

## Textual and Historical Observations on a Bilingual Statue Base of Ptolemy I Soter (Breccia, *Iscrizioni greche e latine*, no. 1)

This paper focuses on a bilingual, Greek and demotic inscription preserved on a small black granite statue base which provides one of the earliest attestations of the epithet Soter in use for Ptolemy I both in the Greek and in the demotic evidence. Since its publication, this inscription has always been discussed separately from a Greek or demotic point of view. The present discussion aims to fill this gap with the purpose of providing a reliable chronology of the stone and an historical interpretation of its text with regard to the early history of Ptolemy I's epithet Soter.

### 1. The stone and its bilingual text: Paleographic analysis

The small size of the stone (32 × 59 × 32 cm; fig. 1) suggests that the statue was a small portrait. The text makes it clear that the person represented was Ptolemy I, whose name is accompanied by the royal title *basileus* and by the epicleris Soter. The latter is clearly legible at least in the Greek version of the dedication. The lack of information about the provenance of the stone and the original context where the statue was erected makes it impossible to conclude whether the king was portrayed in a Greek or Egyptian style. However, the presence of a demotic text suggests that the donor, a Greek called Diodotos son of Achaios (1), dedicated the statue in an Egyptian context, or at least in a place where both Greek and Egyptian subjects could see it. In light of the fact that the donor mentioned his name, we may assume that the statue was exhibited in a public place, like a sanctuary, or at least in a semi-public one, such as the venue of an association, where Diodotos would have gained prestige from being recognized as the author of this act of allegiance to the king.

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(1) This person is not otherwise known; see TM People 66104 ([www.trismegistos.org/person/66104](http://www.trismegistos.org/person/66104)).

The Greek version of the dedication does not pose any philological problems (2):

βασιλέα Πτολεμαίων | Σωτήρα Διόδοτος Ἀχαιοῦ

Conversely, the reading of the demotic text is made difficult by the bad state of preservation of the end of the lines (which, contrary to the Greek, run from right to left). As a consequence, the text has received two publications which significantly differ with regard to the presence and rendering of the Egyptian version of Ptolemy's epithet Soter:

Spiegelberg (3)

*Pr-ʿ3 Pturmīs n (?) t. t (?) | Tiututs pʿ 3 Agis  
Pharaoh Ptolemaios by (?) | Diodotos, son of Achaios*

Vleeming (4)

*Pr-ʿ3<sup>c.w.s</sup> Ptwrmys<sup>c.w.s</sup> p3-ʿSwṯrʿ [n-dr.t (?)] | Tywtwts s3 3kys  
Pharaoh<sup>l.p.h.</sup> Ptolemaios<sup>l.p.h.</sup> the Soter(?), [from(?)] | Diodotos, son of  
Achaios*

The restauration of *p3-ʿSwṯrʿ*, the Egyptian transliteration of the Greek epithet Soter, was explicitly rejected by the first editor, and its actual presence in the demotic text remains uncertain. As a matter of fact, traces of the article *p3* are still legible; the following sign might be a S, but the reading is highly problematic.

The epithet Soter was used of two Ptolemaic kings: Ptolemy I (king in 305/304-283/282 BC) and Ptolemy IX Soter II (king in 116-107 and, after a period of exile in Cyprus, 88-80 BC) (5). Commenting on the Greek text, W. Dittenberger argued in favor of Ptolemy I, contrasting the simple style of this inscription with the more elaborate texts of the reign of Ptolemy IX (6). It is, however,

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(2) For the Greek text, see STRACK 1901, p. 200, no. I; OGIS 19; BRECCIA 1911, no. 1, with photo at pl. I.1; SB V 8848.

(3) SPIEGELBERG 1906, p. 254 no. II, based on a squeeze by Seymour de Ricci.

(4) VLEEMING 2011, I, pp. 68-69 no. 98 A-B, based on the photo in BRECCIA 1911, no. 1.

(5) On Ptolemy I, see HAUBEN 2010; MUCCIOLI 2013, pp. 81-94; CANEVA 2020a, 2020b and 2020c (Greek evidence); PESTMAN 1967, p. 14 (demotic evidence); MINAS 2000, pp. 87-88 (Greek and Egyptian evidence). On Ptolemy IX, see MUCCIOLI 2013, pp. 160-161; CANEVA 2020b (Greek evidence); PESTMAN 1967, p. 74 (demotic evidence); MINAS 2000, pp. 155-157 (Greek and Egyptian evidence).

(6) See e.g. OGIS 167 and 169-173. In comparison with these texts, the base with the dedication by Diodotos does not include the donor's ethnic and aulic title. Since they came into use

the paleographic analysis that bears the conclusive evidence in favor of an early date. Even though high-quality Ptolemaic inscriptions from Egypt show a high degree of conservatism (7), both the form of the individual letters and their combined appearance in the text point to the reigns of Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II. The diverging bars of  $\Sigma$  are decisive. This feature, together with the narrow rendering of B, the large H and M, and  $\Pi$  with a short extending over the left vertical, make I.Ptol.Alex. 37 (probably from the reign of Ptolemy II) a close parallel for this text. Both hands are characterized by a slightly curvy rendering of the long bars, with a broadening at the end without serifs.

An early date is also plausible for the demotic text on paleographic grounds. First, the sign for L in the name of Ptolemy is written without the diacritical stroke distinguishing L from R: the writing of *Ptwrmys* instead of *Ptwlmys* is consistent with an early date, since the distinction between the two sounds is better respected in the later period (8). Second, Ptolemy's name is accompanied by a dual annotation of the royal cartouche: the first appearance of the cartouche regularly precedes the personal name (which is the rule in all periods), while a new closing is placed between Ptolemy's name and the *nh wd3 snb* symbol (*l.p.h.* = "life, prosperity, and health"). This use seems to be typical of the first half of the Hellenistic period (9).

## 2. Contextualizing the epithet Soter

The early date (reign of Ptolemy I or Ptolemy II) proposed on the basis of the paleographic analysis leads us to discuss this document against the broader background of the use of the epithet Soter for Ptolemy I at this early date. In the following, I will consider the Greek evidence first, then the Egyptian one.

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in the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, aulic titles were usually mentioned in dedications. However, there are two reasons why this argument is not conclusive. First, the small size of the stone, together with the need to divide up the available space for the bilingual dedication, may justify the succinct style of the inscription. Second, the fact that Diodotos did not cite any aulic title might simply depend on the fact that he had none.

(7) See on this point DEL CORSO 2017.

(8) CLARYSSE, VAN DER VEKEN 1983, pp. 142-143.

(9) CLARYSSE (2013), pp. 9-10. The same writing of the royal name appears in VLEEMING 2011, pp. 94-97, no. 134, a text dated 282 BC.

Ptolemy was acclaimed Soter in Rhodes in 305/304, after the end of the siege of Demetrios Poliorketes, and, probably, by the Nesiotic League sometime in 288-286 BC, at the time of Ptolemy's takeover of the Aegean cities from Demetrios (10). These episodes, however, were occasional acclamations associated with the granting of cultic honors to great benefactors by civic communities and only had a local (or regional) relevance. In other words, the fact Ptolemy, as other Diadochs in the same period, was acclaimed Soter in some cities should be kept distinct from the establishment of his standard dynastic title at the kingdom scale. The standardization of the denomination Soter for Ptolemy I only occurred during the reign of his son Ptolemy II: this is proved by the lack of reference to this title in the dating formula of Ptolemy I's reign in the Greek and demotic documents (inscriptions and papyri) and, more in general, by the absence of a standard denomination of Ptolemy I in texts referring to this king down to the years 260s. These two features can be contrasted to the constant presence of the standard denomination "*Ptolemy Soter*" in numismatic legends and in dating formulae from the second half of Ptolemy II's reign (11). One may also notice that some documents long considered as early attestations of the use of the title Soter in Ptolemy I's lifetime have been re-dated to a later period. The original publication of I.Prose 62, a decree of Ptolemais Hermiou referring to the foundation of this city by Ptolemy I, should more plausibly be ascribed to the reign of Ptolemy II (12). I.Varsovie 50, a statue base representing "*King Ptolemy and Queen Berenike, Theoi Soteres*", is now dated to the early-1st century BC (13). This makes (Kleopatra) Berenike III,

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(10) On Rhodes, see HAUBEN 2010 and CANEVA 2020c, defending the historical reliability of the acclamation of Ptolemy as Soter on the island, for which see PAUS. 1.8.6. *Contra*, see HAZZARD 1992 and WORTHINGTON 2016a, pp. 168-169; their arguments, however, rely on an erroneous understanding of the Rhodian epigraphic evidence.

(11) The formula "*of Ptolemy Soter*" appears for the first time on the tetradrachms of Ptolemy II in 262/261 BC. Three years later, in 259/258, the end of the co-regency with Ptolemy the Son was accompanied by the introduction of a new dating formula counting the regnal years "*of King Ptolemy, (son) of Ptolemy Soter*", which remained in use until the end of Ptolemy II's reign. For a more detailed overview of the evidence, see CANEVA 2020a.

(12) CANEVA 2020b.

(13) The typical paleographic features of 3<sup>rd</sup>-cent. Ptolemaic writing are absent here. The horizontal bars of Σ are parallel or only very slightly diverging. There is no trace of the curvy rendering of the long bars, which characterizes Diodotos' dedication and other contemporaneous inscriptions. The thickening at the end of the letters occasionally turns into small serifs (esp. for Σ). All in all, this writing exemplifies the conservative style of high-quality late Ptolemaic in-

together with her uncle Ptolemy X Alexander (101-88) (14) or with her father Ptolemy IX Soter II (88-81/80) (15), the best candidates for the identification with the mentioned ruling couple (16).

Let us now move to the demotic documentation, where the Greek epithet Soter can be rendered either with the Egyptian translation *ntj nḥm* (“*the one who protects*”) or with a transliteration from the Greek, *P3 Swtr*. Neither form is attested before the reign of Ptolemy II, when, as seen above, the epithet of the dynastic founder appears in the dating formula of demotic documents. Moreover, an ink graffito from Deir el-Bahari, for which the first editor proposed a date in winter 304, soon after the assumption of the royal title by Ptolemy I, is now re-dated to the reign of Ptolemy II on both paleographic and historical grounds (17).

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scriptions, for which see DEL CORSO 2017. Based on the paleographic analysis, the late date of the inscription is also defended by A. Łajtar in I. Varsovie 50. For the early chronology, see RUBENSOHN 1913, pp. 156-157, no. 1, and WILCKEN 1913, p. 202, note 1; more recently, the identification with Ptolemy I and Berenike I is accepted by MUCCIOLI 2013, pp. 83-84, and PFEIFFER 2015, pp. 33-34, no. 5.

(14) PESTMAN 1967, pp. 72-75.

(15) *Ibid.*, pp. 74-77.

(16) The question of which of the two couples was referred to remains difficult to answer. Ptolemy X and Berenike usually bore the composite title Theoi Philometores Soteres, but the recent publication of an altar from Amathous with a dedication to King Ptolemy Alexander and Queen Berenike, Theoi Soteres (THÉLY 2016, p. 467: [Πτολ]εμαίου | [Ἀλ]εξάνδρου | Βερενίκης | Θεῶν Σωτήρων) shows that the reduction of the royal title to the sole epithet Soteres was perfectly possible. On the other hand, the simple use of the title Soter, without Philometor, for Ptolemy IX can be understood against the background of the conflict that opposed him to his mother Kleopatra III, after she had him expelled from Alexandria in 107 BC. The identification of the royal couple depicted by the statue group with Ptolemy IX and Berenike III is favored by Łajtar in I. Varsovie 50, pp. 150-151. However, some uncertainty remains about whether Ptolemy IX and his daughter actually ruled together: BENNETT 2002-2012; PFEIFFER 2015, pp. 33-34, no. 5.

(17) The text was originally published by E. BRESCIANI, «MDAI(K)» 39 (1983), pp. 103-105. According to this scholar, the text would bear the date 22 Thot, 2<sup>nd</sup> year of “*Pharaoh Ptolemy, Protecting king, Soter and Berenike*”. Bresciani identified the royal couple with Ptolemy I and Berenike I, which would date the text 28 November 304 BC. Following this interpretation, HUSS 2001, p. 239, concludes that Ptolemy I used the epithet Soter as his title from the very beginning of his reign. The first criticism against this interpretation came from CLARYSSE 1987, p. 30, note 87, who contested the reading Soter in the royal formula. In a new edition of the graffito, VLEEMING 2015, pp. 147-149, no. 1529, rejects Bresciani’s reading of the name Berenike and interprets Soter as part of the father’s name of Ptolemy II, to whose reign the text should be dated. I must add that even accepting Bresciani’s edition, a date under Ptolemy I would remain

### 3. King and Savior

On the basis of these observations, it seems probable that Diodotos dedicated a statue of Ptolemy I under the reign of his successor, Ptolemy II. However, this inference may seem in contradiction with the fact that in the Greek version of the dedication, Ptolemy I bears the royal title *basileus*. Ptolemaic kings were usually referred to as kings only in their living, whereas after their death they were mentioned only by their personal name (18). If we stick to the assumption that the presence of the title *basileus* should be interpreted as a sign that Ptolemy I was living at the time of Diodotos' dedication, we could date this statue to the period 305/304-283/282 and interpret this unique document as the sole extant piece of evidence in favor of the hypothesis that the epithet Soter was used in Egypt as the title of Ptolemy I already before the reign of Ptolemy II.

I. Worthington has recently suggested that Ptolemy I received his title in Egypt after the repulsion of Antigonos' invasion in 306 BC (19). In line with this interpretation, we might see Diodotos' dedication as an early response to this event, and perhaps even as the dedication made by a member of Ptolemy's court to jointly promote the two titles recently assumed by Ptolemy – king and Soter – in front of both the Greek and Egyptian subjects. However, a sole attestation of Soter in the documentation of the reign of Ptolemy I, and moreover in an individual dedication rather than in an official document, provides a very weak support to this hypothesis and, more generally, to Worthington's interpretation of the origins of Ptolemy's title. Even more importantly, some exceptions

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improbable because Berenike never appears together with the king in the dating formulae of the reign of Ptolemy I. This point, together with a date of the text during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century based on paleographic grounds, is confirmed by ŁAJTAR 2006, pp. 17-18.

(18) This use is not attested for all Hellenistic dynasties. The Attalids, for instance, still bore the royal title in inscriptions mentioning them as dead ancestors, but in this case the further epithet *Theos* was added to distinguish the dead king from the living one. To my knowledge, the only Ptolemaic inscription following a comparable pattern is an altar privately dedicated in Teos, probably in 33/32 BC, to a series of Ptolemaic queens (JONES 2011). Here the living queen Kleopatra VII is contrasted, as *basilissa*, to her ancestors who are referred to with the epiclesis *Thea*. However, the Teos altar is a *unicum* in the Ptolemaic documentation and dates to a period when the royal formulae of the previous centuries had to a large extent been abandoned or reformed.

(19) WORTHINGTON 2016a, pp. 168-169, and 2016b. For criticism of this hypothesis, see CANEVA 2020c.

exist to the assumption of a perfect equation between the presence of the royal title used for a king in a document and the publication of this text during this king's lifetime. The most evident one is provided by the so-called Nikouria decree, issued by the representatives of the Nesiotic League in Samos c. 280 BC (SIG<sup>3</sup> 390). In lines 10-11, the decree refers to Ptolemy II's father as ὁ | [β]ασιλεὺς καὶ σωτὴρ Πτολεμαῖος within a passage which refers to the past benefactions of Ptolemy I towards the members of the League and the Greeks in general. As seen above, the new date of the decree I.Prose 62 from Ptolemais Hermiou provides another occurrence of the title *basileus* referred to the deceased Ptolemy I during the reign of Ptolemy II (20).

The possibility that the royal title was used of the deceased Ptolemy I provides a plausible chronological match with the inferences drawn from the use of the epithet *Soter* in Diodotos' dedication. To conclude with, this bilingual statue base does not provide an exceptionally early attestation of Ptolemy I's title in his lifetime, but more plausibly testifies to the developments of royal formulary during the reign of Ptolemy II. The place where Diodotos dedicated this statue of Ptolemy I is probably lost forever, but his intentions may at least hypothetically be reconstructed: to publicly show his adherence to the ideological program of Ptolemy II, which consisted in strengthening and disseminating the memory of his father in terms of monarchic legitimacy (the royal title) and of efficacy in protecting and saving his subjects (the epithet *Soter*, with its strong religious implications). By means of this ideological process, both these seminal aspects of Hellenistic leadership describing Ptolemy II's father were projected onto the living king and were therefore presented as trademarks of the Ptolemaic dynasty.

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(20) See the discussion in CANEVA 2020b.





Fig. 1 - Bilingual statue base, from BRECCIA 1911, pl. I.1.

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