

Letters from Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III Concerning the Gymnasium of Omboi

[AXON 507]

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Riassunto Nel 135 a.C., il ginnasio di Omboi (Alto Egitto) approvò un decreto che fissava su pietra la corrispondenza concernente alcuni benefici concessi da Tolemeo VIII, Cleopatra II e Cleopatra III. Pochissimi anni dopo, il dossier fu manomesso e i nomi dei sovrani – a eccezione di quello di Cleopatra II – rimossi (*damnatio memoriae*). L'iscrizione è stata quindi interpretata come una testimonianza epigrafica della guerra civile fra Tolemeo VIII (affiancato da Cleopatra III) e Cleopatra II. Nonostante il suo stato di conservazione, le vicende del dossier di Omboi consentono alcune riflessioni, cui si aggiungono alcune proposte testuali.

Abstract In 135 BC, the gymnasium of Omboi (Upper Egypt) issued a decree immortalising on stone the correspondence concerning some *philanthropa* bestowed by Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III. Only a few years later, the dossier was defaced and the royal names were erased (*damnatio memoriae*) except for that of Cleopatra II. The inscription has thus been interpreted as an epigraphic evidence of the civil war between Ptolemy VIII, flanked by Cleopatra III, and Cleopatra II. In spite of its poor state of preservation, the Omboi dossier allows some useful considerations on its vicissitudes, along with some further restorations.

Parole chiave Ginnasio. Omboi. Neaniskoi. Philanthropa. Tolemeo VIII. Cleopatra II. Cleopatra III. *Damnatio memoriae*. Guerra civile. Boeto.

Keywords Gymnasium. Omboi. Neaniskoi. Philanthropa. Ptolemy VIII. Cleopatra II. Cleopatra III. *Damnatio memoriae*. Civil war. Boethos.



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Object type Stele; dark granite; 39.5 × 28 × 13.5 cm. Fragmentary. A trapezoidal stone slab of contained size. None of the four edges of the original stele has survived. The left side of the remaining part is diagonally broken. The central portion is damaged in correspondence of ll. 2-8. Ll. 2-4 are affected by two deep holes, ll. 3-8 by a scratch on the right edge, and ll. 8-9 by a further damage in the middle. Two deliberate erasures in ll. 12 and 16 following, in both cases, the name of βασιλίσσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ ἀδελφὴ. Undecorated.

Chronology 136-135 a.C. [shortly after 22 April 135 BC i.e. the date of the first letter].

Type of inscription Official letter.

Findspot and circumstances Egypt, Omboi (Kom Ombo), albeit Łajtar (1996, col. 465) suspected less immediate circumstances; acquired in 1906 by Wilhelm Weissbrodt for the epigraphic collection of the Lyceum Hosianum of Braunsberg (present-day Braniewo, Poland).

Preservation place Poland, Warsaw, National Museum, Ancient Art Gallery, no. inv. 198817.

Script

- Structure: epigraphic prose.
- Layout: the design and the layout of the lines as a whole are not too irregular (even though each character has a shape on its own: e.g. in Ἐρωσθε in l. 15 the first *rho* is bigger than the second one), as the letters were quite correctly engraved; an apparent *vacat* running from side to side under l. 10.
- Execution technique: engraving.
- special letters: Α *alpha*; Α *alpha*; Θ *theta*; Ο *omicron*; ο *omicron*; Π *pi*; Γ *pi*; Φ *phi*.
- Letter size: 0.7-0.9 cm.
- line spacing: 0.3-0.4 cm.
- palaeographic features: Α with straight or angled crossbar; Θ with complete bar; Ο may be smaller, set in midline; asymmetrical, sometimes rounded Π, with shorter right descender; Σ with horizontal or oblique external bars; Υ may be taller; Φ with small, raised loop.
- Arrangement: progressive.

Language *Koine*.

Lemma Wilcken 1913, 410-11, 415-16 [Weissbrodt 1913, no. II.7; Schröter 1932, nos. 37 (ll. 12-15), 38 (ll. 16-18); Lenger 1964, nos. 48-49 (ll. 12-18); *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 189; *I.Egypte prose* I no. 21]; *I.Mus. Varsovie* no. 42, pl. 42 [Pfeiffer 2015, no. 28; Pfeiffer 2020, no. 28; Paganini 2022, 59-60, 180-1 (ll. 6-18), 182]. Cf. Wilcken 1912, 138-40; San Nicolò 1913, 44; Preisigke, Spiegelberg 1914, 23; Otto, Bengtson 1938, 45 and fn. 2, 66; Lenger 1944, no. I.B.6; Launey 1949-50, 2: 859 and fn. 5; Lenger 1952a, 499 fn. 79; Lenger 1952b, no. 11; Smith 1974, 108-9 fn. 3; Piejko 1990, 154; *SEG XL*, 1571; Bingen 1990, 155; Maehler 1992, 210; Łajtar 1996, col. 465; *SEG XLVI*, 2085; Legras 1999, 212-14, 225,

235; Łajtar 1999, no. 46; SEG XLIX, 2109; Dietze 2000, 86-9; Łajtar 2000, 69, 72-3, 79; Martín Hernández 2003, 305; Honigman 2003, 180 fn. 38; Habermann 2004, 338, 342; SEG LIV, 1712; Nadig 2007, 75, 94-6; Savalli-Lestrade 2009, pl. C no. 1; Wilcken 2010, 259-62; Faensen 2011, 400-1, no. 34; Fischer-Bovet 2014, 286; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 72 fn. 115, 254, 258-9, 292; Paganini 2015, 48 fn. 2; Bielman Sánchez 2017, 91; Richter 2017, 30 fn. 34; Lanciers 2020, 32; Caneva 2022, 381; Eller 2022, 39 fn. 61.

Text

[-----]ασαι αυτό χ[-----]?[-----]
 -----]ν καθ' ἣν ἔχουσα χ[-----]ασαν θ[-----]
 -----]ξιούμενον και ὄν χ[ριστῶς γενο]μένης ἐπιστο[λῆς
 -----]ναι, ἐφ' οἷς και τοῦ ο[-----]ν ἐ[δέ]ξατο τὴν τῶν ἐ[-----]
 -----καλῶς δ' ἔχοντος και τὸ γεγ[ι]νός] παρὰ τῶν<---> περιφανέ[σ-5
 τῶν φιλανθρώπων ἀξιούσθαι, δεδόχθαι τ]οῖς νεανίσκοις ἀναγ[ρ]ά[ψ]αι τὸ ψήφισμα τούτ[ο
 και τὴν παρὰ τῶν βασιλέων ἐπιστολὴν τ]ὴν περὶ τούτων εἰς στηλ[λ]ην λιθ[ι]νὴν τοῦ γείτονος ἐ[-----]
 -----και ἀνατε]θῆναι ταύτην ἐν τῷ γυμ[νασί]ῳ παρ[ὰ] τῆι ἐσταμένη[ι
 -----]τοῦ πρώτου φίλου και κτίστου τοῦ γυμνασίου, ὅπως τ[-----]
 -----]ι παρὰ τῶν σεμνοτάτων βασιλέων ἀπομνημονεῖ[ν] (vel [ων-) 10
 ται εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον.] vacat
 [[Βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος και] βασι]λισσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ ἀδελφῆ [[και βασι]λισσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ γυνῆ]]
 [τοῖς ἐκ τοῦ ἐν Ὀμβοῖς γυμνασίῳ]ν χαίρειν. Ἀγκιμάχου και Θεμιστοκλέους τῶν παρ' ὕμῶν ἀποδό[ν-
 τῶν ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμέτεραν ἔντευξιν] πρὸς Βόηθον τὸν συγγενῆ και στρατηγὸν τὴν ὑποκειμένη[ν
 ἐπιστολὴν ἐγράψαμεν.] vacat Ἐρρωσθε. (Ἔτους) λε' Γορπιαίου κθ' Φαμενώθ κθ'. vacat 15
 [[Βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος και] βασι]λισσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ ἀδελφῆ [[και βασι]λισσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ γυνῆ]]
 [Βοῖθῳ τῷ ἀδελφῷ χαίρειν· ἥς ἔγραψα]ν ἡμῖν ἐπιστολῆς οἱ ἐκ τοῦ ἐν Ὀμβοῖς γυμνασίου
 [ὑποτετάχαμεν σοι τὸ ἀντίγραφον· καλῶς ἀν ποιήσεις κατακολουθήσας] τοῖς εἰς[δε]δ[ο]μ[ε]ν[ο]ῖς
 τούτοις -----]τ[-----]

Apparatus 1]ασαι αυτό χ[ed. pr. | sunt reliquiae 2 litterarum obscurae || 2]ν καθ' ἣν ἔχουσα [ed. pr., Bernard |]ν καθ' ἣν ἔχουσα χ[Łajtar-Twardecki, quos sequor, sed]ν καθ' ἣν ἔχουσα[vidi tantum |]ν καθ' ἔνουσα χ[Pfeiffer, non recte | χ[-----]]ασαν lacuna 8-9 litterarum | Cf. I. Egypte prose I no. 32, ll. 30-1; no. 39, ll. 22-3; nr. 42, l. 21; no. 43, ll. 19-20; no. 44, l. 18: καθ' ἣν ἔχεις πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐσέβειαν |]ΑΣΑΝΘ[lapis |]ασαν [ed. pr., Bernard |]ασα [Łajtar-Twardecki || 3 Cf. *I. Philae* I no. 19, l. 16 et *I. Thèbes Syène* no. 244, l. 38: καθάπερ ἀξιούσι | ΚΑΙΟΝΧ[lapis | και δι- ed. pr., quem omnes seqq. | ὄν χριστῶς γενο]μένης supplēvi || 4]ναι, ἐφ' οἷς και του[----]]ε[----]ξατο τὴν τῶν ε[--- ed. pr., Łajtar-Twardecki |]ναι, ἐφ' οἷς interpunctionem conieci | Ο[---]Υ lapis | ὄχλου? conieci vestigia difficilia secutus. Cf. SEG XXVI, 1817, ll. 12, 53 | ἐ[δέ]ξατο supplēvi ob genetivum ac assiduitatem; numquam persuadent ἐργάξατο, ἐπράξατο, ἐτεύξατο, νε ἐτεύξατο quidem || 5 καλῶς δ' ἔχοντος και τὸ γεγ[ι]νός] ed. pr. | ΤΩΠΕΝΦΑΝΕ[lapis, cum E priore incerto et emendatione antiqua N > Π (cf. Wilcken 1913, 410 n. 1) | παρὰ τωπ[-]ριφανέ- ed. pr. | παρὰ τῷ conieci, locutionem γίγνομαι παρὰ τινος secutus || 5-6 περιφανέ[στατων φιλανθρώπων ἀξιούσθαι supplēvi || 6 lacuna quidem certe nomen ac verbum continebat | δεδόχθαι τ]οῖς νεανίσκοις vel δεδόχθαι τοῖς τε ἐφήβοις και τ]οῖς νεανίοις ed. pr., restitutionem alteram Pfeiffer accepit, ac πρεσβυτέροις in vicem coniecit; exitum fere spatium priori sententiae perficiendae | δεδόχθαι interpunctionem conieci || 7 και τὴν παρὰ τῶν βασιλέων ἐπιστολὴν τ]ὴν ed. pr., omnes seqq. || 7-8 ἐπ[ρ]οσθηρίου conieci ex Hiller von Gaertringen qui τοῦ γείτονος “auf den benachbarten Steinbruch” (Wilcken 1913, 414 nr. 4) referendum coniecit || 8 και ἀνατε]θῆναι ed. pr., omnes seqq. || 9 εἰκόνι ed. pr., omnes seqq. | Cf. Wilcken 1913, 413 n. 2: “muß eine Ortsbezeichnung o. ä. gestanden haben”; etsi ἐν τῷ ἐπιφανεστάτῳ τόπῳ (ut in I. Egypte prose I no. 16, ll. 16-17 multisque aliis locis), ἐν τούτῳ τῷ τόπῳ vel similia prae spatio gymnasiacae maxime mentione non dantur; locum ad ἐσταμένη[ι pertinentem, εἰκόνι et conditoris nomen lacuna certe continebat | τ]οῦ articulum supplēvi | ὅπως

τ[- ed. pr., τ dubium || 9-10 [αί | περι τούτων εὐεργεσίαι αἱ γεγонуῖα] i conieci ob τ[dubium (cf. *I.Philae* I no. 19, ll. 38-40); Paganini “the benevolence” coniecit || 10-11 ἀπομνημονεύ[-]ται εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον.] ed. pr., (cf. *I.Philae* I no. 19, ll. 39-40) | ἀπομνημονεύ[η]ται Bernand, Łajtar-Twardecki, Pfeiffer || 12 [[Βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος καὶ]] βασίλισσα ed. pr., omnes seqq. | [[καὶ βασίλισσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ γυνὴ]] ed. pr., omnes seqq. || 13 [τοῖς ἐκ τοῦ ἐν Ὀμβοῖς γυμνασίῳ] ed. pr., omnes seqq. || 13-14 ἀποδό[ν]των ἡμῖν ed. pr. | ἀποδό[ν]των ἡμῖν τὴν ἔντευξιν Bernand | ἀποδό[ν]των ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμέτεραν ἔντευξιν Łajtar-Twardecki || 14-15 ὑποκειμένη[ν | ἐπιστολὴν ἐγράψαμεν.] ed. pr., omnes seqq. || 15 LΛE lapis || 16 [[Βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος καὶ]] βασίλισσα ed. pr., omnes seqq. | [[καὶ βασίλισσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ γυνὴ]] ed. pr., omnes seqq. || 17 [Βοήθῳ τῷ ἀδελφῷ χαίρειν· Ἡς ἔγραψαν] ed. pr., omnes seqq. || 18 [ὑποτετάχαμέν σοι τὸ ἀντίγραφον. Καλῶς οὖν ποιήσεις ed. pr. |]ΤΟΙΣΕΙΣ[-] Δ[lapis |]τοῖς εἰς[-]λ[ed. pr., Łajtar-Twardecki | Καλῶς οὖν ποιήσεις συντάξας προνοηθῆναι ὅπως τεύξονται ----] Bernand, ex *I.Philae* I no. 19, l. 16 et *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 244, l. 29 litterarum obstantibus reliquiis | καλῶς ἂν ποιήσεις [κατακολουθήσας] τοῖς εἰς[δε]δ[ομένοις] Piejko, quem sequor lacunam accommodando; non καλῶς οὖν ut in *SEG XL*, 1571 relatum || 19 τούτοις supplevi (cf. *I.Egypte prose* I nr. 40, l. 47) | sunt reliquiae 3-4 litterarum obscurae.

Translation [...] which [...] in accordance with which [...] requested/worthy (of) [...], and what [...] since a letter has been happily delivered [...] for these reasons, (...) received from the [...], too, the [...] of the [...], since it is also fine to give to the results of the truly outstanding benefits the consideration they deserve, [it has been decided] by the young men to inscribe this decree [and the letter from the sovereigns] concerning these matters on a stone stele from the nearby [...] and to] set it up in the gym[nasium, near] the [status of ... – the] first friend and the founder of the gymnasium –, which stands [...], so that [...] the benevolence? ...] of the most revered sovereigns may be remembered [in perpetuity]. [[[King Ptolemy,]]] queen Cleopatra the sister, [[and queen Cleopatra the wife]] [to those who are in the gymnasium of Omboi], greetings. Since Alkimachos and Themistokles have handed over [to us your petition] on your behalf, [we have thus written] to Boethos, the kinsman and *stratēgos*, the following [letter]. Farewell. Year 35, 29 Gorpaïos, 29 Phamenoth. [[[King Ptolemy,]]] queen Cleopatra the sister, [[and queen Cleopatra the wife]] [to our brother Boethos, greetings. We submit to you the copy] of the letter that those who are in the gymnasium of Omboi [wrote] to us. [Therefore you might do well to comply with] which [is handed here. ...]

Figures

Figure 1. The stele. Source: Digital collections of the National Museum in Warsaw (see the link below). <https://mizar.univie.it/axon/public/upload/000507/im-magini/MNW,%20Cat.%20198817.jpg>.

Links

Information page of the exhibit (Digital collections of the National Museum in Warsaw): <https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/en/catalog/606470>.

Commentary

1 Introduction

On 22 April 135 BC, the Egyptian sovereigns king Ptolemy VIII, queen Cleopatra II, and queen Cleopatra III signed as a “trio au pouvoir”¹ a letter which granted some special privilege(s) to the thankful Upper Egyptian gymnasium of Omboi² – then the capital of the eponymous Ombite nome, in the region of Thebaid.³ A delegation, perhaps one composed of *neaniskoi*⁴ i.e. “the youth, beyond the age of children”,⁵ had previously been sent from the gymnasium to the court in this respect. The implementation of the royal will was therefore entrusted to the *stratēgos* Boethos son of Nikostratos.⁶

Only a few years later, the granite stele immortalising *in loco* the whole correspondence about the benefits received was defaced and the royal names erased, except for that of Cleopatra II. Her name is still easily readable today in the Warsaw National Museum, where the otherwise badly damaged remains of eighteen or nineteen lines are kept on display.

It is by a curious coincidence that a strong epigraphic evidence of the tumultuous *stasis* of 132/131-125/124 BC⁷ between Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II – flanked by his second wife Cleopatra III, “the young-

1 Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 259. For the triple monarchy, see Otto, Bengtson 1938, 31-112 *passim*; Hölbl 2001, 195-6; Whitehorne 2001, 110, 112-15; Huss 2001, 605-6; Minas-Nerpel 2011, 65-8; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 215-16, 245-71; Pfeiffer 2017, 153-5 and Lanciers 2019 (on chronology).

2 I prefer to call it Omboi (see l. 17: ἐν Ὀμβοίῳ), as e.g. Wilcken 1913; *I.Mus. Varsovie* no. 42 and Legras 1999, 212, not Ombos, as e.g. *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 189; *I.Egypte prose* I no. 21; Pfeiffer 2015, no. 28 and Pfeiffer 2020, no. 28.

3 For Omboi and the Ombite nome, see generally Locher 1999, 201-29, 281-5; Geissen, Weber 2004, 259-64; Dijkstra, Worp 2006, 183-4 with prev. bibl.; Weber, Geissen 2013, 49-50 and esp. Eller 2022, 36-51 with prev. bibl.; see also Gutbub 1978 (focused on one aspect of its unique double Temple, but still informative) and Hölbl 2001, 261-3.

4 Legras 1999, 213.

5 Paganini 2022, 179. See *infra*. The best survey on gymnasia in Ptolemaic Egypt is now Paganini 2022. See also Maehler 1983 (= Maehler 2006) and Habermann 2004.

6 For this high official, see generally *Pros. Ptol.* I no. 188, II nos 1869 and 4290, VI no. 16240, VIII no. 1868a (?); Vandoni 1970, 6-7; Mooren 1975, 90-1 no. 053, 221 no. 0062; Thomas 1975, 91-4; Kramer 1997 and Heinen 1997 (as a founder of *poleis* in P.UB Trier S 135-1 and 135-3 = SB XXIV no. 15974); Heinen 2000 (the same, in relation with *OGIS* I no. 111 = *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 302); Hölbl 2001, 189; Huss 2001, 581-2, 592-3, 621; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 62-3, 131-2, 254-5, 274, 291-2 and Clarysse 2020, 173.

7 See, from different angles, Otto, Bengtson 1938, 47, 56-112 *passim*; Will 1982, 429-32; Hazzard 2000, 136-8; Hölbl 2001, 197-201; Whitehorne 2001, 117-19; Huss 2001, 608-18; Gehrke 2005, 109; Minas-Nerpel 2011, 67-8; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 273-340; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2016, 169-70; Bielman Sánchez, 2017; Pfeiffer 2017, 159-61; Bielman Sánchez, Joliton 2019, 85-9 and Lanciers 2020.

er daughter of his sister and wife who was thus his own niece and step-daughter”⁸ – and his sister and first wife Cleopatra II probably comes from the important site of Omboi, present-day Kom Ombo.⁹ One would recall that Omboi – the ancient Nubt, about 48 km north of Aswan and 1,000 km up the Nile from Alexandria – was a long-time domain of Seth as the ‘lord of Nubt’ (*nwbty*).¹⁰ Above all, Seth was the god of discord and disorder involved in a most prominent *Chaoskampf*.

However, since the inscription examined here tells us about two distinct moments in the life of a provincial gymnasium, it has really nothing to do with the fierce enemy of Horo. Rather, it tells us about dynastic conflictuality and its traces on monuments within a Greek context “thoroughly embedded in the social and cultural environment of Egypt”.¹¹ The actual extent of such embedding in the case of this inscription’s later fate will be discussed *infra*. According to some, this very fate coincides with the support to Cleopatra II and, in Will’s words, with “les forces vives de l’hellénisme”.¹²

Out of metaphor, the traces of subsequent hostility (*damnatio memoriae*) easily detectable on the surface of the stone are to be constructively read in a broad historical perspective, inasmuch as they constitute a major point of interest of this object as a politically dense one when it comes to its local context and to the feelings that materially enlivened it. As is well known, political violence is visibly represented by a fair amount of Greek inscriptions.¹³ It is also in the light of this fact that, for instance, Bielman Sánchez has recently reconsidered the Omboi dossier within her reassessment of Ptolemaic queenship as well as of its perception and recognition during the violent dynastic/marital crisis¹⁴ that marked the central years of Ptolemy VIII’s second reign (145-116 BC).¹⁵ This crucial state of affairs is the surest key to understanding this inscription’s major point of interest from a historical and local perspective.

⁸ Hölbl 2001, 195.

⁹ Commenting on its provenance as maintained by Bernand (*I.Egypte prose* I, 8, 59, no. 21), Łajtar (1996, col. 465) speculated that it was ultimately retrieved by Rubensohn at an antiquities market in Cairo, not in Kom Ombo (so also Pfeiffer 2015, no. 28, 145 and Pfeiffer 2020, no. 28, 165). But see now *infra*.

¹⁰ Velde 1967, 10-11, 99, 116, 131.

¹¹ Paganini 2022, 15.

¹² Will 1982, 433.

¹³ See ultimately Rhodes 2019 and Östenberg 2019. See also Savalli-Lestrade 2009, esp. 146-7 on Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III.

¹⁴ Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 72 fn. 115, 254, 259, 292 and Bielman Sánchez 2017, 91.

¹⁵ For Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VIII’s chronology, see Samuel 1962, 140-7.

2 Description

The stone and therefore the inscription are now in an irretrievably fragmentary state. None of the four edges of the fine-grained dark granite slab is preserved. It is arguably the worst case in epigraphy. So, the reconstruction of the depolarised text, out of what survives literarily floating among the lacunae, is highly hypothetical and revolves around the remaining core – if it can be considered as such¹⁶ – of the original stele.¹⁷

The left side of the remaining part is diagonally broken, while the break of both the upper and lower sides looks more irregular. The right side looks somewhat straight, but very rugged. There is a good chance that the original right edge was not far from there. In addition, the central part of the inscribed surface is damaged in correspondence of ll. 2-8, with a sensible fading of the characters to the detriment of readability. Plus, ll. 2-4 are affected by two deep holes, ll. 3-8 by a curved scratch on the right edge, and ll. 8-9 by a further damage in the middle. Ll. 12 and 16 (counting the apparent *vacat*-line as an originally inscribed one: see *infra*) display the deliberate erasures following, in both cases, *basilissa Kleopatra hē adelphē*.¹⁸ The neat break always precedes Cleopatra II's name, thus depriving us of Ptolemy VIII's obvious double obliteration.

The stone has now an irregular, trapezoidal shape and a contained size: it is 39.5 cm wide, 28 cm high, 13.5 cm deep. The letters have an average height of 0.7-0.9 cm. The line spacing is 0.3-0.4 cm. Under l. 10, i.e. between the ending of the very fragmentary gymnasial decree and the beginning of the first royal letter, there is a *vacat* running continuously from side to side, so that it may seem as though the original text were divided into (two) sections. This may not be the case, as in Wilcken's convincing reconstruction of the text.¹⁹

The design and the layout of the lines as a whole are not too irregular, even though each character has a shape on its own: for instance, the first *rho* of the greeting Ἑρρωσθε (l. 15) is bigger than the second. Generally speaking, the letters are quite correctly engraved. On closer inspection, *alpha* has both a horizontal straight or angled crossbar; *theta* has a complete bisecting bar; in most cases, *omikron* is consistently smaller, set in midline; *pi* is asymmetrical,

¹⁶ Even Łajtar (*I.Mus. Varsovie*, 116, no. 42) was not sure about the original central position of the remaining text.

¹⁷ See Wilcken 1913, 411 for the reconstruction Βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος καὶ βασίλισσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ ἀδελφὴ καὶ βασίλισσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ γυνὴ in ll. 12 and 16 (brackets omitted) as an element of certainty.

¹⁸ For this peculiar designation, see *infra*.

¹⁹ Wilcken 1913, 415-16.

sometimes rounded, with a shorter right descender; *sigma* has both horizontal or oblique external bars; *psilon* is sometimes taller; *phi* has a small, raised loop.

3 History of the Studies

The circumstances surrounding the discovery of the Omboi dossier and its arrival in Europe have not always been traceable with adequate precision. Or better, since the stele originally stood within a building located in ancient Omboi, it was assumed – for instance, by Bernand in *De Thèbes à Syène*²⁰ and *La prose sur pierre*²¹ – that it had been found in Kom Ombo: which is self-evident²² and goes without saying regardless of the epoch of its finding and the identity of its first finder(s). At a deeper level, Łajtar suspected that Rubensohn, the *makrobios* archaeologist to whom not just papyrology owes a lot,²³ ultimately retrieved it at an antiquities market in Cairo,²⁴ where it could have been brought by clandestine diggers.

Since the *editor princeps* affirmed that a first observation had been held in Berlin,²⁵ Łajtar maintained that the stone must have first arrived – perhaps, still unassigned – in the Prussian capital to the benefit of the learned coryphaei of classical studies.²⁶ In his 2003 edition of the Varsovian inscriptions, Łajtar cautiously maintained: “Lieu et contexte de la découverte inconnus. Parvenu à la collection du Lyceum Hosianum à Braunsberg avant 1913”.²⁷ As always, it would have been fundamental to know the exact context of the discovery. Today we know better. By quoting, as Łajtar was hoping,²⁸ a *Notiz* by Rubensohn in the archive of the Akademie der Wissenschaften of Berlin, Faensen has recently made it clear that the Omboi dossier was acquired in 1906 with the mediation of the famous Egyptologist Ludwig Borchardt after its discovery in Kom Ombo.²⁹

Because of the relative rarity of the subject, it will not be vain to spend a few words about this inscription’s early Prussian life.

²⁰ *I.Thèbes Syène*, 129, no. 189 (“L’inscription a été trouvée à Kom Ombo”).

²¹ *I.Egypte prose I*, 59, no. 21.

²² See Łajtar, *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 116, no. 42.

²³ For a recent bio-bibliographic profile, see Kuckertz 2013. See also the contributions collected in Pomerance, Schmitz 2015.

²⁴ Łajtar 1996, col. 465.

²⁵ Wilcken 1913, 410.

²⁶ Łajtar 2000, 73.

²⁷ *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 116, no. 42. For the Lyceum Hosianum, see *infra*.

²⁸ Łajtar 2000, 86.

²⁹ Faensen 2011, 400-1, no. 34. See also p. 163.

When the Omboi dossier came into scholarly attention in 1913, the Lyceum Hosianum was an old cultural institution of the Prussian town of Braunsberg (present-day Braniewo in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, Poland).³⁰ An Antik-Archäologische Kabinett consisting of Greek and Roman sculptures, plaster casts, terracottas, small bronzes, coins, glassworks, pottery, ancient Egyptian items, and chiefly of ancient inscriptions, had been established there in 1880-81 by the classical philologist and archaeologist Wilhelm Weissbrodt (1836-1917)³¹ for didactic purposes.³² It is remarkable how a non-negligible stele that had once stood in an Upper Egyptian gymnasium eventually went on display in an East Prussian lyceum (no. inv. 958).³³ From 1917 onwards, the collection was supervised by Josef Kroll, Bernhard Laum, and Josef Weinig.

In sum, for decades, since their arrival in Europe, the Omboi dossier and the relevant³⁴ collection to which it belonged did witness a crucial moment of public and private antiquities collecting in that peculiar region that was East Prussia.³⁵ Unlike many collectors such as Bernardino Drovetti, Weissbrodt did not travel in order to buy or retrieve the pieces firsthand; like many antiquities collectors, he trusted experienced people who were working *in loco* and acted through them. Apparently,³⁶ Weissbrodt's direct intermediaries were Theodor Wiegand of the Königliche Preussische Museumsstation zu Konstantinopel and Otto Rubensohn with his excellent grasp of Egypt

30 For some historical information about the Lyceum Hosianum, see Łajtar 1999, 147; Mikocki 2005, 26 and Kopiczko 2020. It was founded in 1565 by the Polish cardinal Stanisław Hozjusz (Stanislaus Hosius) as a Jesuite college: hence the name. It was renamed as Königliche Preussische Akademie in 1913 and as Staatliche Akademie in 1918, functioning as such until the end of the Second World War.

31 Weissbrodt curated the collection until his death. In his *Checklist*, Łajtar (1999, 147) wrote that he died in 1926, while the correct date is in Łajtar 2000, 67 and *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 7. For a biographic profile, see Faensen 2000, 64-9.

32 For the history of the Kabinett and of the Greek epigraphic collection housed in the Lyceum Hosianum, see Faensen 2000; Kolendo 2000; Łajtar 2000; Łajtar, *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 6-8 and Faensen 2013, 158-67, 234-5 (also 396-484 for a general catalogue); see also Robert, *Hellenica* XI-XII, 579 and Robert 1966, 11-14 (esp. on Wiegand: for whom see *infra*). For a quick overview on former German antiquities collections in present-day Poland, see Mikocki 2005 (esp. 26-8, on Greek and Roman inscriptions from Braunsberg).

33 Weissbrodt 1913, 11, no. II.7.

34 It has been noted that, "especially with regard to the Greek epigraphic finds from Egypt, the Braunsberg collection was a leading set in Europe in its days" (Mikocki 2005, 28).

35 A phenomenon thoroughly inspected in Faensen 2013.

36 Łajtar 1999, 147: "In the present state of our knowledge it is impossible to state whether they actually bought stones for Weißbrodt, but on any account, the majority of inscriptions from Asia Minor and Thrace, which later on came into the possession of the Lyceum Hosianum at Braunsberg passed through the hands of Wiegand and those from Egypt through the hands of Rubensohn" (the same words in *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 8).

and Egyptian antiquities markets restocked by local *fellahin* who were always pre-discovering tremendous amounts of artefacts, papyrus, and tombs:

Une chose reste certaine, à savoir que la majorité des monuments épigraphiques grecs parvenus à Braunsberg étaient passés par les mains de l'un ou de l'autre. C'est aussi à Wiegand et à Rubensohn que l'on doit les premières publications d'un grand nombre des inscriptions, publications fort précieuses car basées généralement sur l'examen des pierres fait directement chez le marchand d'antiquités.³⁷

This is not the case with the Omboi dossier, as it was first deciphered and published by Wilcken in synergy with Hiller von Gaertringen and Schubart.³⁸ Indeed, a worthy entrance into classical studies. But first it is worth noticing that the stele belongs to a wounded collection, that is such for two interconnected reasons.

Following the post-war fate of many former German collections in present-day Polish territory,³⁹ the Braunsberg collection was moved from its original place between 1946 and 1948: first to Olsztyn, afterwards to its current location in the National Museum in Warsaw (no. inv. 198817).⁴⁰ Several pieces which had been carefully recorded in Weissbrodt's time went lost.⁴¹ According to Łajtar, "tout porte à croire qu'elles [scil. the missing inscriptions] s'étaient perdues ou qu'elles avaient été détruites soit pendant la seconde guerre mondiale soit dans la tourmente qui l'avait suivie".⁴² In fact, Braunsberg was heavily bombed in the winter of 1944-45 during the East Prussian Offensive and the museum ended up being destroyed with 80% of the town. The Graeco-Roman and Egyptian artworks, the coins, and the plaster casts went missing at that time,⁴³ fortunately, the inscriptions had already been evacuated. Weinig himself was killed on 15 March that year.

Paulo feliciora canamus. As said above, the *editio princeps* of the very fragmentary Omboi dossier was prepared by Hiller von Gaer-

³⁷ *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 8.

³⁸ Wilcken 1913.

³⁹ Mikocki 2005.

⁴⁰ Of course, only part of that Museum's Graeco- and Roman-Egyptian epigraphic collection comes from the Lyceum Hosianum. See e.g. Twardecki 1999.

⁴¹ As for the Greek inscriptions, see *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 333-6, where we read about three dedications (including one to Hadrian as Zeus Olympios), three epitaphs, the base of an Egyptian statue of Artemis Soteira, and an inscription of the *synodou neaniskōn ek tou Osirieiou*.

⁴² *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 8.

⁴³ But, according to Faensen (2000, 82), "es ist nicht auszuschließen, daß sie heute noch in einem der russischen Museen oder Depots liegen".

tringen, Schubart, and Wilcken, who immediately acknowledged its historical value⁴⁴ thus ascribing the defacement to the Egyptian dynastic struggle of the 130s-120s BC.⁴⁵ Wilcken published the dossier in 1913 in *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* after the autopsies carried out by Hiller von Gaertringen and Schubart themselves.⁴⁶ The text established is very convincing, even if the first ten lines – the decree proper – retained their major lacunae, except for l. 7 and some minor lacks. Wilcken rightly ascribed it to 136-135 BC and observed that the surviving text is divided into three sections: a *psēphisma* (ll. 1-11), a letter from the sovereigns to the gymnasium of Omboi (ll. 12-15), and a letter from the royal trio to Boethos (ll. 16-18⁴⁷).⁴⁸ A fourth part with a copy of the original petition was probably attached below (l. 7).⁴⁹

The year before, Wilcken had introduced the so-called ‘Weißbrodtsche Inschrift’ in the chapter of his *Grundzüge* devoted to the gymnasial education,⁵⁰ just to deduct that virtually every city – not only the Greek *poleis* in Egypt, but also the nome *metropoleis* in the *chōra* – could have had their own gymnasia.⁵¹ He also dwelt on the *neaniskoi* and on *hoi ek tou gymnasiou*, that is, an official designation employed all over Egypt, albeit not too frequently attested.⁵² According to Wilcken, it referred to those belonging to the gymnasium at a given time as a state-recognised association (“eine staatsrechtlich anerkannte Genossenschaft oder Verein”)⁵³ whose members could correspond with the sovereigns without intermediaries. Later that year, Weissbrodt reproduced Wilcken’s edition and commentary in the summer semester issue of the *Verzeichnis der Vorlesungen an der*

⁴⁴ Wilcken 1913, 414: “die Weißbrodtsche Inschrift hat ein hohes Interesse für die Geschichte des Hellenismus in Ägypten, insofern sie uns für die Ptolemäerzeit aus der bisher überhaupt nur wenige Nachrichten über Gymnasien vorliegen, für das ferne Omboi ein Gymnasium bezeugt”.

⁴⁵ Wilcken 1913, 411.

⁴⁶ Wilcken 1913.

⁴⁷ In addition, the 19th line is conjectured here.

⁴⁸ Wilcken 1913, 411. For the subdivision, see now Legras 1999, 212; *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 118, no. 42; Pfeiffer 2015, no. 28, 147 and Pfeiffer 2020, no. 28, 167.

⁴⁹ Wilcken 1913, 413. See also *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 118, no. 42 and Nadig 2007, 94 fn. 90.

⁵⁰ Wilcken 1912, 138-40. For a recent translation, see Wilcken 2010, 259-62.

⁵¹ Plus, he cited the case of the city of Arsinoe. Who would not think back at these scholars’ often unjustified optimism – that of pioneers – with a degree of sympathy? When working on the honorary decree of the priests of Amun-Ra held in the Egyptian Museum of Turin, the philologist Amedeo Peyron came to suspect that every nome metropolis would have yielded such bilingual and trilingual Ptolemaic stelae. See Rossini 2022, 131 fn. 61.

⁵² See *infra* and Paganini 2022, 181-3.

⁵³ Wilcken 1913, 412.

Königlichen Akademie zu Braunsberg devoted to the Greek and Latin inscriptions of the collection.⁵⁴

As regards the history of studies, the early reception of the Omboi dossier gives evidence of a many-sided interest. In 1913, the legal historian San Nicolò kept it in mind in his *Habilitationsschrift* about associations in Graeco-Roman Egypt, when discussing the juridical profile of *hoi apo* (or *ek*) *tou gymnasiou* who held a correspondence with the sovereigns.⁵⁵ Schröter, in turn, extrapolated the two letters addressed to ‘those who are in the gymnasium of Omboi’ and to Boethos (ll. 12-15, 16-18) and inserted them in his seminal 1932 study about the diction of Hellenistic royal letters preserved upon stone.⁵⁶

Finally, in their important 1938 monograph about the reigns of Ptolemy VIII and Ptolemy IX, Otto and Bengtson briefly focused on the inscription as a piece of evidence on the tenure of the triple monarchy. To this end, they compared these lines to a contemporary dedication found in Dakka (Lower Nubia) in which Cleopatra III is strangely unmentioned,⁵⁷ but it was also on the basis of the Omboi dossier that they ruled that no striking friction should be intended by the mid-30s.⁵⁸ Otto and Bengtson took the defacement as an example “für einen gewissen Fanatismus” of both Cleopatra II’s and Ptolemy’s supporters in the *chōra*,⁵⁹ with the further annotation that the singularity of this case, as well as the fact that only the names were carved out, may suggest that such deletion could hardly have taken place on government instructions.⁶⁰ In fact, other characteristics pointing to the joint rule were left intact.

In the following years, the expert of Ptolemaic law-making Lenger returned to the inscription more than once. She showed little interest in the deletion of the royal names, rather focusing on the constructive moment: that of April 135 and of the royal goodwill. In two articles of 1944 and 1952 about the legislative practices of the Ptolemies, she offered a brief profile and a *status quaestionis* of the Omboi letters and included them among various *prostigmata* concerning the bestowal of royal privileges⁶¹ (a topic she analysed in a subse-

⁵⁴ Weissbrodt 1913, no. II.7.

⁵⁵ San Nicolò 1913, 44.

⁵⁶ Schröter 1932, nos. 37 (ll. 12-15), 38 (ll. 16-18).

⁵⁷ *OGIS* I no. 131 (= *SB* V no. 7907 = *Dakke* III no. Gr. W): Ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου καὶ βασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας τῆς ἀδελφῆς | θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν [καὶ τῶν τέκνων, θεῶν μεγίστων Ἑρμῆι τῶι] καὶ | Παοιπνούφι[δι καὶ τοῖς συνναοῖς θεοῖς (ἔτους)] λϵ’.

⁵⁸ Otto, Bengtson 1938, 45 fn. 2.

⁵⁹ Otto, Bengtson 1938, 66.

⁶⁰ Otto, Bengtson 1938, 66 fn. 1.

⁶¹ Lenger 1944, no. I.B.6 and Lenger 1952b, no. 11.

quent study on the notion of *philanthrōpon*,⁶² on which I will return later) thus offering a schematic interpretation. To sum up, she maintained that the decree was voted by the members of the gymnasium themselves.⁶³

Of course, the Omboi dossier could not be missing in Lenger's 1964 collection of the provisions the Ptolemies made both on their own accord and in response to applicants. Once again, she only published the fragmentary letters (ll. 12-18) as two distinct items with translation and commentary. In line with the scope of the *corpus*, she just mentioned the actual decree of the *neaniskoi* (ll. 1-11).⁶⁴ As a point of interest, a comparison to a couple of similar provisions from the Thebaid was rightly meant to help reconstructing the essential features of the Omboi dossier:⁶⁵ two letters from Ptolemy VI-II, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III to the priests of Isis at Philae and to the *stratēgos* Lochos concerning an exemption request made by the priests, plus the executive order;⁶⁶ and another two letters from Cleopatra III and Ptolemy IX to the priests of Khnum in Elephantine and to the *stratēgos* Hermokrates concerning some tax benefits (?) requested by the *hierēis* themselves.⁶⁷

By the time Lenger took interest in the inscription, the text established by Wilcken had been left uncha(lle)nged. It remained so until 1989, when Bernard inserted a new edition of the whole document, including the decree, with few substantial changes conducted on Wilcken's text, in his volume *De Thèbes à Syène*.⁶⁸ Again, no more than a few lines were devoted to the instances where the double erasure of the royal names could have happened.⁶⁹ Furthermore, he proposed to *rapprocher* the obscure envoy Alkimachos (l. 13) to a certain Alkimachos of Colophon (Ἀλκίμαχος Κολοφώνιος) we read about in a 3rd century BC inscription from Samos already examined

⁶² Lenger 1952a (the inscription is mentioned on p. 499, fn. 79). See also Lenger 1952b, 497-8. In the same years, Launey wrongly cited (1949-50, II: 859) the inscription in his *Recherches* as if it were a decree concerning the erection of the statue of the nameless founder of the gymnasium.

⁶³ Lenger 1944, no. I.B.6, 131; Lenger 1952b, no. 11, 514 and Lenger 1964, nos. 48-49, 118. See also Habermann 2004, 342 and Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 259.

⁶⁴ Lenger 1964, nos. 48-9. The Lyceum Hosianum was incorrectly reported to be the current location.

⁶⁵ Lenger 1964, nos. 48-9, 118. See also *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 118-19, no. 42.

⁶⁶ *OGIS* I nos. 137-139 (= *C. Ord. Ptol.* nos. 51-52 = *I.Philae* I no. 19 = *I.Prose* I no. 22), ca. 124-118/116 BC.

⁶⁷ *OGIS* I no. 168, ll. 32-50 (= *C. Ord. Ptol.* nos. 57-58 = *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 244, ll. 32-50 = *I.Prose* I no. 24, ll. 32-50), 115 BC. For this important dossier, see Piejko 1992.

⁶⁸ *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 189.

⁶⁹ *I.Thèbes Syène*, 131, no. 189.

by Robert:⁷⁰ a list of soldiers serving under the Ptolemies. In doing so, he modified the dating⁷¹ thus arousing Bingen's severe criticism.⁷² Plus, Bernard suggested to identify the other envoy, the equally unknown Themistokles, with [Θε]μιστοκλῆς ἀύλητῆς (from Cyprus?) of an undated graffito in the second court of the Memnonion of Abydos.⁷³ This same edition was also reprinted without apparatus in *La prose sur pierre dans l'Égypte hellénistique et romaine* three years later.⁷⁴

In 1989, the decree of the *neaniskoi* was reputed to be too fragmentary to be translated.⁷⁵ By 1992, Bernard had changed his mind with a tentative translation (from l. 6).⁷⁶

At any rate, the reference edition is now the one Łajtar edited for the *Catalogue des inscriptions grecques du Musée National de Varsovie* (2003) with a fair number of comprehensive annotations (physical and palaeographical description, textual and historical notes). The Polish epigraphist could also benefit from the insightful account Legras had included in his *Néotês*, stressing that “le groupe des *neaniskoi* d'Omboi doit [...] être reconnu comme l'un des corps les plus représentatifs de la société ptolémaïque”, that “il fait partie intégrante des organes de direction de la société lagide”, and was treated as such.⁷⁷

Since about Maehler,⁷⁸ scholarly criticism is more interested in the circumstances surrounding the obliteration of Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra III's names. As a trace of Boethos' involvement in the defacement, Maehler considered the possibility that, as “a member of the Greek upper class which backed Cleopatra II”, the *stratēgos* sided with her whose name was spared on the stele just before being replaced by the Egyptian *stratēgos* Paos by 130 BC.⁷⁹

Dietze in turn examined the historical context of the dossier in perspective with other contemporary Ombite inscriptions related to the

⁷⁰ Robert, *Ét. épigr. et philol.*, 114, l. 5.

⁷¹ *I.Thèbes Syène*, 131, no. 189.

⁷² Bingen 1990, 155. See also Legras 1999, 213 fn. 79.

⁷³ *I.Memnonion* no. 531, l. 2. The musician left his signature in company with a certain Ὀνάσιμος Σαλαμίνιος.

⁷⁴ *I.Egypte prose* I no. 21.

⁷⁵ Bernard, *I.Thèbes Syène*, 130, no. 189.

⁷⁶ *I.Egypte prose* I, 58, no. 21.

⁷⁷ Bernard 1999, 212-14, 225.

⁷⁸ Maehler 1992, 210.

⁷⁹ See also *infra*. See also Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 254-5, 292 and Bielman Sánchez 2017, 91. *Contra* Lanciers 2020, 32. For Paos, see *Pros. Ptol.* I nos. 197 and 302; Vandoni 1970, 7; Mooren 1975, 91-2 no. 054; Thomas 1975, 94-6; Hölbl 2001, 198; Huss 2001, 610, 619, 621; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 254-5, 292, 295-6, 299.

army, the Temple, and loyalism:⁸⁰ a dedication to Haroeris, Apollo, and the other deities of the Temple on behalf of Ptolemy VI, Cleopatra II, and their children εὐνοίας ἔνεκεν by “the infantry and cavalry soldiers and the others stationed in the Ombites”,⁸¹ and another dedication ἀρπτεῖς ἔνεκεν καὶ εὐνοίας by the same people to Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra III, the god Souchos (?), and the other deities of the Temple with no mention to Cleopatra II.⁸² Wondering whether *hoi ek tou gymnasiou* in Omboi during Ptolemy VIII’s reign were identical with the soldiers of the coeval Temple inscription, Dietze concluded that, alongside the Temple and the army, the gymnasium “constituted a circle in its own right”.⁸³ It is, indeed, a politically relevant assessment to think of when observing the scratches on the stone:

While the army [...] was in several ways connected with the Egyptian temple and high officers could be hellenized Egyptian priests, the members of the *gymnasion* were, as we know, dedicated to Greek culture and Greek gods only.⁸⁴

It is therefore noteworthy that, during the civil war of 132/131-125/124 BC, Cleopatra II did not appear, in Bielman Sánchez and Joliton’s words,

on any temple reliefs, probably due to the briefness of her independent reign and also because the main Egyptian temples were located in troubled regions, and because the Egyptian high priests were loyal to Euergetes II, who had been generous towards temples.⁸⁵

Finally, the same Bielman Sánchez took the Omboi dossier into account (in the context of her ongoing study on female public activities

⁸⁰ Dietze 2000.

⁸¹ OGIS I no. 114 (= SB V no. 8388 = *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 188). It has been discussed whether this inscription depended on private military or royal initiative, and about whose *eunoia* was that immortalised on stone. See also Fischer-Bovet 2014, 339-40 and fn. 36 with prev. bibl., and pl. A.2, no. 16 and Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 60, 134, 136-8, 149 pl. III (esp. on syncretism and on “the others” interpreted as the inhabitants of Omboi). For the soldiers in the epigraphy of Ptolemaic Egypt, see Fischer-Bovet 2020 (esp. 155 for the inscriptions discussed here).

⁸² SB V no. 8389 (= *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 190). See also Fischer-Bovet 2014, 340 and pl. A.2, no. 17.

⁸³ Dietze 2000, 89. *Contra* Nadig 2007, 95 and fn. 95 (quoting a papyrus of 103 BC).

⁸⁴ Dietze 2000, 88. See also Fischer-Bovet 2014, 286 fn. 230. For the Egyptian presence in gymnasia (with an eye on *Hellenismus*), see Clarysse 1995, 7; Paganini 2015, 56 and 2022, 187-92. Diodorus’ *locus classicus* (1.81.7) about the perplexity and the scepticism the gymnasia would have aroused among the Egyptians is questioned e.g. in Paganini 2022, 187.

⁸⁵ Bielman Sánchez, Joliton 2019, 87.

in the Hellenistic world) as a proof of the existence of groups favourable to Cleopatra II in this region of the kingdom during the *stasis*.⁸⁶ In her monograph on Cleopatra I and Cleopatra II, and in tune with Lenger,⁸⁷ Bielman Sánchez maintained that the *enteuxis* was sent as the result of a common decision. She concluded that

la preuve de ce fonctionnement collégial réside, paradoxalement, dans l'effacement ultérieur des noms de Ptolémée VIII et de Cléopâtre III sur la stèle d'Omboi [...]: on a voulu par cet acte attribuer a posteriori à la seule Cléopâtre II la paternité d'une décision présentée à l'origine comme collective.⁸⁸

In sum, it can be seen how scholarly criticism has examined the Omboi dossier from an administrative, a social, and a political perspective: namely, from both a formal and an unorthodox (that of political violence) one. Since all these aspects are to be synthesized into historical enquiry, the enquiry itself on this stele's pre- and post-132/131 BC vicissitudes can not avoid a proper analysis of the inscribed words.

4 The Text

4.1 The Motivations (ll. 1-6)

Since it was set on the upper part of the stele, the actual decree (*psēphisma*) of the *neaniskoi* concerning the engraving and the display of the whole dossier is the least preserved of the three discernible parts of the text. In fact, it is largely lost. The remains of the *psēphisma* – namely, of the motivations (ll. 1-6) and of the deliberation (ll. 6-11) – now occupy the first eleven lines: not a few. Yet the original deliberation was surely (much?) longer.⁸⁹ After the usual pre-script and the dating formula, the deliberation must have mentioned or narrated the object of the petition along with eulogising the royal *philanthrōpia* made visible through the gracious and benevolent deeds (*philanthrōpa*) 'of the most revered sovereigns' (l. 10). Such

⁸⁶ Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 72 fn. 115, 254, 259, 292 and Bielman Sánchez 2017, 91.

⁸⁷ See *supra*.

⁸⁸ Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 259.

⁸⁹ Pfeiffer (2015, no. 28, 145, 148 and 2020, no. 28, 165, 168-9) recently described the dossier as part of a honorary decree for "einen königlichen Funktionsträger". However, there are no traces of such purpose in the text as it has come down to us.

subdivision can be observed, for instance, in the similar dossier from Elephantine which Lenger already compared to the Omboi inscription: τὰ περ]ιγεγονότα [...] φιλάνθρω[π]α (l. 46).⁹⁰

Only a few words – and particularly unrevealing half sentences such as the καὶ τοῦ ο[---]ῦ⁹¹ ἐ[δέ]ξατο τὴν τῶν ἐ[partly conjectured here (l. 4) – float among the lacunae. The worst consequence is that we do not know anything about the privilege(s) granted by the sovereigns.

As a merely suggestive means of comparison,⁹² we could think about a late 160s BC inscription found in the site of the gymnasium of the Ptolemaic garrison of Thera.⁹³ It is a *prostagma* by Ptolemy VI Philometor – Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II's brother, Cleopatra III's father – granting to the gymnasium some land an *oikonomos* had previously confiscated.⁹⁴ Did the royal favour towards the gymnasium of Omboi concern the grant of land, or some injustice the institution had suffered,⁹⁵ or the expenses for sacrifices and for the oil used during the exercises, or rather (among all the possible exemptions) the tax itself weighing on the oil (*elaikē*)?⁹⁶ As a point of fact, there are too many possible options to hope to fill this gap. “[C]e qui est certain, c'est l'appel à la *philanthrōpia* royale, l'appel à la bienveillance, au bienfait royal”.⁹⁷ an appeal that succeeded even though the royal house had not been directly⁹⁸ involved in the foundation of the gymnasium of Omboi (l. 9).

However, Nadig interpreted it with concreteness as an attempt on the part of Ptolemy VIII to win approval from the Greek local elite and to smooth out dissensions.⁹⁹ For chronological reasons, he did not mention Diodorus' notice about the king who repents of his former cruelties and endeavours to regain popular favour through acts of *philanthrōpia*.¹⁰⁰ As a proof, Nadig inferred a testimony of Ptole-

⁹⁰ See *supra*. For a quick overview of the multifaceted relation between kings and gymnasia in the Hellenistic world, see Chankowski 2009.

⁹¹ For the missing word, see *infra*.

⁹² See Legras 1999, 225.

⁹³ IG XII.3 no. 327 (= C. Ord. Ptol. no. 33).

⁹⁴ See Paganini 2022, 131-4. For Ptolemy VI's activities with Cleopatra II in this sector, see Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 64 fn. 70, 72-4, 135-6, 147-8 pl. III.

⁹⁵ Legras 1999, 213-14 (quoting Lenger 1952a, 484).

⁹⁶ See Paganini 2022, 122-9 with prev. bibl.

⁹⁷ Legras 1999, 214.

⁹⁸ See also Habermann 2004, 338 on the nameless *prōtos philos* as a man “mit Beziehungen zum Königshaus”.

⁹⁹ Nadig 2007, 95 fn. 96.

¹⁰⁰ Diod. 34/35.20 (μετενόει γὰρ ἤδη καὶ ταῖς φιλάνθρωπίας ἔσπευδε διορθώσασθαι τὴν τῶν ὄχλων πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀποθηρίωσιν).

my VIII's hostility towards the gymnasial association(s) of Alexandria once he had regained the city (127/126 BC) at the end of the interdecennial war against his sister.¹⁰¹ It is a tradition handed down by Valerius Maximus, Lucius Ampelius, and even in the *Historia Augusta*.¹⁰² Furthermore, a papyrus from Tebtunis concerning the purchase of confiscated land contains the faint traces of an "extreme" *prostagmata*, according to Paganini, which compelled gymnasia, corporations abroad (*politeumata*), political clubs (*synodoi*), and maybe also religious associations (*thiasoi*) and groups of ex-ephebes (*haireseis*) to alienate their possessions into the treasury.¹⁰³

In l. 1, the likely remains of an aorist infinitive that ended with $\lambda\alpha\sigma\alpha\iota$, the neuter singular $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}$, and the initial $\chi\lambda$ of the next word are all we can read.

The situation gradually improves in the following lines. The narrative/descriptive expression $\kappa\alpha\theta' \eta\nu \xi\chi\omicron\nu\sigma\alpha$ (loosely, 'in accordance with which') has unfortunately lost its object – a feminine noun referred to $\eta\nu$ –, but it is followed by the initial $\chi\lambda$ seen by Łajtar, then by a lacuna of about nine letters ending with $\lambda\alpha\sigma\alpha\nu$. In spite of the gratitude expressed in these lines, a hypothetical restoration $\kappa\alpha\theta' \eta\nu \xi\chi\omicron\nu\sigma\alpha \chi\lambda\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\nu$ would be hazardous, if not even unsuitable. For a merely illustrative correspondence to this phrase's eulogistic temperature, one could perhaps think of $\kappa\alpha\theta' \eta\nu \xi\chi\epsilon\iota\varsigma \pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \tau\omicron \theta\epsilon\iota\omicron\nu \epsilon\upsilon\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\beta\epsilon\iota\alpha\nu$ attested in some Egyptian inscriptions of the 1st century BC.¹⁰⁴

The preserved part of l. 3 begins with the clear participle $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu$, translatable as 'requested',¹⁰⁵ 'worthy (of)', and the like. The following characters are barely recognisable due to the stone damage: $\kappa\alpha\iota \delta\lambda$ – was all that Wilcken and Łajtar reported in their editions, but $\kappa\alpha\iota \delta\omicron\nu \chi\lambda$ may be seen instead in high-definition photographs. Indeed, since the characters $\lambda\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\lambda\eta\varsigma$ come after a gap of about nine or

101 Nadig 2007, 96-7.

102 Val. Max. 9.2.5 (*frequens iuventute gymnasium armis et igni circumdedit omnesque qui in eo erant, partim ferro, partim flamma necavit*); Ampel. *Lib. mem.* 35.5 (*Ptolemaeus Tryphon, qui seditiosos in theatro sagittis occidit, alios flammis dedit*); *SHA M. Ant.* 6.2-3 (*Inde Alexandriam petiit [scil. Caracalla], in gymnasium populum convocavit eumque obiurgavit; legi etiam validos ad militiam praecepit. Eos autem quos legerat occidit exemplo Ptolemaei Euergetis qui octavus hoc nomine appellatus est*). See Fraser 1972, III: 166 fn. 325 and Whitehorne 2001, 111 fn. 16 both suggesting that this atrocity seems more characteristic of the purges that took place upon Ptolemy's accession in 145 BC, though it is commonly (and convincingly) ascribed to 132/131-125/124 BC; Otto, Bengtson 1938, 67-9; Will 1982, 433-4; Legras 1999, 234-6; Gehrke 2005, 109; Nadig 2007, 62 fn. 30, 180-3 and fn. 262, 191-4; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 183, 287-8, 305 and Paganini 2022, 81. See also Hölbl 2001, 200 and Huss 2001, 619.

103 *P.Tebt.* III.1 no. 700, ll. 22-55 (= *C. Ord. Ptol.* no. 50). See Otto, Bengtson 1938, 67-8 esp. fn. 3; Legras 1999, 234; Nadig 2007, 97 fn. 103 and Paganini 2022, 88.

104 See *supra* (Apparatus, *ad loc.*).

105 See again *I.Philae* I no. 19, l. 16 and *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 244, l. 38: $\kappa\alpha\theta\acute{\alpha}\pi\epsilon\rho \acute{\alpha}\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota$.

ten letters starting with a *chi*, no single-word reconstruction may be hypothesised. I cautiously propose χ[ρηστῶς γενο]μένης ἐπιστο[λῆς, ‘and what [...] since a letter has been happily delivered’.

There is a good chance that, up to this point, the inscription recalled the circumstances surrounding the needs of the gymnasium thus highlighting Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III’s royal mercy.

In the preserved fragment of l. 4, the words ἐφ’ οἷς καὶ, ‘for these reasons’, seem to draw some very practical conclusions which are now lost, if not for the likelihood that the almost illegible characters which follow are perhaps to be unfulfillingly read as τοῦ ὄχλου ἐ[δέ]ξατο τὴν τῶν ε[...], ‘received from the multitude, too, the [...] of the [...]’. Both Wilcken and Łajtar established ἐφ’ οἷς καὶ του[----]ε[---]ξατο τὴν τῶν ε[...]. The common verb *dechomai* seems to be the only acceptable option in accordance with the genitive (in fact, ἐργάξατο, ἐπράξατο, ἐτεύξατο, or ἐπεύξατο are definitely unsatisfactory). In a similar way, the first and the last letter of the supposed ὄχλου are less damaged than the central ones, despite the fact that this point of the stone is very tormented. So, this may perhaps appear to be the only fitting choice, inasmuch as the disjointed remaining signs do not match with *horkos* and the like. As for this sentence’s irrecoverable meaning, it should only be noted that *ochlos* is more than often a pejorative term¹⁰⁶ (*mobile vulgus*), but it has been interpreted as a designation for non-*politai* or for the communities scattered in the *chōra* in reference to the honorary decree the city of Arsinoe in Cyrenaica issued for Aleximachos of Taucheria (1st century BC). We read, in fact, that Aleximachos behaved with *epieikeia* and *philanthrōpia* towards the masses (*ochloi*) and the cities.¹⁰⁷ In this case, it may perhaps seem as though the people outside the gymnasium (in more than one sense) were involved in the affair at some unknown degree.

It is generally agreed that

village gymnasia were private institutions outside any civic context, they were founded by rich private individuals and treated as private property; they were independently administered by their users who gathered together and decided about their business autonomously.¹⁰⁸

As near as we can tell, l. 5 summarised and drew conclusions on what was stated in the previous lines. Plus, by introducing the deliberation, it probably contained the last sentence of the part devoted

¹⁰⁶ See *LSJ* 9, s.v. “ὄχλος”.

¹⁰⁷ *SEG* XXVI, 1817, ll. 12-14 (see also l. 53, where Aleximachos works for the salvation of the *ochloi*). See Struffolino 2016-17, 151-2 with prev. bibl.

¹⁰⁸ Paganini 2015, 48 (with a reference to Omboi, too).

ed to the decree's motivations. Here is Wilcken's convincing restoration, rightly preceded by no punctuation because of the particle *de*: καλῶς δ' ἔχοντος καὶ τὸ γεγ[ονὸς] παρὰ κτλ. The preposition explicited the cause or the author(s) of τὸ γεγ[ονὸς]: 'since it is also fine to [... verb] what has depended on/the results of...'

At first sight, this line's remaining characters are far from clear and testify of a moment of inattention by the stonemason: ΤΩΠΕΝΦΑΝΕ[(my punctuation). Wilcken limited himself to τωπ.ριφανε[. He also noted that the letters between ΤΩ and ΦΑΝΕ[show signs of correction:¹⁰⁹ an original Ν was unsuccessfully modified in order to look like Π, while the first Ε is quite unshapely, perhaps because of the momentary loss of control. In my opinion, a letter is missing after ΤΩ. It would have had to be either the dative singular τῶ<ι> or the genitive plural τῶ<ν>. Since a *ny* (which may be similar to *pi*) was engraved and corrected right after, and for other reasons like the expression *gignomai para tinos*, I maintain that the genitive is to be preferred. The next word is not too difficult to restore: τῶ<ν> περιφανέ[σ|τατων. Since the adjective *periphanēs* ('seen all round, conspicuous') is to be preferably applied to something, not to someone (namely, not to a hypothetical βασιλέων),¹¹⁰ I follow the example furnished by the logical development of several decrees¹¹¹ and propose, in full: καλῶς δ' ἔχοντος καὶ τὸ γεγ[ονὸς] παρὰ τῶ<ν> περιφανέ[σ|τατων φιλανθρώπων ἀξιοῦσθαι, 'since it is also fine to give to the results of the truly outstanding benefits the consideration they deserve'. It fits well with the king's image as the quintessential *philanthrōpos* or, in Muccioli's words, "benefattore per eccellenza".¹¹² Lenger's study on this topic has already been cited:

Pour les Grecs comme pour les Égyptiens, le Ptolémée est avant tout le protecteur des sujets lésés ou opprimés: les appels à la justice, à la bienveillance, à la *philanthropie*, qui motivent les requêtes au roi, le prouvent.¹¹³

As Samuel noted about the majestic amnesty decree¹¹⁴ – much more than a long list of *philanthrōpa* – issued well after Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II's reconciliation,

¹⁰⁹ Wilcken 1913, 410 fn. 1.

¹¹⁰ See *LSJ* 9, s.v. "περιφανής".

¹¹¹ See e.g. *IG* XII.5.1 no. 722, ll. 37-9 (καλῶς δ' ἔχοντος τῶ[ι] δήμῳι τοῦ[ς] | [κ]αλοῦς [καὶ] ἀγαθοῦ[ς] τῶν] ἀνδρ[ῶ]ν ἀποδο[χῆ]ς ἀ[ξι]οῦσθαι [π]ε[ρι] τοῦ[ς] | ἄλλου[ς], δεδόχθαι κτλ.) and *OGIS* I no. 51 (= *I.Egypte prose* I no. 6), ll. 12-14 (καλῶς δ' ἔχει τοὺς τοιοῦτους τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐπισημαινομένους τιμὰν ταῖς πρεπούσαις τιμαῖς, | δεδόχθαι κτλ.).

¹¹² Muccioli 2013, 179.

¹¹³ Lenger 1952a, 486.

¹¹⁴ *P.Tebt.* I no. 5.

the *philanthropa* represented by many provisions of the decree show an aspect of the conception of appropriate kingly behavior [...]. The *enteuxeis*, or petitions, of which we have a good number from the end of the third century, form one category of texts which show the concept of the king as the direct source of benefit and justice to the populace. There is no doubt that the petitions themselves were processed by the bureaucracy (indeed they acknowledge that explicitly); but the terminology of the appeals makes the king the source of *euergasia* which the petitioner requests. In the same way, the *philanthropa* present the notion of the king as the kindly protector of his people, generous, merciful, beneficent. This idea [...] forms part of the ideology of kingship which is taken to have been developed by philosophers and propagandists of the second century; and it is in the course of that century that we see these concepts reflected in official texts.¹¹⁵

Hence my theoretic basis for restoring φιλανθρωπων in l. 6 and for hypothesising εὐεργεσία in l. 10. One should not forget that Ptolemy VIII's official epithet was Euergetes, i.e. 'Benefactor'¹¹⁶ (not Physkon,¹¹⁷ as he is almost regularly called today) in the footsteps of his great-grandfather Ptolemy III, as well as both Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III were called Euergetis.¹¹⁸

4.2 The Deliberation

As said, Lenger maintained that the decree was voted by the members of the gymnasium.¹¹⁹ In l. 6, Bernard restored δεδόχθαι -? τῶν νεανίσκοις accordingly.¹²⁰ The question mark refers to Wilcken's ancient doubt whether the *psēphisma* was issued by the *ephēboi* too:¹²¹ δεδόχθαι -? τῶν νεανίσκοις (final edition) or, hypothetically, δεδόχθαι τοῖς τε ἐφήβοις καὶ τῶν νεανίσκοις.¹²² In his commentary, Pfeiffer also conjectured about *presbyteroi* (so, πρεσβυτέροις).¹²³ Since there would

¹¹⁵ Samuel 1993, 189-90. See also Smith 1968, 210. For further considerations with a focus on gymnasia and cultural training, see Criscuolo 2015.

¹¹⁶ See Muccioli 2013, 184-9 with prev. bibl.

¹¹⁷ See Muccioli 2013, 186-7 fn. 90 with prev. bibl.

¹¹⁸ See Muccioli 2013, 184, 189.

¹¹⁹ See *supra*.

¹²⁰ *I.Thèbes Syène*, 130, no. 189.

¹²¹ Wilcken 1913, 414. See also Legras 1999, 213 fn. 78.

¹²² For a literary reference of the couple *ephēboi kai neaniskoi*, see Plut. *Cim.* 16.5 with the earthquake occurring γυμναζομένων ὁμοῦ τῶν ἐφήβων καὶ τῶν νεανίσκων.

¹²³ Pfeiffer 2015, no. 28, 148 and Pfeiffer 2020, no. 28, 168.

not be enough space for the completion of the previous sentence, I follow Launey¹²⁴ in maintaining δεδόχθαι τοῖς νεανίσκοις, ‘it has been decided by the young men’.

Launey himself identified the *neaniskoi* – a panhellenic kind of association – as a class of young privileged individuals who were part of the gymnasium’s clients: namely, an administrative committee with full authority on liturgy.¹²⁵ That is why, according to him, the *neaniskoi* of Omboi “agissent en maîtres du gymnase”. Paganini has now blunted this view, describing how, despite playing an important role and being involved in many activities, the *neaniskoi* “were not an independent and autonomous body within the gymnasium: they managed neither themselves nor the gymnasium’s affairs”.¹²⁶ It is assumed that the actual *neaniskoi* were aged between 18 and 25/30 years,¹²⁷ even though there are also traces of a broader and freer use of this term (especially when it came to distinguishing the young users of the gymnasium from the ephebes or not).¹²⁸

Though the essentially Greek nature of everything pertaining to the gymnasium may be a vague clue in this sense, the presence of the *neaniskoi* in the decree, as well as their deliberation of 135 BC, do not necessarily imply their unmediated involvement in the subsequent destruction of the royal names.

Caution is required in a complex scenario of *stasis*. As said, Maehler’s deduced that the Greek *stratēgos* Boethos sided with the *philellēn* queen whose name was spared before being replaced with the Egyptian official Paos; Boethos’ name is intact, too (l. 14). Lanciers has recently questioned this conclusion on the basis that Boethos is attested as an eponymous officer in 129 BC i.e. after the end of his tenure as *epistratēgos*, still under Ptolemy VIII’s control.¹²⁹

In Wilcken’s accepted reconstruction, it was decided with no surprise to ἀναγράψαι τὸ ψήφισμα τοῦτ[ο] | καὶ τὴν παρὰ τῶν βασιλέων ἐπιστολὴν τὴν περὶ τούτων εἰς στήλ[η]ν λιθίνην, “to inscribe this de-

124 Launey 1949-50, II: 859 fn. 5.

125 Launey 1949-50, II: 859.

126 Paganini 2022, 179, 181. For the *neaniskoi*, see in general Launey 1949-50, II: 859-66; Sacco 1979; Legras 1999, 195-217; *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 119, no. 42 (“jeunes Grecs issus de bonnes familles qui faisaient leur service militaire, préparaient une carrière de magistrat et fréquentaient le gymnase, à côté d’éphèbes et d’anciens éphèbes”); Martín Hernández 2003; Habermann 2004, 342-3; Scheuble-Reiter 2012, 42, 53, 94 and fn. 213, 309-15 and Paganini 2022, 175-81.

127 See Sacco 1979, 49. See also Paganini 2022, 179 fn. 40 with prev. bibl.

128 See Paganini 2022, 179.

129 Lanciers 2020, 32 with prev. bibl. See also Thomas 1975, 96: “The appointment of Paos [...] is undoubtedly to be connected with Euergetes’ attempts to win the support of the Egyptian population in his struggle with Kleopatra II, partly to compensate for his lack of popularity at Alexandria”.

cree [and the letter from the sovereigns] concerning these matters on a stone stele" (ll. 6-7). The *psēphisma* mentioned here is the text to which these very words belong (ll. 6-11). The *epistolē* is the lost one which had been sent to the court,¹³⁰ modestly referred to as περὶ τούτων, "concerning these matters",¹³¹ unless *tauta* are - more or less directly - the same *philanthrōpa* I propose for l. 6.

The stele had to be τοῦ γείτονος ἐ[], with an enigmatic¹³² complement that perhaps specified that the monument was to be of or from something (?) nearby (*geitōn*). We learn from Wilcken that Hiller von Gaertringen suspected this to be a reference to the nearby quarry from which the material for the stele was to be taken.¹³³ Since the important granite quarry of Aswan¹³⁴ is not so *geitōn*, and only the first letter ε[of the following word has survived, ἐ[ρ]γαστηρίου - so, 'a stone stele from the nearby [workshop]' - may perhaps be conjectured. But the gap of l. 8 is much longer than a single word. Following Robert's well-known warnings against the epigraphic *horror vacui*,¹³⁵ I choose not to insert such a dubious word in the present edition.

The final disposition concerns, as usual, the placement of the monument: καὶ ἀνατε[θ]ῆναι ταύτην ἐν τῷ γυμ[νασίῳ], 'and to] set it up in the gym[nasium]' (l. 8). The chosen place was mentioned with exactitude: παρ[ὰ τῆ] ἐσταμένη[ι], 'near the [...] which stands [...]' (ll. 8-9). Since the lacuna of l. 9 ends with a personal titlature, Wilcken soon deduced that εἰκόνι ('statue') should be restored, and that ἐσταμένη[ι] would be superfluous without the precise indication of a place.¹³⁶ Wilcken himself, but also Bernand and Łajtar, added nothing but εἰκόνι. A proper name must have preceded the obvious article τοῦ. However, since the gymnasium is mentioned just above, potential restorations such as ἐν τούτῳ τῷ τόπῳ εἰκόνι τοῦ ----- τοῦ πρώτου φίλου καὶ κτίστου τοῦ γυμνασίου, with adequate space left for the proper name only, are to be ruled out.

For now, the name of the distinguished courtier (*vornehm Hofmann*)¹³⁷ and 'first friend (of the king)' who established a gymnasium in the far

¹³⁰ See Wilcken 1913, 413.

¹³¹ See the French translation in Bernand, *I.Egypte prose* I, 58, no. 21 (followed by *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 118, no. 42): "la lettre émanant du roi à ce sujet".

¹³² So Wilcken 1913, 414 fn. 4.

¹³³ Wilcken 1913, 414 fn. 4.

¹³⁴ See Kelany, Negem, Tohami, Heldal 2009 ("The 'Aswan Granite' was the third most important stone used in Egyptian civilisation, after sandstone and limestone"). See also Harrell, Storemyr 2009, *passim*.

¹³⁵ E.g. Robert *OMS* V, 99 (when it comes to "une vague supposition indémontrable [...] l'épigraphiste doit être insensible à l'horreur du vide").

¹³⁶ Wilcken 1913, 413 and fn. 2. For the statues of founders in gymnasia, see Pagani 2022, 63 fn. 54 (esp. the inscriptions).

¹³⁷ Wilcken 1913, 414.

Omboi remains unrepairable. A mere suggestion can be drawn from the well preserved honorific title. Habermann distinguished between *prōtos philos* and the later designation of *tōn prōtōn philōn* ('of the first friends'),¹³⁸ and considered the former as a 3rd century BC forerunner of the latter, thus ascribing the foundation of the gymnasium to that century,¹³⁹ while Wilcken found it unlikely that Omboi did not have a gymnasium until the 2nd century BC.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, Lanciers' recent study about the emergence of *tōn prōtōn philōn* in the 210s as a military title created in the 3rd century for high-ranking officers and members of the royal entourage should be recalled here.¹⁴¹ As for the *prōtos philos* acting as a *ktistēs* in Omboi, Paganini has gone so far as to the early years of 2nd century BC at the latest.¹⁴² If so, both the name of the long dead founder in l. 9 and the chosen position would have evoked distant memories of the community.

The standard adverb ὅπως¹⁴³ introduces the final wish that the benefits received be remembered forever. It is followed by a long lacuna spanning from l. 9 to the first half of l. 10 and ending with ἡ παρά τῶν σεμνοτάτων βασιλέων ἀπομνημονεύ[ι], which no editor has filled yet. Wilcken established ὅπως τ[ι]- with certainty, but the *tau* seems no (longer) visible. Plus, this is the rugged part of the stele. Given the stone's various vicissitudes in its late Prussian life, I cautiously choose not to ignore Hiller von Gaertringen and Schubert's *tau*, which makes some difference. Otherwise, I would have proposed ὅπως [αἰ | περὶ τούτων εὐεργεσίας αἰ γεγονυῖα] ἡ παρά τῶν σεμνοτάτων βασιλέων ἀπομνημονεύ[ων|ται εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον.], 'so that [the acts of benevolence] of the most revered sovereigns [regarding these matters] may be remembered [in perpetuity]' (ll. 9-11). Yet it is obvious - as already noted by Paganini¹⁴⁴ - that the royal benevolence was referred to in this missing part. Wilcken restored the time indication thus rebuilding *ex nihilo* the l. 11, which is now completely lost and may be mistaken for a whole *vacat*-line. The phrase about the *euergesiai* should be compared to the aforementioned dossier *I.Philae* I no. 19, where it reads: [...] ἀναγράφομεν | τὴν γεγονυῖαν ἡμῖν

138 Here is the system of court titles established during Ptolemy V's reign (205-180 BC): *syngenes, tōn prōtōn philōn, archisōmatophylax, tōn philōn, tōn diadochōn, tōn sōmatophylakōn*. Under his son Ptolemy VIII, *tōn homotimōn tois syngenesin* and *tōn isotimōn tois prōtois philois* were added. See Huss 2001, 524, 630 with prev. bibl.

139 Habermann 2004, 338. See also Wilcken 1913, 414; Pfeiffer 2015, no. 28, 148 and Pfeiffer 2020, no. 28, 168. *Contra* Nadig 2007, 95 fn. 93.

140 Wilcken 1913, 414.

141 Lanciers 2018. See also Fischer-Bovet 2020, 138.

142 Paganini 2022, 59-60.

143 See Guarducci, *Epigrafi greca*⁵, 116.

144 Paganini 2022, 180 (translation).

ὕφ' ὕμῶν περὶ τούτων φιλανθρωπίαν, | ἵνα ἡ ὑμετέρα χάρις ἀείμνηστος
ὕπάρχει παρ' αὐτῆι εἰς τὸν | ἅπαντα χρόνον (ll. 37-40).

4.3 The Correspondence

As said, the decree predisposing the exposure of the whole correspondence is followed by two letters from the sovereigns to the gymnasium (ll. 12-15) and to the *stratēgos* Boethos (ll. 16-19). Fortunately, the latter half of the inscription is much less challenging, largely due to Wilcken's early reconstruction and to such documents' conventional form. Again, useful parallels are offered by the near contemporary epigraphic dossiers *I.Philae* I no. 19 and *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 244.

4.3.1 The Letter to the Gymnasium

Although the first *epistolē* might seem a simple anticipation/report of the executive order contained in the second letter, it is nonetheless essential in order to contextualise the whole dossier. In fact, these lines give the most information about the background: namely, about Alkimachos and Themistokles' delegation and Boethos' involvement. Additionally, the remains of the letter headings with the Ptolemaic triad have survived in both cases. Yet this is the only document whose date has survived: (Ἔτους) λε' Γορπιαίου κθ' Φαμενώθ κθ', 'Year 35, 29 Gorpaioi, 29 Phamenoth' (l. 15). Hence, Wilcken ascribed the dossier to 136/135 BC without dwelling on month and day.¹⁴⁵ Lenger was the first to determine the accepted date of 22 april 135 BC.¹⁴⁶

As for the letter heading, the *editor princeps* promptly reconstructed l. 12 as [[Βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος καὶ] βασιλίσσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ ἀδελφὴ [[καὶ βασιλίσσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ γυνὴ]] on the basis of existing parallels.¹⁴⁷ It is in effect the peculiar restoration of an erasion within a lacuna.

Savalli-Lestrade noted that, with the exception of an inscription attesting the disgrace and the successful *damnatio memoriae* of a 'partisan' (*ho tou Neilou hiereus*) of Arsinoe III shortly after 204 BC (?),¹⁴⁸ epigraphic cases of memory proscription are concentrated in the period 179-108 BC i.e. between the beginning of Ptolemy VI's reign and the end of Cleopatra III's co-regency with her son Ptolemy IX.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Wilcken 1913, 411. See also Schroeter 1932, no. 37, 82.

¹⁴⁶ Lenger 1964, nos. 48-49, 118.

¹⁴⁷ See e.g. *I.Philae* I no. 19, ll. 11-12.

¹⁴⁸ *SEG* VIII, 453 (= *SB* V no. 7783 = *I.Delta* I p. 237 no. 8). See Savalli-Lestrade 2009, pl. B no. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Savalli-Lestrade 2009, 143 with prev. bibl. and pl. B.

Significantly enough, the condition of this line reminded Wilcken of the dynastic tensions within the Eighteenth Egyptian dynasty, in which – he considered with a look into pharaonic history – conflicts often led to the deletion of the names of those sovereigns whose authority was disputed or challenged.¹⁵⁰ In particular, Wilcken explicitly compared Ptolemy’s ‘unyielding sister’ Cleopatra II to queen Hatshepsut (ca. 1479-1458 BC) (“auch hier spielt eine tatkräftige Schwester, Hatschepset, eine Hauptrolle”) with a reference, for instance, to the contemporary studies by Kurt Sethe.¹⁵¹ The role played by the famous female pharaoh was a major Egyptological issue at the turn of the 19th and 20th century (one recalls Édouard Naville’s career). So was the elusive – and sometimes odd and incoherent – obliteration or substitution of her names and images under her successors Thutmose III and Amenhotep II.¹⁵² Of course, a far more nuanced scenario is now available,¹⁵³ but the fact remains that, like several other ‘revised’ monuments,¹⁵⁴ the Omboi dossier too retains clear traces of its previous life.

Despite the elimination of the names, the inscription was not completely re-worked. The plural form τῶν σεμνοτάτων βασιλέων (l. 10) and the date (Ἔτους) λε’ Γορπιαίου κθ’ Φαμενώθ κθ’ (l. 15) were spared,¹⁵⁵ so that it is not entirely perspicuous whether the erasers intended to assign thirty-five regnal years to their queen alone. Possibly not: or the plural form in l. 10 would constitute an ever odder exception.

Of course, there are several documents dated to the 1st (132/131 BC), 2nd (131/130 BC), and 3rd (130/129 BC) regnal years of the sole Cleopatra II.¹⁵⁶ Because of this naivete, Otto and Bengtson ruled out the possibility of a direct order from the top.¹⁵⁷ Maehler’s view¹⁵⁸ on Boethos’ plausible involvement has already been presented. Lan-

150 Wilcken 1913, 411-12.

151 Wilcken 1913, 412 fn. 1. See Sethe 1896, 1-57.

152 See e.g. Sethe 1898, esp. 30-50.

153 See Dorman 2005 and Roth 2005.

154 And not necessarily in a violent atmosphere: see e.g. *OGIS* I no. 194 (= *I.Egypte prose* I no. 46) and Rossini 2022, 128-32.

155 See Wilcken 1913, 412 and fn. 2; Otto, Bengtson 1938, 66 fn. 1 and Nadig 2007, 96 fn. 98.

156 See Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 292-8 and fn. 88, 322-33, pl. VI and Lanciers 2020, 30-1.

157 Otto, Bengtson 1938, 66 fn. 1: “Daß diese Tilgung der Königsnamen kaum auf Weisung der Regierung erfolgt sein dürfte, dafür spricht die Singularität dieses Falles sowie die alleinige Ausmeißelung der Namen, während andere auf die Samtherrschaft hinweisende Merkmale stehen geblieben sind”.

158 Maehler 1992, 210.

riers is skeptical about this scenario¹⁵⁹ – differently from Bielman Sánchez,¹⁶⁰ who has also examined in detail the styles of titulature in force between 141/140 and 132 BC, i.e. between Ptolemy VIII’s marriage with Cleopatra III and the outbreak of the dynastic conflict.¹⁶¹

Le mariage entre Ptolémée VIII et Cléopâtre III a placé à la tête du royaume lagide trois souverains réunis dans une configuration familiale pour le moins inhabituelle: un frère et sa soeur, une mère et sa fille, un oncle et sa nièce. Étonnamment, cet étrange trio parvient, durant quelques années au moins, à trouver un *modus vivendi* sur le plan officiel et à administrer les affaires d’Égypte.¹⁶²

The letter headings of the Omboi dossier are just two of many examples of this problem’s final settlement at the conclusion of a confused two-year period (from about the end of 142 BC).¹⁶³ By the early 30s, in fact, Ptolemy VIII was reigning with Cleopatra II ‘the sister’ (*hē adelphē*) and, in third place, Cleopatra III ‘the wife’ (*hē gynē*). Of course, such appositions must be intended and completed as ‘his’ i.e. of Ptolemy himself: king Ptolemy, queen Cleopatra *his* sister, and queen Cleopatra *his* wife. This detail is impliedly tied to the obliteration of the royal names, and to what is said above about altered inscriptions. Actually, the full formula βασιλίσσα Κλεοπάτρα ἡ ἀδελφή was spared in both ll. 12 and 16, thus inadvertently leaving something of Ptolemy’s heavy presence.

It is a widely shared opinion that, in Hölbl’s words, “the agreement” which Ptolemy VIII “reached with Cleopatra II upon his accession to the throne was only for the sake of appearances” and that, “with this act, the king deeply injured his sister and at the same time caused mother and daughter to become the fiercest of rivals”.¹⁶⁴ Searching for a possible cause, Lanciers has now actualized the hypothesis about the sudden explosion of a pent-up tension with a focus on the installation of a special male priest (the *hieros pōlos*) for Cleopatra III just before the breakup.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ Lanciers 2020, 32.

¹⁶⁰ Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 254-5, 292 and Bielman Sánchez 2017, 91.

¹⁶¹ Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 215-71 *passim*.

¹⁶² Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 245.

¹⁶³ See Otto, Bengtson 1938, 31-2; Hölbl 2001, 195-6; Whitehorne 2001, 115; Huss 2001, 606 and fn. 73; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 217-39 and 242-4, pl. V (with a plenty of examples from papyri, temple walls, and inscriptions) and Lanciers 2019.

¹⁶⁴ Hölbl 2001, 195. For this rivalry, see Minas-Nerpel 2011.

¹⁶⁵ Lanciers 2020, 23-9. See also Minas-Nerpel 2011, 67 with prev. bibl.

According to Justin's vivid resume, the people of Alexandria turned against Ptolemy VIII and *statuas eius et imagines detrahit*.¹⁶⁶ The fragile balance of the three *theoi Euergetai* had thus reached a breaking point. Livy's *Periochae* add that the mob set fire to the royal quarters and assigned the throne to Cleopatra II,¹⁶⁷ while Ptolemy *clam Cypron profugit*¹⁶⁸ with Cleopatra III.

According to some, Cleopatra II was supported by "les forces vives de l'hellénisme"¹⁶⁹ as she distanced herself from the rivals by leaving them out of dynastic cult and protocols. Of course, she got the same treatment on the other side of the frontline.¹⁷⁰ Plus, she abandoned the epiclesis of Euergetis and assumed that of Philometor Soteira (tied to the memory of her late brother-husband Ptolemy VI Philometor and of their forefather Ptolemy I Soter)¹⁷¹ with related cult.¹⁷² Savalli-Lestrade interpreted this new course as "une sorte de *damnatio memoriae* préventive et durable"¹⁷³ perfected by much more concrete interventions wherever the unyielding sister had supporters. Here is the case of Omboi: a much less puzzling one when compared to deliberate absences such as, for instance, those of Cleopatra III in the aforementioned dedication from Dakka¹⁷⁴ and of Ptolemy XII's *basilissa* in a recently re-examined *proskynēma* from Philae.¹⁷⁵

The first letter is addressed, with a royal extended gaze, τοῖς ἐκ τοῦ ἐν Ὀμβοῖς γυμνασίῳ, "[to those who are in the gymnasium of Omboi]" (l. 13). Wilcken borrowed this phrase from the preserved part of l. 17. It is an official and conventional formula designating the whole community who held assemblies, took relevant decisions, voted decrees, issued honours for benefactors, drew up *enteuxeis* to

¹⁶⁶ Just. *Epit.* 38.8.12.

¹⁶⁷ Apart from Alexandria, she was recognised e.g. in Elephantine and Hermonthis. See Otto, Bengtson 1938, 94; Huss 2001, 612; Savalli-Lestrade 2009, pl. C no. 1 with prev. bibl.; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 293 and fn. 98, 330 pl. VI and Lanciers 2020, 31-44.

¹⁶⁸ Liv. *Per.* 49.14.

¹⁶⁹ Will 1982, 433.

¹⁷⁰ See Minas 2000, 150-3; Savalli-Lestrade 2009, 146 and pl. C no. 1; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 292-8 and fn. 88, 322-33 pl. VI and Lanciers 2020, 30-1.

¹⁷¹ See Minas 2000, 150-1; Minas-Nerpel 2011, 67 and Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 296-8.

¹⁷² See Carrez-Maratray's (2002; 2006) problematic conclusions in this respect (for comments: *BE* 2007, 555 and Muccioli 2013, 243 fn. 521). See also Minas 2000, 150-1; Hölbl 2001, 197; Huss 2001, 608; Savalli-Lestrade 2009, 146; Eldamaty 2011, 35 and Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 296-8.

¹⁷³ Savalli-Lestrade 2009, 146.

¹⁷⁴ *OGIS* I no. 131. See Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 191-2 fn. 2, 253-4, 259.

¹⁷⁵ *I.Philae* I no. 55. See Rossini 2021.

the sovereigns, and so on.¹⁷⁶ According to Paganini, this formula indicated “not only ephebes and the youth but also the governing body and the adult members who took part in the life and in the running of the gymnasium”.¹⁷⁷

So, it can be inferred that the two obscure delegates charged with handing over the petition to the sovereigns were chosen among *hoi ek tou gymnasiou*. In fact, we learn about Ἀλκιμάχου καὶ Θεμιστοκλέους τῶν παρ’ ὑμῶν ἀποδο[ν]των ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμέτεραν ἔντευξιν, ‘Since Alkimachos and Themistokles have handed over [to us your petition] on your behalf’ (ll. 13-14), with a narrative touch. Legras supposed that they were just two of the *neaniskoi*,¹⁷⁸ which is far more convincing than Bernard’s proposal to identify Alkimachos with the homonymous Colophonian soldier that had served the Ptolemies in Samos no less than a century earlier.¹⁷⁹

Nevertheless, τὴν ἔντευξιν] is precisely Bernard’s restoration.¹⁸⁰ For this purpose, he cited Guéraud’s old book ENTEΥΞΕΙΣ.¹⁸¹ Łajtar’s proposal τὴν ὑμέτεραν ἔντευξιν] is reproduced here.¹⁸² Once more, useful parallels are provided by *I.Philae* I no. 19, ll. 13-14 ([τῆ]ς δευ[τέρ]ης ἡμῖν | [ἐν]τευξ[ε]ως) and *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 244, ll. 34 ([διὰ τῆς ἐντεύξεως]) and 36 ([τῆς δεδομένης ἡμῖν ἐντεύξεως]).

The sovereigns dryly announce: πρὸς Βόηθον τὸν συγγενῆ καὶ στρατηγὸν τὴν ὑποκειμένην | ἐπιστολὴν ἐγράψαμεν, ‘[we have thus written] to Boethos, the kinsman and *stratēgos*, the following [letter]’ (ll. 14-15). It is, in sum, an *ecce!* expressed in a perfectly official way. As for Boethos, the title of ‘kinsman (of the king)’ honoured him as one the most esteemed officials by placing him at the top of the court hierarchy and figuratively associating him, in the poet’s words, with the αἶμα τῶν Λαγιδῶν.¹⁸³ We can assume that the *syngenēs* Boethos wore the insignia of his dignity: the headband (the mitre, similar to the royal diadem)¹⁸⁴ and the golden button.¹⁸⁵ In second place, the ti-

176 See Paganini 2022, 114, 181-3

177 Paganini 2022, 182.

178 Legras 1999, 213.

179 See *supra*.

180 Bernard, *I.Thèbes Syène*, 131, no. 189.

181 Guéraud 1931-32.

182 See *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 118, no. 42.

183 C. Cavafy, Ἀλεξανδρινοὶ βασιλεῖς, 28. For this title, see Láda 2013. See also Huss 2001, 524-5 and Moyer 2011b, 21-4 with prev. bibl. inferring epichoric examples. As for literary occurrences, Arrian (*Anab.* 7.11.6) reports about Alexander the Great’s Persian *syngeneis*, and Livy (30.42.6) mentions Philip V’s *purpurati et propinqui*. As for their potential, see Caes. *BCiv.* 3.103.2: in 49-48 BC, Ptolemy XIII expels Cleopatra VII *per suos propinquos atque amicos*.

184 See Moyer 2011a, 133-5 and 2011b, 15, 36-8.

185 See *I.Egypte métriques* no. 5, ll. 4-5; Joseph *AJ* 13.102 and Moyer 2011b, 32.

tle of *stratēgos* put Boethos in charge with the nome administration, since by then it had integrated its original military nature with other high responsibilities.¹⁸⁶

We can trace Boethos's long career with some degree of certainty. He is attested as *archisōmatophylax* and *stratēgos* of the Thebaid between about 149 and 135 BC, but it is likely that he had been an accomplished high official in the region for many years, as noted by Thomas.¹⁸⁷ By the time the Omboi correspondence took place, Boethos had been admitted among the *prōtoi philoi* and then elevated to the rank of *syngenēs*. Between 134 and Paos' takeover in 130 BC, he was surely *epistratēgos* and *stratēgos* of the Thebaid.¹⁸⁸ It can therefore be observed that Boethos was involved in Omboi while still in his career's ascending phase, but there are no grounds to suspect that his effective managing of things in the metropolis in 135 BC determined in some way his almost coincident appointment as *epistratēgos*.

4.3.2 The Letter to Boethos

The four-lines long *epistolē* to the gymnasium is followed by the remains of the letter which Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III (l. 16 is identical to l. 12) sent to Boethos as an intermediary in charge with putting into effect the granted *philanthrōpa* by means of his authority. In fact, according to Wilcken's restoration, it is addressed [Βοῆθῳ τῷ ἀδελφῷ χαίρειν, 'to our brother Boethos, greetings' (l. 17). Likewise, the dossier *I.Philae* I no. 19 has [Λό]χῳ τῷ ἀδελφῷ χαίρειν (l. 13), while *I.Thebes Syène* no. 244 has both Φορμοῦτι τῷ ἀδελφῷ χαίρειν (l. 26) and Ἐρμοκράτει τῷ ἀδελφῷ χαίρειν (l. 36).

Yet this inscription as a whole is certainly not a fortunate one, as it ends abruptly just before the explicit reaffirmation of the *philanthrōpa* themselves. Always drawing on existing parallels as well as on the survived words ἡμῖν ἐπιστολῆς, Wilcken concluded that the letter to Boethos must have opened with the announcement that a copy of the petition was attached:¹⁸⁹ ἥς ἔγραψαν] ἡμῖν ἐπιστολῆς οἱ ἐκ τοῦ ἐν Ὀμβοῖς γυμνασίου | ὑποτετάχαμέν σοι τὸ ἀντίγραφον, 'We submit

¹⁸⁶ See Thomas 1975, 32-42, 53-4. The bibliography on the Hellenistic *stratēgos* is particularly extensive and ramified: Bengtson's decade-long work, re-edited in 1967-67, should be remembered here (esp. volume 3, devoted to Ptolemaic *stratēgoi* and *epistratēgoi*). For the Ptolemaic case, see shortly Hölbl 2001, 59; Bagnall, Derow *HST*, 286 and Fischer-Bovet 2014, 86, 156-8.

¹⁸⁷ See Thomas 1975, 92.

¹⁸⁸ See the documents listed and discussed in Mooren 1975, 90-1 no. 053, 221 no. 0062 and Thomas 1975, 91-4.

¹⁸⁹ See Wilcken 1913, 413.

to you the copy] of the letter that those who are in the gymnasium of Ombi [wrote] to us' (ll. 17-18).

The rest is beyond our knowledge, since only a few characters have survived in l. 18. However, it can be – and has been – assumed that the second letter was followed by the now lost *antigraphon* of the petition itself.¹⁹⁰ For instance, the core of the second letter copied in *I.Philae* I no. 19 reads as follows:

[Λό]χωι τῶι ἀδελφῶι χαίρειν· [τῆ]ς δευτέρας ἡμῖν | [ἐντεύξει]ως παρὰ τῶν ἱερέων τῆς ἐν τῶι Ἀβάτῳι καὶ ἐν | [Φίλ]αις Ἰσιδος ὑποτετά[χαμ]έν σοι τὸ ἀντίγρα[φον]· | [κ]αλῶς οὖν ποιήσεις συντάξας, καθάπερ ἄξι[οῦσι, μηδέ]||[ν]α ἐνοχλεῖν αὐτοὺς κτλ. (ll. 13-17)

And the second letter registered in *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 244:

[...] τῆς γεγραμμένης παρ' ἡμῶν ἐπιστολῆς πρὸς τοὺς ἐν Ἐλεφαντίνῃ ἱερεῖ[ς] κτλ. ὑποτετάχαμ[έν] σοι τὸ ἀντίγραφο|ν· καλῶς οὖν ποιήσεις συντάξας προνοηθῆν[αι] ὅπως κτλ. (ll. 27-9)

According to the same pattern, an invitation by the sovereigns to give course to their grant would have followed. Wilcken only restored καλῶς οὖν ποιήσεις. Bernand relied excessively on *I.Philae* I no. 19, l. 16 and on *I.Thèbes Syène* no. 244, l. 29 thus uncautiously proposing καλῶς οὖν ποιήσεις συντάξας προνοηθῆναι ὅπως τεύξονται ----,¹⁹¹ which does not match with the remaining characters]ΤΟΙΣΕΙΣ[--] Δ[of l. 18.¹⁹² I reproduce here Piejko's ingenious reconstruction:¹⁹³ καλῶς ἂν ποιήσεις κατακολουθήσας] τοῖς εἰσ[δε]δ[ομένοις] (my punctuation), to which I add τοῦτοις: '[Therefore you might do well to comply with] which [is handed here]'.¹⁹³

5 Conclusions

It goes without saying that, due to its poor state of preservation, the Ombi dossier gives rise to more doubts than certainties. However, it is not an inert testimony representing itself like a pinned insect. Rather, these lines are quite indicative, even if not instructive, on the topic of memory proscription as an actual instrument in dynastic conflicts.

In this sense, although belonging to the history of the studies, Wilcken's early and optimistic reference to the "tatkräftige Schwester"

¹⁹⁰ See Wilcken 1913, 413; *I.Mus. Varsovie*, 118, no. 42 and Nadig 2007, 94 fn. 90.

¹⁹¹ See Bernand, *I.Thèbes Syène*, 131, no. 189.

¹⁹² According to Wilcken:]τοῖς εἰσ[-]λ[.

¹⁹³ Piejko 1990, 154.

Hatschepsut subtly relates to Bielman Sánchez's focus on the inscription as part of a wider research on Cleopatra II's queenship, its perception, and recognition during the civil war. As importantly stated by Minas-Nerpel with a special reference to the royal lists,

die *damnatio memoriae* ist ein Mittel, dessen man sich bereits im pharaonischen Ägypten in den Königslisten bediente, indem man z.B. die Regierungen Hatschepsuts und Echnatons nachträglich auslöschte. Unbequeme Herrscher konnte man so der Vergessenheit anheimfallen lassen und dadurch ein verzerrtes Bild der Herrschaftsabfolge bieten. Dies taten auch die Ptolemäer, indem sie gerade in der zweiten Hälfte ihrer Herrschaftsepoche Könige und Königinnen je nach politischem Bedarf und wechselnder Hegemonie ein- und ausgrenzten.¹⁹⁴

Indeed, a Greek gymnasium in the Egyptian *chōra* was not an Egyptian temple. Cleopatra II's active supporters were not Thutmose's posthumous erasers. Nor the material dimension of defacing images and inscriptions, with all its possibly inconsistent results, may be intended to justify the link between Cleopatra II and Hatschepsut¹⁹⁵ on a historical basis. In this sense, when it comes to cultural transfers, what may be true for an actual Egyptian sacerdotal decree issued in Greek language under Cleopatra VII such as the Kallimachos decree from Thebes¹⁹⁶ – a non-literary example of Stephens' 'seeing double'¹⁹⁷ –, does not seem to apply to what motivated the defacement of the Omboi dossier in its Greek context.

Wilcken's millennia-spanning comparison shall be counterbalanced by a closer one. As in Hatschepsut's case, the worst suppressions of Cleopatra II's name occurred after her death (115 BC),¹⁹⁸ i.e. no less than nine years after the formal reconciliation of the Ptolemaic trio.¹⁹⁹ There is *consensus* that such deletion occurred, in Huss' words,²⁰⁰ at the behest of her 'abysmally hateful' daughter

¹⁹⁴ Minas 2000, 180 (see also p. 76).

¹⁹⁵ Minas-Nerpel (2000, 150) also mentioned Twosret, the queen regnant of the Nineteenth dynasty.

¹⁹⁶ *OGIS* I no. 194 (= *I.Egypte prose* I no. 46). See Rossini 2022.

¹⁹⁷ Stephens 2003.

¹⁹⁸ Eldamaty 2011, 37 tried to prove that Cleopatra II only died in 108-107 BC, thus granting her with an astounding tenure as *basilissa* of about sixty-two years.

¹⁹⁹ See Otto, Bengtson 1938, 103-5 ("nur muß man den Glauben völlig ausschalten, daß es sich damals um eine wirkliche Versöhnung gehandelt habe"); Will 1982, 435-7; Hazzard 2000, 138-9; Hölbl 2001, 201; Whitehorne 2001, 119; Huss 2001, 615; Minas-Nerpel 2011, 68; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 341-5; 2016, 170; Bielman Sánchez 2017, 103-5; Pfeiffer 2017, 161 and Lanciers 2020, 49-52.

²⁰⁰ Huss 2001, 640.

Cleopatra III. The latter's decision resulted, for instance, in Cleopatra II's longlasting deletion from the official list of divinised sovereigns.²⁰¹ The Greek version of a fragmentary trilingual decree dated to 112/111 BC, in which *hē thea Euergetis hē kai Philomētōr Sōteira* mentioned right after *ho theos Euergetēs* Ptolemy VIII is Cleopatra III herself, is frequently quoted in this regard:

Βασιλεϋόντων Κλεοπάτρας κα[ι] Πτολε[μαίου, θεῶν] | Φιλομητόρων
Σωτή[ρ]ων, ἔτους ἕκτου, [Φ]αφ[φὶ ..], | ἐπὶ ἱερέως Ἀρτεμιδώ[ρο]υ τοῦ
Σωτίωνος Ἀλ[εξάνδρου] | καὶ θεῶν Σωτή[ρ]ων καὶ θεῶν Ἀδελφῶν
καὶ θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν καὶ θε[ῶν] Φιλοπα[τόρων] καὶ θεῶν Ἐπιφανῶν
κ[αὶ] | θε[οῦ] Εὐπάτορος καὶ θεοῦ Φιλομήτορος καὶ θεοῦ Νέου | [Φι]
λοπάτο[ρος] καὶ [θεοῦ] Εὐεργ[έτου] καὶ θεᾶς Εὐεργετιδ[ος] | [τῆς] καὶ
[Φιλ]ομή[τορος] Σωτ[ε]ρί[ας] κτλ. (Pl. 1-8)²⁰²

A serious measure, indeed. Some may remember, for instance, the many issues posed by the Abydos king list composed at the time of the Ramessid dynasty, as we know that the banishment from the cult was a clearly intentional measure to be interpreted as an actual political demise of members of the royal family.²⁰³ In comparison with Cleopatra II's final obliteration, the Omboi erasures might emerge as the outcome of some minor zeal. Cavafy, the Alexandrian poet, would perhaps have captured it better than scholarly hypotheses.

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201 See generally Otto, Bengtson 1938, 138-9, 144; Thompson 1989, 699-700 (cautious); Minas 2000, 155-6; 158 ("Durch die Übernahme der Epitheta der älteren Kleopatra versuchte die Tochter ihren Triumph über die verhaßte Gegnerin zu dokumentieren"); Hölbl 2001, 287; Huss 2001, 640 and fn. 115 with prev. bibl.; Savalli-Lestrade 2009, 147 and pl. C no. 3; Minas-Nerpel 2011, 68-9. For the epichoric context, see e.g. Minas 2000, 26-7, 29-31.

202 *OGIS* II no. 739 (= *SB V* no. 8931 = *I.Egypte prose* I no. 26 = *I.Alexandrie ptol.* no. 30). See the bibl. *supra* (esp. Minas 2000, 156).

203 So Minas 2000, 180.

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