

## THE CULT OF APHRODITE

THE CULT OF APHRODITE UNDER THE PTOLEMIES:  
THE CONSOLIDATION AND LEGITIMIZATION OF A DYNASTY

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## **Lay Abstract**

Following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, his empire was divided between his generals. Ptolemy I obtained control of Egypt, and established a dynasty that endured for over two centuries before falling to Rome. This thesis examines the foundation of the dynasty, and the manner in which Ptolemy I and his early successors secured their power. It focuses on Greek and Egyptian religion, and argues that the cult of Aphrodite was integral to the legitimization and consolidation of the dynasty. Discussion extends beyond Aphrodite to those with whom she was associated, including the Egyptian goddess Isis, and the Ptolemaic queens Arsinoë and Berenice. The aim of the thesis is to highlight the complexities of religious practice, and demonstrate the significance of Aphrodite and the sociopolitical impact of her cult in Egypt and throughout the Hellenistic world.

## **Abstract**

Aphrodite is one of the oldest deities of the Graeco-Roman pantheon, and her cult has a rich and varied history in its development throughout the Mediterranean and beyond. The goddess has been associated with numerous female deities from other cultures, including Astarte, Inanna, and Ishtar from the Near East; Hathor and Isis from Egypt; and Venus from Rome. The origins and development of the cult of Aphrodite have long been favoured topics in Classical scholarship, with notable works including Friedrich's *The Meaning of Aphrodite* (1978) and Budin's *The Origin of Aphrodite* (2003). The nature of syncretism between deities continues to be a popular topic of debate, and collections such as *Transformation of a Goddess: Ishtar-Astarte-Aphrodite* (2014) are produced from conferences and symposiums. Likewise, interest in the history of the Ptolemaic dynasty remains high; in particular, the field of numismatics eagerly anticipates the final release of Lorber's *Coins of the Ptolemaic Empire* (2018 - ), which will replace the seminal work of Svoronos (1904) as the primary catalogue.

Although it is common for works concerning the Ptolemaic dynasty to reference Aphrodite, detailed discussion of her cult often arises only in the context of Arsinoë II, with whom she was syncretized. This thesis aims to bring Aphrodite to the forefront, and produce a cohesive narrative which highlights the role of her cult in the development of the Ptolemaic dynasty. It surveys the presence of the goddess in Egypt to determine her nature and significance, before examining the manner in which her cult was manipulated to the benefit of the Ptolemaic dynasts, predominantly through syncretism to the queens Arsinoë II and Berenice II. The discussion of syncretism is extended to include Isis, whose increasing popularity is connected to the eventual decline of the cult of Aphrodite in Egypt.

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## **Declaration of Academic Achievement**

The following thesis is a product of original research by the author.

*To Grandpa Bob*

**1933 - 2020**



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## List of Abbreviations

The following thesis adheres to the standard abbreviations as listed in the fourth edition of the Oxford Classical Dictionary.<sup>1</sup> Further references to modern works used in this thesis are as follows:

*ANS*: American Numismatic Society, available online at  
<http://numismatics.org> (accessed January 2021)

*BMP*: British Museum Project, available online at  
[https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20190801105141/  
https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/projects.aspx](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20190801105141/https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/projects.aspx) (accessed  
January 2021)

*CPE*: Coins of the Ptolemaic Empire, C. Lorber (2018).

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<sup>1</sup> xxvi-liii. The abbreviations include general conventions and modern sources as well as the works of ancient authors.

### Introduction

τῶν δ' ἄλλων οὐ πέρ τι πεφυγμένον ἔστ' Ἀφροδίτην /  
οὔτε θεῶν μακάρων οὔτε θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων.

*As for all the rest, there is nothing that has escaped Aphrodite /  
none of the blessed gods nor any of mortal humans.<sup>2</sup>*

The goddess Aphrodite has long enthralled the human imagination, a favourite muse in literature and art since the origination of her cult in the Archaic period.<sup>3</sup> Her purview over the fundamental human domains of beauty, eroticism, love, and fertility allowed for a universal recognition of the goddess; consequently, the cult of Aphrodite spread throughout many cultures across the Mediterranean. The Ptolemaic dynasts made use of this capacity for integration, primarily through assimilation of Aphrodite to the queens as well as her Egyptian counterpart, Isis. Examination of the cult serves as a lens through which it is possible to trace the growth of the Ptolemaic dynasty, and the underlying cultural movements which shaped its development.

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<sup>2</sup> HH 5, 34-35 (trans. G. Nagy).

<sup>3</sup> The origin and development of the cult of Aphrodite remains a popular topic in modern scholarship, enhanced by discussion of the various goddesses with whom she is associated, including Astarte, Ishtar and Inanna. Although this thesis accepts and explores the connection of the goddess to Cyprus, treatment of the cult is constrained by chronology and geography, and does not extend to earlier Mesopotamian, Sumerian or other Near-Eastern influences. Select works concerning these topics include Breitenberger (2007); Budin (2003, 2014); Friedrich (1978); Pickup and Smith (2010); Pirenne-Delforge (1994); and Rosenzweig (2004).

### **Background: Ptolemaic History**

The rise and fall of the Ptolemaic dynasty chronologically mirrors that of the Hellenistic period, which is commonly accepted to have begun in 323 BCE with the death of Alexander the Great, and ended c. 31/30 BCE with the Battle of Actium and subsequent Roman conquest of Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>4</sup> The Ptolemies founded one of the three most powerful dynasties of the Hellenistic period, alongside the Seleucids in Syria and Persia, and the Antigonids in Greece and Macedon; the Diadochi (Successors) warred over the division of Alexander's vast empire for approximately 50 years before boundaries became largely settled, albeit still subject to some dispute.<sup>5</sup> The Ptolemies maintained a position of strength among their rivals throughout the 3rd century, but the turn of the century was marked by internal and external strife which was never fully resolved and from which the dynasty never fully recovered.

Ptolemy I was granted the satrapy of Egypt in 323, a position which he held until he declared himself king almost two decades later, in response to the practice initiated by Antigonos I and Demetrius I. He ruled as both Hellenistic king and Egyptian pharaoh from c. 305/304 until his death in 282. Ptolemy I is frequently remembered for his military and political acumen, and highlights of his

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<sup>4</sup> All dates are BCE unless otherwise noted.

<sup>5</sup> In this thesis, terminology, including names and locations, will adhere to the latin spelling unless otherwise dictated by convention.

career in Egypt include the acquisition of Cyprus into his territory, and the requisition of the body of Alexander the Great.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the strategic opportunities each action afforded, they were both integral to the cultural development of the Ptolemaic dynasty; the former due to the island's close connection with the cult of Aphrodite, and the latter in consideration of its role in the development and promotion of ruler cult, which became a core component of Ptolemaic propaganda and power.<sup>7</sup>

Although instigated by Ptolemy I, the establishment of ruler cult and its expansion into dynastic cult is accredited to his son, Ptolemy II, whose reign (284-246) was characterized by religious innovation and patronage. He undertook an extensive building and restoration programme, directed at local temples throughout Egypt, and maintained close relationships with the priestly elite. His benefactions further contributed to the promotion of the arts and literature in Alexandria, and the Library and Museum flourished under his rule. Ptolemy II directed his attention outwards toward the Mediterranean with the same fervour as he did inwards toward Egypt; ongoing efforts at colonizing the Aegean occurred

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<sup>6</sup> The extent to which this characterization of Ptolemy is an accurate reflection or one carefully curated by the dynast himself remains contested; see discussion in Heckel, 7-15.

<sup>7</sup> The impact of Cyprus is addressed in the first chapter of this thesis, and the question of ruler cult emerges in the second and third chapters. Although the body of Alexander was not necessary for the instigation of ruler cult under the Ptolemies, the proximity of his tomb in Alexandria likely aided its propagation and lent credence to its authenticity.

concurrently with conflicts such as the Syrian and Chremonidean wars.<sup>8</sup> The latter brought with it the decline of the Ptolemaic naval force, which up until this point was unparalleled throughout the Aegean.<sup>9</sup>

The severance of the Ptolemaic thalassocracy did not hinder the continued imperialism of Ptolemy III, under whom the dynasty reached its greatest extent. His reign (246 - 222) shared similar highlights with that of his father, including the relatively peaceful succession of the throne, continued wars in Cyrenaica and Syria, and increased support for Egyptian temples and the priestly elite. The relationship between the dynast and the priests was codified in the Canopus decree, issued after a synod held in 238; it is the first known decree to concern all temples within Egypt, rather than being addressed to individual sanctuaries, and its universality is also marked by its trilingualism. The decree also extols the military virtues of Ptolemy III, and references his successful containment of the Egyptian revolt in 245, the first of multiple revolts which would come to plague successive dynasts.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The first Syrian war began in 274 when Ptolemy II invaded Syria, Seleucid territory controlled by Antiochus I, and three years later, it was resolved *status quo ante bellum*. Over a decade later, c. 260, the second Syrian war was underway, this time against Antiochus II. It ended in 253, with a treaty promising Antiochus fiscal and marital rewards. The difference in performance by the Ptolemies may have resulted in part from the Chremonidean war, which occurred between 267-261, between Macedon and the remaining Greek poleis.

<sup>9</sup> Thonemann, 31.

<sup>10</sup> OGIS 56, 6-7 (S. Birch, trans.)

These troubles manifested within the following generation. Ptolemy IV (r. 221 - 204) was a weak king who largely depended on his two advisors, Sosibius and Agathacles. While his military campaigns in the Fourth Syrian War were successful, he lost a considerable amount of his territory in Egypt to revolt leader Horwennefer, who proclaimed himself pharaoh and ruled Upper Egypt for almost two decades, before his defeat in 186.<sup>11</sup> Ptolemy IV perished in uncertain circumstances in the summer of 204 while attempting to resolve these conflicts, and he was succeeded by his young son, Ptolemy V.

The reign of Ptolemy IV marked the beginning of the decline of the Ptolemaic dynasty, and successive reigns were characterized by a series of weak or child kings, familial feuds, civil wars and increasing capitulation to foreign influences, culminating in the fall of Egypt to Rome. The continued failures of the Ptolemaic kings nevertheless highlight the strength of the Ptolemaic queens, who, although active from the early stages of the Ptolemaic dynasty, were officially recognized as joint or sole rulers by the end of the second century; Cleopatra VII

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<sup>11</sup> The Fourth Syrian War was instigated in 219, when Antiochus III attacked a strategic port city under Ptolemaic control, and its end was reached two years later at the battle of Raphia, recognized as one of the largest conflicts of the Hellenistic period and concluding with a decisive victory for Ptolemy IV. Despite his success at securing his territory from foreign threats, his efforts were undermined by domestic unrest, and Ptolemy returned to revolts in both Upper and Lower Egypt, as well as invasions from neighbouring African kingdoms hoping to take advantage of the turmoil.



was the last dynast of Ptolemaic Egypt before her defeat by Octavian and subsequent suicide.<sup>12</sup>

### **Structure and Outline**

Each of the early Ptolemaic dynasts adhered to a standard policy of religious tolerance and advocacy to support their regime. Although this practice is well-attested for Egyptian cults and temples, it is also necessary to consider the effects of royal patronage of Greek cults. This thesis examines the cult of Aphrodite in Egypt, and argues that it had an integrative function which contributed to the legitimization and consolidation of the Ptolemaic dynasty. The chapters are broadly divided chronologically and thematically: the first chapter addresses the development of the cult from the Archaic period, and frames the discussion for the arrival of the Ptolemies in the Hellenistic period; the second chapter focuses on Arsinoë II, the first Ptolemaic queen assimilated with Aphrodite, and addresses the development of both cult and dynasty from the Greek perspective; and the third and final chapter likewise features her successor

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<sup>12</sup> The last words of Cleopatra were purported to be οὐ θριαμβεύσομαι (*I will not be led in triumph*); although likely a romanticized tale and impossible to confirm, it nonetheless speaks to the queen's strength of character (Porphyrio, *On Horace's Odes*, 1.37.30; see discussion in Gurval, 63-64). Cleopatra was survived by her son Caesarion, who arguably reigned as Ptolemy XV in the eighteen-day window between the death of his mother and the formal annexation of Egypt by Octavian, but he "had no meaningful support and could have no thought of taking up his throne" (Tyldesley, 198).

Berenice II, and addresses the waning of the cult of Aphrodite in the face of rising Egyptianization.

**Chapter One** provides a brief chronological and geographical outline of the cult of Aphrodite in the Ptolemaic dynasty, primarily focused on Naukratis and Cyprus as cult centres. Discussion of evidence from the Archaic period establishes the traditional nature and significance of the goddess, and thus provides a foundation from which it is possible to trace the development of her cult. The chapter introduces the core component of the thesis by highlighting the integrative function of the cult of Aphrodite, and the following chapters demonstrate how this integrative function was crucial to the legitimization and consolidation of the Ptolemaic dynasty; the chapter likewise introduces the key themes of Egyptianization and Hellenization, which underlie this analysis.

**Chapter Two** addresses the relationship between the dynasts and deity from the Greek perspective, focusing on Arsinoë II and her assimilation to Aphrodite. Analysis of this assimilation follows two trajectories, each in accordance with a particular aspect of Aphrodite; inward-facing concerns of dynastic legitimacy, marriage and succession politics are treated in light of her purview as an erotic goddess, whereas outward-facing concerns of expansion and expression are filtered through her mantle as a marine goddess. Both trajectories demonstrate that the assimilation of Arsinoë to Aphrodite was integral to

Ptolemaic propaganda and the efforts of the early dynasts in the legitimization and consolidation of their reign. This assimilation also had a pivotal role in the development of ruler cult, and thus functioned not only as an immediate solution to contemporary political problems, but directly shaped the remainder of the dynasty and the entire Hellenistic world.

**Chapter Three** addresses the relationship between the dynasts and deities from the Egyptian perspective, introducing Isis into the analysis as the counterpart to Aphrodite. The integrative function of the cult is thus demonstrated in its capacity for assimilation between cultures, in consideration of shared divine attributes as well as recognition and worship across both Greek and Egyptian populations. The process of Egyptianization features in this chapter not only on account of its cultural effects, but because it provides a chronological limit, setting the waning of Aphrodite against the rise of Isis. Although Aphrodite does not disappear, she becomes increasingly less relevant than her Egyptian and Roman counterparts. This process reinforces the position that the Ptolemaic relationship to the cult of Aphrodite was ultimately designed for a Greek audience in the initial efforts of legitimization and consolidation.

Each chapter features discussion of archaeological material, supplemented as necessary by literary accounts; although narrative sources are in short supply, this lack is ameliorated by the “large quantities of papyri in Egypt, inscriptions

that were so much part of Greek civic life, coins minted by cities and kings [and] continuing archaeological discoveries.”<sup>13</sup> The works of the Alexandrian court poets offer contemporary commentary on the early Ptolemaic dynasts and are integral to the study of the cult of Aphrodite in Egypt, not only due to their role in the establishment and development of the queens’ assimilation to the goddess, but also because they are often the only extant record of cultic sanctuaries. Of equal significance to the current study is the epigraphic and numismatic evidence, particularly in consideration of Ptolemaic propaganda; it is possible to analyze both the manner in which the dynasts chose to portray themselves and disseminate that information, as well as the extent to which this dissemination spread and its reception by the public.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Erskine (2003), 4; see also discussion in Thonemann, 9-16. The narrative history of the Hellenistic period is recounted by multiple authors in accordance with theme and chronology, most prominently: the division of Alexander’s empire among the Diadochi in Diodorus (18-20) and Plutarch (*Hellenistic Lives*); the Roman rise to power in Polybius, supplemented by Livy (31-45); and the history and religion of the Jewish population in Josephus (11-12), and Maccabees I and II (Thonemann, 10). The majority of third and fourth century sources are lost, including “Aristoboulos of Kassandreia (FGrH 139), Kallisthenes of Olynthos (FGrH 124), Kleitarchos (FGrH 137) and Ptolemy I of Egypt (FGrH 138)... [as well as] Douris of Samos, Hieronymos of Kardias, Phylarchos and Timaios of Tauromenion” (Erskine 2003, 5). Other notable sources include Arrian, Q. Curtius Rufus, Pompeius Trogus (in Justin), Pausanias and Strabo (ibid 6-8).

<sup>14</sup> The emphasis on epigraphic and numismatic evidence reflects the quantity and quality of the source material, not just for the Ptolemaic dynasty but rather for the Hellenistic period generally. In particular, numismatic studies have been recognized as more significant to the Hellenistic period than “any other period of antiquity” (Thonemann, 14). Students of Ptolemaic coinage have long benefited by the efforts of Svoronos, whose seminal work *Τα νομίσματα του κράτους των Πτολεμαίων* (1904-1908) has recently been replaced as the main catalogue of reference by the recent and forthcoming publications of Lorber’s *Coins of the Ptolemaic Empire*, further enhanced by the concurrent release of the research tool, *Ptolemaic Coins Online* (<http://numismatics.org/pco/>).

### Note on Terminology: Cult and Syncretism

Two recurring themes which frame much of the following discussion are *cult* and *syncretism*. I employ the term *cult* with the following applications: i) in its neutral form, ***cult*** refers to the recognition and worship of a specified deity; ii) ***dynastic cult*** refers to worship of the monarch(s) together with their ancestors; whereas iii) ***ruler cult*** refers to worship of a specific monarch in isolation; iv) ***private cult*** is a privately sponsored cult; whereas v.) ***public cult*** is state-sponsored.<sup>15</sup> This distinction in type of cult, although useful to trace the development of religious practices, does not detract from the overall integrative function of the cult of Aphrodite in Ptolemaic Egypt.

Similar nuances arise in consideration of syncretism, and contention exists regarding both the subject matter at hand and the terminology used to discuss it. I loosely adhere to the principle that *association* is an imprecise term that is “fairly

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<sup>15</sup> The following selection of authors are those from whom these definitions are derived, or whose observations are of particular significance to the current study, in order: **i)** Dowden, 41 on cult as practice, including “whatever represented themselves as performing acts to, for, or at least with an audience of, gods.” **ii)** Coppola, 17; Johnson, 112. Coppola distinguishes between a “minimalist reading, a cult expressing a message of intergenerational continuity” and a “maximalist interpretation, one related to an interrupted genealogical list of sovereigns including the dynastic line in its entirety” (ibid). **iii)** Caneva (2014), 86-88; Dunand (2007), 261-262; Johnson, 112. Dunand distinguishes between dynastic cult as Greek and ruler cult as Egyptian. On agency and development of ruler cult, see Caneva (2014), 86. **iv)** Purvis defines “private cults [as those] performed by choice rather than prescribed... [which] were funded and administered without government intervention” (1-2). She notes the artificiality of the division between private and public cults given the public nature of worship, and lists *private* cults as interchangeable with *elective* cults (2). On *elective* cults: Price 108-125, in particular 123-125 on Hellenistic and Roman Isis; also Parker, 59-61; 248-250, in discussion on elective cults and religious freedom. **v)** Deacy, 222; Parker, 247; Rask, 2-3.

safe to use, since it does not indicate an interpretative result,” whereas *assimilation* is more closely connected to syncretism “since it can amount to full identification;” however, these terms may be used interchangeably.<sup>16</sup> In the following chapters, I treat syncretism as it is evidenced by epithets and the cultic double name, both of which are generally used either to emphasize a particular aspect of a deity or to identify two deities with one another.<sup>17</sup> The epithet is thus used for purposes of accentuation or differentiation, but does not alter the essential identity of the deity, though it may pick out different aspects of the deity’s significance and involve different connotations.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Wallensten, 4; see discussion, 3-5. The present objective is to understand the uses of syncretism as pertains to the cult of Aphrodite, such as the dissemination of the cult and how it advanced Ptolemaic ambitions; in-depth discussion of the nature of syncretism as a phenomena is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>17</sup> See discussion in Parker, 67-70. The first type of epithet is frequently toponymic, and often refers to the local sanctuary of a cult; even within the same site, a deity with numerous sanctuaries will likely have equally numerous epithets. In contrast, the second type of epithet is rarely restrained by geography, and assimilates multiple deities across cultural and ethnic boundaries.

<sup>18</sup> Such distinction in portrayal is discussed by Pomeroy, who contrasts Aphrodite Pandemos and Aphrodite Urania (32-34). Whereas Pandemos implies a “common prostitute” (32), and is therefore disreputable, Urania is “particularly concerned with marriage and fertility” (34). This distinction affected cult practice. Pomeroy draws attention to an Alexandrian decree that prohibits goats as acceptable offerings to Arsinoë Philadelphus; since goats are symbolic of lust and traditionally sacrificed to fertility deities including Aphrodite, Pomeroy argues that this decree was specifically designed to prevent assimilation between Arsinoë and Aphrodite Pandemos (33), though it is uncertain how successful this decree was as a preventative measure because i) there is no quantifiable method to assess a perception, and ii) the fact that such a deterrent was deemed necessary at all suggests that it was an anticipated occurrence.

## **Chapter 1**

### ***Coming to Egypt: The Cult of Aphrodite in Naukratis and Cyprus***

#### **Introduction**

It is nigh on impossible to capture the essence of a goddess, especially one that is worshipped in so many diverse places and with so many aspects as Aphrodite. Nonetheless, the objective of this chapter is to survey the cult of Aphrodite in Egypt and its environs — that is, what would become the territory of the Ptolemaic kingdom — to determine the nature of the cult and the manner in which it changed under the Ptolemaic dynasts. The discussion will feature Naukratis and Cyprus as the known cult centres of the goddess, but will also address the spread of the cult throughout Egypt. This survey establishes both chronological and geographical parameters from which it is possible to trace the development of the cult of Aphrodite and its role in the legitimization and consolidation of the Ptolemaic dynasty.

The narrative of the cult of Aphrodite in Egypt begins with Naukratis in the Archaic period; the first and oldest Greek site in Egypt, Naukratis retained prominence throughout the Classical and into the early Hellenistic period, before the emergence of Alexandria rendered it obsolete. At approximately the same time that the cult of Aphrodite was first introduced at Naukratis, it was also beginning to develop in Cyprus. The island was recognized as the goddess' location of

origin, and she remained of utmost importance throughout Cyprus from the Classical to the Roman period. The cult of Aphrodite thus had a history at both Naukratis and Cyprus, and the Ptolemies sought to make use of established institutions and shared cultural values to relate to and control the local population. Although initially limited to these two traditional cult centres, the Ptolemaic arrival brought with it the spread of Greek culture, which facilitated the dissemination of the cult of Aphrodite throughout Egypt. With the exception of Alexandria, no new major cult centres emerged, but the goddess herself was a popular muse for literary and artistic endeavours, and continued to be so even as the cult declined in the face of increasing Egyptianization.

Discussion of the evidence for the cult of Aphrodite in Egypt in this chapter centres on Naukratis, with comparison to Cyprus where appropriate. Recognized as the birthplace of the goddess, Cyprus was closely connected to Aphrodite before, during and after the Ptolemaic dynasty, and thus offers a



general constant against which other cult sites can be measured.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Naukratis traces the development of Aphrodite as a poliadic deity in a location which was not inherently connected to the origins of her cult, and thus offers greater insight into the Greek perspective of the nature and function of the cult.

### **Naukratis: Overview<sup>20</sup>**

The ancient site of Naukratis has long been recognized for its significance in the trade networks of the Archaic and Classical Mediterranean. Situated on the Canopic branch of the Nile, the *emporion* was the first permanent Greek settlement in Egypt. Perhaps the most famous account of the site is from Herodotus, who states that Amasis bequeathed the land to the Greeks not only for

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<sup>19</sup> It is possible to trace the connection between Cyprus and Aphrodite to the eighth century. There are numerous references in early literature, including the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the Homeric Hymns, and the *Theogony* (eg. Hom. *Il.* 5.330, 5.422, 5.760, and *Od.* 8.362-363; HH 5.1-2, 6.1-2, 10; Hes. *Theog.* 194-199). This tradition is referenced and expanded upon by multiple authors throughout the Classical period and into the Roman Empire, such as Herodotus (1.95.2-3) and Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.3.1). See Karageorghis (1-2) for a brief summary and analysis of these authors and their works as pertains to the history of Aphrodite. Although there is some variance in detail, each of these works recognize a profound relationship between the location and the goddess; the continuity in mythological tradition throughout a millennium attests to the strength of this association. However, each of the cited sources are of external origin, and may not accurately reflect the beliefs and traditions of Cyprus itself. Karageorghis (2-7) has crafted a compelling chronology for the development of the Cypriot Aphrodite, which encompasses decisive moments from the Bronze Age until the abandonment of pagan temples under Theodosius in the fourth century CE.

<sup>20</sup> The majority of the evidence from Naukratis discussed in this chapter is derived from the British Museum Project *Naukratis: Greeks in Egypt*, and where appropriate, any associated contributions will henceforth be noted in the citations of this thesis by the acronym BMP; these sources are likewise separately listed in the bibliography.

settlement but also as a religious oasis.<sup>21</sup> Although perceived as a Greek site, Naukratis had a diverse population which included Egyptian, Phoenician, and Persian inhabitants. Archaeological evidence attests to occupation of the site between the 7th century BCE and the 7th century CE, and confirms the multiethnic nature of its population.<sup>22</sup>

The decline of the site in the Byzantine period saw it fade into obscurity, and its location was only rediscovered in the late 19th century.<sup>23</sup> It is in a remote location, and much of the original excavation area is now underwater.<sup>24</sup> Recent excavations have resulted in revisions to the understanding of the size and layout of the site.<sup>25</sup> At its peak, Naukratis covered an irregularly shaped area of approximately 60 hectares.<sup>26</sup> The Nile lay to its west border, with access to the water in the north for its international harbour and in the south for the sacred quay.<sup>27</sup> The sacred precincts are located in the central and western area of the site;

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<sup>21</sup> Herodotus 2.178. He states that Amasis “gave those who came to Egypt the city of Naukratis to live in; and to those who travelled to the country without wanting to settle there, he gave lands where they might set up altars and make holy places for their gods.” He then specifies which poleis contributed to which sanctuaries; the sanctuary of Aphrodite is notably absent from this list.

<sup>22</sup> Demetriou (2017), 52-53; Villing et al. (BMP) 2-3.

<sup>23</sup> For further discussion on the search for and discovery of the site, see Villing (BMP, a).

<sup>24</sup> Möller 89; Villing (BMP b), 3.

<sup>25</sup> See Villing and Thomas (BMP) for the summary of excavations and in-depth discussion about the topography of the site.

<sup>26</sup> Villing and Thomas (BMP), 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 4. See Möller on the literary tradition concerning the placement of Naukratis on the Canopic branch of the Nile (115-116).

the Sanctuaries of the Dioskouroi, Apollo and Hera are to the north, along with the Hellenion, whereas the Sanctuary of Aphrodite is found further south amidst the residential quarter.<sup>28</sup> The Sanctuary of Aphrodite is adjoined by a faience workshop, and is in close proximity to the Egyptian temple complex, otherwise known as the Great Temenos.<sup>29</sup> Other notable features of Naukratis include its residential and commercial buildings, its cemetery, and its waterways; additional temples attested in literary sources stand to be discovered in future excavations.<sup>30</sup>

Over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, there were limited excavations at Naukratis. The initial investigations under Petrie, Griffith and Gardner (1884-1886), and Hogarth (1899 and 1903) became the standard references for the site until it was revisited by Coulson and Leonard (1977-1983).<sup>31</sup> Increased interest in Naukratis in the 21st century has led to ongoing activity at the site, including excavations since 2012 as part of the Naukratis Project sponsored by the British Museum.<sup>32</sup> An essential component of the Naukratis Project is the publication of a comprehensive catalogue of the

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<sup>28</sup> Villing and Thomas (BMP), 4-6.

<sup>29</sup> The precise chronology and geography of this structure remains a contentious issue (see Villing and Thomas BMP, 6-8 for overview); however, for the purposes of this survey it suffices to identify this area as an Egyptian sanctuary dating to the sixth century (*ibid*, 7).

<sup>30</sup> Villing and Thomas (BMP), 8-10. The list primarily consists of as yet unlocated temples attested to by literary sources, but also suggests the possibility of evidence for Hellenistic festivals.

<sup>31</sup> See Möller (92-94), and Villing (BMP a) for discussion on the history of excavation at the site.

<sup>32</sup> Villing (BMP a), 2-3.

material evidence of the site; selections from this catalogue and the associated commentary by the project curators form the basis of the following discussion on the cult of Aphrodite.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Sanctuary of Aphrodite**

Villing has recently argued that the foundation of the Archaic Greek sanctuaries was “planned in one sweep,” aligned in respect to the river and designed to accommodate the spatial needs of each sanctuary.<sup>34</sup> The Sanctuary of Aphrodite was situated in the urban centre of Naukratis, and likely served both the local population and international visitors.<sup>35</sup> Aphrodite was also venerated at the Hellenion, and variation in votive distribution between the two sites suggests that a distinct aspect of the goddess was recognized in each sanctuary.<sup>36</sup> Despite a general lack of surviving architectural remains, the stratigraphy of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite is remarkably well preserved.<sup>37</sup> Gardner identifies three

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<sup>33</sup> The catalogue produced by the Naukratis project includes approximately 17,000 objects from the site, and the relation between local production and imported wares of various mediums and types, such as ceramics, stoneware, and terracottas, is the focus of multiple recent and upcoming studies (Villing et al. BMP, 2-3). Of this number, approximately 10% of finds were published, 11% partially published, and 79% unpublished between 1884 through 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Villing (2019), 219. She specifically notes the necessity of “space for feasting and storage.”

<sup>35</sup> Williams, 186-190; Villing (2019), 226. Bowden suggests that the Sanctuary of Aphrodite accommodated local religious needs, whereas the Hellenion was frequented by international visitors (28-29); Villing discounts this supposition owing to the lack of comparative evidence from other sanctuaries (2019, 226).

<sup>36</sup> Villing (2019), 229.

<sup>37</sup> See Villing et al. (BMP), 8-9 on the extant architectural remains at Naukratis (c. 130 objects; mostly in a religious context).

developmental phases of the sanctuary; he suggests that the original Archaic temple was destroyed and rebuilt in the Classical period, and was again reconstructed at the beginning of the Hellenistic period.<sup>38</sup> Each phase of the temple differed from its predecessors in layout, which likely reflected the developing needs of the community. Minute developments within each phase attest to continual activity at the site; although this activity was largely a byproduct of the attempt to counteract the accumulation of earth, the very act of maintenance implies the continued significance of the sanctuary.

### **Pre-Hellenistic Epigraphic Evidence**

Three of the four dedications to Aphrodite on stone were recovered from or near her southern sanctuary, whereas the fourth was found in the Hellenion; all date to the sixth and fifth centuries.<sup>39</sup> The three dedications recovered from the sanctuary of the goddess are votives in different forms, including a disk, a statue

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<sup>38</sup> Gardner primarily relies upon the rate of accumulation of earth to determine dates for each phase of the temple, and provisionally places the construction of each at the beginning of the 6th c., 4th c. and 3rd c. respectively (37). He is hesitant to commit to a specific destruction date for the Archaic temple, but suggests that it is connected to the Persian invasion in 525 (35-36); his supposed date for reconstruction at the end of the century corresponds to the recovery of Egyptian independence. Villing demonstrates that the first phase of the sanctuary was “up and running well before 600” (2019, 219), but the remainder of Gardner’s suppositions have largely been accepted. Möller summarizes Gardner’s work and reiterates the Persian connection (102-104); Williams also adheres to this view, and posits a date of reconstruction between 520-510 (188). Thomas proposes a similar date of 530-510, and further situates Temple 3 between 330-250; he intends to publish “a detailed account of the stratigraphy of the Aphrodite sanctuary” (BMP a., 7).

<sup>39</sup> On suggested dates, see Bernand (744-746) and Johnston (BMP b, 5).

of a woman, and a statue of a hunter.<sup>40</sup> Each artefact is made of limestone and follows a minimalist formula which includes the name of both the dedicator and the dedicatee; the disk also includes the toponym Naukratis within the inscription. The fourth inscription is upon a stone base, dedicated to Aphrodite by a Mytilenian, and presumably of a later date than the aforementioned exempla.<sup>41</sup> The dedication by a foreigner, who specifically chose to honour Aphrodite among the multiple deities at the Hellenion, is suggestive of the continued significance of the goddess at Naukratis beyond the Archaic period. However, the ceramic evidence suggests that her significance may have declined.

Approximately 2800 inscribed ceramic fragments dating have been excavated at Naukratis, half of which have been identified as dedications.<sup>42</sup> The majority of these dedications are votives to Aphrodite and Apollo, and largely consist of the relevant deity's name.<sup>43</sup> The fragmentary nature of the evidence

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<sup>40</sup> Bernand 744-745, No. 5, No. 4 and No. 6 respectively. The latter two are both of Cypriot origin, representative of what Johnston classifies as a "dedicatory peculiarit[y]" at Naukratis (Johnston BMP b, 5-6, 12).

<sup>41</sup> Bernand 745-746, no. 7; Johnston (BMP b), 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> Villing et al. (BMP) 19-20. The second half is a miscellaneous collection, which encompasses "owner's inscriptions, commercial notations or '*bons mots*'" as well as uncertain assignations (20). The catalogue produced by the Naukratis Project attests to double the amount recorded in earlier scholarship (19). Johnston comments on the individual nature of previously unknown results, and highlights the increased amount of text on Chian pottery from the late Archaic period and on Attic pottery from the Classical period as the two central emendations (BMP a, 78). See Johnston for summary of previously published ceramic texts and revised readings (BMP a, 8-12).

<sup>43</sup> See Johnston for commentary on dedicatory formulae to Aphrodite and Apollo, and rare exceptions to standards (BMP a, 29-31).

makes it difficult to confirm quantitative statistics, but recent scholarship attests to approximately 285 dedications to Aphrodite; this amounts to almost 20% of the extant dedications.<sup>44</sup> The prevalence of dedications to Aphrodite is in itself indicative of the significance of her cult at Naukratis, and this is reinforced by the nature of the inscriptions. A large percentage of votive pottery dedicated to Aphrodite are *dipinti*, many of which were inscribed before firing and thus purposefully commissioned for dedication at Naukratis.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to incised dedications, which “could have been put on by anybody at any time before dedication,” the pre-fired *dipinti* emphasize the pre-determined intent to honour the Naukratite Aphrodite.<sup>46</sup> The majority of the dedicatory inscriptions are attributed to the first half of the sixth century, after which period votive pottery seems to fall into decline.<sup>47</sup> This trend is seen in both local and imported pottery; although local pottery was produced in both Greek and Egyptian style from the

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<sup>44</sup> Johnston (BMP a), 6. Approximate statistics derived from Johnston’s catalogue of dedicatory inscriptions are as follows: 31% Apollo; 19% Aphrodite; 42% unknown; 8% to other deities.

<sup>45</sup> Villing et. al. (BMP), 20. Also see Williams, 177-179; and Johnston (BMP a), 14-15. Inscriptions were either painted (*dipinti*) or incised (*graffiti*); of the 2800 ceramic inscriptions, approximately 300 were *dipinti* (Johnston BMP a, 14). Johnston specifies that 260 of these *dipinti* were Chian drinking vessels, and “where there is clear evidence, bear dedications to Aphrodite, with the exception of six examples” (ibid).

<sup>46</sup> Villing et al. (BMP) 20. The majority of *graffiti* dedications are believed to have been inscribed at the site of Naukratis (Williams 177).

<sup>47</sup> Johnston (BMP a), 8.

inception of the site, evidence from local workshops becomes increasingly scarce until the Hellenistic period.<sup>48</sup>

It is uncertain whether the decline in votive pottery is a result of evidence bias or reflective of a historical trend. Villing observes that the comparative scarcity of evidence of subsequent development in favour of the Archaic period reflects the preferences of the early excavators, and consequently shapes the overall picture of Naukratis;<sup>49</sup> however, other evidence suggests that there was a decline in attention to the cult of Aphrodite, reflecting the Egyptianization of the city in the Classical period. A similar decline is found in the importation of figurines, and specifically a “decline in the numbers of foreign visitors to the site carrying votives for dedication to Greek gods.”<sup>50</sup> This process began much earlier

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<sup>48</sup> Villing (BMP c) 2, 6. Villing suggests that local workshops directed their attention to production of utilitarian pottery in response to competition with imported pieces (6); this is reflective of the Athenian monopoly of trade during this two hundred year period (Johnston BMP a, 8).

<sup>49</sup> Villing (BMP c), 6.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas (BMP c), 8. The corpus of material culture recovered from Naukratis includes three main categories of figurines, divided in accordance with chronology and geography: first, those of Cypriot import, dating from the seventh century and rarely after the sixth; second, those of East Greek origin, in the late sixth century and early fifth century; and third, those which were locally made, which became increasingly popular in the fifth century and dominant from the late fourth century (Villing et al. BMP, 24). Although the latter category includes some figurines of Greek style, the majority are of Egyptian influence (ibid); in particular, “Egyptian deities were popular subjects in local terracotta production since the founding of Naukratis” (Thomas BMP b, 6). Production at Naukratis during the Egyptian Late Period (664-332) frequently featured portrayals of nude women, who were associated with Isis and Hathor (Villing et al. BMP, 24); these two goddesses rose in prominence to become “most notable among figures by the third century” (Thomas BMP c, 7).



at Naukratis, and anticipates similar occurrences elsewhere in Egypt in the Ptolemaic period, including the emergence of Isis as a major deity.<sup>51</sup>

### **Aphrodite Pandemos: An Integrative Goddess**

Votive offerings to Aphrodite at Naukratis were rarely characterized by epithets, and there is some ambivalence in modern scholarship as to what the cult title was. Epigraphic evidence indicates that the goddess was recognized by at least three epithets; Aphrodite Pandemos was the most prevalent, but other appellations include Aphrodite of Naukratis, Aphrodite Hiere and Aphrodite Pythochrestos.<sup>52</sup> The latter two epithets are of minimal consequence to this investigation. *Hiere* is descriptive and applicable to any goddess, and therefore offers little commentary on the cult of Aphrodite in particular. In contrast, *Pythochrestos* holds more specific connotations, and is worth further exploration in consideration of cross-cultural connections; however, the evidence for this

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<sup>51</sup> Isis was one of the deities that was most frequently represented in bronze votives and terracotta figurines at the site of Naukratis (Masson BMP b, 6-7; Thomas BMP c, 8). Despite this prevalence, Bricault argues against a specific cult to Isis at Naukratis prior to the Hellenistic period, but allows that a percentage of the population was aware of the association between Aphrodite, Hathor and Isis throughout the Mediterranean (23). Discussion of the emergence of Isis as a major Egyptian deity is the focus of the third chapter.

<sup>52</sup> Williams (2015) and Demetriou (2017) each specify three epithets for Aphrodite; Pythochrestos is listed by the former (185-186), whereas Hiere is listed by the latter (59).

epithet at Naukratis is extremely fragmentary and scarcely cited in scholarship, and thus remains beyond the scope of the current investigation.<sup>53</sup>

Williams also dismisses the toponymic epithet for revealing little of significance concerning the cult of Aphrodite, but it should not be discounted so quickly.<sup>54</sup> Toponymic epithets were frequently employed to identify the various manifestations of Aphrodite throughout the Mediterranean, but the emphasis on location extends beyond a simple means of distinction; it expresses the poliadic nature of the goddess.<sup>55</sup> It binds Aphrodite to the land and therefore to the people who inhabit it; although this geographical claim is not the only aspect of the goddess, it is nevertheless omnipresent. The connection between deity and

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<sup>53</sup> BM GR 1900, 0214.5 The fragmentary inscription is from a chalice which dates to the sixth century, and reads *...tei Aphro]ditei py[...* (Williams 185-186). Williams appears to be the first to offer this reading of the inscription, and cites three other fragmentary graffiti which contain some variation of *...]pyth[...* and therefore could plausibly support his hypothesis (*ibid*). Williams' interpretation offers an alternative to Johnston, who claims that the first is hard to categorize, the second is a personal name, and the third is a deity; however, Johnston posits that the deity in question is the Pythian Apollo (BMP a, 50).

<sup>54</sup> This stance mirrors that of Johnston, who speaks against Aphrodite of Naukratis as a “diagnostic cult epithet” (BMP a, 32). Williams allows that toponymics might indicate the popularity or exceptionality of a cult, but otherwise only attends to the epithet as indicative of the fact that a vase on which it was inscribed “was specially commissioned in North Ionia for dedication in Egypt” (184-185).

<sup>55</sup> A full accounting of the role of toponymic epithets in Greek religious practices is beyond the scope of this present study. Polinskaya addresses the inherent “cognitive tension between local deities and Panhellenic divine identities” in the use of toponymic epithets, and contrasts each model of Greek religion; although she highlights the faults of both local and Panhellenic interpretations, she nonetheless reiterates the significance of the local model (15-25).

location is evidenced elsewhere down into the Hellenistic period.<sup>56</sup> It is not unreasonable to suppose that this association persisted at Naukratis, though owing to the lack of dedications we do not see it attested.<sup>57</sup>

Of greater interest to modern scholars is the cultic epithet *Pandemos*, despite a similar scarcity of evidence.<sup>58</sup> Dedications to *Aphrodite Pandemos* were recovered from both the southern sanctuary to *Aphrodite* as well as the *Hellenion*.<sup>59</sup> There is contention among scholars as to the exact interpretation of the epithet *Pandemos*, but the two underlying aspects which emerge are its civic and integrative functions.<sup>60</sup> The integrative aspect of the cult functions at multiple levels; *Demetriou* and *Williams* each highlight the necessity and benefit of civic

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<sup>56</sup> Permutations of the Cypriot *Aphrodite* exemplify the commonness and continuity of toponymic epithets for the goddess from the Archaic to the Roman period. Epigraphic evidence indicates that it was not until the end of the fourth century that she was referred to as *Aphrodite* rather than the *Paphian*, the *Golgian* or simply the goddess, and these epithets along with *Kypria* were often used in the Hellenistic and Roman periods (*Karageorghis*, 7).

<sup>57</sup> See *Johnston* (BMP a, 32-33) and *Williams* (184-185) for the catalogue and commentary of extant exempla. It is worth noting that although dedications to *Aphrodite* of *Naukratis* were limited, they were not far behind those addressed to *Aphrodite Pandemos*.

<sup>58</sup> The British Museum's online catalogue attests to five extant examples of *Pandemos*; the cultic epithet is inscribed upon four Attic sherds from the 6-5th centuries. The fifth example is an earlier Chian vessel which *Scholtz* uses to connect *Aphrodite Pandemos* to local prostitution (240-241), although the cultic epithet is not inscribed on this sherd. Despite the Attic origins of the cups, the Athenians did not have a significant role at *Naukratis*, nor is the Athenian concept of the epithet *Pandemos* obviously applicable to the *Naukratite Aphrodite* (see *Höckmann and Möller*, 17; *Scholtz*, 232).

<sup>59</sup> *Höckmann and Möller*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> *Scholtz* is the most frequently cited author in recent scholarship; he argues against a civic interpretation of *Pandemos* but instead presents the deity in a "general access" capacity at the site (232). Responses to *Scholtz* include *Höckmann and Möller* (16-18) and *Williams* (185). In contrast to *Scholtz's* portrayal, *Williams* (185), *Demetriou* (2017, 59) and *Villing* (2019, 229) all emphasize the civic aspect of *Aphrodite* at *Naukratis*.

harmony, especially concerning the economic interests of the *emporion*. The cult of Aphrodite at Naukratis was frequented not only by Greeks of varied classes and professions, both local and foreign, but also devotees of other ethnicities.<sup>61</sup> As Aphrodite Pandemos, the goddess' divergent attributes were synthesized into a single, but varied, role; she was both an erotic and marine goddess, patron of both hetairai and sailors.<sup>62</sup> This emphasis on unity in diversity reflects the diverse nature of Naukratite society, and so the aspect of Aphrodite as Pandemos is also a function of her poliadic role. Thus, the Archaic epigraphic evidence characterizes the goddess and attests to the integrative function of her cult; it is this function which, centuries later, the Ptolemies would attempt to call upon in their own endeavours at integration.

### **Hellenistic Epigraphic Evidence**

Epigraphic evidence of Ptolemaic presence in Naukratis derives primarily from stone inscriptions. There are significantly fewer stone inscriptions than

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<sup>61</sup> For example, Cyprian and Phoenician. However, it is important to note that in the Archaic period, the emphasis was on the establishment and perpetuation of a Greek identity in a foreign land. See Höckmann and Möller (17-18) on the function of Panhellenic sanctuaries in the Greek world, and the importance of identity at Naukratis.

<sup>62</sup> See Scholtz (240-241) regarding the connection between Aphrodite Pandemos and the *hetairai*. Parker argues that despite the apparent distinction between spheres in which Aphrodite is involved, she remains “the same smiling and persuasive goddess,” and the connection between her activities “would have been easily perceived by a Greek” (90). The dual role of her erotic and marine domains is discussed in the following chapter.

ceramic, and as a class they predominantly consist of epitaphs and dedications.<sup>63</sup>

Bernand has published all but 18 inscriptions of the extant corpus; those he omitted are either fragmentary or irrelevant to the current study.<sup>64</sup> The largest section of his catalogue is comprised of dedicatory inscriptions, followed by funerary steles and fragmentary material; Aphrodite and the Ptolemies are among the most prolific names attested in this corpus, but at Naukratis the interest of the Ptolemies seems not to be with Aphrodite, but other deities, chiefly Egyptian.<sup>65</sup>

One fragment dedicated to Ptolemy II was recovered from the Great Temenos, but this is the only inscription with a designated provenance; the remaining six inscriptions are listed simply as from Naukratis.<sup>66</sup> The inscriptions are fragmentary and most often only contain the cult title of the dynast, from

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<sup>63</sup> Villing et al. (BMP, 21). The catalogue from the Naukratis Project attests to approximately 67 Greek inscriptions, although the uncertain provenance of a select few pieces makes a specific number difficult to ascertain (Johnston BMP b, 2).

<sup>64</sup> Bernand, 742-768. Johnston deems 13 of the missing inscriptions “fragmentary at best”; the remaining five, although “more substantial” have little bearing upon this study as they are either not contextually or chronologically applicable to Aphrodite or the Ptolemies (BMP b, 2).

<sup>65</sup> Bernand records 30 stone dedications at Naukratis, 25 of which are dated between the Archaic and Hellenistic periods (742-761). Of this number, seven are dedicated to (or associated with) the Ptolemies, four to Aphrodite, and three unspecified; the remaining eleven are divided among nine Greek deities, including one dedication to the “gods of the Greeks” (ibid). Johnston observes that although the stone dedicatory material is lacking in contrast to the ceramic record, it is demonstrative of the multitude of cults in operation at Naukratis; moreover, it reflects patterns of other Egyptian settlements, in which it is common for the cult of the Ptolemies to “bulk the largest” (BMP b, 12).

<sup>66</sup> Bernand 747-754, nos. 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 18; Johnston (BMP b, 8-9). Johnston’s synopsis offers little commentary or correction to Bernand, except to note that Petrie’s original excavation journal records the composition of one of the dedications to Ptolemy XII (no. 17) as limestone rather than granite (9).

Ptolemy II to Ptolemy XII.<sup>67</sup> One notable marble stele is dedicated to Isis, Sarapis and Apollo by the steward of the Naukratis district on behalf of Ptolemy IV; apart from the inclusion of Dionysos as part of the cult title of Ptolemy XII, this is the only example of other deities mentioned alongside the Ptolemaic dynasts in Greek stone epigraphy at Naukratis.<sup>68</sup>

Egyptian epigraphic evidence is similarly sparse, but it augments both the quantity of deities and dynasts attested at the site, including the only contemporary attestations of Ptolemy I.<sup>69</sup> Cartouches of Ptolemy II have been recovered from the foundation deposits of the Great Temenos and exemplify the religious investment of the Ptolemies at Naukratis; the dynasts were not only the objects of cult worship, but deliberately enhanced *temenoi* as part of their building

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<sup>67</sup> Bernand, 753-754. Ptolemy II is mentioned in two inscriptions (nos. 10 and 11); Ptolemy IV in two (nos. 13 and 14); and Ptolemy XII in three (nos. 16, 17, and 18). The longest intact inscription is actually dedicated to the nurse of Ptolemy XII by at least two men who identify themselves as citizens; however, Naukratis is not explicitly named nor is the provenance secure (no. 18).

<sup>68</sup> Bernand 749-750, no. 13; Johnston (BMP b), 8-9. Egyptianization began to develop early in the Hellenistic period, likely in the beginning of the 3rd century.

<sup>69</sup> Ptolemy I is included as a patronymic in one of the dedications to Ptolemy II (no. 11), but is otherwise not mentioned in the Greek stone epigraphic evidence from Naukratis. In contrast, cartouches of Ptolemy I are found in the *soubassement* of Amun-Ra; fragments of a granite relief depict personifications of various nomes alongside Ptolemy I, who is presenting them to the eponymous deity (Muhs 110; von Recklinghausen 2-5; Said El-Kharadly 123). A stela naming Ptolemy V also depicts him in relief as pharaoh, alongside his wife Cleopatra I; they are accompanied by Amun-Ra, Mut, and Khonsu, the so-called triad of Naukratis (British Museum, AN1517852001001). It is believed to be symmetric to the well-known Damanhur Stela, which likely originated from the Great Temenos at Naukratis; however, the cartouches remain unfinished, and the dynasts are accompanied by Shu, Tefnut, and “six divinized ancestors of the king” (British Museum, AN1612942958001).

programme.<sup>70</sup> However, despite the prolific presence of the Ptolemies in the religious sphere, there is no significant connection to the cult of Aphrodite

This apparent lack of interest on the part of the Ptolemies stands in contrast to what we see on Cyprus. It was common practice there to honour the dynasts by statuary in the *agorai* and sanctuaries, and inscriptions on the bases of these statues constitute one of the three main categories of Cypriot epigraphy in the Hellenistic period.<sup>71</sup> The statues are not merely associated with Aphrodite due to their provenance within her sanctuaries, but are often dedicated to the goddess, thus binding the deity and the dynasts closely together.<sup>72</sup> Although the cult of Aphrodite at Naukratis persisted in the Hellenistic period, material evidence suggest that it peaked in the Archaic period and thereafter faced a steady decline; in contrast, the cult of Aphrodite at Cyprus flourished throughout antiquity. The

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<sup>70</sup> Masson (BMP a), 7-8. Although the identification and chronology of the Great Temenos and its constituents have long been debated amongst scholars, it is commonly accepted that the monumental *pylon* was constructed by Ptolemy II (Said El-Kharadly 122-123; Spencer 34-38).

<sup>71</sup> Kantirea, 2-3; the remaining two categories are votive and funerary inscriptions. The corpus of epigraphic evidence from Cyprus is in excess of 5000 inscriptions, including Phoenician, Greek and Latin scripts (*ibid*, 1). Dedications to Aphrodite at her temple in Palaipaphos constitute a large percentage of the extant Greek epigraphic evidence of the goddess in the Ptolemaic kingdom. Commentary on the nature of the evidence recovered from the sanctuary is found in Mitford (1961).

<sup>72</sup> Pfeiffer and Dumke, 88. They argue that the dedicatory and donatory inscriptions are indicative of ruler cult practice at the sanctuary of Aphrodite in Palaipaphos, although there is no evidence that the living king was worshipped. Their investigation is focused on the reign of Ptolemy VIII to Ptolemy X, but this later chronology does not refute their overall depiction of the sanctuary as “an interface between local elites, the Ptolemaic royal household and the royal family itself” (*ibid*). Epigraphic evidence attests to the existence of the ruler cult on Cyprus from the reign of Ptolemy I, and both dynastic and individual ruler cults developed in the private and public spheres (Grabowski, 34-35).

Ptolemaic dynasts were astute manipulators of religious practices in the service of their own ambitions, and frequently patronized local deities to ingratiate themselves to the population.<sup>73</sup> It seems that Naukratis during the Classical period had steadily Egyptianized, and so the earlier prominence of the cult, with its integrative function, had declined such that, when the Ptolemies arrived, it was the Egyptian temples that drew their patronage. However, if the Ptolemies focused at Naukratis in terms of temples on Egyptian cults, they did in another sphere demonstrate interest in connecting themselves to the old tradition of Aphrodite as poliadic deity there, at least at first, namely in respect of their coinage.<sup>74</sup>

### **Ptolemaic Coinage: An Overview**

Although Greek coinage was introduced to Egypt long before the establishment of the Ptolemaic dynasty, it did not function as money until the fourth century.<sup>75</sup> Local production from Persian satraps and temple authorities immediately ceased with the incursion of Alexander and the subsequent

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<sup>73</sup> This practice was likely inherited from Alexander, whose “religious activity was in fact tied to places” (Samuel, 81-82). Samuel argues that the early Ptolemies emulated Alexander’s approach to religion in that they recognized new deities they encountered whilst maintaining traditional worship to their native deities (92-93).

<sup>74</sup> A search of the Packhum Database (<https://inscriptions.packhum.org>) indicates that the vast majority of epigraphic evidence which attests to Aphrodite in Egypt holds either Naukratis or Cyprus as its provenance.

<sup>75</sup> Lorber (2018a, 22). As early as the sixth century, Greek coinage entering Egypt was used as a form of bullion, but later was used in multiple sectors, “as pay for Greek mercenaries in the service of native pharaohs, as a medium of exchange in transactions, and as a store of wealth for Egyptian temples and elites” (Lorber 2018a, 22-23; also Hazzard 1995, 90 n. 3).



introduction of imperial coinage, which soon became the only legal currency in Egypt.<sup>76</sup> During his satrapy, Ptolemy continued minting the coins of Alexander, but soon began developing his own types; he was the first of the Successors to feature his name in the legend, a practice which was later standardized.<sup>77</sup> The Ptolemaic dynasts minted in precious metals and bronze, and although variation in type occurred across multiple denominations, the coinage as a whole remained remarkably conventional in terms of iconography.<sup>78</sup> Any deviation from these standards is thus worthy of consideration, especially if it occurs with a degree of frequency; such is the case with the inclusion of Aphrodite in early Ptolemaic coinage.

There are five coin types which feature Aphrodite, four of which were minted in Naukratis or Cyprus, and three of which are attributed to the reign of

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<sup>76</sup> Lorber (2018a, 23). Local coinage was imitative of the Athenian owl, which was the preferred standard throughout the ancient Near East. The abrupt disappearance of this coinage is attested by a break in the coin hoards; Lorber argues that since it was of the same weight standard and purity as the new imperial coinage, there is no normal mechanism by which one should put the other out of circulation and concludes that an official policy was imposed to achieve this effect. It is uncertain whether this policy was initiated under the authority of Cleomenes of Naukratis or Ptolemy I, but Lorber favours the latter because it adheres to the nature of his later monetary reforms as both satrap and king (23-24).

<sup>77</sup> Lorber (2018a, 26, 29). Ptolemy first attached his name to the legend of a coin type issued in 312/311, whereas previously all coinage was inscribed with the name of Alexander (ibid, 26). Following the currency reform of 294, the legend ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ naming Ptolemy as king was standardized, and used throughout the dynasty (ibid 29; Hazzard 1995, 57).

<sup>78</sup> Gold and exceptional silver coinage depicts regnal portraits, not necessarily of contemporary monarchs; silver coinage, the portrait of Ptolemy I Soter/eagle on thunderbolt; and bronze coinage, the laureate Zeus/eagle on thunderbolt (Hazzard 1995, 57; Lorber 2018a 32, 585-586; Poole xiii).

Ptolemy I.<sup>79</sup> With the exception of the gold staters minted in Cyprus, which depict Aphrodite on both the obverse and reverse of the coin, each type depicts Aphrodite on one side, and a symbol of dynastic power on the other.<sup>80</sup> The coinage supports the identification of Aphrodite as a poliadic deity, and a closer examination of the types minted at Naukratis and Cyprus will reveal the degree to which her poliadic nature is expressed and utilized at each site.

### **Ptolemaic Coinage: Naukratis**

It is likely that Ptolemy I operated an auxiliary mint at Naukratis at the beginning of his reign, although there is little other evidence of coin production at the site following this period.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> This number excludes the coinage which bears a lotus, emblematic of Aphrodite and often used as a mint mark in Cyprus (Lorber, 2018b, 107; see also Lorber, 2001). The catalogue references are as follows: (1) CPE 214-215; (2) CPE B3; (3) CPE B118-B130; (4) CPE B447-451; and (5) CPE B520-B523. The first four were minted in Naukratis and Cyprus and will be discussed in greater detail below; the last was minted in Arsinoë in the Peloponnesus (Methana), and will be discussed in the next chapter as its iconography features the syncretized Arsinoë-Aphrodite.

<sup>80</sup> CPE 214-215: gold third and twelfth stater, respectively. The phrase “symbol of dynastic power” is loosely used to incorporate the breadth of symbols which either directly or indirectly represent or invoke the Ptolemaic dynasty, their policies, and their interests. The manner in which they are associated with the dynasty (e.g., in the military or religious spheres) and the strength of this association are variable, but these concerns are of less consequence in light of the fact that the association exists at all. The symbols depicted on the Aphrodite-type coins include a soldier (CPE B520-B523); an eagle (CPE B118-130); a portrait of Alexander (CPE B3) and a portrait of Zeus-Ammon (CPE B447-451); although the soldier is likely representative of Ares, he is nonetheless interpreted as “a guardian figure to be associated with the protective function of the Ptolemaic garrison” (Lorber 2018b, 131).

<sup>81</sup> Lorber (2018a, 27). It is likely that Ptolemy opened mints at Memphis, Naukratis, and Pelusium to augment the output of the central Alexandrine mint in a monetary reform prior to his ascendance as king, although these auxiliary mints would not have been in operation for a long period of time. Lorber identifies Naukratis as the possible location for “Uncertain Mint 2,” which produced a series of tetradrachms with Athena/eagle on thunderbolt between 306-303 (CPE 78-82) but she does not otherwise identify a Naukratite mint under the early Ptolemies.

The American Numismatic Society attests to two coin types minted at Naukratis: (1) a silver obol, Athena/Owl, dated to 400-320;<sup>82</sup> and (2) a bronze hemiobol, Alexander/Aphrodite, dated to 330-323.<sup>83</sup> Redon argues that these coins were contemporaneous of one another, each produced in the satrapy of Cleomenes during the transitional period between Alexander and Ptolemy I.<sup>84</sup> He emphasizes the symbolic value of these issues over their economic utility, since by producing its own coinage, Naukratis had fulfilled the final qualifications for “*tous les attributs d’une cité grecque.*”<sup>85</sup> The desire to evoke and perpetuate the Hellenic nature of Naukratis has been interpreted as a reaction to the shifting power dynamics within Egypt, and the rise of Alexandria in particular.<sup>86</sup> The Greek population thus turned to mythic history and the foundation of their city in

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<sup>82</sup> ANS 1944.100.75458, American Numismatic Society, <http://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.75458?lang=en> (accessed January 2021).

<sup>83</sup> ANS 1944.100.75459, American Numismatic Society, <http://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.75459?lang=en> (accessed January 2021). This Aphrodite coin corresponds to CPE B3. Neither the ANS nor the CPE identify the male portrait as the head of Alexander; however, Lorber’s commentary of this type implicitly accepts this identification, and she offers no alternatives for consideration (2018b, 2-3).

<sup>84</sup> Redon, 60. Although governed at least nominally by Cleomenes, Redon depicts this period as semi-autonomous for the Naukratite population, albeit short-lived. Moreover, he identifies this period as the only point at which Naukratis minted coins, and only of these two types.

<sup>85</sup> Redon, 61

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 63.

the Archaic period as a means of legitimization to leverage against the threat of other powerful cities.<sup>87</sup>

In consideration of this framework, it is unsurprising that the portrait of Aphrodite is featured on the civic coinage of Naukratis.<sup>88</sup> The iconography recalls the prevalence of her cult in the Archaic period, and the depiction of a Greek deity rather than an Egyptian one deliberately reaffirms the Hellenic identity of the population.<sup>89</sup> Although the portrait of Alexander has received the most attention in scholarship, the identification of the female deity as Aphrodite is worthy of equal consideration.<sup>90</sup> The portrait was originally interpreted as a personification of the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid. Naukratis benefited from “the prestige of being the first Greek city in Egypt,” and the population thus directed their efforts to emphasizing the antiquity of their city (Redon 70; Villing 2019, 221).

<sup>88</sup> It is possible that the female deity depicted is Hera, as she too was worshipped at Naukratis since the Archaic period; however, given the lack of distinctive iconography to support the identification of a particular goddess, the prevalence of the cult of Aphrodite makes her the most likely candidate.

<sup>89</sup> Here it may be useful to distinguish between the ethnic and cultural identity of the population, although the two are often conflated; the former indicates descent and is often perceived as a static fact, whereas the latter may be intentionally cultivated so as to present a self-reflection of values and ideals. Despite the subset of the Egyptian population and the slow but ongoing assimilation of Egyptian culture, Naukratis retained its Greek identity, first as an *emporion*, and then as a polis.

<sup>90</sup> See Lorber 2018b, 2-3. The excavation at Naukratis under Petrie yielded the earliest example of this coin type, which was published in 1886 by Head. However, the obverse portrait was not identified as Alexander until almost a century later, in a study by Price in 1981. Subsequent scholarship focused primarily on stylistic elements of the portraiture, as well as the dating of the coin; Lorber notes that the inclusion of Alexander’s name in the legend “strongly recalls the inscription on early bronzes of Ptolemy’s satrapy, which were introduced perhaps in 312/11” (2018b, 3).

polis, “represented under the form of one of the indigenous Aphrodites.”<sup>91</sup> This identification of the deity as a personification has been refuted on the grounds that coinage of the early Hellenistic period did not feature personifications; however, even if Aphrodite is not considered a direct personification of Naukratis, her depiction on the coinage underlines her nature as a poliadic deity.<sup>92</sup> In contrast to the mimicry of the Athenian standard, the Alexander/Aphrodite coin was unique to Naukratis and thus can be interpreted as a form of self-portrayal, a carefully crafted composition in which Aphrodite emerges as representative of the polis.<sup>93</sup>

### **Ptolemaic Coinage: Cyprus**

In contrast to Naukratis, which does not have a history of coin production and thus makes the inclusion of Aphrodite significant due to its rarity, Cyprus produced coinage featuring the goddess both before and after the arrival of the Ptolemies; what is significant here is the continuity. The earliest issues were minted under the authority of Menelaus, the brother of Ptolemy I, who succeeded

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<sup>91</sup> Lorber 2018b, 3. The initial identification was made by Head and accepted by Svoronos. A third possibility for the identification of the deity is Hera, as she too was worshipped at Naukratis since the archaic period; however, scholarship subsequent to Head and Svoronos retains only the identification of Aphrodite.

<sup>92</sup> Lorber 2018b, 3.

<sup>93</sup> The production of the Athenian coinage attests to the autonomy of Naukratis as a polis, and its adherence to the standard economic practices of the Mediterranean. However, as a mimicry of a standard issue, it offers little insight as to the individual character of Naukratis.

Nicocreon as a vassal king of Salamis in 311.<sup>94</sup> During his short-lived reign, Menelaus produced gold third and twelfth staters, which depict Aphrodite on both the obverse and reverse of each denomination.<sup>95</sup> The coins adhere to the practices of previous Cypriot kings, and thus anticipate the standard policy employed by the Ptolemaic dynasts to respect and maintain local practices and institutions.<sup>96</sup>

The loss and subsequent reconquest of Cyprus coincided with the final coinage reforms of Ptolemy I, at which time he minted a series of bronze coins featuring Aphrodite.<sup>97</sup> The obverse depicts the portrait of the goddess, with an eagle on a thunderbolt on the reverse.<sup>98</sup> The iconographic combination of “a type

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<sup>94</sup> Lorber (2018a, 293-294). Prior to his death, Nicocreon was the foremost ally of Ptolemy I, and generously rewarded for his aid in securing Cyprus against Antigonos in 314. The mint at Salamis produced both Alexandrine and royal coinage until the possession of the island by Demetrius in 306.

<sup>95</sup> CPE 214-215. There is a slight variation in the legend of each denomination, but otherwise both types share the same iconography and control marks. The obverse and reverse portraits are likewise similar, featuring Aphrodite facing left, with an earring and necklace; however, in the former she bears a turreted crown, and in the latter a diadem ornamented with leaves.

<sup>96</sup> Lorber (2018a, 294).

<sup>97</sup> Ptolemy was defeated by Demetrius at the Battle of Salamis in 306, which led to Antigonid control of Cyprus until 294. The island then remained under Ptolemaic control until it was acquired by the Roman Republic in the first century. Some scholars date the bronze series to Ptolemy’s satrapy prior to the fall of Cyprus, due to the lack of royal title; however, Lorber argues that the coinage adheres to the stylistic standards of the later reform (2018b, 29).

<sup>98</sup> CPE B118-B130. There is slight variation between and among denominations in regard to the legend, control marks, and iconography; of particular interest is the variation in the accoutrements of the goddess. Both the obol and chalkous depict Aphrodite with a *polos* ornamented with palmettes, but the hemiobol depicts either *stephane* or *taenia*. It is possible that this variation indicates that certain types were minted at Salamis and others at Paphos, which in turn could indicate a form of geographic particularism that would have further ramifications as to the interpretation of Aphrodite. However, Lorber argues that “the pattern of finds is consistent with an origin at Palai Paphos... and the double types of the hemiobol denomination suggest that the variety with *stephane*... could have been struck at Nea Paphos” (2018b, 29).

of local significance...with Ptolemy's personal badge" should be understood part and parcel of Ptolemy's efforts to consolidate his newly reclaimed territory.<sup>99</sup> The interest in identification with the Cypriot Aphrodite persisted under his successors. The bronze series attributed to the reign of Ptolemy III depicts the laureate Zeus-Ammon on the obverse, and a statue of Aphrodite on the reverse.<sup>100</sup> It was likely minted at Paphos, although this attribution is uncertain.<sup>101</sup> The later chronology and the relative commonness of this series is suggestive of the significance of the goddess on the island and the ongoing importance of Cyprus to the Ptolemies.

### **From Naukratis and Cyprus, to Beyond!**

The treatment of the epigraphic and numismatic evidence from Naukratis involves consideration of multiple elements, including chronological,

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<sup>99</sup> Lorber 2018b, 29. Although most coins with a known provenance were recovered from Cyprus, specimens attributed to Kos (B122), Pisidia (B122), Nemea (B123), and Fethiye (B123, B129) attest to a certain degree of international circulation.

<sup>100</sup> CPE B447-451. The series has also been attributed to Ptolemy V, although this is largely discounted in consideration of stylistic and metrological analysis (Lorber 2018b, 108; also Wolf 2013). The full catalogue description reads as follows: "Horned head of Zeus-Ammon r., wearing taenia with *basileon* above forehead, dotted border/ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ on l., ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ on r., facing statue of Aphrodite on base, wearing chiton and polos, r. hand holding lotus blossom to breast, l. hand holding poppies or myrtle branches, dotted border" (Lorber 2018b, 108). There is no variation in type across or within denominations, aside from countermarks of specific mints (CPE B447, 448). It is likely that the iconography represents the archaic cult statue of the goddess (Olivier, 7).

<sup>101</sup> Lorber 2018b, 108-109. Early scholarship attributes this type to Cyprus (Svoronos, 139), Sidon (Poole, 52) and Rhodes (Hill, 181). Recent scholarship advocates for a Cypriot mint, but there is variation regarding the extent to which the provenance and iconography of a coin contributes to the attribution of its mint (see Lorber 2018b, 108-109; Mørkholm, 108; and Olivier, 6-7).

geographical, and sociocultural context. The ceramic inscriptions attest to the integrative function of the cult of Aphrodite in the Archaic period, augmented by the use of cult epithets such as Aphrodite Pandemos and Aphrodite of Naukratis. The cult persisted through the Classical and Hellenistic period, but reflecting the advance of Egyptianization in the former, the attention of the new Ptolemaic rulers at Naukratis was chiefly to Egyptian temples, in contrast to what we see on Cyprus where they were concerned to integrate themselves into the still very central cult of Aphrodite as a poliadic deity. However, in the period of Ptolemy I at least, the new ruler was concerned to connect with the old traditions of the site as a Greek city by establishing a mint there and the production of coinage on which the poliadic Aphrodite is prominently featured.

Beyond the traditional centres, the spread of the cult of Aphrodite elsewhere in Egypt was often a matter of reflection rather than imposition.<sup>102</sup> Depictions of Aphrodite in art serve as a lens into the public reception of the goddess and her cult, and the variations in expression are indicative of cultural integration; examples include the stylistic differences and creation of new forms, and the syncretism with other deities and queens. In the case of the latter, art represents a dialogue between the dynasts and the general public, and although

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<sup>102</sup> The following chapters discuss the propagation of the cult of Aphrodite under the Ptolemies, but these efforts were largely directed towards a specific aspect, namely, the ruler cults of the syncretic queens; chapter two details the relationship between Aphrodite and Arsinoë II, and chapter three focuses on Isis and Berenice II.



Aphrodite is not the only subject with which such a process occurs, her capacity for syncretism facilitates the breadth of expression.<sup>103</sup>

### **Aphrodite in Statuary**

More statues of Aphrodite survive than of any other Greek divinity.<sup>104</sup> In the Hellenistic period, the image of Aphrodite was sculpted in “many types, sizes and materials,” and small figures were most popular as votives, talismans, gifts and domestic decorations; they were thus easily circulated throughout Egypt.<sup>105</sup> The variation in type mimicked shifts in cultural trends, the most fundamental of which “amounted to a breaking up of the old religious sentiment... [wherein] cult worship included kings as well as gods and philosophy more and more replace[d]

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<sup>103</sup> Clayman argues that artistic representations of the Ptolemies were not centrally managed propaganda, but instead “a collage of impression contributed by a wide variety of sources, some coming from top down, other percolating from bottom up, some from brilliant creative minds, and others from modest craftsmen, both Egyptian and Greek” (2014, 11). This sentiment is echoed in Plantzos, who observes that syncretism “allowed for more stylistic and iconographical freedom than might be understood by modern scholarship” (396).

<sup>104</sup> Havelock (1995), 1. She postulates that there are more statues specifically of the nude Aphrodite than of other deities, although draws attention to the lack of the Knidia-type in art or literature prior to the end of the second century (2). The range of the different nude Aphrodite types are primarily known through Roman copies, and there is a distinction due to purpose of nudity; she is different as an object of lust or desire such as those on Athenian red figured vases, compared to the “cult figure of a goddess to be viewed and venerated” (Burn, 146).

<sup>105</sup> Burn, 22; 106, 147. See also Brinkerhoff, 52; Bieber, 98; and Havelock (1995), 74-76 and 94-100. Individual life sized or colossal statues were rare, and most of the extant exempla are either later copies or not from Egypt; famous examples include the Aphrodite of Knidos, Aphrodite of Arles, Aphrodite Medici, the Capitoline Aphrodite, Barberini Venus, Borghese Venus, Aphrodite of Melos and Aphrodite Kallipygos.

religion.”<sup>106</sup> One consequent trend included a shift towards increased humanization of the gods, including the depiction of Aphrodite.<sup>107</sup>

It is likely that at least three types of Aphrodite statues were developed in the Hellenistic period, including Aphrodite Anadyomene, the Sandal-binder, and the Crouching Aphrodite.<sup>108</sup> Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact dates and provenance for the originals of each type, their stylistic development and popularity have been attributed to workshops within Egypt.<sup>109</sup> Brinkerhoff even suggests that the Aphrodite Anadyomene became symbolic of Ptolemaic culture due to its popularity; this assertion is difficult to accept in its entirety, considering the popularity of the motif of Aphrodite rising from the waves, as well as the depiction of the goddess in the nude.<sup>110</sup> Nonetheless, Brinkerhoff’s argument lends itself to the popularity of the statue type within Egypt, thus supporting the dissemination of the cult. Although most statues cannot be dated beyond a general

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<sup>106</sup> Brinkerhoff, 26-27.

<sup>107</sup> Brinkerhoff, 127, c.f. Pomeroy, who notes that in the Hellenistic period, “nudity endowed the female body with idealization previously reserved for athletes and gods” (33).

<sup>108</sup> For summary and analysis of each type, see Havelock (1995), 80-93.

<sup>109</sup> Bieber, 98, cf. Brinkerhoff, 70; see also Brinkerhoff, 83-84, 110; and Cheshire (2007). Scholars have long sought to establish a chronological scheme concerning the development of the various Aphrodite types, prompted by the efforts of Winckelmann (1764) at categorizing ancient works by style. Studies following in Winckelmann’s attempts include the works of J.J. Bernoulli (1873), Lullies (1954), Bieber (1977), Brinkerhoff (1978), and Havelock (1995). The quantity of theories which have been proposed is superceded only by their criticisms, and there remains a lack of consensus which may never be possible to achieve. Nevertheless, the unifying factor of each work is the reiteration of the breadth and variety of Aphrodite, thus supporting the successful spread of her cult and its continued significance throughout the Hellenistic period.

<sup>110</sup> Brinkerhoff, 61.

attribution to period, this lack of specificity does not detract from the significance of the evidence, but instead allows trust in a certain degree of continuity; that Aphrodite was present within the public domain, and if her cult lost prominence in the wake of Egyptianization, then the goddess herself remained as inspiration for art.

### **Conclusion**

The evidence thus suggests that Aphrodite was prevalent in the Archaic period at Naukratis, and although the popularity of the cult waned as the site developed, it was nevertheless sustained from proximity to Cyprus. The arrival of the Ptolemies brought with it a spread in Greek culture, and Aphrodite was of sufficient significance to be selected as a dynastic symbol. This symbol was primarily directed at the Greek population in Egypt and its environs, and called upon the integrative function of the cult to once more unite the population, this time directing them under Ptolemaic rule. It was during the reigns of the early dynasts that the cult of Aphrodite reached its greatest influence in the shaping of the Ptolemaic dynasty, and the following chapters outline the manner in which this process was accomplished and expressed. Although the popularity of the cult diminished in the face of increasing Egyptianization, it never fully disappeared: Ptolemaic patronage of the cult continued until the end of the dynasty, and Aphrodite herself remained a popular muse for literary and artistic expression.

## **Chapter 2**

### ***Sex and the Sea-ty: Arsinoë and Aphrodite***

#### **Introduction**

The Greek presence in Egypt originated at Naukratis in the Archaic period, and at the site, Aphrodite developed as a local poliadic deity, as she did on Cyprus. Although largely limited to Naukratis prior to the arrival of Alexander the Great, the beginning of the Hellenistic period marked the spread of Greek culture in Egypt, and as outlined in the previous chapter, this process included increased recognition of the cult of Aphrodite throughout Egypt. To determine the function of the cult and its role in the consolidation of Ptolemaic power, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the cult and the Ptolemaic dynasts.

Ptolemaic patronage of the cult existed to varying extents throughout the duration of the dynasty, most prominently in the assimilation of the goddess to the Ptolemaic queens.<sup>111</sup> Arsinoë II was the first and most famous queen assimilated to Aphrodite in a cult that was introduced during her lifetime and which persisted after her death. It was introduced as a response to contemporary issues faced by

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<sup>111</sup> Examples of patronage by Ptolemaic dynasts are discussed in the previous chapter. Epigraphic evidence recovered from sites throughout Egypt and Cyprus includes dedications to Aphrodite by the dynasts (OGIS 139; SEG 8:360); on behalf or in honour of the dynasts (ABSA 56 (1961) 22,56; ABSA 56 (1961) 33,88; SEG 31:1359); and depicting the dynasts as Aphrodite (Salamine XIII 81). Interaction between the priesthood(s) of Aphrodite and the dynasts further supports Ptolemaic recognition of the cult and at least minimal interest in its continued operation (ABSA 56 (1961), 3,2). The variation in dates across the third and second centuries lends itself to the longevity of the cult and its significance throughout the Hellenistic period.

the queen concerning the legitimization and consolidation of her power, but the manner in which these issues were addressed had long-reaching implications which did not only affect Arsinoë but shaped the entire Ptolemaic dynasty.

Examining the life of Arsinoë reveals two distinct narratives concerning the assimilation between deity and dynast, each of which coincides with a particular aspect of the goddess. The first narrative emerges in the context of Arsinoë's marriage to her brother Ptolemy II, in which the dynasts appealed to the erotic and marital aspects of Aphrodite to justify their incestuous marriage to their Greek subjects. This approach not only served to secure Arsinoë's position at court, but set the standard for the marriages of each successive regnal couple. The second narrative is concerned with the maritime aspect of Aphrodite, and presents the assimilation between Arsinoë and the goddess as an expression of Ptolemaic naval power. The Ptolemaic fleet dominated the Mediterranean in the early Hellenistic period, and was essential in the consolidation of their territory following the death of Alexander the Great and the division of his empire among the Diadochi. As protector of sailors and harbours, the assimilation between Arsinoë and Aphrodite played a crucial role in Ptolemaic propaganda and international policies.

An innovation of the Hellenistic period, ruler cult quickly became one of its defining features, and was utilized to consolidate dynastic power. Arsinoë was

not the first to receive such honours, but was nonetheless a pioneer in the development of ruler cult due to the popularity of her personal cult, which was largely secured through her assimilation with Aphrodite. Egyptian culture had a long-standing practice of recognizing their pharaohs as gods. The cult of Aphrodite, aimed as it was at the Greeks, thus aided in the integration between the Greek and Egyptian populations under the Ptolemies in a common practice of ruler cult.

### **Hellenistic Royal Women: Ascension of Power**

It is traditional to frame the power of royal women in terms of their family relationships, for they served an intermediary function between their “families of birth and marriage,” most often on an international level.<sup>112</sup> It is possible to trace a gradual ascension of the Ptolemaic queens throughout their three hundred year dynasty, from subordination, to equality, and — by the time of Cleopatra VII — supremacy.<sup>113</sup> Hazzard challenges Macurdy’s assertion that the success of the Ptolemaic queens is simply attributable to “their strong character and political acumen,” and notes that other Hellenistic queens had the same qualities but

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<sup>112</sup> Carney (2013), 91. She argues that a similar model should be adapted to understand the “religious patronage of royal women” and its actualization in foreign policy (91-92); however, she acknowledges a distinction between the portrayals of idealized relationships and the reality of court intrigue and politics, and warns against conflating them (7).

<sup>113</sup> Hazzard (2000), 101.

lacked the appropriate infrastructure necessary to consolidate power.<sup>114</sup> He thus emphasizes the unique nature of the Egyptian kingdom under Ptolemaic rule, and identifies Ptolemy II's glorification of Arsinoë II as the impetus for the development of this form of monarchy.<sup>115</sup>

### **Arsinoë: Biography**

Arsinoë II was the daughter of Ptolemy I and Berenice I, and the elder sister of Ptolemy II. She was born c. 318-314 in Egypt, but there is little evidence concerning her early life prior to her first marriage.<sup>116</sup> Her marriage to her brother was her third in a life governed by dynastic power struggles.<sup>117</sup> Arsinoë II married Lysimachus (300), and ruled with him in Macedonia when he ascended the throne (285). Upon his death in 281, Arsinoë married her half-brother Ptolemy Ceraunus in a political alliance which was ultimately to her detriment; Ceraunus murdered two of her sons and caused Arsinoë herself to flee to Samothrace. She returned to Egypt (c. 279-276), and was a member at the court of Ptolemy II in Alexandria

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, c.f. Macurdy, 194-223, 230.

<sup>115</sup> Hazzard (2000), 103.

<sup>116</sup> Carney (2013), 11; see also Dmitriev (2007) and van Oppen de Ruyter (2012). The marriage of Arsinoë to Lysimachus is referenced in Justin (17.1.4), Memnon (FGrH 434 4.9), Pausanias (1.10.3-4) and Plutarch (*Demetr.* 31.3) and is frequently used to derive her date of birth.

<sup>117</sup> Lorber, 2018a, 62. A detailed account of the political intrigue and machinations of the Ptolemaic dynasts is beyond the scope of this paper. For a recent summary and analysis of the reign of Ptolemy II, see Lorber (2018a, 61-104).

prior to their marriage (c. 275).<sup>118</sup> Arsinoë was able to secure her status through this marriage, and managed to enjoy a degree of stability in Egypt before her death scant years later.<sup>119</sup>

What did this relationship between siblings look like in practice? To answer this question, it is necessary to look at portrayals of both Ptolemy II and Arsinoë II. The importance of image cannot be overstated, and Ptolemy II was “too sickly, too cynical, and too remote” to serve as a beloved monarch.<sup>120</sup> He had a turbulent relationship with the military, since despite being embroiled in war throughout his reign, he neither led a battle nor achieved a significant victory.<sup>121</sup> However, he also inherited the Ptolemaic fleet established by Ptolemy I, and

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<sup>118</sup> The suggested dates follow the chronology presented by Carney, with the caveat that “virtually all dates are approximate and most are disputed” (2013, xiii); see full monograph for biography. For the most part, these dates are sufficient for the current study, and the determination of more specific dates is not material; the exception is the date of Arsinoë’s death (270/68). The two proposed years result from conflicting evidence from the Mendes and Pithom stelae, and a tentative preference for the later date is expressed in modern scholarship (Carney 2013, 104; van Oppen de Ruiter 2010, 149). The chronological distinction is significant because it determines whether or not Arsinoë was recognized as *thea philadelphos* posthumously.

<sup>119</sup> As a daughter of the royal family, Arsinoë was of elite status on account of her birth, but as demonstrated above, success and survival in court life depended on constant defence and augmentation of personal status. See discussion in Carney on the question of status and the significance of being the “living ruler’s wife” (2000b, 226-227).

<sup>120</sup> Hazzard (2000), 43. He observes that Ptolemy had difficulties in both obtaining support beyond the Greek elite, and in maintaining control even among that particular faction; however, Ptolemy managed to retain power for multiple decades, so at least a portion of his efforts were successful.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. Hazzard argues that Ptolemy was well aware of his “failing,” on account of the emphasis of his martial prowess by his apologists (*ibid.*, 39). It is worth noting the contemporaneous development of the Ptolemaic navy, which would have at least marginally offset Ptolemy’s failure in other arenas; although recognition of the maritime Aphrodite is associated with Arsinoë rather than her husband, it is an interesting parallel that could have encouraged the development of the cult.



maintained naval supremacy through adherence to similar policies in the defence of coastal regions.<sup>122</sup> Within Egypt itself, Ptolemy II directed the majority of his attention to his Greek subjects and their interests; although he maintained a relationship with the Egyptian clergy, it was clearly secondary to other objectives.<sup>123</sup> Religious practices under Ptolemy II also shifted from the recognition of traditional gods to familial glorification; these efforts were met with a mixed reception before slowly gaining traction.<sup>124</sup> Thus, despite a seemingly poor reputation, Ptolemy II retained power for a considerable period, and demonstrated both innovation and efficacy in his efforts to consolidate and legitimize his dynasty. How much of Ptolemy II's success is attributable to Arsinoë II is uncertain. Often depicted as a fierce and dominating woman, earning the moniker "tigress queen," Arsinoë was a significant force with the capacity to

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<sup>122</sup> Clayman (2014), 134. Such policies may have developed beyond those set by Ptolemy I; Meadows (2013) attributes the foundation of the Nesiotic League to Ptolemy II. Despite the brevity of the league's existence, which was likely confined to the rule of Ptolemy II, it is significant for its innovation; of particular interest to the present investigation is the involvement of the cult of Arsinoë-Aphrodite Euploia-Zephyritis (Meadows, 29-31).

<sup>123</sup> Hazzard (2000), 108-110. He argues that there is no evidence of Ptolemy concerning himself with his Egyptian subjects, or elevating them to high positions (110). Although it is necessary to be wary of absolutes, this observation echoes the argument for Greek conservatism recurrent in Samuel (116-117).

<sup>124</sup> Hazzard (2000), 110. Whereas Ptolemy I was a traditionalist who both "revered the old gods" and accepted the new ones, Ptolemy II "glorified real and alleged members of his own family" (ibid). Hazzard specifically notes objections to the inclusion of divine honours in the marriage between Ptolemy II and Arsinoë II in 273/2, and the deification of Arsinoë II after 268, to the extent that neither cult was included in the Ptolemaieia in 262; however, public recognition of Arsinoë resumed thereafter and was supported by the elite (ibid). On the religious attitudes of the early Ptolemaic dynasts, see also Samuel, 92-96.

effect change, but ultimately did not wield “extraordinary power.”<sup>125</sup> Hazzard thus follows Burnstein’s argument that popularity did not elevate Arsinoë above Ptolemy; instead, he attributes her reputation to propaganda efforts.<sup>126</sup> These included the promotion of ruler cult in which Arsinoë was identified with Aphrodite.

### **Assimilation to Aphrodite**

The promulgation of the assimilation of Arsinoë and Aphrodite is evidenced in the work of the Ptolemaic court poets, including Apollonius of Rhodes, Callimachus of Cyrene, Theocritus of Syracuse, and Posidippus of Pella,

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<sup>125</sup> Hazzard (2000), 81-82; for summary of the “scholarly standoff” concerning Arsinoë as a dominant queen, see 96-99. Arguments in favour include (i) ancient sources which attest to her ambition and unscrupulousness; (ii) reception of honours both in life and death; and (iii) her presence in Egypt during a period of “especially vigorous” foreign policy (ibid, 97). Arguments against include (i) attribution of similar characteristics to Ptolemy; (ii) his greater political acumen; (iii) the distinction between honours and powers; (iv) reference bias; and (v) burden of proof. Hazzard ultimately concedes that each side has valid arguments, and that both sides highlight the importance of perception of power.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 81-82. This hierarchy is evident in literary and artistic representations of Arsinoë; she is praised for lesser achievements and in fewer lines in Theocritus (*Id.* 15, 17), and is depicted behind Ptolemy in numismatic iconography, in adherence to the trend of subordinate positioning in portraiture (ibid, 93).

and in iconography.<sup>127</sup> Its acceptance by the populace is evidenced in the epigraphic record. In iconography, the syncretization was typically expressed by representation of the queen with the goddess' attributes. As Havelock observes, "it is one thing for a mortal to be identified with a deity in the literary arts or to be portrayed with a divine attribute [but] it is quite another to have oneself represented as an actual god."<sup>128</sup> Although Havelock argues against the existence of any statuary which depicted Arsinoë as Aphrodite, Stephens avers that "Arsinoë

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<sup>127</sup> On the literary background of the association between Aphrodite and Arsinoë, see Fulińska (2012), 50-56. The most frequently referenced ancient works on modern scholarship for each poet are as follows:

- (1) Apollonius of Rhodes: *Argonautica*. Although there is no explicit assimilation between Aphrodite and the queen, there are allusions to Arsinoë and Ptolemy II (see Carney 2013, 102-103; and Clayman 2014, 118-120).
- (2) Callimachus: *The Lock of Berenice* (PSI 1092; P. Oxy. 2258; also Catullus, 66). See discussion in Clayman (2011) and Gutzwiller (1992a). This work will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter.
- (3) Theocritus: *Adoniazusai* (*Id.* 15) and *Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (*Id.* 17). See Caneva (2012), 92-94; Gutzwiller (1992a), 364-367; also Foster (2006) and Reed (2000).
- (4) Posidippus AB 36 - 39, 116, 119; also in Ath. 318d, 497d-e. Before the publication of the P. Mil. Vogl. VIII 309, only 116 and 119 were known, both referring to the temple of Arsinoë Zephyritis; 36-39 are all dedicated to this same deity, but while the latter references the temple, the first three are concerned with votives (Barbantani, 148-149; see also Fraser, 239-40, 568-71). On Posidippus: Bing (2003) and Stephens (2005).

Another significant piece of literary evidence is a second century CE Hellenistic Hymn to Aphrodite (P. Lit. Goddsp. 2), which Barbantani convincingly connects to the cult of Arsinoë II (Barbantani 2005). She argues that the emphasis of the marital and marine aspects of the goddess "perfectly fits Ptolemaic royal propaganda in III-II BC [during which] the cult of Aphrodite is transformed into a celebration of the harmony of the royal couple, granting dynastic legitimacy and continuity" (Barbantani, 141; cf. Theoc. *Id.* 17. 34-57). Many of the following arguments in this chapter concerning the portrayal of Aphrodite and Arsinoë's absorption of these aspects are influenced by Barbantani's analysis of this hymn.

<sup>128</sup> Havelock (1995), 128.

was completely identified with the goddess” in her cult statue at Zephyrium.<sup>129</sup>

Full syncretic form was likewise scarce in depictions of Arsinoë in other media.<sup>130</sup> Typically, Arsinoë is depicted with a combination of Greek and Egyptian attributes characteristic of Ptolemaic efforts of cultural integration.<sup>131</sup>

The most common attributes of Arsinoë include a *stephane*, a lotus sceptre and a ram horn, which associate her with both Aphrodite and Isis.<sup>132</sup> This composite image became the conventional depiction of the queen as Arsinoë Philadelphus, and was standard issue on the precious metal and bronze coinage of Ptolemy II.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Stephens (2005), 247; cf. Havelock (1995), 128. Stephens’ argument is predicated on Posidippus’ description of the temple of Arsinoë-Aphrodite at Zephyrium, which is said to have had a single cult statue identified as Kypris-Arsinoë and Arsinoë Euploia; both epithets are cult titles of Aphrodite (2005, 247; Pos. AB 116, 119, and 39). Further details of the cult sites and titles of the deified Arsinoë are discussed below.

<sup>130</sup> Stanwick, 66-67. As discussed in the following chapter, Arsinoë’s lifetime marked a period of transition in multiple ways, one of which is increased “interest in the individual portrayal of the female form in art” (Plantzos, 390; see also Smith, 204).

<sup>131</sup> The dual cultural interpretation of symbols and their incorporation into Ptolemaic propaganda is particularly evident in the analysis of numismatic iconography; see discussion in Lorber (2018a) on the significance of the coinage of Ptolemy I (46-47) and Ptolemy II (124-129).

<sup>132</sup> Detailed analysis of the history of each symbol and its corresponding breadth of meaning is beyond the scope of the current investigation. The use of these attributes as it pertains to the deified Arsinoë is well-treated by Fulińska (2010, 79-83; 2012, 57-60) and Lorber (2018a, 124-129). The question of syncretism between Aphrodite and Isis features in the following chapter.

<sup>133</sup> Coinage of Arsinoë Philadelphus featured her cultic emblem, the double cornucopia, on the reverse; limited exceptions include the silver tetradrachms and certain bronze issues, which retained the Ptolemaic eagle (Lorber 2018a, 586; 2018b, 193). This coin type was issued in multiple denominations during the reign of Ptolemy II, including gold double mnaeia, mnaeia, and tetartes; silver tetradrachms, decadrachms, drachms and triobols; and bronze hemiobols and dichalkons (Lorber 2018a, 585-587; 2018b 193-194; see discussion in Lorber (2018a, 107-110) concerning the issue and use of the precious metal coinage). The coins reached a large audience; the bronze circulating primarily within Egypt, and the precious metal issues abroad (Dunand 2004, 204).

Inscriptions reveal the take-up of the syncretization in cult. One dedication from Alexandria reads:

Ἀφροδίτῃ | Ἀκραίαι Ἀρσινόῃ | Φιλοκράτης | καὶ Ἑλλάγιον,

Philokrates and Hellagion, to Aphrodite Akraia Arsinoë.<sup>134</sup>

A second inscription, also from Alexandria, identifies the dedicator as a priest of Arsinoë Aphrodite.<sup>135</sup> These inscriptions support worship of the syncretic goddess outside of what may be considered literary or artistic flattery. The dedicators were not members of the Ptolemaic family, but rather members of the public; the inscriptions thus exemplify the results of propaganda efforts. Although the dates of the inscriptions are uncertain, best estimates indicate that they were produced following the reign of Ptolemy II, which suggests a degree of longevity of the cult and therefore its success.

The examination of literary and iconographic evidence reveals the dissemination of the syncretic Arsinoë-Aphrodite through a variety of mediums, and the epigraphic evidence speaks to the success of this circulation. Although

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<sup>134</sup> SEG 8: 361 = PH222893, personal translation. The use of the cult title Akraia is likely a reference to the temple of the goddess at Zephyrium (cf. Strabo 17.1.6). The inscription is dated to the second or first century, which may suggest longevity of the cult beyond the reign of Ptolemy II. Fraser refers to Aphrodite Akraia Arsinoë as an example of divine “identification by juxtaposition,” which he notes is characteristic for Arsinoë Philadelphus (245); see also discussion in Wallensten (3-5; 12 n. 23).

<sup>135</sup> Breccia, *Alexandria Mus.* 12 = PH227423. The inscription is dated to the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes (247-221). There is a significant percentage of the text missing, including the full name of Arsinoë, but Breccia’s reconstruction seems sound.

Aphrodite was not the only goddess with whom Arsinoë was associated, over the course of her life and after her death, the queen was successfully syncretized with Aphrodite to the point that the goddess herself was not always mentioned by name.<sup>136</sup>

### **Goddess of Love, Sex, and Marriage**

The Diadochi understood the value of marriage as a method of legitimization.<sup>137</sup> Although sibling marriage was a common pharaonic practice, it was novel for the Greeks; Ptolemy II and Arsinoë II instituted the practice of consanguineous marriage among the Ptolemaic dynasts, which was thereafter maintained throughout the Hellenistic period.<sup>138</sup> The practice was at first poorly received among Greeks, but was justified through appeal to Zeus and Hera.<sup>139</sup> This comparison supported Ptolemy II and Arsinoë II as Theoi Adelphoi, and not only circulated in literature, but was also reinforced by the erection of statues of the couple opposite the temple of Zeus and Hera at Olympia.<sup>140</sup> As Hazzard argues, the comparison to the gods was not merely a way of justifying the

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<sup>136</sup> Carney (2013), 98. For example, Posidippus uses the epithets Kypris (AB 116 and 119) and Euploia (AB 39) to describe Arsinoë, both of which are cult titles for Aphrodite.

<sup>137</sup> Carney (2000b), 207.

<sup>138</sup> Riad, 31; see also Carney (2013), 105.

<sup>139</sup> Hazzard (2000), 39, 45. Literary references of this approach include Plutarch (Mor. 736F) and Theocritus (*Id.* 17.131-4), specifically in reference to Homer (Il. 18.356).

<sup>140</sup> Grabowski, 26; see also Clayman (2014), 73.

marriage; rather, it was the point of the marriage in the first place, as supporting the deification of the dynasty.<sup>141</sup>

However, the association to Zeus and Hera soon declined in favour of Dionysos and Aphrodite.<sup>142</sup> In the fourth century, there was a shift from Hera to Aphrodite as patron of marriage, concomitant with a new attention to mutual desire between spouses.<sup>143</sup> Although Aphrodite functions as an archetype for all women, those most often associated with her were the royal courtesans and wives; both classes of women wielded power that derived from a fundamentally sexual relationship.<sup>144</sup> Carney argues that acknowledgement of this power through association to Aphrodite was “less unsettling and more meaningful” than in relation to Hera.<sup>145</sup> The association with Aphrodite and marriage began in the case

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<sup>141</sup> Hazzard (2000), 90; see also Grabowski, 26 n.29. Although it is evident that Arsinoë benefitted from marriage to Ptolemy, it is more difficult to discern Ptolemy’s intentions. Hazzard reviews and dismisses several popular theories, including the appeasement of Egyptian subjects; control of territory governed by Arsinoë; and establishment of dynastic solidarity (see discussion, 85-90).

<sup>142</sup> Carney (2000b), 222. Dionysos was the preferred syncretic deity for all male successors; although there is no precedence in the mythological tradition for a relationship to Aphrodite, theirs was nevertheless deemed an “appropriate pairing.”

<sup>143</sup> Ibid; Gutzwiller (1992a), 364, 367; Pomeroy, 31. On mutual desire as an expression of female power and agency in marriage, see Gutzwiller (ibid, 368); similar themes are echoed in Carney, who argues that “as a consequence of independence, more women were able to avoid polygamy or like Arsinoë act to eliminate it” (2000b, 231).

<sup>144</sup> Carney (2000b), 224-225.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 224.

of the Ptolemies with Berenice I, after her death.<sup>146</sup> Arsinoë II is thought to have promoted this practice, since it not only elevated the status of both her mother and herself, but helped to offset some of the difficulties surrounding her own marriage.<sup>147</sup> Thus, the Ptolemies sought to consolidate their rule by the institution of ruler cult, through, among other things, the adoption of the Egyptian custom of sibling marriage, which was promoted to their Greek subjects by the identification of the queen with Aphrodite.<sup>148</sup>

### **Goddess of the Sea**

While the internal politics and concerns of succession focused on the purview of Aphrodite as a marital and erotic goddess, an equally strong association to her aspect as a marine goddess developed in conjunction with Ptolemaic naval interests and expansion into the Mediterranean.<sup>149</sup> The boundaries of the Ptolemaic kingdom were in flux; attempts at expansion was most often confined to coastal regions, and these territories were under constant threat of

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<sup>146</sup> Clayman (2014), 66. Although this post-mortem association is confirmed, it is uncertain whether the relationship between queen and goddess occurred during her lifetime (Carney 2000b, 219).

<sup>147</sup> Clayman (2014), 66-67.

<sup>148</sup> Both Arsinoë II and her successor, Berenice II, relied upon their association to Aphrodite to justify their incestuous marriages; in successive generations, the necessity of this tactic lessened as what had been innovation became tradition.

<sup>149</sup> Barbantani, 145; Grabowski, 28-29.



war.<sup>150</sup> Ptolemaic efforts at settlement largely took place outside of Egypt, and flourished under the reigns of Ptolemy II and Ptolemy III.<sup>151</sup> Settlement was integral to the consolidation of dynastic power, particularly in consideration of communications and trade, and the manifestation of this power was reinforced by the use of dynastic toponyms.<sup>152</sup> The choice of toponym is revealing; although a variety of toponyms are found only within Egypt, beyond its borders only five were used: Arsinoë, Ptolemais, Berenice, Philoteris, and Philadelphia.<sup>153</sup> The use of Arsinoë was not only the most common throughout the territory, but may have been used to indicate the importance of a site.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Grabowski, 45. Arsinoë herself was actively involved “in the Ptolemaic struggle for naval supremacy, in which Cyprus and Rhodos were of particular importance” (Fulińska 2012, 54).

<sup>151</sup> Grabowski, 142. Grabowski notes that under Ptolemy I, involvement in the Red Sea was “barely traceable,” but that he nonetheless put forward an effort to procure resources (151). He dismisses Burnstein’s argument that coastal foundations were simply a secondary consequence of pursuit for ivory in particular; he allows that demand for ivory potentially triggered exploration, but argues that consolidation of rule was the primary impetus for settlements (151-157).

<sup>152</sup> Grabowski, 146; Mueller, 159. See also Carney on the development of dynastic toponyms; she attributes the inception of the custom to Philip II ca. 356, which was then taken to the extreme by Alexander and the Diadochi (2000b, 207-208). It was common for royal women to confer their names from the beginning of the third century, and was used as a means of legitimization. Carney specifies that this was an honour, but that it did not necessarily equate to actual power; she also notes the lack of evidence for cults dedicated to royal women “in the cities named after them but not founded by them” (ibid, 208). This observation not only speaks to the difference in cult practice for male and female *oikists* (since the former were usually the recipients of cults) but addresses the necessity of active propagation of female cults, thus reinforcing the significance of Arsinoë’s and Berenice’s agency.

<sup>153</sup> Mueller, 11.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. Marquaille presents an attractive theory in which foundations named after Arsinoë were strategically located whereas others were not; Mueller refutes this claim based on insufficient chronological data, but does admit that “it is fascinating that Ptolemeis founded only settlements of Arsinoë on Crete, Cyprus and the Central Aegean: no other settlements with dynastic names are attested” (157-158).

The presence of Arsinoë was doubly confirmed in most eponymous sites, since all Ptolemaic harbours had a cult to her as Thea Philadelphos.<sup>155</sup> A series of altar plaques to Arsinoë Philadelphus have been recovered from Lesbos, Delos, Paros, Ios, Amorgos, Thera and Miletus.<sup>156</sup> These altar plaques were “integral to the cult of Arsinoë-Aphrodite Euploia-Zephyritis,” and were most likely used by sailors, thus emphasizing the extent to which the assimilation to Aphrodite affected the development of Arsinoë’s personal cult.<sup>157</sup> Arsinoë’s assimilation to Aphrodite in her marine aspect thus aimed at the wider Greek world of rivalrous Hellenistic kingdoms. The Ptolemaic fleet set sail under the banner of Aphrodite Arsinoë Philadelphus, and its conquests and protectorates take her name and propagate her worship; thus, the cult of Aphrodite facilitated the integration of the Ptolemaic settlements into the wider empire.

### **Arsinoë-Aphrodite: Goddess of Love, Mistress of the Sea<sup>158</sup>**

Syncretism is a complex process, and the assimilation between Arsinoë and Aphrodite had numerous interwoven meanings and uses. The first section of this chapter introduced Arsinoë, provided evidence of her assimilation to

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<sup>155</sup> Carney (2013), 109; see also Barbantani, 146-147.

<sup>156</sup> Meadows, 29-30. On altars for Arsinoë Philadelphus, see discussion in Caneva (2014) 94-96.

<sup>157</sup> Meadows, 29-30; see also Bing (2003), 256. The use of these altars reflects the poetry of Posidippus, who recommends that sailors seek the favour of Aphrodite Arsinoë Philadelphus (AB 119, 1-2) and Arsinoë Euploia (AB 39, 1-2).

<sup>158</sup> Subtitle derived from Barbantani’s article of the same name (Barbantani, 2005).

Aphrodite, and outlined two narratives in which specific aspects of the goddess were used to shape Ptolemaic domestic and foreign policies. The deified queen was also introduced as Arsinoë Philadelphus, the title for her personal cult, and a closer examination of this ruler cult reveals its role in the development of dynastic cult characteristic of the Hellenistic period. The second section of this chapter traces this development through the examination of Alexandria and Memphis, the sociopolitical and cultural epicentres of Ptolemaic Egypt. The two sites are representative of the Greek and Egyptian cultures which were predominant in the Ptolemaic kingdom, and set in juxtaposition against one another, highlight the significance of the cult of Aphrodite in the development of ruler cult and the integration of a disparate population.

Alexandria, as the Ptolemaic capital, is the site which best showcases the relationship between the dynasts and the general public. It was a Greek city, in which it is possible to trace the development of Greek cult. There was there an emphasis on the marine Aphrodite and her identification with Arsinoë Philadelphus; this process is fully realized in the figure of the syncretic goddess Aphrodite Arsinoë Philadelphus, and Aphrodite was thus interwoven into the Greek ruler cult of the Ptolemaic queen.

In contrast, Memphis provides insight into the Egyptian perspective. The cult of Arsinoë Philadelphus flourished at the site; but as one might expect,

Aphrodite is notably absent from the Egyptian cult of the deified queen.<sup>159</sup>

Arsinoë is recognized as divine in her own right, and the syncretic Aphrodite and Arsinoë provided for the extension to the Greeks of a ruler cult that was customary among Egyptians, who already recognized the divinity of the pharaohs.

Although it is difficult to fully separate the aspects of Aphrodite as the Goddess of Love and Mistress of the Sea, at Alexandria, wherein a safe harbour and favour of the seas is a necessity for both trade and martial endeavours, it was natural that the emphasis was on the marine aspects of the syncretic cult. Both aspects, however, of Aphrodite are crucial to the development of her cult within Ptolemaic Egypt, and the corresponding development of ruler cult and dynastic cult through the *Thea Philadelphos*.

### **Alexandria: Overview**

Alexandria is a significant site, not only due to its status as the Ptolemaic capital, and thus as a sociocultural and political centre, but also because it is one

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<sup>159</sup> In his account of Egypt, Herodotus does refer to a “Foreign Aphrodite” at Memphis (2.112), but the temple is most commonly held to have been that of the Phoenician Astarte (Thompson 1988, 90; Lloyd, 44). Astarte had long since been incorporated into the Memphite pantheon as the consort of Ptah, and her cult was still active during the Ptolemaic period (Thompson 1988, 89-91). Thompson refrains from including syncretism to Aphrodite in her discussion of the Hellenistic cult, and instead emphasizes the self-identification of its priesthood as Phoenico-Egyptian (*ibid*); cf. Villing, who notes that “Astarte was equated there [i.e. Memphis] with the Greek Aphrodite and Egyptian Hathor” (2019, 159). In her discussion of a contemporary marble bas-relief, Thompson comments on the “remarkable” syncretism in the iconography of Isis-Hathor, both Egyptian goddesses who themselves have been syncretized with Aphrodite (1988, 90). Although it is thus possible to argue that Aphrodite was, to some degree, present at Memphis by means of syncretism, this connection remains tenuous. Further discussion of Isis will feature in the following chapter, which focuses on the Egyptian perspective.

of a limited number of Greek sites within Egypt; only Alexandria, Naukratis and Ptolemais Hermiou were officially recognized as cities.<sup>160</sup> In its position as rival to Memphis, Alexandria paralleled many of its basic demographic and geographic features, albeit on a larger scale. Situated in the Nile Delta and along the coast of the Mediterranean, it was ideally located for both commercial and military purposes.<sup>161</sup> Estimates for the early Ptolemaic site include an area of 840 ha and a population of 25, 000 - 75, 000.<sup>162</sup> The Greek inhabitants formed the Alexandrine elite, but they were only one of multiple minority communities living alongside local Egyptians; one should thus be cautious about reducing the identity of Alexandria to an extrapolation from a singular demographic, since this approach

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<sup>160</sup> Hölbl, 26. That is not to say that the Ptolemaic dynasts were uninterested in settlement and migration, but such efforts most frequently took the form of cleruchies (Mueller, 75-76; on regional variability within Ptolemaic foundation, see discussion 75-84). Alexandria and Ptolemais Hermiou were likely founded simultaneously at the end of the fourth century, in accordance with the model of the traditional Greek polis; both cities thrived under Ptolemaic patronage, and alongside Memphis, became the largest sites in Egypt (Mueller, 146-147; see also Cohen, 350-351). It is generally accepted that Ptolemais Hermiou was founded as a political and religious counterbalance to Thebes in Upper Egypt, paralleling the relationship between Alexandria and Memphis in Lower Egypt; however, it is unlikely that this objective was fully realized (Chauveau, 68; Lorber 2018a, 19). Although often underrepresented in scholarship, references to Ptolemais Hermiou emerge primarily in the context of ruler cult, which will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

<sup>161</sup> On the significance of the sea and the Nile in the development of Alexandria and Ptolemaic Egypt, see discussion in Thompson and Buraselis, 1-18. McKenzie pieces together and comments on a site plan as attested by literary sources, in particular Diodorus Siculus, Arrian and the Alexander Romance (37-40). On the foundation of the site and the conceptualization of space in Alexandria and Egypt, see Krasilnikoff (24-30).

<sup>162</sup> Mueller, 93-96. Approaches to demographic and geographic analysis of ancient sites vary wildly, and thus produce equally varied results. On urban development and population growth in Alexandria, see also Scheidel, 1-31.

hardly reflects the divergent customs and concerns of the entire population.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, the treatment of Alexandria in this chapter focuses on its Greek population, since the actions of the early Ptolemaic dynasts were primarily directed to this demographic, in the attempt to secure their position at the head of a colonial ruling people.

### **Ancient Sources**

Very few traces of ancient Alexandria are visible or accessible at the modern site, since most of the material culture has been buried, destroyed, removed or submerged as the city developed.<sup>164</sup> Scholarship frequently relies upon Strabo's account of the site, which describes the topography of the city and its monuments, but McKenzie observes that "we have considerably more knowledge of the plan of the ancient city than is generally realized."<sup>165</sup> While Alexander the Great is credited with the initial design of the city, extensive

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<sup>163</sup> Dunand (2004), 219; Fraser, 38; Hölbl, 27. Fraser identifies four main population groups in early Alexandria: Greeks, Egyptians, non-Greek immigrants, and slaves; he further subdivides the Greeks according to citizen status and "external ethics" (Fraser, 38; see discussion 38-92). Fraser's seminal work on Ptolemaic Alexandria is critiqued by Scheidel, who in particular finds his section on demographic analysis lacking; Scheidel enumerates numerous unanswered questions concerning population growth and development at the site (Scheidel, 2-3).

<sup>164</sup> Clayman 2014, 45; McKenzie, 8; Mueller, 111; Wilkinson (2000), 102-103. On the destruction of Alexandria and overview of excavations, see McKenzie 8-18.

<sup>165</sup> Strabo, 17.1.6-10; McKenzie, 19. She identifies Fraser's influence on English scholarship as the catalyst of this deficiency, since Fraser follows Hogarth in the dismissal of Mahmoud-Bey, who surveyed Alexandria in 1866; more recent excavations have confirmed Mahmoud-Bey's site plan (see discussion, 19-30). As a resident of the city at the end of the first century, Strabo's detailed testimonial is relatively reliable, albeit "missing some vital information, such as the location of the city walls and its gates" (Clayman 2014, 45-46). On the testimony of Strabo, see Fraser, 7-37; and McKenzie, 173-176.

development occurred under the early Ptolemies, with a focus on religious space and reliance on both Greek and Egyptian elements; major temples were located within the urban centre, but shrines and temples were spread throughout the site.<sup>166</sup> The question then becomes which of these temples, if any, were dedicated to Aphrodite. Attention should be directed not only to Aphrodite, but also those with whom she was associated; it is likely that there were multiple temples dedicated to the goddess in or around Alexandria on account of her association with Arsinoë II.<sup>167</sup>

### **The Sanctuary at Zephyrium**

The sanctuary of Arsinoë-Aphrodite Zephyritis was one of the most celebrated cult sites of either goddess within Egypt, and is “unique in being the only edifice of the third century BCE commemorated in multiple epigrams by various leading Hellenistic poets.”<sup>168</sup> It is not located within the city boundaries, but approximately halfway between Alexandria and Canopus on the Zephyrium

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<sup>166</sup> Clayman 2014, 46; McKenzie, 33-34; Mueller, 111-113, 128. Although the requirements for its religious life were met by the end of the third century, expansion continued so that there were over 2300 sanctuaries by the Roman period (McKenzie, 34; Mueller 128).

<sup>167</sup> Dunand (2007), 257. It is unclear whether is simply referring to the temples attested in the material and literary record — listed in greater detail below — or making the suggestion that there are likely further (unsubstantiated) temples within Alexandria itself due to the popularity of both goddess and queen.

<sup>168</sup> Bing (2003), 245. Callimachus (G-P 14), Hedyllus (G-P 4) and Posidippus (AB 39, 116, 119) all emphasize the connection to the Cypriot Aphrodite as protectress of the sea (Clayman 2011, 239).

promontory; an exact location is yet to be confirmed.<sup>169</sup> Posidippus attributes the foundation of the temple to Callicrates of Samos, but it is likely that Ptolemy II and Arsinoë II were involved in the process to some degree.<sup>170</sup> Hauben identifies the establishment of the cult to Arsinoë-Aphrodite Zephyritis as the “most prestigious achievement” of Callicrates, despite his successful and varied career as *nauarchos*.<sup>171</sup> This prestige is paralleled in the positive reception of the cult, both in Alexandria and throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>172</sup> Although the cult was primarily intended for Greek participation, it is noted for Egyptian features, such as a mechanical, musical rhyton in the shape of the god Bes.<sup>173</sup> The emphasis on such features attests to the dual cultural influence on the building programme of

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<sup>169</sup> Pos. 116; McKenzie, 52.

<sup>170</sup> Pos. AB. 39, 116, 119. Carney (2013, 99) and Grabowski (29) both argue for the contribution of the dynasts, but the date of its foundation may limit its extent, since it is uncertain whether the temple was founded before or after Arsinoë’s death. While Fulińska (2012, 54) and Bing (2003, 245) equivocate on the date, the prevailing view is in favour of the construction of the temple in her lifetime (Gutzwiller 1992a, 365; Grabowski, 29).

<sup>171</sup> Hauben (2013), 47. Despite the military title, Hauben comments upon the dearth of evidence for Callicrates’ in specific conflicts, and instead emphasizes his involvement in “religious, diplomatic, sporting and cultural matters” (see discussion 45-53).

<sup>172</sup> Stephens (2005, 246) warns against overstating the importance of this temple, and questions whether Posidippus was prone to exaggeration; this caution is offset by material evidence of the spread of the cult, particularly in the Aegean. As Robert’s seminal study of them shows, the altar plaques “integral to the cult of Arsinoë-Aphrodite Euploia-Zephyritis” that have been recovered from no less than ten sites outside of Egypt attest to the influence of Callicrates in the dissemination of the cult (Meadows, 29-30; see also Bing 2003, 256).

<sup>173</sup> Hedylyus (in Ath. 11, 497d-e; see also Fraser 239, 571); Bing (2003), 246; Carney (2013), 98; McKenzie, 51-52. This rhyton is the only of the “Egyptian features” identified by McKenzie, who uses it to liken the temple at Zephyrion to the Arsinoëion in Alexandria (52). Although the rhyton was merely a dedication, its creation is attributed to Ctesibius, whose inventions were featured in the Ptolemaia festival (Weber, 237-238); thus, it was likely to draw attention as a novelty item, even if it could not compare with the sheer size of the obelisk in front of the Arsinoëion.



the Ptolemies that was present since its inception; and it is possible to identify a trajectory of increasing Egyptianization with each successive dynast.<sup>174</sup> Arsinoë-Aphrodite was recognized as a goddess of sexuality at the temple, while the epithets Zephyritis and Euploia emphasize the marine aspect.<sup>175</sup> The longevity of the temple is supported by the aforementioned dedication to Arsinoë Aphrodite Akraia.<sup>176</sup> Despite — or perhaps because of — the strong association with Arsinoë, there appears to be little effort to incorporate Berenice II into the cult in the successive generation, but the temple nonetheless laid “the groundwork for her own identification with Aphrodite.”<sup>177</sup>

### **The Arsinoëion and The Thalamegos**

The temple at Zephyrium was connected to the Arsinoëion in Alexandria through their common recognition of Arsinoë in her purview as a marine deity; for “like Arsinoë[-Aphrodite] Zephyritis from Cape Zephyrium, Arsinoë Philadelphus from the Alexandrian shrine protected all sailors coming to and going from

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<sup>174</sup> For overview of the construction efforts of the early Ptolemies, see McKenzie 40-65. Discussion of Egyptianization and its effect on the cult of Aphrodite under the Ptolemies features in the following chapter.

<sup>175</sup> Callimachus (5 Pf = 14 GP); Gutzwiller (1992a), 366. On Callimachus (5 Pf = 14GP), see Gutzwiller (1992b).

<sup>176</sup> SEG 8: 361 = PH222893; see also footnote 132.

<sup>177</sup> Gutzwiller (1992a), 363; also Clayman (2014), 47. The temple at Zephyrium may have been the model for a separate possible temple to Berenice II along the nearby coast (Grabowski, 31-32). Ptolemy IV apparently dedicated the *Sozousa* temple to Berenice, which served a similar purpose to that at Zephyrium since it recognized her as a maritime goddess (Zen. 394). See also Clayman (2011) 239, n. 38.

Alexandria.”<sup>178</sup> The Arsinoëion was a major monument at Alexandria; likely located near the harbour, it was approximately one third the size of a city block, and featured one of the largest obelisks ever made.<sup>179</sup> The temple was designed with a magnetic roof and an iron cult statue of Arsinoë, to give the illusion of mid-air suspension, although completion of this project is uncertain.<sup>180</sup> The sanctuary is thus significant not only on account of its sheer magnitude and consequential promotion of Arsinoë within the Ptolemaic capital, but in its implicit connection to Aphrodite, reinforced by its symbolic and geographical proximity to the temple at Zephyrium.

Of similar scale to the Arsinoëion was the Thalamegos, a houseboat of Ptolemy IV. The Thalamegos was a catamaran approximately three hundred feet long and forty-five feet wide, and boasted numerous facilities designed for

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<sup>178</sup> Grabowski, 29. Here the “Alexandrian shrine” refers to the Arsinoëion.

<sup>179</sup> Grabowski, 29; McKenzie, 51-52; Stanwick, 16. Details of the construction and features of the sanctuary are recorded in Pliny (NH, 34.42; 36.14; and 37.32). The sanctuary may have covered an area of c. 105 x 263 m (see McKenzie, 386 n.151). The obelisk was 80 cubits (c. 42 m) high, and distinctive for appearing by itself rather than in a pair (ibid, 51); it was therefore a significant landmark, especially for sailors entering the port (Grabowski, 29).

<sup>180</sup> Pliny (NH, 34.2); Clayman (2014), 47; Fraser, 25; McKenzie, 51. Pliny also attests to a second statue honouring Arsinoë and consecrated within her temple; it was four cubits (c. 2.1 m) tall, and made of peridot (NH 37.32; McKenzie, 51, and 386 n.147).

comfort and luxury.<sup>181</sup> Located on the upper deck, amidst the various dining rooms and open space, was a circular shrine to Aphrodite, which included a marble statue of the goddess.<sup>182</sup> Although often overshadowed by the other architectural features of the houseboat, the inclusion of this shrine presents intriguing implications. The supposition that the houseboat reflects the interior design of Ptolemaic palaces is frequently made in modern scholarship, and if it holds merit, then it follows that they may well have contained shrines to Aphrodite.<sup>183</sup> At the same time it is possible that the goddess was simply present on the boat in her role as Euploia. This interpretation is no less interesting, since it

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<sup>181</sup> McKenzie, 62. The Thalamegos is extensively detailed in Athenaeus (5.204d-206c), whose account is based on Callixenus of Rhodes (See also discussion in Brophy, 3-5). It is not the only such luxury houseboat; the Syracusia was of equal grandeur, and bequeathed to Ptolemy IV as the Alexandris because its size prohibited it from entering other lesser harbours (McKenzie, 64; Ath. 5.206d-209b). Aside from further description of the shrine of Aphrodite, commentary on this and other similar boats neither augments nor detracts from the discussion concerning the Thalamegos, and thus they remain supplementary in this section.

<sup>182</sup> Brophy, 7; McKenzie, 62; Strootman, 78-79; Ath. 5, 204d-e. The literary description consists of these few scant details — on the location of the shrine, its shape, and the marble statue within — and accounts of the houseboat in modern scholarship rarely offer further commentary; Brophy notes the practical concerns of the weight of statues and the likelihood that only the “heads and extremities would have been made of marble,” (7). More detail is provided concerning the Syracusia/Alexandris: “Built next to these was a shrine of Aphrodite large enough to contain three couches, with a floor made of agate and other stones, the most beautiful kinds found in the island; it had walls and ceiling of Cyprus-wood, and doors of ivory and fragrant cedar; it was also most lavishly furnished with paintings and statues and drinking-vessels of every shape” (5.207e). The shrine of the Syracusia is thus carefully furnished and decorated as lavishly as the remainder of the ship; although the description of the Thalamegos is succinct in comparison, there is no reason to believe that the same did not hold true for its shrine. However, it is equally important to avoid overstating the significance of the shrine on account of decoration: it may match ostentation of the remainder of the ship, but to meet a specific standard of luxury rather than specifically curated for the goddess.

<sup>183</sup> McKenzie (62) and Strootman (78) both give voice to the likelihood that the houseboat shared features with other structures; like other similar studies, their focus lies in describing these features and contextualizing their significance, usually in relation to the contrasting influence of Greek and Egyptian styles and culture (see discussion, McKenzie 62-64; Strootman 78-79).

is one of the few examples of Aphrodite in which the Ptolemaic dynasts relate to her maritime aspect as supplicants rather than syncretists. Brophy notes that the Thalamegos was not “provided for public consumption, but for a select group of family and members of the court.”<sup>184</sup> Although the private nature of this space is dubious, it is nonetheless far more constrained and personal than the other spaces we have examined, and is thus at least somewhat suggestive of the domestic religion of the dynasts.<sup>185</sup>

### **Alexandria: Conclusion**

A locational survey of Alexandria identifies the temple of Arsinoë-Aphrodite at Zephyrium, the Arsinoëion, and the shrine in the Thalamegos as the three most significant sites in which Aphrodite manifests, albeit by association in

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<sup>184</sup> Brophy, 7. However, this so-called private context does not preclude display; Brophy refers to the statuary, shrine, and dining rooms as “evidence of the wealth and power of the ruling dynasty” (ibid). Accessibility to the Thalamegos is also a factor, since in addition to the dynasts and invited guests, there must have been a significant crew. Ancient estimates include 4000 to man the oars and 2000 on deck, plus reserves (Ath. 5. 204b-c); although literary accounts of numbers are often suspect, a more conservative estimation does not actually change the fact that there were far more people present than normal conceptions of “private” might entail.

<sup>185</sup> Fraser posits that this “same interest in Aphrodite” evidenced by the Thalamegos served as the impetus for later Ptolemaic recognition of the goddess, including consecration of temples to Hathor/Aphrodite by Ptolemy IV at Cusae and Ptolemy VIII at Philae (197; see also Dunand 2007, 257). Although the focus on temples redirects the discussion from the personal sphere back to the public, it at the very least attests to the longevity of the cult and the continued significance of the goddess.

the second case.<sup>186</sup> The analysis of each of these sites not only attests to a strong presence of Aphrodite at Alexandria, but emphasizes the connection to her purview as goddess of the sea. It is this marine aspect of Aphrodite that was subsumed into the recognition of Arsinoë Philadelphus and incorporated into Ptolemaic propaganda, and at Alexandria, these elements were directed both inward to the local population, and outward to the wider Mediterranean.

### **Memphis: Overview**

The site of Memphis and its significance in the history of Egypt has long been recognized in scholarship, to the extent that the city has been considered synonymous with the country.<sup>187</sup> Its advantageous location between the Delta and Nile Valley marked the border between Lower and Upper Egypt, and allowed for access to fresh water and control of trade routes.<sup>188</sup> The site was founded at the end of the fourth millennium, and functioned as a capital city and royal residence

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<sup>186</sup> Notably absent from this study is the Serapeum and an Isieion. Although the Serapeum was one of the most important Alexandrine cult sites, the temple itself was only peripherally connected to Aphrodite or any of her syncretic forms; much more relevant is the role of the cult of Sarapis and Isis in the propaganda efforts of the Ptolemies, evidence of which is primarily found in epigraphy, coinage, and various forms of artwork. A case could be made to include other Alexandrine infrastructure in this survey, such as Arsinoë's eponymous streets (Clayman 2014, 181) and fountain house (McKenzie, 61), but these are not related to religion. They are accoutrements of daily life and worth noting for their presence, but otherwise offer little in the context of cult.

<sup>187</sup> Thompson (1988), 3. This connection between city and country is not an invention of modern scholarship, but is found within the "Greek name for the country as a whole, *Aigyptos*, [which] derives from one of the Egyptian names for the city, *Hekaptah*". See also Colburn, 27.

<sup>188</sup> Thompson (1988), 3; Wilkinson (2000), 114.

from its inception to the incursion of Alexander the Great.<sup>189</sup> With the exception of its burial grounds, little of ancient Memphis survives; statistical estimates from the Ptolemaic period suggest that the site covered an area of 600 ha and hosted a population between 12,500 - 37, 500.<sup>190</sup> This population was ethnically diverse, and consisted of immigrant communities in addition to Egyptian natives prior to the incursion of Alexander the Great.<sup>191</sup> Although these communities contributed to a nuanced and multicultural identity, this chapter largely generalizes the diversity of the population into an overarching Egyptian narrative, predicated on the authority of the Egyptian priestly class.<sup>192</sup> Such a narrative, construed in this manner, not only highlights the influence of the Memphite clergy within the city and throughout Egypt, but functions in juxtaposition to the Greek narrative which

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<sup>189</sup> Despite political fluctuation — and competition from other major sites such as Thebes — in the development of Egypt from the Early Dynastic Period (c. 3050-2686) to the Late Period (653-332), Memphis retained its position of ‘first city’ of Egypt and its role as the administrative, economic, militaristic, and religious centre of the country. See Colburn, 27-28; Thompson (1988), 3-4; Wilkinson (2013), 369-370.

<sup>190</sup> Mueller, 93-96; Wilkinson (2000), 114. These numbers are far more conservative than earlier estimates, which range between 50, 000 and 200, 000 (see discussion in Thompson 1988, 32-38).

<sup>191</sup> Phoenicians, Ionians, Carians, Persians and Jews are prominent among the immigrants who arrived in Memphis as conquerors, merchants, mercenaries, prisoners and refugees throughout the history of the site; see Thompson for further discussion of the arrival and integration of each group into the wider community (1988, 82-105).

<sup>192</sup> This approach reflects and builds upon the treatment of Memphis — and other sites within Egypt — commonly found within modern scholarship; detailed analysis of ethnic minorities are often set aside in favour of a bilateral framework which juxtaposes the immigrant Greeks against the native Egyptians. Such an approach is attractive due to its capacity for organization and established precedent, but is often also necessitated by the available evidence (Thompson 1988, 104-105).

emerges from Alexandria, the new capital which had a similarly mixed population, but was governed by the Greek elite.

The Memphite clergy was quasi-autonomous and wielded significant political power throughout the history of Egypt; the priests not only controlled land and wealth through their temple complexes, but functioned in the governance of the country as mediators between the dynasts, the gods, and the general population.<sup>193</sup> The apex of this mediation was the conferment of dynastic legitimacy; the Egyptian tradition recognized the pharaoh as a deity incarnate, and it fell to the priests to testify to this position.<sup>194</sup> The history of legitimization was well-established for native sovereigns and foreign incumbents alike, and the recognition of Alexander the Great by the Memphite clergy marked the first insertion of the Macedonian rulers into this tradition.<sup>195</sup> Throughout the Hellenistic period, the Memphite clergy shared a reciprocal relationship with the

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<sup>193</sup> Dunand (2004), 206-210; Thompson (1990), 104-107.

<sup>194</sup> Dunand (2004), 198-199; Wilkinson (2013), 25-34.

<sup>195</sup> Egyptian sacerdotal recognition of dynastic legitimacy can be traced from Kushite and Libyan kings from the first millennium to the Persian kings in the sixth-fourth centuries, with the caveat that the latter were represented by satraps within Egypt (Dunand 2004, 198-199). It is uncertain whether Alexander was crowned at Memphis according to Egyptian custom, and it is not until the end of the third century that such ceremonies became common practice for the Ptolemaic dynasts; although it is possible that Ptolemy II Philadelphus received such honours, Ptolemy V Epiphanes has been recognized as the first certain Ptolemy to be thus crowned (Dunand 2004, 199-200; Lorber 2018a, 61; Thompson 1990, 106-107).

Ptolemaic dynasts, in which the dynasts sustained the affluence and influence of the clergy with the expectation that its reach would be utilized to their benefit.<sup>196</sup>

### **Egyptian *Sunnaos Theos* and the Development of Ruler Cult**

The propagation of ruler cult was essential to the legitimization and consolidation of the Ptolemaic dynasty. First established under Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the official ruler cult of the Ptolemies developed separately in Greek and Egyptian contexts.<sup>197</sup> The Egyptian narrative begins with the deification of Arsinoë II Philadelphus and her induction as a *sunnaos theos* as mandated in the Mendes decree; thereafter, the image of the deified queen was disseminated throughout the country, and Arsinoë II was fully incorporated into the Egyptian

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<sup>196</sup> Caneva (2012), 88. Although the power wielded by the clergy posed a credible threat to the Ptolemies, accounts of their interactions favour collusion between the priests and dynasts rather than conflict (Thompson 1988, 112, discussion 106-114; see also Dunand 2004, 206-210). It is important to note that although the Memphite high priests of Ptah are specifically recognized for their close association with the Ptolemaic dynasts, this working relationship was not constrained to representatives of a specific temple; indeed, the Ptolemies supported and utilized clergies throughout Egypt (Dunand 2004, 206-210). Thompson suggests that although there were tensions between temple and state in Memphis, the consistent loyalty to the dynasts “prevented the city’s total eclipse by Alexandria;” in contrast, Thebes had a history of revolt and was eventually defeated by Ptolemy IX Soter II at the beginning of the first century (1988, 107-108).

<sup>197</sup> Carney (2013), 106-110; Thompson (1990), 110-113. See also Quaegebeur, who comments upon the prominence of Memphis “among the cities where Arsinoë was incorporated,” but largely attributes it to the historical significance of the site (1971, 244).



pantheon.<sup>198</sup> Similar honours and cult practices are outlined in the Canopus decree, which deified the Princess Berenice following her death during the synod under Ptolemy III Euergetes.<sup>199</sup> The Canopus decree was integral to the propagation of ruler cult, since it not only confirmed the precedent set with Arsinoë II in respect to the cult of the *sunnaoi theoi*, but it also incorporated the entire Egyptian clergy into the cult of Ptolemy III and Berenice II as the Theoi Euergetai.<sup>200</sup> Although the Mendes decree and the Canopus decree were, as evident by name, ratified in locations outside of Memphis, they nonetheless required widespread involvement of the Egyptian clergy, who would be expected

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<sup>198</sup> The Mendes decree is the first of over eleven extant sacerdotal decrees which were issued between the reigns of Ptolemy II and Ptolemy VI (Brophy, 9). It is of considerable significance to understanding the cult of Arsinoë II, since it addresses the deification of the queen, describes the cult statue, and specifies the locations in which the statue should be erected (ibid, 9-10). Thompson emphasizes the “bold and innovative” nature of the Mendes decree, and argues that “such a degree of direct interference in the religious life of Egypt had probably not been seen since Akhenaten, the heretical pharaoh of the fourteenth century BC” (1990, 110). Hölbl likewise comments on the “spectacular” nature of the decree, but nonetheless frames the deification of Arsinoë within its Egyptian context by listing numerous cults of deceased pharaohs established within Memphis (101). On deified native kings, see also Quaegebeur (1971), 245.

<sup>199</sup> Princess Berenice was the daughter of Ptolemy III and Berenice II; the description of her cult image in the Canopus Decree specifically distinguishes her iconography from that of her mother (Brophy, 11; Clayman 2014, 167-168). Brophy observes that the necessity for this distinction presupposes an earlier inclusion of the cult image of Berenice II (11).

<sup>200</sup> Brophy 11-12; Thompson (1990), 110; Wilkinson (2000), 87. Although the reciprocal relationship between the clergy and dynasts is emphasized in scholarship concerning the Canopus decree, Thompson cautions that “in practice the title was only given to particular individuals,” which frequently included the high priest of Memphis (1990, 110).

to enforce them. These two decrees set a precedent for future sacerdotal decrees regulating ruler cult.<sup>201</sup>

Further involvement of the Memphite clergy in the propagation of Ptolemaic ruler cult is evident in its close association with the cult of Arsinoë. The deified queen was not only present at Memphis as a *sunnaos theos*, but was worshipped within her own temple; moreover, the Egyptian Arsinoëion was elevated on account of its close association to the temple of Ptah.<sup>202</sup> The ‘first-prophet’ of Ptah was foremost in the hierarchy of the cult, and served as the high priest of Memphis; such a position was frequently accompanied by office in the dynastic ruler cult, and in particular the role of scribe for the cult of Arsinoë.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> In addition to the Mendes decree (270-246) and the Canopus decree (238), almost-complete copies of the Raphia decree (217), the Memphis decree (196), the Second Philae decree (186) and the First Philae decree (185/4) have been found throughout Egypt (Brophy, 9; see 9-16 for discussion). These decrees were trilingual, inscribed on stelae and erected outside of major temples; they were intended not only to be accessible to both Greek and Egyptian populations, but were specifically designed “to create a single ideological and cultic image from the distinct figures of the Basileus and the pharaoh” (Hölbl, 106). Whereas the first two decrees reflect the reciprocal relationship between the early Ptolemies and the Egyptian clergy, the Raphia decree marks a shift in this relationship and a corresponding increase in tension (see Brophy, 15; Dunand 2004, 207-210; Hölbl 106).

<sup>202</sup> Carney (2013), 106-108; Hölbl, 102; Quaegebeur (1971), 262-263. Ptah was the foremost deity recognized at Memphis, whose temple complex numbered among the largest throughout Egypt, and whose priests dominated the Memphite region (Thompson 1990, 103-105; Wilkinson 2000, 114-115). Similarly to most major Egyptian complexes, the temple of Ptah extended beyond a place of worship, but functioned as a well-developed economic and administrative centre; it also provided support for at least four other large enclosures (Thompson 1990, 105; see also Dunand 2004, 206-207). Within or nearby this complex, Ptolemy II constructed the sanctuary of Arsinoë Philadelphus, which was still operational at least until the end of the second century (Quaegebeur 1971, 263).

<sup>203</sup> Thompson (1990), 102, 108.

## Conclusion

In contrast to Alexandria, where the syncretism was predominantly with Aphrodite, at Memphis the deified Arsinoë as *sunnaos theos* was syncretized to multiple deities. This process, largely achieved through the efforts of the Memphite clergy, facilitated the propagation of the cult of Arsinoë Philadelphus throughout Egypt. Aphrodite was closely assimilated to Arsinoë II, and this assimilation exploited two different aspects of the goddess. The erotic aspect of Aphrodite served to translate the Egyptian custom of royal sibling marriage and ruler cult into Greek terms for the Greek population and the marine aspects of Aphrodite served the dynasty in its outward facing claims within the larger Greek world. Both of these models addressed immediate contemporary concerns in the consolidation of Ptolemaic power, but also had long-reaching effects which shaped the entirety of the dynasty.

The assimilation between Arsinoë II and Aphrodite facilitated the widespread acceptance and popularity of the deified queen, which in turn supported the establishment and propagation of Ptolemaic ruler cult; the continued association with Berenice II in the following generation built on this. While discussion in this chapter briefly outlined the Egyptian development of ruler cult, the primary focus was on the Greek perspective. The following chapter will augment this discussion by further analyzing the Egyptian perspective of both

ruler cult and the cult of Aphrodite under the Ptolemies, and the role of Egyptianization in its rise and decline.

### **Chapter 3**

#### ***She's All That: The Question of Syncretism***

##### **Introduction**

The consummate assimilation between Arsinoë II and Aphrodite had great effect in the queen's life, death and legacy. Whereas the previous chapter directed its attention to the queen herself, the current chapter is concerned with her legacy, with particular emphasis on the significance of Aphrodite beyond Arsinoë.

Although the Greek goddess never disappeared from the Egyptian literary or archaeological record, as discussed in the first chapter, her prevalence under the Ptolemies gradually declined concurrent with the rise in prominence of Isis. This chapter demonstrates how capacity for syncretism was the greatest feature of the cult of Aphrodite and facilitated its integrative function, but also ultimately allowed for its eclipse.

The first part of the chapter consists of a brief overview of the Ptolemaic queens, including Arsinoë, Berenice and their successors. It focuses primarily on Berenice, and the role her position as the immediate political and symbolic successor of Arsinoë played in the development of syncretism with Aphrodite and Isis. It then traces the further development of this syncretism down to the end of the dynasty.

The second part of the chapter takes a closer look at the question of syncretism. This discussion is largely focused on Isis, one of the eldest and most eminent Egyptian deities, who underwent significant reinvention at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period and emerged as one of the foremost Graeco-Egyptian deities. This reinvention was closely intertwined with her syncretism to Aphrodite and the early Ptolemaic queens, and saw Isis eventually usurp the Greek goddess in her position as a leading deity of the dynasty.

### **The Ptolemaic Queens: Arsinoë, Berenice and Successors**

#### **Biography of Berenice<sup>204</sup>**

Ptolemy II and Arsinoë II were succeeded by Ptolemy III and Berenice II, both of whom claimed direct descent from their predecessors; however, their claim to be siblings was fabricated.<sup>205</sup> Clayman argues that the appropriation of a new family equated to a new life, and thus eradicated the sins of the past, which would have served Berenice given her tumultuous background and reputation.<sup>206</sup>

And in claiming to marry her brother, she was, like Ptolemy II and Arsinoë II,

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<sup>204</sup> The following biography is an adaptation primarily drawing from Clayman's monograph on Berenice (Clayman 2014), supplemented by her more detailed analysis on the Lock of Berenice (Clayman 2011).

<sup>205</sup> Clayman (2011), 242. Ptolemy III was the son of Ptolemy II and Arsinoë I; he and Berenice II claimed to be siblings, despite the circulation of the truth throughout Alexandria. Epigraphic evidence from a statue group recovered in Aetolia identifies Berenice as the daughter of Magas (IG IX, 12 I 56); Magas is also the recipient of a Callimachean poem. However, official documents such as the Canopus decree (OGIS 56) identify Ptolemy II and Arsinoë II as their parents.

<sup>206</sup> Clayman (2011), 242.

conforming her marriage to the traditions of pharaonic ruler cult. While Ptolemy III was the son of Ptolemy II and Arsinoë I, Berenice was born some time before 264 in Cyrene to Magas and Apame; the former was the stepson of Ptolemy I, and the latter was the granddaughter of Seleucus I, and thus succession politics shaped Berenice's life from her birth.<sup>207</sup> Upon the death of Ptolemy I, Magas challenged his half-brother Ptolemy II for his position and failed, but nevertheless managed to secure the betrothal of his daughter to the future Ptolemy III.<sup>208</sup> However, following the death of Magas, Apame sought to arrange marriage between Berenice and Demetrius the Fair, the half-brother of Antigonos Gonatus; Berenice is believed to have murdered Demetrius before leaving to marry Ptolemy III in his stead.<sup>209</sup> Together, Ptolemy and Berenice had six children, five of whom are named in a family monument at Thermos.<sup>210</sup>

Although Ptolemy III may seem a “pale third” in comparison to his predecessors, it was under his reign that the Ptolemaic empire reached its military

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<sup>207</sup> Clayman (2014), 2.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. See discussion on source material: although the reliability of Justin's *Epitome* is questionable, Clayman argues that there is enough corroboration in other sources such as Callimachus to at least implicate her (ibid, 5).

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 171. From eldest to youngest, the children are: Arsinoë III, Ptolemy IV, unknown, Alexander, Magas, and the Princess Berenice. The early death of the Princess Berenice resulted in the first change of the Egyptian clergy when Ptolemy III added a fifth class to the existing priestly classes in her honour (Thompson 1990, 108)

and cultural peak.<sup>211</sup> Coastal settlements throughout the Mediterranean honoured both Ptolemy III and Berenice II, and Ptolemy himself honoured his wife, albeit in a manner in which she remained subordinate.<sup>212</sup> Ptolemy III died of natural causes in 222, and Berenice was murdered by her eldest son, Ptolemy IV, shortly thereafter; he was credited with deifying his mother approximately a decade later.<sup>213</sup>

It is possible to trace similar elements in the biography of Berenice to that of Arsinoë, namely in consideration of marital and martial concerns. These recurrent issues faced by the incumbent queen led to similar exploitation of Aphrodite, both in her role as goddess of love and mistress of the sea. Although Clayman emphasizes the importance of Berenice's assimilation with Athena,

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<sup>211</sup> Clayman (2014), 122. This peak extends to geography; it was at this time that the “overseas empire reached its greatest extent” (134).

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 134; Hazzard (2000), 112-113. Hazzard notes the repeat of this pattern in the honours each Ptolemy gives to their respective queens; they may be multiple, but carefully constrained according to the power conferred.

<sup>213</sup> Clayman (2014), 171-173. Much of the account of the succession of Ptolemy IV, as it pertains to the deaths of the various peripherals, is derived from Polybius as follows: his father, Ptolemy III (2.71.3); his uncle Lysimachus and his brother Magas (5.34.1; 5.36.1; 15.25.1-2); and his mother, Berenice II (5.36.1).



Agatha Tyche and Isis rather than with Aphrodite, the qualities she exhibits in each of their aspects are easily identifiable with the latter goddess as well.<sup>214</sup>

### **Lock of Berenice**

One of the most famous means by which Berenice is known to the modern audience is through her commemoration in the *Lock of Berenice*. The original Callimachean poem was until recently only preserved through a Catullan adaptation, summarized by Clayman as follows:

*“It begins with Conon, an astronomer and mathematician who lived in Alexandria at the time of the third Ptolemy. It was he, she says, who first saw her, a lock of hair from the Queen’s head, shining brightly in the sky. Then, in a flashback, the Lock explains how it happened. Shortly after Berenice’s marriage to the King, her husband went off to war. His Queen, in a frenzy of anxiety and despair at his absence, vowed to the gods that she would sacrifice a lock of her hair if her husband returned safely. His military adventure was a great success, he came back in triumph, and the Queen fulfilled her vow (Catull. 66.1-38).*

*The lock was dedicated at the Temple of Arsinoë-Zephyritis, and promptly disappeared. Even as she tells the tale, the Lock is beside herself with grief. She bemoans her absence from Berenice’s beloved head and melodramatically recounts the trauma of being swept from the temple by Zephyr into the sea and then up to the sky among the other constellations (Catull. 66.39-68). But the Lock is not yet resigned to her fate. She especially misses the unguents that Berenice applied to her hair when she was young, and asks that the queen and other chaste, married women pour*

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<sup>214</sup> Clayman (2011), 233-244. Similar biographical details prompt certain elements of assimilation, such as Athena and Berenice’s shared birthplace and mutual disdain for their mothers (234-235); however, the elements with most syncretic potential are behaviours and personality traits. Clayman emphasizes both the martial and nurturing aspects of Berenice, and connects them to the aforementioned goddesses, but these are domains in which Aphrodite also has an equal or greater purview.

*libations of perfume to her before spending the night with their like-minded husbands (Catull. 66.75-88). ”<sup>215</sup>*

There is an immediate connection between Berenice and Aphrodite through the setting of the poem, and although there was no evidence that Berenice was worshipped at Zephyrium, the promontory was referenced in her cult title Aktia.<sup>216</sup> Thus, Callimachus associates Berenice to Aphrodite, even if not as a syncretic form of the goddess, and this relationship persisted on account of the popularity and consequent retransmission of the story throughout the Hellenistic and into the Roman period. The association with Aphrodite also entails association with Arsinoë, who also bore the cult title Aktia. Gutzwiller argues that the choice of site was specifically undertaken by Berenice to lay “the groundwork for her own identification with Aphrodite,” following the example set by Arsinoë.<sup>217</sup> The poem thus shows Berenice deliberately molding herself in the

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 229-230. On the history of poem and its transmission, see Clayman (2011) 230-231, 240-241; also Bing (2009), 65-82. The Callimachean poem is fragmentary, and published in a series of papyri; new discoveries in the 20th century originated with PSI 1092 in 1929, followed by P. Oxy. 2258 in 1952, and more recent commentaries have been produced at the turn of the century (Clayman 2011, 231). Clayman elucidates the prevailing view in scholarship that the Catullan version “is not a literal translation at every point, though it is certainly a brilliant one, and where the Greek is missing altogether, Catullus is an indispensable guide to the general contents” (ibid). On rhetorical and thematic analysis of the poem, see Gutzwiller (1992a).

<sup>216</sup> Clayman (2014), 136. Aktia is only one of multiple epithets attributed to the queens, and emphasizes their purview of the sea (Bricault, 29-30).

<sup>217</sup> Gutzwiller (1992a), 363. Although she emphasizes Arsinoë II, Gutzwiller also acknowledges the influence of Berenice I in the development of association with Aphrodite.

image of her predecessor, who has already achieved apotheosis and is fully conceptualized in a syncretic role with Aphrodite.

At a more general level, the poem reiterates the themes of love and marriage, thus situating Berenice and her actions in the domain of Aphrodite. It is evident from her biography that marriage and succession politics governed Berenice's life as much as it did Arsinoë's, if not more. However, Callimachus' depiction of Berenice's marriage was "predicated upon the queen's own interests and experiences as a woman."<sup>218</sup> Gutzwiller identifies the hair-cutting ritual as a symbol of erotic devotion, and emphasizes Berenice's agency in the choice of ritual and clear objective of legitimization.<sup>219</sup> This act incorporates both Greek and Egyptian mythological canon, thus serving to introduce Isis into the relationships between Arsinoë, Berenice and Aphrodite.<sup>220</sup>

### **Successors and Legacy**

The biographies and depictions of Arsinoë and Berenice clearly demonstrate their assimilation not only to Aphrodite, but also to Isis, setting a

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 384.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> On the ritual of hair cutting in the Greek context, see Gutzwiller (1992a), 369-373; these examples are categorized by Clayman into "moments of grief, as physical manifestations of vows, or as markers for certain changes in social status" (2011, 239). In Egyptian fertility myths, Isis cut her hair upon receiving the news of Osiris' death, left it at her temple in Coptos, and then initiated the Nile flood through her tears of grief; this motif became an integral aspect of the goddess, to the point that she was recognized in Greek texts by epithets referencing her hair (ibid). On the iconographic significance of hair in Graeco-Egyptian portraiture, see Stanwick (37-38).

pattern for queens that would be followed throughout the Ptolemaic dynasty. Under the early Ptolemies, a shift from Aphrodite to Isis begins to emerge; although the former never fully disappears, there is an increasing inclination towards the latter, which is fully realized in the portrayal of Cleopatra as Nea Isis.<sup>221</sup>

In his doctoral thesis on *The Religious Identification of Ptolemaic Queens with Aphrodite, Demeter, Hathor and Isis*, van Oppen de Ruiter has tabulated “approximately fifty-five identifications or comparisons of Ptolemaic queens with mostly Greek and Egyptian goddesses.”<sup>222</sup> The table is meant to provide an approximate overview and is by no means exhaustive, nor does it address the frequency or nature of the identifications, such as whether the cult was private or public, or the level of association between queen and goddess.<sup>223</sup> Despite these limitations, the table clearly demonstrates that queens continued to be identified with Aphrodite after Arsinoë; it thus attests to both the continued significance of

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<sup>221</sup> Although Cleopatra was widely recognized as the “first queen completely identified with Isis during her lifetime,” her assimilation with this goddess was not exclusive; Cypriot coins depicted Cleopatra and Caesarion in the guise of Aphrodite and Eros, and thus attest to the continued prevalence of Aphrodite, at least in her traditional homeland (Havelock 1995, 129).

<sup>222</sup> van Oppen de Ruiter (2005), 9 and 523. The table largely consists of evidence collated from the works of leading scholars such as Tondriau, Thompson and Quaegebeur.

<sup>223</sup> van Oppen de Ruiter (2007), 9-10.

the goddess throughout the dynasty, and that the emergence of Isis did not wholly eclipse the Greek goddess.<sup>224</sup>

The progression of syncretism as it pertains to the Ptolemaic queens is evident in artistic representations, in which the influence of Arsinoë and Berenice upon their successors is also manifest.<sup>225</sup> Prior to Arsinoë II, artistic representations featured little individualization; statues in particular were intentionally designed to augment the narrative of pharaonic succession.<sup>226</sup> However, the unprecedented participation of women in royal cult was reflected in an increased “interest in the individual portrayal of the female form in art.”<sup>227</sup> These added details included both personal and divine emblems which became

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<sup>224</sup> Of the ten queens included in the chart, Aphrodite is assimilated to six, Demeter to either five or six, and Hathor and Isis each to seven. Although a considerable amount of overlap is unavoidable due to the numbers involved, it is worth noting that every queen assimilated to Aphrodite is also assimilated to Isis; the seventh queen not assimilated to Aphrodite is Cleopatra I (van Oppen de Ruyter 2007, 523).

<sup>225</sup> In particular, these trends can be traced in royal portraiture, wherein successive queens are depicted in accordance with their image and iconography (Smith, 204; Stanwick, 37).

<sup>226</sup> Stanwick, 66-67. He argues that “if one did not know the facts of the historical accounts and simply looked at the visual evidence of royal portraiture, one might conclude that the early Ptolemies were the direct descendants of the last native pharaohs [since] the faces of the Egyptian-style sculptures of the first Greek rulers closely follow those of the Nectanebos” (66).

<sup>227</sup> Plantzos, 390; see also Smith, 204.

recurrent motifs, imitating not only Arsinoë and Berenice, but alluding to Aphrodite and Isis by association.<sup>228</sup>

### **The Question of Syncretism: Aphrodite, Isis, Arsinoë, and Berenice Egyptian Origins and Emergence of Isis as a Universal Deity**

The earliest and most fundamental conceptualization of Isis from pharaonic Egypt is as the personification of the royal throne, as indicated by the hieroglyph of her name.<sup>229</sup> Incongruously, the mythological canon indicates Isis came from rather humble origins, as a local goddess of the delta.<sup>230</sup> Since the Old Kingdom (c. 2686–2181), she was recognized as a maternal figure, and was soon inserted into both the Osirian cycle and the Ennead of Heliopolis.<sup>231</sup> Through

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<sup>228</sup> Stanwick, 37-38. The accoutrements of Arsinoë II included the “combination crown,” double cornucopia, and ceremonial dress; the latter was worn by the queens when they were “portrayed as sunnaoi theoi and when they were conferred with the right to divine queenship” (ibid 37; for detailed analysis of Arsinoë’s crown see Nilsson 2010). Stanwick identifies the depiction of hair as one of the most identifying features on statuary; not only was it used to distinguish between the portraits of specific dynasts, but it was a “deifying quality” that mimicked the depiction of pre-Hellenistic goddesses (ibid, 37-38).

<sup>229</sup> Bricault 2020, 1; Thompson (1973), 58.

<sup>230</sup> Dunand (2004), 236; Thompson (1973), 58. See also Bricault, who suggests that toponymous and archaeological evidence supports the origin of the cult within lower Egypt, but that the claim remains uncertain (1). The association with the Delta manifests in relation to the Nectanebos in the fourth century, who are credited with the spread of her cult “from Behbeit el-Hagar... all the way to the island of Philae (ibid).

<sup>231</sup> Dunand (2004), 236. Both Isis and her brother-husband are recorded in the pyramid texts from the third millennium, and prominent among what would become her numerous roles is the depiction of Isis as a maternal and uxorial archetype (Witt, 18-21). Bricault argues that the maternal nature is not only one of her roles, but the very essence of what allowed her to appropriate “the functions, specializations and attributes of most of the Egyptian goddesses” (1).

these cycles, Isis was associated with death, life and regeneration.<sup>232</sup>

Isis was considered a universal goddess both in consideration of where she was recognized as well as the domains attributed to her. She was identified by Herodotus as the only deity except for Osiris who was worshipped throughout Egypt, and the popularity of the goddess only increased throughout the Ptolemaic and then Roman period.<sup>233</sup> Within Egypt, there were numerous sanctuaries to Isis, including at Busiris and Memphis; subsequently, the building program of the early Ptolemies included significant expansion and renovation of traditional cult sites at Behbeit el-Hagar and Philae.<sup>234</sup> Isis also had an established reputation outside of Egypt, particularly among the Greeks, and was recognized at Athens and Eretria.<sup>235</sup>

More often, however, Isis is considered as universal in accordance with her domains; she was not only *polyonymos* but *myrionymos*, recognized as “the only divinity whose epiclesis marked that the number of names was not merely

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<sup>232</sup> Barbantani, 151; Bricault, 1; Witt, 138.

<sup>233</sup> Hdt. 2.42.2; Dunand (2004), 235. It is worth considering the context within which Isis was recognized, since “a universalist version of the goddess occurs in Greek as well as Egyptian texts” (ibid, 237). Dunand notes the difficulty of interpretation, since the use of Greek nomenclature could indicate either a separate Greek deity or simply an Egyptian equivalent (ibid, 242).

<sup>234</sup> Dunand (2004), 236-237; Witt, 59-60. The size and significance of sanctuaries to Isis differed dramatically throughout the countryside, and the goddess was often relegated as a *synnaos theos*. Although epigraphic evidence attests to her presence in “nearly all towns of the Faiyum and all centres of the Delta,” other notable cult sites include Coptos, Dendera, and Edfu (Dunand 2004, 236-237).

<sup>235</sup> Samuel, 82; see also Kahil, 83. Samuel argues that it was this familiarity of Isis among the Greek population that encouraged Ptolemy I to promote her cult (83).

large but infinite [and thus was conceptualized as] all things to all men.”<sup>236</sup> This breadth of domains was gained through syncretism with other deities; Isis was one of the major divinities who could — and often did — incarnate as another deity and thus subsume their abilities.<sup>237</sup> This practice was both frequent and widespread, with the result that Isis “assumed the functions of nearly all female deities in Egypt, and eventually outside as well.”<sup>238</sup>

Among the earliest assimilated deities were Bastet and Hathor; from the latter deity in particular Isis favoured a bovine portrayal, since she originally had no personal cult creature or zoomorphic form.<sup>239</sup> This association between Isis and Hathor was particularly close, and Isis assumed the majority of epithets associated with the other goddess from the beginning of the Ptolemaic period.<sup>240</sup> However, in most cases it appears that syncretism adhered to a standard practice in which Isis was associated with other deities depending on their prominent role or aspect.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Witt, 121. See also discussion in Bricault, 2-4.

<sup>237</sup> Dunand (2004), 236.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. See also discussion in Witt concerning Isis’ capacity for syncretism and her absorption of “all characteristic qualities of Greek goddesses” (111-112).

<sup>239</sup> Witt, 30.

<sup>240</sup> Žabkar, 82. See also Otto on Isis and Hathor (381). One simplistic observation to keep in mind is the connection between the universality of deities and how it corresponds to their age; the longevity of a deity often facilitates their capacity for syncretism, especially in light of greater conceptual fluidity in the religious sphere in earlier periods (Otto, 381).

<sup>241</sup> Witt, 20. For example, Herodotus primarily conceptualizes Isis as the equivalent to Demeter, and thus as a fertility goddess (Hdt. 2.59.2).



The origins and universality of the goddess attest to the longevity and ongoing development of her cult, both prior and subsequent to Ptolemaic arrival. Isis was not only familiar to the Greek population throughout the Mediterranean, but similarly to numerous contemporary cults, recognition of the goddess was susceptible to foreign influence through contact and trade.

### **Reinvention under the Ptolemies**

The long history of Egypt and its development under numerous foreign empires might lead one to expect constraint of indigenous religious beliefs, but in the wake of Alexander “far from suffering a setback, [they] gained a reputation and influence never seen before.”<sup>242</sup> Ptolemy I called for a systematization of the religious ideas of his kingdom, a task which is traditionally associated with Manetho and Timotheus, respectively an Egyptian and a Greek religious

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<sup>242</sup> Witt, 46. Also worthy of consideration is the importance of adaptation to the survival of polytheism; this topic is discussed by Witt, who outlines an ongoing struggle for the survival of religious practices throughout the Hellenistic period and into the Roman, particularly with the eventual institution of Christianity under Constantine (129). He presents a model in which polytheism and integration were spearheaded under Isis, who “claimed to break down national barriers” since incarnations of local deities were conceptualized as manifestations of the goddess (ibid). Although the highlighted issues are, in general, chronologically beyond the scope of the current investigation, these abilities of Isis are derived from the core aspect of the goddess, and were equally present several centuries earlier.

official.<sup>243</sup> Isis was likely present at Alexandria from the inception of the site, and her precedence was recognized through conventional reference to “Isis and the fellow-temple gods.”<sup>244</sup> It is widely accepted that Isis underwent a form of Hellenization, and thus became a Graeco-Egyptian deity.<sup>245</sup> It is important to note that this process was not a synthesis of the two dominant cultures but rather a meeting “of mutual influences.”<sup>246</sup> Accordingly, both Greek and Egyptian influences are demonstrable within two distinct developments that contributed to

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<sup>243</sup> Witt, 21. Tacitus (*Hist.* 4.83-84) and Plutarch (de Iside, 28) offer similar accounts in which Ptolemy I retrieved a statue of Pluto from Sinope after receiving an omen that instructed him to install the statue in Alexandria; Manetho and Timotheus are said to have reconceptualized the statue as Sarapis, thus contributing to the inception of his cult within the capital. The exact position Manetho held and his relationship to the Ptolemaic dynasts is uncertain, but it is likely he was closely connected to the courts of both Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II; he is notable not only due to his high rank as an Egyptian native, but also because his *Aegyptiaca* featured the “religious policy of the Ptolemies in the continuity of their pharaonic era predecessors” (Gorre, 139; see also Dillery, 109-113).

<sup>244</sup> Witt, 200. He argues that this hierarchical placement “strongly supports the view that whatever the theological aims of Ptolemy Soter, Manetho and Timotheus were at the outset, the pattern of a family triad — father, mother and son — was not the standard arrangement,” thereby marking a re-imagination of the goddess from the inception of her cult at Alexandria. Although Arrian (*Anab.* 3.1) specifically highlights “Isis of Egypt” among the numerous temples in his description of the urban layout of Alexandria, it is uncertain whether her cult was previously established at Rhakotis (see Fraser, 259-261; Thompson 1973, 58).

<sup>245</sup> This process is summed up by Samuel, who asserts that “gods like Isis and Sarapis were approached as if they were Greek, certainly as if they knew Greek, and were served in Greek form and with Greek rite” (95). This approach is too simplistic and absolute, and fails to address the nuances of cultural influence; however, it is also necessary to avoid over-correction in the opposite direction.

<sup>246</sup> Kahil, 78. This reinvention was largely conceptualized in the melding of Greek and Egyptian iconography in the portrayal of the goddess; see Kahil, 83 and Dunand (2004) 271-275 for discussion on artistic representation.

the reinvention of Isis: the assimilation of the goddess to Aphrodite, and her position as a consort of Sarapis.<sup>247</sup>

The divine couple, Isis and Sarapis, was often portrayed with the dynasts.<sup>248</sup> Both Isis and Sarapis have Egyptian roots, albeit of varying chronologies, but were reworked in the fourth and third centuries for Greek consumption.<sup>249</sup> Memphis is traditionally accepted as the place of origin for Sarapis, and Isis was recognized there in her role as the divine mother.<sup>250</sup> Upon transference to Alexandria, Sarapis became closely identified with the royal court and the Greek population, but Memphite influence persisted through relationship

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<sup>247</sup> Thompson considers that each of these narratives could account for the assimilation of the Ptolemaic queens to the goddess, since such a practice did not occur in the pharaonic period and thus there was no “pressure of Egyptian theology” to demand its inception (1973, 58).

<sup>248</sup> Fassa, 1; Plantzos, 389. Together, Isis and Sarapis were “frequently associated with the royal couple in prayers, dedications and official oath formulas” (Dunand 2004, 218). Despite the early presence of Isis and her numerous cultic affiliations, it was not until Ptolemy III that Isis and Sarapis were attached to the deified Ptolemies in royal oaths, and their cult “as dynastic gods was only consolidated under Ptolemy IV” (Barbantani, 150-151).

<sup>249</sup> Plantzos, 389. See also Witt 100-101. Alexandria and Memphis were equally important for the development of Graeco-Egyptian theology in general and Isis in particular; furthermore, Witt argues that “the conservative elements provided by the Memphis religion” were necessary for the cults of Isis and Sarapis to flourish in Alexandria and Pharos (100). The divine couple became the “two main deities which permeate[d] Greek culture,” with the Greek population of Egypt slowly beginning to “turn more and more to the rituals of Isis, Osiris and Sarapis” (Samuel, 75). These practices, however, did not necessarily indicate Egyptianization; instead, Samuel emphasizes that although the Greeks were “in service to the hellenized Isis, to Sarapis and to the Greek gods” they limited participation in other native cults (97).

<sup>250</sup> Witt, 101. He argues that the significance of Memphis “as the place where Isis and Osiris passed from among mankind was never lost [and that] the shrine of the goddess was pointed out to Hellenistic tourists in the temple precincts of Ptah.”

between Isis and Ptah.<sup>251</sup> In this context, Isis was thus assimilated to the Ptolemaic queens in her role as consort to Sarapis and specifically as a maternal and uxorial archetype.<sup>252</sup>

### **Assimilation of Aphrodite and Isis**

Assimilation between Aphrodite and Isis seems to have been an invention of the early Hellenistic period, and dedications to a syncretic form of the goddess frequently occurred throughout Egypt in the third and second centuries.<sup>253</sup> The syncretic form of the goddess retains the multifaceted aspects of each deity, most commonly concerning fertility, love and beauty, and the sea. Although the domains themselves are not new concepts, the imagery and iconography of Isis at Alexandria offered a new interpretation of each aspect, and the popularity of a particular motif is informative of the relationship between the deity and her devotees.<sup>254</sup> Each of these three aspects are surveyed below, with focus on Isis-

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<sup>251</sup> Kahil, 78. See also Witt, who suggests that this relationship was so great that the two deities “must have seemed to the esoteric worshipper virtually joint manifestations” (157). One of Isis’ numerous epithets included ‘chosen of Ptah,’ which was frequently used in the Ptolemaic period throughout Egypt, including at her sanctuary at Philae.

<sup>252</sup> Plantzos, 389; Witt, 50. The revised mythological canon under the Ptolemies situates Isis as a source of divination through her maternal relationship to Ptolemy-as-Horus; adherence to the Isiac faith is accordingly identified as a central aspect to the apotheosis of not only the dynasts but also, eventually, the princeps (Witt, 50).

<sup>253</sup> Barbantani, 150-151. Exact chronology is uncertain; although the syncretic form of the goddess “is unknown to Herodotus...by the time of Alexander, the Egyptian goddess had inherited many characteristics of her Greek counterpart” (151).

<sup>254</sup> Dunand observes the preference for “Isis-Aphrodite, the nude goddess, and the divine mother Isis” and suggests a continued significance between the deity and her female adherents (2007, 259).

Aphrodite as a marine deity since it is in this role that the development and effects of syncretism are made most manifest.

### **As Goddess of Fertility**

Greek authors favoured assimilation between Isis and Demeter, in both agricultural and chthonic functions; to Herodotus, both were fertility goddesses and nigh on indistinguishable from one another.<sup>255</sup> Witt contrasts Isis-Demeter to Isis-Aphrodite, largely in respect of mood and symbolism; while the former “portends decay of vegetation in autumn and winter and gloom of death,” the latter is instead “the fresh joy of spring and glow of life.”<sup>256</sup> Fertility symbols constitute a large part of the ideology and iconography of the Ptolemaic queens, making assimilation with a syncretic Isis in this particular aspect attractive.

### **As Goddess of Love and Beauty**

The choice of syncretism between Graeco-Egyptian goddesses was constrained by representation, and the boundary between anthropomorphic and zoomorphic conceptualizations could be difficult to cross.<sup>257</sup> In particular, the association between Hathor and Aphrodite was problematic, since the bovine attributes of the former would be difficult to consolidate with the Greek depiction

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<sup>255</sup> Hdt. 2.59; see discussion in Thompson (1973), 58; and Witt 20, 127-128.

<sup>256</sup> Witt, 128.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 123.

of Aphrodite as the epitome of beauty.<sup>258</sup> It is thus possible that Isis was a more palatable choice for assimilation, given her close identification with Hathor and lack of personal cult animal.<sup>259</sup> Such considerations became increasingly relevant with concurrent association to the Ptolemaic queens, who “because of their beauty were assimilated to Aphrodite.”<sup>260</sup>

### **As Goddess of the Sea**

Assimilation with both Aphrodite and the Ptolemaic queens contributed to the emergence of Isis as a marine deity, which soon became one of her core domains throughout the Hellenistic and into the Roman period.<sup>261</sup> Isis was recognized as a marine deity in multiple temples in close proximity to Alexandria,

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 123-126. Witt observes that the “only acceptable apotheosis was that which identified Isis with Aphrodite and granted them [Ptolemaic queens] at least in name the ideal loveliness of Greece” (126; cf. Fulińska 2012, 57 n. 16). Despite this potential problem, the association persists into the Ptolemaic period; Ptolemy IV dedicated a small temple to Hathor-Aphrodite (Hirmer et al., 532).

<sup>259</sup> Witt, 30. It must be noted however, that this lack does not preclude depiction of animalistic attributes; Isis is often depicted with horns. Royal iconography also incorporates such attributes; in particular, ram horns and cow horns are two of the integral constituents of the crown of Arsinoë (Nilsson, 17). However, this image is only found in the Egyptian context, and “there are no known examples of Greek artistic items illustrating Arsinoë where she is wearing the [Hathoric] crown” (ibid, 55). Žabkar argues for a “special” relationship between Isis and Hathor, not only since the former assumed all epithets of the latter, but also because the two deities were often depicted alongside one another (82).

<sup>260</sup> Tassignon, 109. Although the assimilation between the deity and dynasts was multifaceted, the “linkage always involved claims of divine authority and beauty” (Havelock 1995, 127).

<sup>261</sup> Although Isis was occasionally present in conjunction with aquatic themes in the pharaonic period, her association to this element was often “thin and quite vague,” predominantly involving the barques of either the divine or deceased (Bricault, 15-16).

including at Cape Lochia and Pharos.<sup>262</sup> The location of these major temples support the likelihood that this conceptualization of the goddess was an Alexandrian creation, developed after the death of Arsinoë II.<sup>263</sup>

In his recent monograph on *Isis Pelagia*, Bricault traces the history of the marine cults of the goddess, and the influence of Arsinoë and Aphrodite upon its development constitutes a significant portion of his introductory chapter.<sup>264</sup> The model presented by Bricault acknowledges Arsinoë II, her contribution to the Ptolemaic thalassocracy, and her subsequent veneration as Arsinoë-Aphrodite Euploia upon her death.<sup>265</sup> He identifies Isis as an ambassador whom “the political and religious authorities of the kingdom” chose to disseminate the cult of the deified Arsinoë beyond Alexandria and its predominantly Greek audience, and argues that “this association led to a reciprocal transfer of areas of jurisdiction between deceased sovereign and goddess.”<sup>266</sup> Although this could be interpreted as the cult of Aphrodite being folded into a pre-existing local cult, it must be noted that this assimilation fundamentally expanded the breadth of Isis; she was

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<sup>262</sup> Dunand (2004), 242. Witt also emphasizes the importance of Isis Pharia, from whose harbour “ships were to sail forth, some bearing her name, to the most distant parts of the Alexandrian Empire” (47; see also discussion of ships and further dissemination of cult, 70-71).

<sup>263</sup> Barbantani, 152.

<sup>264</sup> Bricault, 23-42.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

not only reimagined as a sea deity, but was reinvigorated through this association to Aphrodite and continued to be recognized in this form centuries later.

### **Syncretism with the Queens**

One of the best known collections of material evidence concerning Arsinoë, Berenice and ruler cult is the corpus of Ptolemaic oinochoai, which includes over 300 fragments in addition to a limited number of almost complete vessels, and dates to the third century.<sup>267</sup> The vessels were “typically decorated with a high-relief image of a Ptolemaic queen standing and turning towards her right while extending a *phiale* (offering bowl) towards an altar, with a pointed, garlanded pillar on her left.”<sup>268</sup> As a class, the oinochoai were largely homogenous “in their material, decoration and iconography,” and may be analyzed in consideration of their utilization in and dissemination of cult.<sup>269</sup> The iconography

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<sup>267</sup> Waraksa, 1. Although this corpus was known to scholars by the mid-19th century, it was not until the publication of Thompson’s seminal monograph, *The Ptolemaic Oinochoai and Portraits in Faience* in 1973 that the topic drew considerable attention (Waraksa, 4). Thompson’s original catalogue consisted of 269 objects (1973, 8), which has since been extended and featured in numerous articles; see Waraksa for more recent contributions and bibliography (1).

<sup>268</sup> Waraksa, 1. On variations of the portrait aspects of Arsinoë and Berenice, see discussion in Thompson (1973, 82-87); the depiction of subsequent queens is also considered, although only Arsinoë III is identified with a significant degree of certainty (ibid, 87-94). See also Caneva for detailed analysis of the scene from a complete vessel from the British Museum (BM 73.8-20.389), with focus on the ritual practice depicted in its iconography (2014, 104-108).

<sup>269</sup> Waraksa, 1. Such an investigation constitutes multiple elements, the nuances of which have been astutely addressed by previous scholars. Whereas a significant part of Thompson’s analysis focuses on the relationship between the oinochoai and ruler cult, Waraksa directs her attention to their functions as “vessels of propaganda and vessels of prestige” (3). For reception of Thompson’s analysis in scholarship, see discussion in Waraksa, 4-8.



reflects the progression of assimilation to Isis in its variant stages under each queen.<sup>270</sup>

The earliest vessels were developed during the lifetime of Arsinoë II, whose depiction upon the oinochoai has been highlighted alongside numismatic portraiture as the most significant representation of the queen.<sup>271</sup> The accompanying inscriptions “link Arsinoë not to Aphrodite but to either Isis or Agathe Tyche” or else identify her in role as Philadelphus.<sup>272</sup> Despite this explicit epigraphic evidence, the extent of Arsinoë’s assimilation to Isis is unclear, especially since the queen is not depicted in a “fully Egyptian Isis costume.”<sup>273</sup> Thompson argues that the oinochoai are among the earliest representations of Arsinoë, and are thus situated at the beginning of a series of depictions which culminates in her “full assimilation with Egyptian deities after her death.”<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Although Isis is the focus of this case study, she was not the only deity on the oinochoai; inscriptions commonly included Isis, Aphrodite and Agathe Tyche in addition to the queens (Thompson 1973, 19-22).

<sup>271</sup> Nilsson, 49. Other listed mediums include “sculptures in the round, terracotta figurines, cameos, figurines and ... reliefs”.

<sup>272</sup> Carney 2013, 109; Thompson (1973), 51. Thompson argues that Agathe Tyche is represented as the personal tyche of Arsinoë rather than as a personified goddess, and that the association is phased out in the oinochoai under Berenice (see discussion in Thompson 1973, 51-55; cf. Waraksa, 17-19).

<sup>273</sup> Thompson (1973), 58.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 59. Arsinoë is “portrayed fully costumed as Isis” on the Pithom stele, which is the earliest example of her complete syncretism with the goddess (ibid; see also Plantzos, 391; and Carney 2013, 108).

In contrast, Berenice is depicted in the “full costume” of the goddess, albeit without insignia, and subsequent queens such as Cleopatra I are similarly clothed.<sup>275</sup> This variation in iconography could suggest a closer syncretism between Berenice and Isis than with Arsinoë, but such an impression is tempered by the overall consistency of the iconography throughout successive generations. Rather than distinguishing between the queens, Clayman conflates Arsinoë and Berenice and instead questions whether each “should be understood as a worshipper of Isis, her representative here on earth, or the goddess herself” and emphasizes that “for the Ptolemies, this line is blurred.”<sup>276</sup>

It is more plausible that this iconographic development reflects the contemporary shift towards Egyptianization, rather than increasing syncretism. This is supported by the introduction of a new type of altar on the oinochoai during the middle of Berenice’s reign, which followed an Egyptian facade; it replaced the altar characteristic of Arsinoë which was likely adopted from the eastern Aegean and commonly used in the cults of Isis and Osiris.<sup>277</sup> It is evident

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<sup>275</sup> Thompson (1973), 61; see discussion 58-61.

<sup>276</sup> Clayman (2011), 238.

<sup>277</sup> Thompson (1973), 35-37. Similar altars were commonly used throughout Egypt, and Caneva cautions “against overestimating their associations with cults related to the gods of the netherworld” (2014, 105-106). Even if this might bring into question the iconographic association between Arsinoë and Isis by means of the altar, it is confirmed by the accompanying epigraphic evidence; inscriptions upon the altars of oinochoai to Arsinoë include the name of the queen, Agathe Tyche, and Isis, whereas those to Berenice only include reference to the Theoi Euergetai (Waraksa, 17; on association with deities and incorporation to Ptolemaic propaganda, 17-18).

that the change in style does not necessarily reflect a corresponding change of substance; although the new altar indicates an increase of Egyptian influence, it does not intensify the association between queen and deity, which was already established by the original altar.

Further iconographic changes are introduced among the last oinochoai of Berenice, in which the queen “acquires a high stephane, [which] at that period was usually only worn by a goddess.”<sup>278</sup> Thompson argues that the stephane indicated assimilation to Aphrodite, rather than being symbolic of Berenice’s own divination, largely predicated on the close resemblance between the queen and other representations of her predecessor in the guise of the goddess.<sup>279</sup> This use of iconography not only confirms the continued clout of Aphrodite even amidst the popularity of Isis among both Greek and Egyptian populations, but also reaffirms the relationship between Arsinoë and Berenice, in which the latter models herself upon the former in religious, political and social spheres. The oinochoai served a cultic purpose, but may also have been sold as souvenirs; Clayman argues that the image of Arsinoë “would have sold very well” and that “the substitution of

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<sup>278</sup> Thompson (1973), 61.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid. She notes that this iconography was developed “too late to be associated with Berenice’s title of Euergetis,” and supplements the identification of Berenice-Aphrodite with contemporary evidence from papyrus (PMagd 2,3). Subsequent oinochoai depict the queens with a similar stephane, and thus perpetuate the presence of Aphrodite in association with the Ptolemies (ibid, 62).

Berenice in the next generation transfers some of that good will to a character who may not have been quite so appealing.”<sup>280</sup>

The circulation of the oinochoai and the corresponding dissemination of cult remains a topic of interest in modern scholarship, one that is not so much controversial as it is uncertain. Of the initial 269 pieces constituting Thompson’s catalogue, over 90% had an Alexandrian provenance, and subsequent finds adhere to similar patterns.<sup>281</sup> Their significance to Alexandrian ruler cult is thus commonly accepted, but details of their use and dispersal are more difficult to ascertain.<sup>282</sup>

Since the majority of the oinochoai have been recovered from Alexandrian cemeteries, their funerary context is undeniable.<sup>283</sup> Thompson suggests that the vessels were initially incorporated into a funerary cult for Arsinoë, which was then “taken over and employed in service of the living queen.”<sup>284</sup> She connects

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<sup>280</sup> Clayman (2011), 238.

<sup>281</sup> Caneva (2014), 104; Thompson (1973), 8; Waraksa 2-3. Other Egyptian find-spots include Bubastis, Canopus, Memphis and Naukratis; distribution outside of Egypt extends to Athens, Canosa, Carthage, Corinth, Crete, Cyrene, Kourion (Cyprus), Samaria, and Xanthos, which are all notably “sites within the greater Ptolemaic empire” (Waraksa, 19-20).

<sup>282</sup> On connection to ruler cult, see discussion in Thompson (1973), 49-51; cf. Caneva (2014), 104-108, Waraksa 6-8.

<sup>283</sup> Waraksa, 2. The more recent discovery of fragments from “habitation zones,” as well as of unspecified provenance outside of Alexandria, indicates that this context is frequent but not exclusive, although such finds rarely detract from the overall analysis of this corpus as constituting grave goods.

<sup>284</sup> Thompson (1973), 60.

both the iconography and find-spots of the oinochoai to argue for their use in chthonic ritual practices, which has faced criticism in recent scholarship.<sup>285</sup> Less contested is her hypothesis that the oinochoai were featured in the Arsinoëa, reinforcing their function as cultic vessels for the Ptolemaic ruler cult.<sup>286</sup>

Although it is likely that the oinochoai were thus seen by the public, there remains some concern regarding their circulation among the different levels of society. Waraksa denies Thompson's argument that the oinochoai were a cheaply made substitute for richer cultic items and were thus favoured by the general public, who not only saw them at festivals but also owned and used them.<sup>287</sup> Instead, she reinterprets the vessels as luxury items which were "manufactured by and for the Alexandrian elite," and lists them among other highly wrought artistic

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid 60, 119; cf. Caneva (2014), 105-108. Caneva dismisses both the "traditional interpretation of the cultic scene as a choe performed within a chthonian cult... [and] that the appearance of some vessels in funerary contexts reveals that libations to deified sovereigns were included in the rituals for the dead" (ibid, 108).

<sup>286</sup> Thompson (1973), 71; see also Carney (2013), 109.

<sup>287</sup> Waraksa, 6; cf. Thompson (1973), 75. Although Thompson directs most of her energy to situating the oinochoai within cultic practices, she does not deny their potential versatility, and suggests other contexts in which the vessels were acquired and used; examples include festival prizes, royal gifts to courtiers, merchandise for both tourists and inhabitants of Alexandria, dedicated votives, or to pour graveside libations (118-119; see also discussion in Waraksa 6-7). Waraksa notes that "no single theory is put forth that would unify all of her proposed functions, nor has one emerged since, with the result that the vessels are still most often characterized as a class of object broadly related to ruler cult rituals, but whose exact social context remains unknown" (7).

items.<sup>288</sup> She suggests that “high-ranking functionaries” acquired the oinochoai at court, often as gifts, which were then “displayed and/or used in cult rituals during the owner’s lifetime... [and] buried with their owners as grave goods.”<sup>289</sup>

Despite the distinctions in the proposed models of use and circulation, a few general conclusions may be drawn. All emphasize the propagandistic nature of the oinochoai and their relation to ruler cult, serving to disseminate the iconography of the deified — and syncretized — queens throughout the Ptolemaic kingdom. Each model relies upon a different form of dissemination; Thompson’s model is indirect, and relies upon the continued popularity of the cult to inspire continued consumption by the general public, whereas Waraksa’s model involves direct action by or on behalf of the Ptolemaic dynasts at court.<sup>290</sup> At the very least, then, the oinochoai and their iconography was visually accessible to a large percentage of the population and not limited to a select minority. A more dynamic

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 16. Waraksa retains a similar method of distribution as proposed by Thompson, in which the vessels were created in Alexandria and exported by individuals, but argues for a specific class of people that accomplished this regularly; namely, priests (see discussion, 20-28). Although she highlights the inclusion of “the eponymous priests of Alexander and the deified Ptolemies and the priestesses of Arsinoë Philadelphus at Alexandria” among this group, she acknowledges that they constitute only one subsection of the mobile elite who were the likely owners of the oinochoai (27).

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, 3. Waraksa emphasizes the prestige of the items and their political symbolism as well as religious; denoting simultaneously, on the one hand, loyalty to the Ptolemies, and on the other hand, a symbol of their favour, if not their patronage. Caneva follows a more neutral perspective, identifying the faience as a cheaper material than earlier metal vessels, but acknowledging that the oinochoai were considered worth preserving as grave goods (2014, 104).

<sup>290</sup> If Waraksa’s model is correct and the oinochoai were largely distributed as gifts, this would not necessarily preclude their availability for purchase elsewhere, but makes it far less likely since the item would be liable to lose a significant portion of its potential prestige.

interpretation emphasizes the integrative nature of the oinochoai since their ritual use crosses the boundaries between private and public, and individual and collective worship.<sup>291</sup>

As a class, the oinochoai encapsulate syncretism in material form, not only in the iconography of the queens and deities, but also in the blending of cultures in the shape and substance of the vessels.<sup>292</sup> Their inscriptions and iconography attest to the syncretism between the queens and deities, and its development over time. It is possible to simultaneously trace the continued significance of Aphrodite alongside the increasing prevalence of Isis, and the effects of Egyptianization in this process. Ptolemaic influence is evident not only in the depiction of the queens themselves, but also in the distribution of the oinochoai and the consequential dissemination of ruler cult; the breadth of the corpus attests to the extent to which these images and ideas were taken up.

## **Conclusion**

In investigating the cult of Aphrodite under the Ptolemies, Arsinoë emerges as an immediate focal point from which further discussions evolve. She

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<sup>291</sup> Caneva compares the function of the iconography on the oinochoai to that of cultic texts, since both depict “the rituals by which individuals and familiar groups participate in a collective event” (2014, 108). He emphasizes the necessity of “public visibility and ritual uniformity” in the establishment of religious practice, and argues that such practice in turn “becomes political loyalism in relation to the cult of the deified sovereign” (ibid).

<sup>292</sup> Faience was a traditional Egyptian material, sourced locally, which was then combined with “Greek and Persian iconographic elements, as well as Greek inscriptions...[which] distinguishes [the oinochoai] from other contemporary ceramics” (Waraksa, 2).

was associated with Aphrodite both during her lifetime and immediately upon her death, an association which then became a significant aspect of her legacy. Her syncretism with the Greek goddess was designed primarily for a Greek audience, first appealing to Aphrodite in her erotic and marital aspects to make palatable the incestuous marriage between Arsinoë and Ptolemy II, confirm the dynastic legitimacy of the queen, and extend the Egyptian practice of ruler cult to the Greeks. Berenice followed Arsinoë's precedent closely, but at the same time as the queens were syncretized, in cult, with Aphrodite, they and Aphrodite were syncretized with Isis. This transformed the cult of Isis, and then gradually over time, reflecting the gradual Egyptianization of the dynasty, Isis assumed greater prominence than Aphrodite. This was the case in regard to the sphere of marriage and procreation, but also in regard to the dominion of the seas. Often the two goddesses are treated as interchangeable, but when distinguished it is Isis who predominates. Aphrodite remains a favoured muse in art and literature, and her association with the Ptolemaic queens persists, but it is Isis, especially in the sphere of cult, who prevails. During Arsinoë's lifetime, Isis remains in a predominantly Egyptian context and Aphrodite in a Greek one; after her death, Isis encroaches continuously further into the Greek sphere, culminating in the complete assimilation with Cleopatra at the end of the Ptolemaic period.



## **Conclusion**

The emergence of the Hellenistic kingdoms following the death of Alexander the Great brought with it a new era of sociocultural innovation, a considerable proportion of which is attributable to the Ptolemaic dynasty. The aim of this thesis is to trace the development of Aphrodite's cult in Egypt under the Ptolemies. Discussion focuses on the cult of Aphrodite under the first three generations of Ptolemies, whose struggle for supremacy, and success in the new world order, frame both the inception of the dynasty and its golden age before succumbing to its slow decline. Although the manner in which it materializes may change, each chapter highlights the role of the cult of Aphrodite in promoting Ptolemaic propaganda and thus securing dynastic power.

The first chapter surveys the presence of Aphrodite in Egypt and its environs, identifying Naukratis and Cyprus as the main cult centres of the goddess. The epigraphic evidence recovered from Naukratis attests to the significance of the goddess in the Archaic period, both in her role as a poliadic deity for the local inhabitants and as Pandemos for local and foreign Greeks alike; the cult of Aphrodite thus facilitated integration of the Greek community at Naukratis. The popularity of the cult waned in response to increasing

Egyptianization, a precursor to the same process which followed Ptolemaic arrival centuries later.

Although the numismatic evidence suggests that an attempt was made at the beginning of the Hellenistic period to tap the tradition of Aphrodite as a poliadic deity for the Greeks, it is clear that, at Naukratis, Aphrodite did not regain the prominence she once enjoyed, in contrast to Cyprus where the Ptolemies patronized the cult of the goddess in the place of her birth. Nevertheless, archaeological evidence recovered throughout Egypt attests to the widespread dissemination of the cult and the continued popularity of Aphrodite as an artistic and literary figure, facilitating sociocultural integration among the diverse population of Egypt.

The interaction between Egyptian and Greek cultural ideologies and practices is underscored in the second chapter, which explores the assimilation between Aphrodite and Arsinoë II. The dual domains of the goddess which Arsinoë assumed each had a distinct purpose: the marital domain to legitimize her marriage to Ptolemy II and secure dynastic succession, and the marine domain to express their naval supremacy. The former was predominantly an internal affair, directed at a Greek audience which had no history of incestuous marriage. The appeal to Aphrodite in this aspect thus served as a justification for the marriage and as a bridge between cultural practices; it was a catalyst for the adoption of

sibling marriage and the pharaonic divine right of rule, both of which were traditional Egyptian practices but became characteristic of the Ptolemaic dynasty. The appeal to the marine aspect of Aphrodite was a matter of foreign policy. Arsinoë assumed the mantle of the goddess as an expression of Ptolemaic mastery of the seas, and sailors rallied behind this promise of success at sea and safe harbours around the Mediterranean.

Evidence from Memphis and Alexandria suggests the separate development of Egyptian and Greek cults for Arsinoë, with Aphrodite absent in the former but of continued significance in the latter. Ruler cult was, for the Greeks, an innovation of the Hellenistic period, and although Arsinoë II was not the first to be honoured in this way, the popularity of her cult launched the practice for subsequent dynasts. The cult of Aphrodite thus played a small but integral role in the integration of the Ptolemies into religious worship.

The relationship between the cult of Aphrodite and Ptolemaic ruler cult is further explored in the third chapter, which introduces Berenice II and Isis into the discussion of syncretism. The first part of the chapter establishes Berenice as the successor of Arsinoë in her identification with Aphrodite and the work it did for the dynasty. It also provides a brief overview of the influence of Arsinoë and Berenice on successive Ptolemaic queens and their continued association to the goddess. The second part of the chapter directs its attention toward syncretism

between Aphrodite and Isis and outlines the development of the cult of Isis under the Ptolemies. It first establishes the universality of Isis in the Egyptian mythological tradition, and her inclination to assimilate with all female deities, including those of other pantheons such as Aphrodite. Her assimilation to Aphrodite was effected in the early Hellenistic period, and incorporated each of the latter's central domains, including fertility, love, beauty, and the sea. Both Isis and Aphrodite lent themselves to syncretism, which allowed their cults to expand and flourish. However, it is this same capacity which led to the eventual decline of Aphrodite under the Ptolemies, as she was increasingly overshadowed by Isis, in line with the Egyptianizing trend of Ptolemaic rule. Aphrodite never disappeared, however, but remained a popular subject in art and literature.

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