «imperial rituals were [...] a way of conceptualizing the world» [13]. Following contemporaneous studies on civic institutions of the Hellenistic period, Price identifies Greek cities as the protagonists in the process of establishment of cultic honours for rulers [14]. For the cities, «these cults formed a way [...] to represent to themselves their *new* masters in a *traditional* guise» [15]. Price's approach and vocabulary are embedded in the Weberian dialectics between innovation caused by individual charisma and the routinization of power negotiated with the elites as the guardians of traditions [16]. Starting from this conceptual background, Price suggests that cultic honours for rulers were intimately related to the rise of the Macedonian power in Greek cities and they were meant to solve the problem of harmonizing the *polis* traditions and values with a new kind of personal power, which ruled *de facto* over the city without being part of its cultural world [17].

According to Price, the increasing number of inscriptions recording ritual acts performed «in favour / on behalf» (*hyper*) of the rulers, rather than directly to them as recipients in the dative, fits with the proposed model as it would attest that the initial pressure imposed on cities by the rise of the kingdoms progressively settled down during the third century. This change would have taken place because the cities became more accustomed to negotiating their autonomy with a superior external author-

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[12] Cf. Caneva 2015, 98-100.

[13] Price 1984, 7.

[14] See in particular Habicht 1970[2] and, only one year after the publication of Price's work, Gauthier 1985.

[15] Price 1984, 25 (my italics).

[16] Weber 1978, 1146-1147, on the routinization of charisma. This concept is explicitly referred to in Price 1984, 58-59, with regard to the role of rituals for Augustus in objectifying, institutionalizing and thus ensuring the durability of the charismatic authority of the *princeps*.

[17] Price 1984, 26-29. Price accordingly explains the lack of Greek civic cults for archaic tyrants or for the Persian *basileus* by stating that the first could still be seen by the city elites as a by-product of the political *stasis* interior to the *polis*, the second as simply extraneous and antithetic to the *polis*' world of values. Price also draws on his model to establish a causal link between the absence of traces of cult for Argead kings in Macedonia prior to Philip and «the lack of independent city traditions [...] combined with the unproblematic nature of the traditional monarchy».

ity [18]. Using a Weberian terminology, the initial overwhelming charisma of the kings would have been progressively routinized into a system where monarchic power was more discreetly connected with the divine sphere. Later, Romans inherited and further promoted this trend by increasingly favouring the practice of rituals *hyper* their leaders and emperors [19]. Commenting on the large majority of rituals performed *hyper* the emperors in the Roman period, Price observed that, in Roman times, «language sometimes assimilated the emperor to a god, but ritual held back» [20].

As intriguing as it is, the applicability of Price's diachronic interpretation of the dynamics between *hyper* and dative formulae is limited by his focus on cities as the only agents contributing to the construction of a religious representation of monarchic power. Although partly justified by the specific historical situation of Asia Minor, which gives large space to civic documentation [21], this approach leaves aside other relevant agents such as non-civic elites, regional leagues, cross-regional networks of individuals and various types of professional/religious associations not directly controlled by civic institutions [22]. When, for instance, we combine Price's analysis of civic decrees and letters with the contribution of dedications made by individuals, the limits of his model become evident: the earliest (Ptolemaic) individual dedications with the *hyper* formula predate those addressed directly to kings and gods in the dative [23]. This chronological

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[18] Price 1984, 225-226. Price's interpretative model could fit with the progressive decline of dative formulae starting from the second century BC, but reasons for this change can also be searched in political rather than in theoretical factors: by that time, internal dynastic conflicts and the rise of Rome in the East reduced the impact of royal euergetism and paved the way to an augmentation of the role of individual benefactors (Gauther 1985, 53-66, for Greek cities; Boddez in this volume; see also below, section 4, for second-century South Thebaid).

[19] Cf. in particular Price 1984, 223 and n. 75, observing that Hellenistic offerings made to a ruler *hyper* a city or another institution, which establish a ritual equation between kings and traditional gods, are not to be found in the Roman period.

[20] Price 1984, 212-213, quoted 213.

[21] Cf. for instance Ma 2002². Similarly, Ptolemaic studies tend to focus on the individual dedications made by elite members because they represent the most abundant source type.

[22] Caneva 2014, 87-96.

[23] The oldest preserved dedications with the *hyper* formula come from Alexandria and its surroundings and probably date to the reign of Ptolemy I: *I.Ptol.Alex.* 1, dedication to Sarapis and Isis by two citizens of Alexandria (Alexandria); *OGIS* 18, dedication to Artemis Soteira by an Athenian (Kanopos) (Iossif 2005, tab. 1, nrr. 1-2); cf. Fassa 2015, 143. The only possible dative dedication from the reign of Ptolemy I might be *SEG* LIX 1507 (Iossif 2005, tab. 2, nr. 1), a dedication by an Alexandrian citizen, but the chronology is debated and a date during the second or even the first century cannot be excluded (cf. *SEG* XLIV 1507).

order can be explained in relation to the increasing success of cultic honours for sovereigns and other members of the royal house. Dedications of individuals to deified sovereigns grew more numerous as a response to the consolidation of cults established by rulers for their deceased relatives first, for themselves as the living sovereigns later [24]. Thus when we focus on individual dedications, what we observe is the progressive strengthening of the royal charisma and of its innovative power rather than a process of routinization and re-integration within civic traditions. More generally, this example shows that medium-specific analyses shed light on different and complementary trends, which should be combined when we move our attention from regional to global trends.

The impression that the interaction between *hyper* and dative dedications unfolded in complex patterns, which do not let us identify a clear-cut conceptual evolution of the honours, is confirmed even when we limit ourselves to discussing the evidence from cities of the old Greek world. Greek cities often let rituals positioning the honoured kings in the place of the gods (dative) coexist with others performed in their favour/behalf (*hyper*). Examples of such coexistence could be multiplied, yet the few cases listed below suffice to clarify a general trend. A decree from Ilion (*OGIS* 212; 281/0 BC) establishes the erection of an altar of Seleukos I and the celebration of a sacrifice to him (ll. 5-9), which seems to be combined

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[24] For the Ptolemaic construction of dynastic continuity through cults, cf. Caneva 2016a, chapters 4-5, and Caneva 2016b. *Hyper*-style dedications also served to represent dynastic continuity in terms of family bonds within the royal house. See, for instance, *SEG* XXIV 1174, a dedication by a certain Simonides to Adonis, the Dioscuri and Ptolemy I Soter, *hyper* Ptolemy II (Egypt; 270-246 BC); *OGIS* 16 (= *RICIS* 305/1702; Caneva 2014, nr. 56), dedication of a shrine of Sarapis, Isis (and?) Arsinoe Philadelphos *hyper* the living king Ptolemy II (Halikarnassos; 270-246 BC); *I.Ptol.Alex.* 14, dedication of altars and sacred precincts to the Theoi Adelphoi, Zeus Olympios and Zeus Synomosios *hyper* Ptolemy III and Berenike II, Theoi Euergetai, by two priests of Zeus (Alexandria, 243-221 BC); *I.Fayum* III 155, dedication of a sacred precinct to Arsinoe and the Theoi Euergetai *hyper* Ptolemy VIII and Kleopatra II Theoi Philometores and their children, by three Egyptians (Narmouthis, 163-145 BC). Family bonds are also expressed by *I.Ptol.Alex.* 16, where the dedication is made by a queen Berenike (II or III) *hyper* her sibling-husband Ptolemy (III or XI Alexander II: for the debated chronology, cf. A. Bernand's commentary on the text). This last use is not limited to the Ptolemies. See, for instance, the relevant entries in the Delian archives: for the Ptolemies, cf. the formula στέφανος χρυσοῦς μυρρίνης, Βερενίκης ὑπὲρ Πτολεμαίου | ἀνάθημα in *IG* XI 2, 161 B, 52, in the Artemision (with Bruneau 1970, 518, VI, for parallel cases), recording a dedication of 279 BC, probably made by the widow Berenike I in the name of her deceased husband Ptolemy I; for an Antigonid parallel, cf. the *phialai* of the festival Stratonikeia, founded in 253 BC, probably by Antigonos II for his deceased wife Stratonike, and commemorated with the formula ὑπὲρ βασιλίσσης Στρατονίκης (*IG* XI 2, 287 B, ll. 124-126, with Bruneau 1970, 561, for other cases; cf. Landucci in this volume, n. 57).

with the performance of another offering to the city goddess Athena *hyper* the king (in the fragmentary ll. 19-22)[25]. The Sardians honouring queen Laodike in 213 BC (*SEG* XXXIX 1284) decreed the erection of a sacred precinct called Laodikeion and the celebration of a festival Laodikeia (ll. 9-12) in combination with a procession and sacrifice to Zeus Genethlios for the *soteria* of the king, the queen and their children (ll. 13-15)[26]. When decreeing honours for King Attalos III (*OGIS* 332; 138-133 BC), the city of Pergamon associated cultic honours as those for the gods with a long prayer for the king's wealth, safety, victory and power[27]. In an inscription from Cyrene from the reign of Ptolemy IX Soter II and his sister Kleopatra Selene (*SEG* IX 5; 109/8 BC)[28], the decreed religious honours comprised sacrifices and prayers for the health and safety of the king, queen and their son, and sacrifices to the royal triad, their ancestors and the other gods (all in the dative) *hyper* the city[29].

Such kind of coexistence is what concerned Price when he dealt with comparable formulae of the imperial cult in Asia Minor. In this regard, Price explored textual cases where «inscriptions simply say that the sacrifices were «'of' the emperor and thus do not specify the relationship between emperor and god». According to Price, these texts point at a «deliberate blurring of the boundaries between the types of sacrifice»,

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[25] Ll. 5-9: ἱδρύσ]ασθαι δὲ καὶ βωμὸν ἐν τῆι | [ἀγορᾶι ὡς κάλλιστον ἐφ' ὧ]ι ἐπιγράψαι· βασιλέως Σε|[λεύκου Νικάτορος· θυσίαν δὲ] συντελεῖν τῶι βασιλεῖ | [Σελεύκωι …]ος τῆι δωδεκ[ά]τηι τὸν γυ|[μνασίαρχον ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ.

[26] Ll. 9-12: οἱ παρ' ὑμῶν ‖ πρεσβευταὶ ἀπέδωκαν τὸ ψήφισμα καθ' ὃ τέμενός τε Λαοδί-κειον ἀνεῖναι | ψηφίσαισθε καὶ βωμὸν ἱδρύσασθαι, ἄγειν δὲ καὶ πανήγυριν Λαοδίκεια | καθ' ἕκαστον ἔτος ἐν τῶι Ὑπερβερεταίωι μηνὶ τῆι πεντεκαιδεκάτηι. Ll. 13-15: πομπὴν καὶ θυσίαν συντελεῖν Διὶ Γενεθλίωι ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ | ἡμῶν βασιλέως Ἀντιόχου καὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας καὶ τῶν παιδίων ‖ σωτηρίας.

[27] Divinizing honours included, among others, the erection of *agalmata* of the king in the temple of Asklepios Soter, so that Attalos may be *synnaos theos* of the god (ll. 7-9), and the offering of frankincense to the king on the altar of Zeus Soter (ll. 11-13). The prayer is recorded at ll. 28-33: καὶ τοὺς ἱερεῖς καὶ τὰς ἱερε[ί]ας ἀνοίξαντας τοὺς ναοὺς τῶν θε|ῶν καὶ ἐπιθύοντας {τὸν} λιβανωτὸν εὔχεσθαι νῦν τε καὶ εἰς τὸν ἀεὶ χρόνον ‖ διδόναι βασιλεῖ Ἀττάλωι Φιλομήτορι καὶ Εὐεργέτηι ὑγίειαν σωτηρίαν νίκην | κράτος καὶ […] κατ[ὰ π]όλ[εμον] κ[α]ὶ ἄρχοντι καὶ ἀμυνομένωι, καὶ τὴν βα|σιλείαν αὐτοῦ διαμ< έ>ν[ε]ιν [κατὰ] τὸν ἅπαντα αἰῶνα ἀβλαβῆ μετὰ πάσης ἀσφα|λείας. Cf. also Hamon 2003 and Paul in this volume for a more detailed discussion of the decreed honours.

[28] This chronology of the inscription is preferable (instead of the period 145-140 BC, for which cf. *SEG* XVI 865) because of the final date of the decree and of the denomination Theoi Soteres for Ptolemy and Kleopatra, which is not attested for Ptolemy VIII and Kleopatra II. Cf. Bagnall 1972; Bielman - Lenzo 2016, 197-198. I am grateful to Giuseppina Lenzo for sharing with me the results of her research on this inscription.

[29] Cf. respectively cl. 1, ll. 8-13 for the rites in favour of the royal house and ll. 19-26 for those to them and the other gods.

«a way of evading precision as to the relationship between the emperor and the gods»[30]. Ambivalence would be ever greater when inscriptions record that «sacrifices were made 'to' the gods and the Sebastoi 'on behalf of' the eternal perpetuation and security of their house. As the Sebastoi, the emperors collectively, include the living emperor, this sacrifice to the Sebastoi on behalf of their house necessarily involves an ambiguity between the two types of sacrificial act». Finally, commenting on *I.Ephesos* 1a 26 (reign of Commodus), where annual sacrifices to Artemis and Commodus are made «in favour of the eternal continuance» of the emperor, Price concluded that in this case «ambiguity becomes a direct contravention […]. Emphasis is again given to the ambiguous status of the emperor»[31].

The assumption that ambiguity concerning the status of the honoured emperors was in some cases a deliberate strategy of the authors of the texts has won consensus among scholarship for Hellenistic and Roman rulers[32]. However, the method by which Price has reached this conclusion needs to be critically reassessed. Hellenistic evidence on the ritual practice of cultic honours for rulers shows that the relationship between human and divine power was thematized in terms of efficacy rather than of status[33]. Efficacy was expressed at two levels: the efficacy of human rulers in the context of decisive political and military interventions in favour of local communities, which could be equated to that of divine epiphanies; the efficacy of ritual communication with the divine, which implied that cultic honours for rulers were modelled after local religious practice for traditional gods.

Face to this documentary background, Price's attempt to define the relationship between individual holders of power and the divine sphere in terms

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[30] Price 1984, 215. Price insists on ambiguity at pp. 210-216, 224-225, and on ambivalence at pp. 232-233, again with concern to the interaction between offerings to and in favour of the rulers. Despite his attention to ambiguous solutions, however, Price does not simplistically reject the assumption that a fundamental difference existed between dative and *hyper*-dedications (cf. p. 46).

[31] *I.Ephesos* 1a 26, ll. 8-10: θύειν τῇ τε προκαθηγε[μόνι τῆς πόλεως ἡμῶν θεᾷ Ἀρτέμιδι καὶ τῷ με|γίστ]ῳ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν καὶ θεῶν ἐν[φανεστάτῳ Α]ὐτοκράτορι Καίσαρι Μ(άρκῳ) Αὐρ(ηλίῳ) Κομμόδῳ Ἀντωνείνῳ [Σεβαστῷ Εὐσεβεῖ Εὐτυχεῖ τὰς κατ' ἔτος θυ||[σί]ας ὑπὲρ τῆς αἰωνίου διαμονῆς [αὐτοῦ. Quote from Price 1984, 216. Against this conclusion with regard to the Roman evidence, cf. Kajava 2011, 583, rightfully arguing in favour of an encompassing interpretation of the *hyper* and dative formulae as complementary and non-contradictory tools of a unique religious and communicative system.

[32] Limiting this list to a few examples concerning the Hellenistic period, cf. Iossif 2005, 238; Gladić 2007, 114-117; Fassa 2015, 142.

[33] Cf. for further discussion Caneva 2015, 98-100, arguing that context-specific political agendas are evident in cases where the positioning of the king in relation to traditional gods is discussed, as in the ithyphallic hymn for Demetrios Poliorketes.

of hierarchical status still depends on the assumption that in Greek religion, the performance of ritual practice needed in general to be accompanied by a theoretical reflection on what characterizes and separates the human, heroic and divine spheres [34]. This general approach has been questioned by recent scholarship and the ongoing shift of focus from status to communication in the interpretation of ritual practice has had important ramifications concerning the evaluation of ruler cults [35].

Of course this observation does not imply refusing *in abstracto* that in some cases, ambiguity might have been a deliberate rhetorical strategy of communication, but is a reminder that this hypothesis should be always checked against the background of the communicative and socio-political traditions in which the message was embedded. Following this approach, ambiguity loses part of its relevance when we consider that cultural representations of the holders of supreme power are multi-faceted compositions, combining a variety of political and cultural elements. Not differently from Commodus at Ephesus, Hellenistic monarchs were at once the holders of a function equating them to the gods, as the guarantors of the wealth of their kingdoms, and mortal beings in need of divine protection, which could be bestowed upon them through an act of ritual intercession by a benevolent and grateful individual or community. The category of religious intercession will be further explored in the following sections, starting from an evaluation of its function in Ptolemaic evidence. The exclusive focus on royal recipients will be replaced with a broader attention to the interaction between ritual agents and a third party benefiting from the religious action.

3. Religious and social implications of ritual intercession

A large number of dedications, prayers and sacrifices recorded in inscriptions and papyri document the use of the Greek formula *hyper* + the genitive in contexts in which ritual agents intended to specify the persons or

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[34] A similar criticism against Price's theoretical focus is expressed by Gradel 2002, 27-32, esp. 28: «As stressed by Simon Price, classical antiquity had no generally accepted definition of what a god actually was in absolute terms, or what it took to become one. Price has taken this ambiguity or uncertainty as enabling worship of the emperor in the first place. I cannot completely agree; it seems significant that the question 'what is god?' (i.e. in absolute terms) was discussed only in philosophical writings, which in fact form the basis of Price's enquiry. And to this genre, in my view, it belonged: there is no evidence that it was ever of relevance to actual cultic practice».

[35] Cf. Versnel 2011, 456-460; Iossif 2014, 132-133.

goods that were expected to take benefit from divine protection and help. A recent comprehensive study by Theodora Suk Fong Jim provides a useful overview of the place occupied by this formula in Greek religion. As stated by Jim, «*hyper* can be rendered 'on behalf of', 'in the interest of', or 'for the sake of' the persons named in the genitive. Its primary function was to specify the direction in which the *charis* associated with the offering should flow, as if to make sure that the gods would dispense their favours to the right persons» [36]. The need to explicitly direct the intervention of the gods towards a certain person (and/or oneself in some cases) is associated with moments of danger and crisis («high-intensity» offerings) or, more often, can be the expression of a precautionary initiative in favour of persons close to the author of the dedication («low-intensity» offerings) [37].

In the most ancient occurrences, which are known in a limited number from the Archaic and Classical periods, agents using the *hyper* formula wished to bestow divine protection upon themselves and their relatives. In contexts where *hyper* is used, the fact of acting *on behalf of* family members is closely related to the expected effect of acting *in favour of* them. Thus *hyper* implies that divine favour is bestowed not only, or not primarily, on the actual agent of the rite, but on a group of persons who are important for him. This function is well attested throughout the life of the formula, down to the Hellenistic and Roman period. However, the early Hellenistic period marks a significant increase in the use of the *hyper* formula, which is accompanied by the broadening of its contexts of use. Evidence from the Hellenistic and Roman periods shows that the personal goodwill and commitment manifested through the *hyper* formula spread beyond the limited field of family bonds, to embrace a larger area of applications: evoking divine protection became an act establishing a special relationship between an individual or institutional agent and a considerably larger set of recipients, including social groups (spontaneous or institutional, such as a *polis*) [38] and individuals other than family members – most notably persons occupying a higher social ranking than the agent – to end up with non-human properties, such as animals and crops [39]. Divine benefits could remain unspoken and generic, or be specified (*e.g.* health, safety, victory, etc.) [40].

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[36] Jim 2014, quote 617.
[37] Jim 2014, 618 (healing), 626 (after danger), 631 (on «low- and high-intensity offerings»), 633 (vows).
[38] Jim 2014, 618-619.
[39] Jim 2014, 623-624. Cf. *I.Th.Sy.* 309 (Philae, 250-200 BC), a dedication to Isis, Sarapis, Harpokrates and Ammon the Saviour Gods for the safety of the captured elephants (ll. 2-3: ὑπὲρ | [τ]ῆς τῶν ἐλεφάντων σωτηρίας).
[40] Jim 2014, 622-623, 625, with a clear predominance of cases from Asia Minor.

The persons benefiting from the ritual did not need to be present [41]. It was the function of *hyper* to presentify them, by making them virtual agents of the ritual act and therefore sharers of the divine favour that was expected to be caused by it. Of course the implications of this virtual agency were not only symbolic, but also economic and, as such, would play a binding social role when *hyper*-style dedications involved persons other than the restricted circle of the family members. I propose that these points made the formula a powerful tool of communication between ritual agents and their social environment, for two important reasons. First, because the *hyper* formula allowed the actual ritual agent to share the merits of his pious act with the benefiting parties, it could be used to express a link of gratitude and good-will with them, possibly expecting something in return. In some cases where the ritual action was charged with legal value, the fact that responsibility was virtually shared with the king also functioned as a device to ensure the legitimacy of the action, as was the case for ritual manumissions of slaves by consecration to gods in the Seleucid East [42]. The second point to bear in mind is that because ritual acts performed *hyper* a third party were often recorded on stone, ritual intercession could act as a way by which ritual agents publicly displayed their link of goodwill and reciprocity with persons occupying higher ranks of the social hierarchy. Rites celebrated *hyper* a third person could therefore be used to promote reciprocity and even to claim social prestige, if the benefiting person was acknowledged a high-standing role within the community which could attend the ritual act, or read its record on an inscribed stone. The economic implication of performing a ritual act or of dedicating a ritual object in name of and for the advantage of, a third person certainly played a part in this process, by allowing the agent to advertise his own wealth. The semantics of religious intercession therefore made the *hyper* formula a suitable tool to establish bonds of *philia* with superiors and to distinguish oneself among peers: in short, to promote ritual agents in a competitive social system.

The social power of the *hyper* formula helps us understand why a significant part of its attestations in the Hellenistic and Roman periods

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[41] In some limit cases, the ritual act could be performed on behalf of a dead person. This notably happens in relation to a vow made by a person who could later not fulfil it (Jim 2014, 626-628).

[42] *I.Estremo Oriente* 191-200 from Susiana (in nrr. 193 and 197 the name of the divine recipient of the act, the goddess Nanaia, is preserved) and 280 (= *RICIS* 405/0101, to Sarapis *hyper* Antiochos, Stratonike and their offspring; Ma 2014, 126-130) from Gurgan, Hyrkania. Cf. Caneva - Delli Pizzi 2015 for a general overview of ritual processes of slave manumission by consecration in temples in the Hellenistic and Roman Eastern Mediterranean.

appears in the evidence of ritual action for rulers and emperors, who occupied the top of social hierarchy and represented its ultimate source of legitimacy. Social dynamics within Hellenistic courts were typically dominated by a twofold pattern of vertical *philia* between kings and elite members and horizontal competition for prestige between peers[43]. The exchange of services for socio-political privileges played a primordial role in fashioning the relationship between the king and his collaborators as well as between agents occupying different ranks in the social hierarchy. The mismatch between the ideally horizontal link established by *philia* and the different potential of the involved parties when it came to making and paying back favours, made gift-exchange an important device in the social construction of hierarchy. Within this system, intercession for the benefit of a superior provided a solution to optimize the effort and expenses met by ritual agents. By making a dedication or an offering *hyper* a higher-ranking third person, ritual agents would gain social prestige at a two-fold level: by drawing attention to their own religious piety and financial capacities and by publicly displaying their proximity to the sovereigns or to other holders of high social status.

Commenting on the use of the *hyper* formula for Hellenistic monarchs, Jim observes that «by channeling the *charis* to the *hegemones*, these offerings were expressions of goodwill towards the monarchs, and not prayers for monarchs who were in illness or trouble». Besides drawing attention to the special bond of gratitude, benevolence and loyalty expressed by the *hyper* formula, Jim's observation also highlights an important social implication of religious intercession: that the ritual act performed by a person, a group of persons or an institution *hyper* the rulers did not respond to an imminent crisis of the royal power («high-intensity offerings»), but was a precautionary evocation of divine protection on the king. In other words, the possibility that subjects and allies celebrated religious intercession for the king gave voice to their goodwill without contradicting the contemporaneous representation of legitimate kingship as based on success on the battlefield and in the administration of the kingdom. Evidence shows that gods were expected to directly bestow their favour and protection upon kings because of their piety and virtues[44]. Thus the religious intercession performed by subjects was not meant to counterbalance a deficit in the special relationship between kings and gods; rather, it would advertise the

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[43] Cf. Strootman 2014, esp. 147-186, on these dynamics in Hellenistic court societies.
[44] Cf. Diod. XVIII 28, 6, on divine support for Ptolemy I as being justified by his *arete* and equity towards his *philoi*.

commitment and loyalty of the subjects, who decided to share the merits of their own religious actions with their sovereigns.

Jim's overview of the place of *hyper* in Greek religions gives new impetus to an encompassing study of rites performed *hyper* a third person, either holding royal status or not, across a large spectrum of sources and social contexts. Dedications made by individuals *hyper* members of the Ptolemaic family have attracted the attention of many scholars because of their high number in comparison with other Hellenistic kingdoms [45]. However, these documents are only one part of a larger set of records of ritual action (*i.e.* dedications, offerings, prayers) performed by individuals *hyper* a third party holding a superior rank in the social hierarchy. Within this broader framework we can fully understand the communicative significance of the *hyper* formula when used by individuals, and possibly the reasons by which this pattern of communication reached precocious and large success in the Ptolemaic kingdom.

Ptolemaic papyri considerably enrich the epigraphic documentation of prayers and offerings performed *hyper* third persons. Authors of Ptolemaic petition letters often recurred to the rhetorical argument of religious intercession in the attempt to win the goodwill and support of Ptolemaic officials. A famous example comes from *P.Cair.Zen.* I 59034 (257 BC), a letter in which Zoilos of Aspendos asks the *dioiketes* Apollonios to take up the task of erecting a new Serapeum. The god Sarapis had repeatedly appeared to Zoilos while, as he states in order to gain Apollonios' benevolence, he was busy honouring the god Sarapis for Apollonios' health and success with king Ptolemy [46]. Having no financial resources to accomplish the divine order, and after having repeatedly suffered from severe illness as a divine punishment for his disobedience to the god, Zoilos asks Apollonios to build the Serapeum in his place and, in order to convince the possible donor, he insists on the advantages that he will get from this initiative: the new priest of Sarapis shall sacrifice on the altar of Sarapis *hyper* Apollonios (and perhaps his relatives) [47]; moreover, Sarapis' favour would increase Apollonios' health and success with the king as a consequence of his act of piety towards the god [48].

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[45] Cf. in particular Iossif 2005; Fassa 2015.

[46] Ll. 2-4: Ἐμοὶ συμβέβηκεν | θεραπεύοντι τὸν θεὸν Σάραπιν περὶ τῆς σῆς ὑγιείας καὶ εὐ[η]μερίας τῆς | πρὸς τὸμ βασιλέα Πτολεμαῖον.

[47] Ll. 7-8: κα[ὶ] ἱ[ερέα] ἐπιστατεῖν κ[αὶ] | ἐπιβωμίζειν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν.

[48] Ll. 18-21: Καλῶς οὖν ἔχει, Ἀπολλώνιε, ἐπακολουθῆσαί σε τοῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ | θεοῦ προστάγμασιν, ὅπως ἂν εὐίλατός σοι ὑπάρχων ὁ Σάραπις πολλῶι σε || μείζω παρὰ τῶι βασιλεῖ καὶ ἐνδοξότερον μετὰ τῆς τοῦ σώματος ὑγιείας | ποιήσηι. Zoilos only ascribes himself the role of supervising the whole business, while the prestige of the initiative will be entirely

The same logic of exchange between religious piety and social reward appears in a contemporaneous letter of the priests of Aphrodite in Aphrodito*polis* (Atfih) to Apollonios (*PSI* IV 328 = *P.Zen.Pestm.* 50; 257 BC). Here the *dioiketes* is asked to send one hundred talents of myrrh for the burial of the holy cow Hesis/Isis, which will make him gain more success with the king thanks to the divine support of the goddess[49]. Promise of divine benevolence is combined with the mention of prayers in favour of the addressee in the petition *SB* XXVI 16742 (Arsinoites; 140-139 BC). The sender of this letter, the priest Petosiris, tries to win the support of Sarapion by stating that he prays every day for him so that he may be healthy and have success with the king and queen[50].

This brief overview of religious intercession for a third party in Ptolemaic evidence can be completed with a few examples from the corpus of *proskynemata* inscribed in Egyptian temples[51]. The Greek evidence from the temple of Isis at Philae follows a clear syntactic structure, where the name of the author appears in the nominative and the persons benefiting from the ritual act in the genitive. In most specimens, the *proskynema* is performed (in Greek, «made» or «written») for family members. Just as for *hyper*-style dedications, however, other persons, with whom the author wanted to express a special personal bond, could be mentioned in the text[52]. This category may include, among others, army comrades and superiors, but also kings and members of the royal family[53].

Religious intercession expressed by the *hyper* formula was part of a communicative strategy meant to establish reciprocity between the ritual agent and a third person. The latter usually enjoyed higher social prestige than the person taking the ritual initiative. Sovereigns occupied a primordial place in this communicative system, as the royal house represented at

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bestowed on Apollonios. Cf. also below, section 5, on the role of *hyper* in relation to the expression of ritual agency.

[49] L. 6: αὐτὴ [the goddess] δέ σοι δοίη ἐπαφροδισίαν πρ[ὸς τὸν βασι]λέα.

[50] Ll. 5-10: <οὐ> παραλεί|πομεν καθ᾽ ἡμέραν εὐχ[ό]|μενοι τοῖς θεοῖς ὑπὲρ σοῦ | ὅπως ὑγιαίνης καὶ εὐημερῆς | τὸν πάντα χρόνον παρὰ | τῶι βασιλεῖ καὶ τῆι βασιλίσσηι.

[51] On *proskynemata* in Greco-Roman Egypt, cf. Geraci 1971; Bernand 1994; Frankfurter 2010, 534-535.

[52] Cf. *e.g.* *I.Philae* 28 (94 BC?): Ἠπιόδω[ρος ἥ]κω πρ[ὸς] | τὴν κυρίαν Ἶ]σ[ιν τὴ]ν ἐν Φίλαις, | τὸ προσκ[ύνημα πο]ιῶ [τ]ῶν ἀδελ[φῶν κα[ὶ τῆς γ]υν[αικὸς καὶ τῆ]ς μητρ[ὸ]ς, ‖ ἐπ᾽ [ἀ]γα[θ]ῶ[ι (ἔτους)] κ΄ [...].

[53] For superiors in the social hierarchy, cf. *I.Philae* 14, made for Eraton, *syngenes*, *archiereus* and prophet of Isis at Philae (89 BC). For kings, cf. *e.g.* *I.Philae* 50 (69 BC), an act of worship made by a military lieutenant: βασιλέως Πτολε|μαίου θεοῦ Φιλο|πάτορος Φιλαδέλφου |καὶ τῆς βασιλίσσης ‖ καὶ τῶν τέκνων | τὸ προσκύνημα | παρὰ τῆι Ἴσιδι τῆι | κυρίᾳ ἔγραψεν | Λυσίμαχος πάρεδρος ‖ (ἔτους) ιβ΄, Μεσορὴ ιβ΄.

once the top and the premise of the whole hierarchy of the kingdom. Even when the kings were not directly concerned, however, the hierarchical gap associated with religious intercession could also be stressed by the sender of the letter as a rhetorical device to stimulate the addressee's benevolence through a declaration of modesty and submission [54].

At this point it is necessary to reflect on the different public for which private letters documented by papyri and epigraphic dedications were thought. While the message of the first was directed to the person with whom the author of the act of religious intercession wished to establish a bond of reciprocity, ritual acts memorized on stone were made visible to a larger public: the whole local community who could read it on place. Paradoxically, when the royal family is concerned, we can wonder whether the information regarding the act of religious intercession ever reached its addressees, unless the rulers visited the place or the author of the dedication (or someone for him) took the initiative of informing them about it. This was certainly the case for dedications of a certain importance [55], but minor dedications, especially if performed far from the royal residence, were primarily meant to be known by the members of the local community. This consideration draws attention to the fact that the function of displaying personal bonds of reciprocity with a (possibly absent) person of higher social status did not only act as a manifestation of loyalty towards this person, but was also, and in some cases principally, meant to share a message at the regional level of the community within which the author of the dedication wished to position himself.

Honours mentioned in civic decrees were communicated to their royal recipients through letters delivered by ambassadors. Conversely, the inscriptions displayed in the cities were meant to share with the local community the message that a bond of reciprocal benevolence and support existed between the kings and the parties holding local power. When applied to the Ptolemaic kingdom, this pattern of communication needs to be adapted to contexts in which the role played by civic institutions was almost non-existent (as in Egypt) or, as in the oversea dominions, was strongly mediated by networks of Ptolemaic *philoi*, administrators and officials connecting the centre and the peripheries of the kingdom. The important role of *poleis* in Seleucid and Attalid Asia Minor was unparal-

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[54] On the epistolary rhetoric of Zoilos, cf. Renberg - Bubelis 2011, 179-188.
[55] Cf. below, section 5, for a case of this type (*I.Prose* 39). Interestingly, in this case the letter of the author of the dedication is recorded on stone for the larger public of the visitors of the temple.

leled in the Ptolemaic kingdom [56], where indigenous cities never achieved the political autonomy of a *polis* and the only newly founded Greek city in the *chora* was Ptolemais Hermiou. The dominating model of organization and exploitation of Ptolemaic Egypt was based on village communities and on the dissemination of military *klerouchoi* and garrisons, the last often operating in close contact with Egyptian temples [57]. Outside Egypt, the Ptolemies proved able to interact with the local *polis*-based systems, although they often imposed a superior level of centralized control through a network of persons directly depending on, or related to the royal house [58].

The centralistic administration of the Ptolemaic kingdom and the vertical structure of its hierarchy can be seen as a decisive factor in the development of interpersonal relations of trust and collaboration as the fundamental sociological unit of Ptolemaic society [59]. Within this framework, the link of personal bond expressed by the preposition *hyper* in Greek religious terminology provided a suitable linguistic and ritual device to express reciprocity and proximity between the members of the Ptolemaic social hierarchy, from its top represented by the royal house in Alexandria down to the members of local communities. It is therefore not surprising that the habit of ritual intercession for a third party, as documented in individual dedications, originated in the area of the Ptolemaic capital, Alexandria, as a means of communication by which members of the rising Ptolemaic elite could establish or display a personal bond with the royal family. This practice then spread throughout the Ptolemaic kingdom and beyond [60], where it coexisted with the similar habit of Greek *poleis* of performing ritual action *hyper* the Hellenistic dynasts as part of their institutional negotiation for royal benefits.

Individual religious intercession flourished in Hellenistic Egypt because of the special social and administrative environment of the Ptole-

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[56] For the role of *poleis* in Asia Minor, cf. Boffo 1985; Capdetrey 2007, 191-224.

[57] Davoli 2010; Fischer-Bovet 2014.

[58] See, for instance, the intensive programme of (re)foundation of strategic harbours in the Eastern Mediterranean at the time of the Chremonidean War. On the other hand, the suppression of the Cypriot kingdoms proves that the Ptolemaic administration could also opt for a significant rupture with local traditions in order to implement a more centralised controlling system in the subjected areas (cf. now Papantoniou 2012, with previous references). Social interactions expressed by honorific dedications interestingly echo this administrative model, as shown by Dumke - Pfeiffer 2015 in their study of statue dedications in Palaepaphos.

[59] Interpersonal values of care, honesty and justice also play an important role in idealizing descriptions of the Ptolemaic administration, as shown by a memorandum of a *dioiketes* to his subordinate (probably an *oikonomos*) in *P.Tebt.* I 703 (210 BC), ll. 262-281: cf. Schubart 1937 on the idealizing discourse on the good king and Crawford 1978 on its adaptation to the ranks of Ptolemaic administration.

[60] As shown by Fassa 2015, Isiac cults were one major factor of this trend.

maic kingdom. While the habit of performing rites *hyper* a third party was not different here from the contemporaneous practice in Greek cities, different dynamics were developed to deal with the needs of non-institutional agents, such as individual members of the elite and their regional networks. In the following section, a case study from second-century Upper Egypt will better clarify this model of interaction with a focus on regional networks at the crossroads between Ptolemaic army and Egyptian temples. The analysis will confirm that the shifting position of the honoured kings in relation to the divine sphere, as expressed by the alternative patterns of dative and *hyper* formulae, responded to the communicative strategies of the ritual agents rather than to ambiguity (deliberate or not) with regard to the definition of the religious status of the king.

4. SECOND-CENTURY DEDICATIONS AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN THE BUFFER ZONE BETWEEN THEBAID AND NUBIA

In the decades following the secession of Upper Egypt under the indigenous dynasty of Haronnophris and Chaonnophris (206/5-181 BC), the Ptolemies reorganized their control over the southern borders of the kingdom by increasing their military presence and by strengthening the links between the army and local temple hierarchies [61]. As documented by a corpus of Greek inscriptions from Egyptian temples between Thebes and the Dodekaschoinos (the region at the border with Nubia), local detachments of the Ptolemaic army were reinforced and created anew in the region around the first Cataract, and at least a part of the troops may have stationed inside, or nearby historical or renewed Egyptian sanctuaries. The Ptolemies ensured a strong point of contact between local temples and Ptolemaic troops by appointing military officers and administrators as high-ranking priests in the local temples, thus enabling the same reliable persons to control both systems from inside. In some documented cases, these key appointments were awarded to Egyptians, a policy increasing the prestige and influence of Ptolemaic governors to the eyes of the indigenous priests and population [62].

Dedicatory inscriptions from the southern part of Thebaid reveal that euergetic initiative was taken up directly by Ptolemaic officers and troops

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[61] For the history of this period cf. in general Huß 2001, 506-513. For Egyptian revolts under Ptolemy V, cf. Veïsse 2004, 7-26.

[62] Dietze 2000; Clarysse 2010, 283-285; cf. more Pfeiffer 2011 and Fischer-Bovet 2014, 238-300, for the social status and networks of Ptolemaic soldiers in the Egyptian *chora*; 301-328, for the interaction between army and temples; 329-362 and tab. A.2, for the euergetic role of soldiers in temples.

for the building and restoration of the temples. The fact that the army, and especially its elite, performed an active role in the euergetic practice towards local temples, a field usually limited to royal initiative, is a sign of the emergence of a regional hierarchical system, where euergetism provided the higher-ranking members of the local community with a possibility to gain and display prestige and power. While this regional hierarchy always remained part of the centralized administrative and social system of the Ptolemaic kingdom (from which it drew its legitimacy), the distance from the centre and the special socio-political conditions of the region made it interesting for the royal house to partly waive its right to exert direct control on the land by leaving space to, and even promoting with reward and privileges, the initiative of individual agents acting in compliance with the royal interests. This trend was accompanied by the diffusion of a particular dedicatory habit whereby members of the local Ptolemaic establishment performed dedications concerning both their superiors and the royal house, but placing them in different positions in relation to the celebrated rite. In the inscriptions of this small but intriguing dossier, religious intercession was carried out in favour of (*hyper*) high-ranking members of the Ptolemaic elite, while the Ptolemaic royal family was referred to in the dative, together with the gods worshipped in the local Egyptian temples [63]. The interest of this dedicatory pattern is increased by the fact that, for the period that interests us, Ptolemaic dedications referring to the royal family in the dative almost exclusively come from the Thebaid [64]. Such combina-

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[63]   Besides the dossier from Thebaid, I know only two other cases of this dedicatory pattern, which confirm its association with the social life of contemporaneous Ptolemaic garrisons: *IG* XII 3, 466 + *IG* XII, Suppl., 1390 (Thera); *OGIS* 103 (Ptolemais Hermiou). For the rest, dedications made to rulers *hyper* a third person (or group of persons) usually mention living sovereigns in the *hyper* formula and their function is related to a message of dynastic continuity (cf. above, n. 24). A different case is provided by *OGIS* 31, an Alexandrian dedication to Arsinoe Philadelphos by Thestor *hyper* himself and his family (Caneva 2014, nr. 11). However, the presence of family members places the dedication in a different context than the inscriptions examined here. Ritual intercession for the king together with another person or group constitutes still another attested configuration of the use of the *hyper* formula in Ptolemaic evidence, geographically limited to the Arsinoites nome in the first decades of the first century BC: *I.Prose* 31, *hyper* Ptolemy X Alexander and the *syngenes* Lysianos (Soknopaiou Nesos, 95 BC); *I.Fayum* I 84, *hyper* Ptolemy X Alexander, Berenike III and their children, and *hyper* the relatives of the donor, an Egyptian priest (Karanis, 95 BC); *I.Fayum* III 203, *hyper* Ptolemy IX Soter II and *hyper* the relatives of the donor (Arsinoites, 88-80 BC). One can notice that in the first case, the high-ranking member of the elite appears directly after the name of the king, while the donor's family is mentioned separately, at the end of the dedication, thus reserving a prominent position to the king himself.

[64]   Fassa 2015, 145-146.

tion of regional specificities may point at a correlated development. The working hypothesis is that the new dedicatory habit came into use to respond to some specific needs of the Ptolemaic establishment in second-century Thebaid, which were caused by the particular social situation of the region. In order to test this hypothesis, I first discuss two inscriptions (*I.Th.Sy.* 302-303) relating to the same donor, Herodes son of Demophon (*Tab. 1*) [65]. The other documents pertaining to the same dossier are then showcased in *Tab. 2* and briefly commented upon as paralleled evidence.

From the earlier inscription, *I.Th.Sy.* 302 (= *OGIS* 111; *I.Louvre* 14; *SB* V 8878; 150-145 BC), we learn that Herodes was a member of the Ptolemaic army holding the aulic title τῶν διαδόχων [66]; his family had come to Egypt from Pergamon and his charges were not only of military and administrative nature, but also religious, as he was prophet of Khnubis and *archistolistes* in the shrines of Elephantina, Abaton and Philae. The occasion of the dedication recorded in *I.Th.Sy.* 302 was the annual gathering, at the Setis Island (Es-Sehel, near Aswan/Syene), of a religious association including the priests of the five *phylai* for the cults of Khnum Nebieb («The Great, Lord of Elephantina») and the Ptolemaic dynasty [67]. On that occasion, the association also celebrated the birthday of Boethos son of Nikostratos, a Carian (Chrysaorian) member of the upper levels of the Ptolemaic elite (ἀρχισωματοφύλαξ), *strategos* of the Thebaid and founder of the settlements Philometoris and Kleopatra in the Triakontaschoinos region, south of the first Cataract [68]. Boethos was also the person in whose favour the association performed its offering, which was directed to the royal house (in the dative) together with a list of local deities, referred to with both their Greek and Egyptian name. Following a rhetorical model commonly attested in honor-

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[65] For a more detailed discussion of the Herodes dossier, cf. Mooren 1977, 127-129, nr. 0149, with a focus on court hierarchy; Dietze 2000 on the presence of Ptolemaic soldiers in Egyptian temples of the Thebaid; Heinen 2000, 129-139, on Boethos, the benefiting party of the dedication *I.Th.Sy.* 302; Koemoth 2006 with a focus on the interaction between Greek and Egyptian gods; Gorre 2009, 5-9, nr.. 1, esp. 8-9, concerning Herodes' charges as an Egyptian priest; Fischer-Bovet 2014, esp. 322-323 and 337-339; Pfeiffer 2011, 241-244; Pfeiffer 2015, 132-136, nr. 25, and 140-145, nr. 27. The same Herodes dedicated an Egyptian offering table to Harbaktes and the *synnaoi theoi* in Tentyris (Dendara), around 163 BC (*SB* III 6045 = *I.Portes du désert* 23; Gorre, text 1) and probably a stele in Hiera Sykaminos (Maharraka, Nubia) in the same period as *Th.Sy.* 302 (*SB* I 1918; Gorre, text 2).

[66] This was the second lowest aulic title of the Ptolemaic elite at the time, for which cf. Mooren 1977, 36.

[67] For the interpretation of [ἱερεῖς τῆς πεν]ταφυλίας at line 20 in this sense rather than concerning only «the priests of the fifth *phyle*», cf. Heinen 2000, 134.

[68] On Boethos as founder of cities, a type of activity usually limited to royal initiative, cf. Heinen 2000; Pfeiffer 2011, 239-241.

ific decrees and dedications, honours for Boethos are justified in relation to his *eunoia* towards the king and the royal family. The special link between Boethos and the sovereigns is stressed by the celebration of Boethos' anniversary on the same occasion of the customary local festivals *hyper* the royal family. This extraordinary privilege was granted by the sovereigns through a royal law, which is mentioned by the association on the stele [69].

The later inscription *I.Th.Sy.* 303 (= *OGIS* 130; *SB* V 8394) is similar to the first. Their differences, however, are particularly important for our discussion. By the time of this new dedication (143-142 BC), Herodes, now defining himself as Berenikeus, perhaps in relation to a demos in Ptolemais [70], had reached the high social rank previously held by Boethos: ἀρχισωματοφύλαξ and *strategos* of the Thebaid [71]. Again, the dedication is made by Herodes together with the members of the association gathering at the Setis Island (here called the Island of Dionysos), who are now named Basilistai [72]. In this case, however, the divine recipients of the religious act (in the dative) only include the gods of the first Cataract – this time in a reverse Egyptian/Greek order [73] – while the royal family is mentioned at the beginning of the text as the part in whose name the dedication was made, and who would derive divine favour from it (*hyper*). The text makes it clear that the members of the association, both Greeks and Egyptians, had to provide the money for the libations and sacrifices on the customary days and for the erection of the stele, which was meant to record the religious act performed by the group.

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[69] The integration εἰς τιμὴν at l. 24 (ὅπως ἄγωσι[ν εἰς τιμὴν Πτολεμαίου τ]ε τοῦ | βασιλέως κα[ὶ] τ[ῆ]ς [β]ασιλίσση[ς] καὶ τῶν | τέκνων αὐτῶν) has no parallel in the extant evidence. Comparison with the texts discussed below, at section 5, suggests to replace εἰς τιμὴν with ὑπέρ. The slightly shorter line does not make any problem in relation to the average line length of the inscription. On the royal law granting Boethos the right of having his birthday celebrated on the occasion of festivals related to the Ptolemaic dynasty, cf. Heinen 2000, 135.

[70] Mooren 1977, 127.

[71] In the meantime, Boethos ascended to the rank of *syngenes*, the highest of the Ptolemaic court hierarchy: cf. Heinen 2000, 126, commenting on *P.UB Trier* S 135-1, col. I, l. 4 (129 BC).

[72] On the Basilistai in Southern Egypt cf. now Fischer-Bovet 2014, 287-289. Ptolemaic cultic associations named Basilistai are also known in Thera (*IG* XII 3, 443) and Cyprus (*ABSA* 56 [1961] 39, 105: Lapethos). It is probable that in these cases too, the association was mainly composed of members of the Ptolemaic garrison and performed a role in combining local cults with the religious honours for the royal house. A similar function was probably performed by the Attalistai during the reign of Attalos II.

[73] Bernand, in *I.Th.Sy.* 263, suggests that varying the order was a way to alternatively meet the expectations of the mixed members of the association. According to Iossif 2005, 250, the priority of the Egyptian name in *I.Th.Sy.* 303 would depend on the Egyptian connotation of the *hyper* formula.

The dedicatory pattern of *I.Th.Sy.* 302 is paralleled by other texts from the southern borders of the Ptolemaic kingdom, where the royal family is mentioned in the dative, together with local gods, whereas the *hyper* formula is used to refer to members of the Ptolemaic elite holding high-ranking charges and aulic titles, sometimes accompanied by their family. In one case (*I.Th.Sy.* 314; *I.Th.Sy.* 243) we can follow the transfer of the aulic title from father to son, an element confirming the impression of an ongoing process of consolidation of the local elite. The authors of the dedications can be individual members of the army holding a lower rank in the Ptolemaic elite, but the same hierarchical gap is confirmed in cases where a group of agents is involved, as the *hypourgoi* of the Abu Diyeiba quarry and the members of the garrison at Omboi (*I.Pan du désert* 59 + *SEG* LVI 1961; *I.Th.Sy.* 190). When explicitly mentioned, reasons for the dedication draw on a standard moral register (*arete* and *eunoia* in *I.Th.Sy.* 190), yet one can assume that more specific reasons were also at stake, such as gratitude for personal favours and help for career advancement (*I.Th.Sy.* 320).

This small dossier from second-century Thebaid sheds some intriguing light on the possibility for members of the Ptolemaic establishment to use the *hyper* formula to express a link of reciprocity and proximity towards persons occupying higher social ranks at a regional level. This dedicatory pattern would respond to different communicative purposes than dedications made *hyper* the royal family, by which donors holding high social status in the regional hierarchy could display their close personal bond with the central top of the Ptolemaic system. Although the limited extension of our evidence does not allow to draw certain conclusions, the rarity of dedications mentioning the sovereigns in the dative in the studied period suggests that the choice of placing the sovereigns among the gods (in the dative) was not a generic way of honouring the members of the royal house. Rather, its communicative function was probably to reaffirm the superiority of the members of the royal family in relation to the local elite honoured in the dedications. By placing them side by side with the locally worshipped gods, donors ritually identified the geographically remote rulers as the present source and justification of the regional hierarchical order. The occasional mention of the honorands' moral merits would also respond to the same purpose as it recalled that the prestige of the elite members was justified by their being integrated within a hierarchical chain of interpersonal relationships, at whose top stood the ruling family[74].

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[74] On the hierarchical implications of the mention of *eunoia* towards rulers and elite members, cf. Dumke - Pfeiffer 2015 on honorific statues in Paplaepaphos.

Table 1. – Text and translation of I.Th.Sy. 302 and 303.

1.1. – *I.Th.Sy.* 302

Βασιλεῖ Πτολεμαίωι καὶ βασιλίσσηι
Κλεοπάτραι τῆι ἀδελ[φῆι θε]οῖς Φιλομήτορσ[ι]
καὶ τοῖς τούτων τέκνοις καὶ Ἄμμωνι
τῶι καὶ Χνού[βει κ]αὶ [Ἥ]ραι [τῆι κ]αὶ Σάτει,
5 καὶ Ἑστίαι [τ]ῆ[ι καὶ] Ἀνούκ[ει] καὶ Διονύσωι
τῶι καὶ Πετεμπαμέντει κ[α]ὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις
θεοῖς ὑπὲρ Βοήθου τοῦ Νικοστράτου
Χρυσαορέως, τοῦ ἀρχισωματοφύλακος
καὶ στρατηγοῦ καὶ [κτί]στου τῶν ἐν τῆ[ι]
10 Τριακοντασχοίνωι πόλεων Φιλομητορίδ[ος]
καὶ Κλεοπάτρας, εὐ[ν]οίας ἕνε[κ]εν
ἧς ἔχων διατελ[εῖ] πρ[ός τε τὸν βασιλέα]
καὶ τὴν βασίλισσαν κ[αὶ τὰ τέκνα α]ὐτῶν,
Ἡρώιδης Δημοφῶντος Περ[γα]μηνὸς
15 τῶν διαδό[χω]ν καὶ ἡγεμὼν ἐ[π' ἀ]νδρῶν
καὶ φρούραρχος Συήνης [καὶ γερρ]οφύλαξ
καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄνω τόπων [τεταγμένος] καὶ
προφήτης τοῦ Χν[ούβεως] κ[αὶ ἀρχ]ιστολιστ[ὴ]ς
τῶν ἐν Ἐλεφαντίνηι [καὶ Ἀβάτωι] καὶ Φίλαις
20 ἱερῶν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι [ἱερεῖς τῆς πεν]ταφυλίας
τοῦ Χνόμω Νεβιὴβ [καὶ θεῶν Ἀδελφῶν καὶ]
θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν [καὶ θεῶν Φιλο]πατόρων
καὶ θεῶν Ἐπιφανῶν καὶ θεοῦ Εὐπάτορος
καὶ θεῶν Φιλομητόρων, οἱ τὴ[ν] σύνοδον
25 συνεσταμένο[ι εἰς τὸ ἐν Σήτει] ἱερό[ν],
ὅπως ἄγωσι[ν ὑπὲρ Πτολεμαίου τ]ε τοῦ
βασιλέως κα[ὶ τ]ῆ[ς β]ασιλίσση[ς] καὶ τῶν
τέκνων αὐτῶν ἐ[νιαυσίας ἑ]ο[ρ]τὰς κα[ὶ]
τὴν γενέθλιον ἡμέραν [τὴν Βοή]θου
30 κατὰ τὸν κείμενον [βασιλικ]ὸν νόμο[ν],
ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα ὑπ[ογέγραπαι].

To King Ptolemy (VI) and Queen Kleopatra (II), her sister, the Theoi Philometores, and to their children and to Ammon who is also Chnubis, to Hera who is also Satis, **(5)** to Hestia who is also Anukis, to Dionysos who is also Petempamentis, and to the other gods, for Boethos son of Nikostratos, Chrysaorian, chief-bodyguard, *strategos* and founder of **(10)** the cities Philometoris and Kleopatra in the Triakontaschoinos, because of the benevolence that he continues to show towards the king and the queen and their children. [Dedication made by] Herodes son of Demophon, from Pergamon, **(15)** member of the successors and officer in charge, commander of the garrison of Syene and guardian of the wickerwork barriers, in charge of the Upper Regions, prophet of Chnubis and *archistolistes* in the sanctuaries in Elephantina, Abaton and Philae; **(20)** [dedication made also by] all the others priests of the five classes of Chnum Nebieb and the Theoi Adelphoi and the Theoi Euergetai and the Theoi Philopatores and the Theoi Epiphaneis and the Theos Eupator and the Theoi Philometores: **(25)** they have gathered at the sanctuary on Setis in order to celebrate, for king Ptolemy and the queen and their children, the yearly festivals and the birthday of Boethos **(30)** in compliance with the royal law in force. Their names are written below.

1.2. – *I.Th.Sy.* 303

Ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου καὶ βασιλίσσης
Κλεοπάτρας τῆς ἀδελφῆς, θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν,
καὶ τῶν τέκνων Ἡρώιδης Δημοφῶντος
Βερενικεὺς, ὁ ἀρχισωματοφύλαξ καὶ στρατηγός,
5 καὶ οἱ συνάγοντες ἐν Σήτει τῆι τοῦ Διονύσου
νήσωι βασιλισταὶ ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα ὑπόκειται,
Χνούβει τῶι καὶ Ἄμμωνι, Σάτει τῆι καὶ Ἥραι,
Ἀνούκει τῆι καὶ Ἑστίαι, Πετεμπαμέντει τῶι καὶ
Διονύσωι, Πετενσήτει τῶι καὶ Κρόνωι, Πετενσήνε[ι]
10 τῶι καὶ Ἑρμεῖ, θεοῖς μεγάλοις, καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς
ἐπὶ τοῦ Καταράκτου δαίμοσιν τὴν στήλην κα<ὶ τ>ὰ
πρὸς τὰς θυσίας καὶ σπονδὰς τὰς ἐσομένας
ἐν τῆι συνόδωι κατὰ τὰς πρώτας ἐνάτας τοῦ
μηνὸς ἑκάστου καὶ τὰς ἄλλας ἐπωνύμους ἡμέρας
15 δι᾽ ἑκάστου εἰσενηνεγμένα χρήματα, ν ἐπὶ ν
Παπίου τοῦ Ἀμμωνίου προστάτου καὶ
Διονυσίου τοῦ Ἀπολλωνίου ἱερέως τῆς συνόδου.
[ll. 18-44: list of members]

For king Ptolemy (VIII) and queen Kleopatra (II), his sister, the Theoi Euergetai, and their children. Herodes son of Demophon, Berenikeus, chief-bodyguard and strategos, **(5)** and the undersigned Basilistai meeting on Setis, the island of Dionysos; to Khnubis who is also Ammon, to Satis who is also Hera, to Anukis who is also Hestia, to Petempamentis who is also Dionysos, to Petensetis who is also Kronos, to Petensenis **(10)** who is also Hermes, great gods, and to the other divinities of the Cataract. [They dedicated] the stele and the sum, which everybody has brought for the sacrifices and libations that will take place at the meeting of the association on the ninth day of every month and on the other eponymous days. **(15)** [Decision taken] when Papias son of Ammonios was president and Dionysios son of Apollonios was priest of the association.
[list of members]

Table 2. – Parallel cases of dedications to the royal family and the local gods «hyper» a third person of higher social rank. Second-century South Thebaid.

Source	Context	Nominative	Hyper + Genitive	Dative	Motivation
I.Th.Sy. 314 (TM 47410)	Philae; ca. 187 BC Stone block *in situ* The content of the dedication is unknown	Kleon son of Diogenes Charge: *hēgemōn* and *phrourarchos* of Philae	1. Ptolemaios son of Eumenes Aulic title: *tōn prōtōn philōn; archikynēgos* 2. His wife Agathokleia 3. His son Ptolemaios Aulic title: *archisōmatophylax; archikynēgos*	King Ptolemy V and Queen Kleopatra I, Theoi Epiphaneis and Eucharistoi Isis	
I.Pan du désert 59 + SEG LVI 1961 (TM 6090)	Amethyst quarry of Abu Diyeiba (Eastern Desert); 175-170 BC	Partly *in lacuna*; *hypourgoi* (assistants) still legible (line 7)	1. Dionysios son of Lysimachos Aulic title: *in lacuna* Charge: *in lacuna*; *hēgemōn* still legible (line 5) 2. His sons (partly *in lacuna*)	King Ptolemy VI and Queen Kleopatra II, Theoi Philometores Pan Epekoos and Eucharistos, and Haroeris, very great gods	
I.Th.Sy. 243 (TM 88865)	Elephantina; 135/4-131 BC Stone block *in situ* The content of the dedication is unknown	Asklepiades son of Ammonios Aulic title: *tōn diadochōn* Charge: *phrourachos* of Elephantina	1. Ptolemaios son of Ptolemaios, son of Eumenes Aulic title: *tōn prōtōn philōn* Charge: *stratēgos* 2. Ptolemaios' sons Aulic title: *tōn isotimōn tois prōtois philois*	King Ptolemy VIII, Kleopatra II, Kleopatra III, their children Chnubis, Hera, Isis, Dionysos, and all the other gods	

Source	Context	Nominative	Hyper + Genitive	Dative	Motivation
I.Th.Sy. 190 (TM 6328)	Omboi; 131-124 BC Location unknown Stone altar	The garrison in the Ombites nome	1. Menandros, son of Mikros Aulic title: *tōn archisōmatophylakōn* Charge: *hipparchos* in charge, *oikonomos* of the royal land and *epistatēs* of the Ombites nome 2. His son Mikros Charge: one of the *hipparchoi* in charge 3. Ptolemaios (*lacuna*)	King Ptolemy VIII and Queen Kleopatra III, Theoi Euergetai Souchos, very great god and the temple-sharing gods	The *aretē* and *eunoia* shown by Menandros, Mikros and Ptolemy
I.Th.Sy. 320 (TM 47462)	Philae; 116 BC Stone blocks *in situ* The content of the dedication is unknown	Nestor, son of Melanippos Aulic title: *archisōmatophylax* Charge: made by Athenaios responsible for the phrourarchy of Syene, Elephantina and Philae, for the care of the light defences and for the strategia in Athenaios' nome	Athenaios Aulic title: *syngenēs* Charge: *stratēgos* of the region around Elephantina	King Ptolemy VIII, Queens Kleopatra II and Kleopatra III, Theoi Euergetai, and their children Isis, Sarapis, Horos and the gods in the Abaton	[Probably out of gratitude for the charges that Athenaios has entrusted upon Nestor]

5. INTERCULTURAL CONTEXTS

Because the act of interceding with the gods expressed with *hyper* was part of the Greek religious tradition, one can assume that a certain degree of conceptual and pragmatic adaptation was needed when the formula was used in relation to the initiative of non-Greek agents. In Ptolemaic Egypt, this is clear regarding the evidence of Jewish communities, where the *hyper* formula used for the consecration of synagogues allowed the donors to pay homage to the Ptolemies without acting in conflict with their faith [75]. A different situation was that of Seleucid Babylonia, where the Akkadian formulae *a-na du-lu* («for the ritual service of») and *a-na bul-ṭu* («for the life of») seem to have provided a suitable parallel to the Greek dual system of dative / *hyper* + genitive [76]. Gladić has traced the evolution of the formula *a-na bul-ṭu* in the dedicatory inscriptions recording the royal foundation and restauration of temples in Babylon. While pre-Hellenistic Babylonian texts traditionally ascribed the architectural initiative to the king, who acted «for his life» (*a-na TI-šú*), the derived formula «for the life of [name of the King]» appears in dedicatory inscriptions recording the initiative of members of the local elite. The formula *a-na bul-ṭu* therefore provides a suitable parallel to the Greek *hyper* not only from a linguistic, but also from a sociological perspective. By means of a formula highlighting the personal commitment and loyalty of the donors towards the king, the local elites of the Seleucid period could take up initiatives of high prestige, traditionally belonging to royal duties, and embed them within a relationship of positive collaboration with the Macedonian monarchic power.

Detecting the margins of correspondence and adaptation across cultural traditions is less easy when it comes to evaluating Egyptian ritual practice. The Egyptian context of many occurrences of the *hyper* formula has led Iossif to interpret the success of this dedicatory pattern in the Ptolemaic kingdom as a sign of the progressive adaptation of Ptolemaic kingship to Pharaonic traditions. Accordingly, Ptolemaic *hyper*-style dedications of individuals for sovereigns would not simply act as manifestations of loyalty towards the rulers (a point confirmed by the foregoing discussion), but would bestow a properly religious status upon the honoured king. The special religious devotion manifested by the donors towards the Ptolemaic

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[75] Cf. *I.Delta* I 414, nr. 3 (Schedia, Kōm el-Ghizeh): synagogue *hyper* Ptolemy III, Berenike II and their children; *I.Delta* I 928, nr. 2 (Abu el-Matamir): gate of the synagogue *hyper* Ptolemy VIII, Kleopatra II and Kleopatra III; *I.Delta* I 960, nr. 1 (Nitriai; Tell el-Barnūgi): synagogue and its appurtenances *hyper* Ptolemy VIII, Kleopatra II and Kleopatra III.

[76] Gladić 2007, 130-134.

kings would reflect an Egyptian mentality, according to which the Pharaoh occupied a mediating position between humans and gods [77]. While I agree that in certain cases the *hyper* formula was used to refer to Egyptian religious traditions, it seems more convincing to propose that the Egyptian elite, and not the Greek one, appropriated foreign religious terminology and adapted its semantics to their specific needs. The compelling proof of this direction of transfer is given by Gladić's analysis of Egyptian dedicatory formulae, which has shown that the Egyptian religious vocabulary did not have a suitable correspondent of the Greek *hyper* before the Roman imperial period. Similarly to the third and second-century synodal decrees, the increasing number of *hyper*-style dedications in Ptolemaic Egypt does not point to a conceptual pharaonization of Ptolemaic kingship, but reflects the increasing role of Egyptian and mixed milieus in the political and ritual interaction with the central power. The later appearance of the preposition *j.jr-ḥr* (translated as «for the benefit of») in a few dossiers of dedications from Roman Egypt confirms that the innovation was brought into demotic from Greek [78].

Because Egyptians did not have a suitable correspondent for the Greek formula of intercession expressed by *hyper*, one can wonder if the Greek dual system of *hyper* and dative dedications would have been clear to every Egyptian subject [79]. Unfortunately, we must accept that our evidence does not allow us to provide a conclusive answer to this question. Egyptians recording a ritual act concerning the Ptolemies in their own language seem to have simply by-passed the problem by ignoring the nuances expressed by *hyper* in Greek [80]. Conversely, they regularly followed the foreign epigraphic habit when they wrote in Greek. The main reason is that when they recorded a ritual act in Greek, Egyptian agents would reasonably aim at maximizing the results of their initiative by expressing a comprehensible message for their Greek-speaking public. *OGIS* 97 (Taposiris Parva, 193/2-181/0 BC) provides a revealing case as it shows that a perfectly Greek formula of dedication *hyper* Ptolemy V and Kleopatra I could record a ritual act which was properly Egyptian: Sparis together with the members of a religious association dedicated an altar and specimens of persea, a traditional sacred plant related to Egyptian kingship, to a hybrid divine triad comprising Osiris the Great/ Sarapis, Isis and Anubis, in addition to all the other gods and goddesses [81].

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[77] Iossif 2005. For the religious figure of the Pharaoh in classical Egypt, cf. Morris 2010.

[78] Gladić 2007, 124, 128, 135.

[79] Hölbl 2001, 96; Gladić 2007, 109.

[80] Gladić 2007, 116.

[81] Cf. Caneva 2016c for this inscription and the traditional link of persea with the cult of Osiris in relation to kingship and renewal of life and power. Another sign of the

Face to the opacity of our evidence, we can only attempt to explore contexts in which the Greek semantics of the *hyper* formula could be adapted to Egyptian or mixed contexts of ritual communication. Since their beginnings, which are related to the introduction of cults for Arsinoe the «Brother-Loving Goddess» in the 260s, cultic honours for members of the Ptolemaic family in Egyptian temples mainly combined the traditional forms of rituals for sacred statues of individual sovereigns and of cults for royal ancestors. Following the contemporaneous development of Ptolemaic messages of dynastic continuity, cultic honours also took the shape of ritual actions for a growing list of ruling pairs, including the living royal couple [82]. Different kinds of sources shed light on a variety of aspects of Ptolemaic ruler cult in the temples, from the organization of priesthoods, festivals and rituals in the textual sources to the friezes and stelae depicting the Pharaoh in the act of honouring his predecessors, in compliance with the Egyptian tradition identifying the sovereign as the ultimate responsible for all acts of communication with the gods. This last aspect needs to be kept in mind when studying Greek texts from Egyptian temples where the *hyper* formula is used in relation to the responsibility of ritual acts.

Ptolemaic inscriptions from the second and first century have transmitted a number of royal decrees conceding the right of *asylia* to temples in the Egyptian *chora*. These *prostagmata* were issued in response to letters of petition (*enteuxis*) sent by local officials and priests. All specimens contain

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Egyptian background of the inscription is provided by the hapax κωμεγ|έται at ll. 10-11, which has been interpreted as a translation of the Egyptian *mr mš'*, a function documented in the demotic rules of a second-century cult association of Sobek in Tebtynis (de Cenival 1972, 159-162; Caneva 2016, 52). Confusion between η with ε (the correct form would be κωμηγ|έται) is also a typical mistake of Egyptians writing Greek: cf. Clarysse 1993, 197.

[82] See the general overviews of Quaegebeur 1989; Lanciers 1991; Lanciers 1993, 213-217. On synodal decrees, see El-Masry - Altenmüller - Thissen 2012 for the Alexandria decree and Pfeiffer 2004 for the Canopos decree. On other Egyptian temple stelae such as those of Pithom, Mendes and Sais, see Thiers 2007; Quack 2008; Schäfer 2011. For Ptolemaic dynastic lists in the evidence concerning Egyptian cults, see Minas 2000. Ritual action directly addressed to members of the royal family is certainly documented in contemporaneous Egyptian temples by the presence of their cultic statues, which made them *synnaoi theoi* of the local gods. Ritual action directly addressed to members of the royal family is certainly documented in contemporaneous Egyptian temples by the presence of their cultic statues, which made them *synnaoi theoi* of the local gods. Cf. *I.Prose* 37 18-19: ἐν οἷς καὶ ἰκό|νες ὑμῶν ἀνάκεινται. References to the royal *eikones* being kept in the Egyptian sanctuaries are a common element in petition letters asking for temple inviolability. For the kind of ritual action in which these statues were involved, see Rosettana, *I.Prose* 16, ll. 38-40. A passage of the *Book of the Temple* concerning the duties of a priest called *nsw.ti*, who is in charge of the rituals for the king, provides interesting information which is, however, difficult to locate in time due to the highly conservative nature of the text (cf. Quack 2004, 21).

a rhetorical argument meant to convince the kings of the importance of protecting the sanctuaries: the temples must be immune from attacks so that the traditional rites may be celebrated for the gods *hyper* the king and his children [83]. It is tempting to interpret this formula in compliance with Egyptian traditions and propose that in these cases, ritual intercession by priests would assume a particularly strong significance: customary rites were not only celebrated in favour of the members of the royal family, but following Egyptian traditions, more specifically on their behalf, i.e. as if they were performed by them as the virtual agents in the temples.

Virtual agency is consistent with the function of the Greek *hyper* in relation to rites celebrated on behalf of absent persons as if to make them present in relation to the reception of divine benevolence caused by the offerings. This active significance of *hyper* is even more evident in other Ptolemaic texts from Egyptian temples. *I.Prose* 39 (69/8 BC) reports the request of the Athenian Dionysodoros to King Ptolemy XII Philopator and Philadelphos to carry out works of restoration of the shrine of Ammon and the *synnaoi theoi* in Euhemeria, Fayum. Dionysodoros uses the *hyper* formula in a context clearly meaning that the king should be considered as the virtual agent of this euergetic initiative:

(ll. 7-16) βούλομαι | ἐπ' αὐξήσει τῶν τοῖς θεοῖς ἀνηκόντων | ἀνοικοδομῆσαι τοῦτο τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνηλώ‖μασι καὶ ἐπιγράψαι ὑπέρ σου, δέσποτα | βασιλεῦ, ὅπως αἵ τε [θ]υσίαι καὶ αἱ [σπ]ονδα[ὶ] | ἐπιτελῶνται, κτ[ι]σθέντος τοῦ σημαι|νομένου ἱεροῦ ὑπέρ τε σοῦ καὶ τῶν προ|γόνω[ν σ]οῦ, μενούσης καὶ τῆς παρὰ ‖ τῶν πλησίων ἱερῶν συνκεχ[ω]ρημένης | ἀσυλίας … [84]

The *hyper* formula makes it clear that Dionysodoros' restoration of the sanctuary would not affect either the attribution of its foundation to the king and his ancestors or the statute of inviolability already granted by

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[83] *I.Prose* 22, C, ll. 29-31 (temple of Isis, Philae, reign of Ptolemy VIII); *I.Prose* 32, ll. 15-18 (temple of Heron, Magdola, reign of Ptolemy X); *I.Prose* 33, ll. 29-33, and *I.Prose* 34, ll. 32-36 (temple of Isis Sachypsis, Theadelpheia, reign of Ptolemy X); *I.Prose* 37, ll. 29-31, 43-46 (temples of Isis Eseremphis and of Herakles, Theadelpheia, reign of Ptolemy XII and Kleopatra Tryphaina); *I.Prose* 38, ll. 11-13 (temple of the crocodile gods Psosnaus, Pnepheros and Soxis, Euhemeria, reign of Ptolemy XII and Kleopatra Tryphaina); *I.Prose* 42, ll. 12-16, 19-20; *I.Prose* 43, ll. 9-15, 17-19, and *I.Prose* 44, ll. 9-15, 16-17 (temple of the crocodile god Pnepheros, Theadelpheia, reign of Berenike IV). Cf. *I.Prose* 24, VIII, l. 55, with prayers of the *sklerourgoi* of Syene for the sovereigns. See also Rigsby 1996, 540-573.

[84] Translation by Rigsby 1996, 567-568, nr. 225: «For the increase of what pertains to the gods, I wish to rebuild this at my own expense and inscribe it in your behalf, mighty king, so that the sacrifices and libations may be celebrated, the said temple having been founded in behalf of you and your ancestors, and with the inviolability that has been granted applying from (?) the neighboring temples […]».

them. The same active function of *hyper* as referring to the honorary agent of the action appears in *I.Prose* 42, 43 and 44 (57 BC), where *hyper* refers to the erection of the inscription recording the concession of the *asylia* to the sanctuary of the crocodile god Pnepheros in Theadelpheia, in the name of Queen Berenike IV and her ancestors [85].

Other occurrences of the *hyper* formula show that in mixed Greco-Egyptian contexts, rites could be celebrated both to and *hyper* the royal family. As concerns the second case, performing a ritual on the behalf of the royal family would imply directing towards them the benevolence of the honoured gods. In the dedication from Es-Sehel *I.Th.Sy.* 302, coexistence between the two patterns of ritual action is documented by the dative formula associating the royal family with the gods of the Cataract, while the celebration of the yearly festival *hyper* the royal house can be read following the category of virtual agency discussed above. Iossif is probably right in proposing that Egyptians found in the *hyper* formula a particularly suitable device to express their view of the role of the Pharaoh as bringing together the human and the divine sphere. An obscure passage in the *asylia* decree *I.Prose* 37 (70 BC) might point in this direction. The text concerns the inviolability of the sanctuaries of Isis Eseremphis and of Herakles Kallinikos in Theadelpheia. Here the reference to the customary rituals for the gods appears twice, once in the standard *hyper* style and once with the simple genitive:

> ll. 29-31: πρὸς τὸ ἀπαραποδίστως τὰ νομι‖ζόμενα τοῖς θεοῖς ἐπιτελεῖσθαι ὑπέρ τε | ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν τέκνων

so that the rites to the gods in your name and of your children may be celebrated without hindrance

> ll. 43-46: πρὸς τὸ ἀνεμ|ποδίστως τὰ νομιζόμενα τοῖς θεοῖς ‖ καὶ τὰς ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν τέκνων θυσίας | καὶ σπονδὰς ἐπιτελεῖν

so that they may celebrate without hindrance the rites to the gods as well as your own and your children's sacrifices and libations [86]

In trying to make sense of the short formula at l. 45, the hypothesis of an involuntary omission of *hyper* is perhaps to be discarded in favour of a semantic interpretation of the gap between Greek terminology and Egyptian ritual practice. Just as the Greek θυσία was an approximate translation

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[85] Cf. respectively at ll. 34-35, 32-33, 28-29.
[86] Translation adapted from Rigsby 1996, 558-559, nr. 222; see also the discussion in Gladić 2007, 11-115.

of the Egyptian holocaust sacrificial ritual [87], so it is possible that the simple genitive as a replacement of the *hyper* formula at ll. 30-31 points at the fact that in Egyptian temples, rituals *hyper* the royal house were felt as acts virtually performed by them as the traditional ritual agents in the temples, rather than more generally as rites celebrated by priests in their favour.

6. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

By objectifying the ambiguity of our evidence, we risk failing to detect deep structural trends underneath superficial paradoxes, which are in most cases the result of the opacity of our sources. In the foregoing analysis of the dual Greek dedicatory habit expressed by the dative and *hyper* formulae I have therefore suggested that we should replace ambiguity and ambivalence with other keywords, such as flexibility of communication and ritual efficacy. This shift is made possible by substituting the need for identifying an abstract, conceptual status of the sovereign which would underlie and be echoed in ritual practice with a dynamic approach to the multiple configurations which various agents could use, also in combination, to construct the religious figure of the monarch in relation to specific contexts and agendas.

The application of this approach to selected case studies has shown that the involved ritual agents were able to discern the semantic characteristics of different dedicatory patterns and to adapt them to their pragmatic needs of communication with the divine sphere and with other members of the communities in which they belonged. Ritual practice (not only dedications, but also offerings and prayers) performed *hyper* the Hellenistic sovereigns has been studied within the broad framework of communication and exchange between agents enjoying different degrees of power. The idea of power adopted in this analysis is closely related to that of agency: the dynamic sum of a person's (or a group's) financial resources, social prestige and ability to construct collaborating networks, which empowers an agent with the possibility to achieve his goals in his social environment. Social dynamics, to which religious action provided a means of expression, have been discussed beyond a limited 'kings and cities' polarity with the purpose of comparing various medium-specific analyses and thus of benchmarking specific trends against general ones.

The category of ritual intercession has provided a valuable hermeneutic tool to make sense of the various meanings of the preposition *hyper* in Greek religious terminology. What is more, this category has allowed to

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[87] Quaegebeur 1993; Lanciers 1993, 215-216.

associate these meanings with the diverse patterns of social interaction enabled by ritual activities. The passage of the semantics of *hyper* from the limited area of family bonds to the broader field of gift-exchange and *philia* has proved to be the crucial turning point in the cultural history of the use of *hyper* for ritual intercession. Once applied to this broader range of social relationships, the *hyper* formula acquired an important role in the social dynamics of constructing reciprocity and hierarchy. The possibility of sharing the merit and positive consequences of ritual action with an absent third party provided ritual agents with a powerful communicative tool to interact with their social environment. This was made possible by the fact that in addition to displaying their piety and wealth by means of a dedication, ritual agents could also establish reciprocity with, and claim proximity towards, the higher-ranking parties for whom the act of intercession with the gods was performed.

Because the royal family was at the top of this system and also assured its legitimacy, members of the Ptolemaic dynasty were the first to benefit from acts of ritual intercession by individual members of the Ptolemaic elite. Later on, the broadening of the social categories that could benefit from ritual intercession was promoted by the hierarchical nature of the Ptolemaic society, which favoured the success of inter-personal bonds of trust and collaboration at all levels of the life and administration of the state. Conversely, institutional agents, especially civic institutions, come to the foreground of our documentation in other geographical environments, such as Asia Minor, where the *polis* traditionally played a prominent political, social and cultural role.

The different patterns of dedication used in second-century Thebaid have pointed at a causal link between the emergence of local dedicatory habits and ongoing processes of hierarchization at a regional level. This correlation does not seem to be an isolated case in the Ptolemaic kingdom [88]. Future comparative studies might confirm the impression that a deep entanglement existed between patterns of administration, social hierarchy and ritual habits across the various geographical regions of the Hellenistic world. Such ambitious task could not be undertaken without taking into due account the intercultural encounters fostered by the installation and development of the Hellenistic kingdoms in the Mediterranean East. The brief overview of the use of *hyper* in indigenous and mixed environments in Ptolemaic Egypt has relied on the assumption that a certain degree of re-adaptation of the semantics and pragmatics of a tradition is inherent in any process of cultural transfer. In the case of *hyper*, it is prob-

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[88] Cf. Dumke - Pfeiffer 2015 on Ptolemaic Palaepaphos.

able that the implications of virtual agency related to this preposition in Greek were re-functionalized in Egyptian milieus to give voice to particular Egyptian ideas concerning the religious figure of the Pharaoh. To present day, however, the opacity of our evidence makes it difficult to measure the intensity of these adaptations. Only the publication of new documents and an increased interdisciplinary approach can allow us to study the impact of cultural encounters with a dynamic focus on their agents, contexts and purposes, which is the only way to avoid falling into generalizations and simplifications of the cultures in contact.

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