

Dedication to Pan Euodos by an Archisomatophylax Loyal to Ptolemy VIII

[AXON 508]

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Abstract In 130 BC, the Cretan archisomatophylax Soterichos made a complex dedication to Pan of Fair Paths (Euodos) on behalf of Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra III, and their children. From a historical point of view, this Upper Egyptian inscription testifies the dynastic conflict between Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II, but also the movement of men and goods in the Egyptian Eastern Desert at a crucial moment in Ptolemaic history. Furthermore, it can also be interpreted as a revealing autobiographical statement and a certificate of loyalty in which the contours of the god (an *interpretatio Graeca* of Min) and the king seem to merge together.

Keywords Archisomatophylax. Soterichos. Dedication. Pan. Euodos. Ptolemy VIII. Cleopatra III. Dynastic conflict. Cleopatra II. Egyptian Eastern Desert. Loyalty. Interpretatio Graeca.



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Object type Stele; grey marble; 33 to 35 × 24 × 1 to 3 cm. Intact. A flag-shaped marble slab of contained size. The upper, left, and lower sides are intact; the right side is irregularly broken with the consequent loss of very few characters (one letter at the end of ll. 1, 4, 6, 7, and 10; two at l. 9; three at l. 2; four at l. 3; ll. 8 and 11-13 are complete). Minor scratches on ll. 7-8. The text – an easily readable, well-written one – is thus reconstructible with adequate precision. Undecorated.

Chronology 130/129 a.C. [probably on 2 October 130 BC].

Type of inscription Dedication.

Findspot and circumstances Egypt, Coptos (Qift).

Preservation place Egypt, Alexandria, Greco-Roman Museum, inv. no. 41.

Script

- Structure: epigraphic prose.
- Layout: the design and the layout of the lines as a whole are regular and accurate. The descending writing is counterbalanced by the perfect alignment of ll. 1-11; ll. 12-13 are equally neatly indented by 2 cm. There is a gap of about 2 cm between the upper and left edges and the corresponding portion of text. The date (l. 13) is preceded by a small *vacat*.
- Execution technique: engraving.
- Special letters: Α *alpha*; Ζ *zeta*; Θ *theta*; ο *omicron*; Φ *phi*; Ω *omega*.
- Letter size: ± 1.
- Line spacing: ± 0,4.
- Palaeographic features: Α with angled crossbar; broad Ε and Σ; Ζ has a perpendicular medial stroke; Θ is a point in a circle; Ο small or very small, set in mid-line; the Π's upper bar is seldom protruding to the right; Ω not very roundish nor symmetrical.
- Arrangement: progressive.

Language *Koine*.

Lemma Botti 1893, no. 2461; Strack 1894, no. 5 [Mahaffy 1895, 185, 394-6; Strack 1897, 257 no. 109; Michel, *Recueil* no. 1233; Meyer 1900, 80 fn. 287 (ll. 4-5), 90 fn. 329 (ll. 4-11); *OGIS* no. 132; Wilcken 1912, 264 (ll. 5-11); Kortenbeutel 1931, 44-5 (ll. 5-11); Otto, Bengtson 1938, 214-15 (ll. 4-11); Préaux 1939, 258 and fn. 3 (ll. 7-11) (also p. 364); Peremans 1946, 152 (ll. 5-11); *SB* V.3 no. 8881 (see also V.4 no. 8881, 550); Bengtson 1964-7, III: 107 fn. 2 (ll. 4-11); Fraser 1972, II: 309 fn. 377 (also I: 180); Mooren 1975, 158-9, 222 (ll. 4-11); Wilcken 2010, 415 (ll. 5-11); Gates-Foster 2012, 200-1]; *I.Brescia* no. 37[b] and pl. X, no. 27; *I.Pan du désert* no. 86 (also pp. 272, 275) [Łajtar 1999, 61-6; *Pros. Ptol.* X no. E370 (ll. 4-11); Hennig 2003, 170-2 fn. 131 (ll. 5-11)]. Cf. Botti 1900, 258 no. 21 (translation); *OGIS* II, 544; Wilcken 1906, 325; Rostovtzeff 1908, 305; Fitzler 1910, 48-51; Martin 1911, 62-4; Reinach 1911, 410 fn. 5; Lesquier 1918, 420 fn. 1, 421; Heichelheim 1925, 56, 88; Wilcken 1925, 101; Bevan 1927, 155; Rostovtzeff 1941, II: 924; van Effenterre 1948, 196 fn.

1; Launey 1949-50, I: 272-3; *I.Cret.* IV, 25; Préaux 1952, 275; Meredith 1953, 104; Fraser 1954, 137; Thomas 1975, 44, 58-9, 71, 72 fn. 132; Drew-Bear 1980, 156 fn. 5; Spyridakis 1981, no. 121; Will 1982, 431; Sidebotham 1986, 6 fn. 30; Walbank 1993, 203-4 (partial translation); Yoyotte, Charvet 1997, 254 (translation); Aufrère 1998, 13-14 (translation); BE 2000, no. 713; Chaniotis 2005, 151; De Romanis 2006, 132-4, 163, 165; Molina Marín 2010, 166 fn. 48 (translation); Sidebotham 2011, 12-13, 30, 35, 63, 209 fn. 15; Angelucci 2012, 220; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 299-300, 311, 330; Evers 2016, 109; Magdy 2017, 192 (translation); Gallo 2018, 299; Cobb 2018, 18, 35 fn. 14; Schneider 2018, 138, 153 fn. 17; Redon 2018, fnn. 20, 68; Woźniak 2019, 399; Bowman, Crowther 2020, 308, no. 590; Vallarino 2023, 80-1.

Text

Ἐπεὶ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου κα[ῖ]
 βασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας τῆς γυναι[κός],
 θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν, καὶ τῶν τέκνων ἀ[ύτῶν]
 Σωτήριχος Ἰκαδίωνος Γορτύνιος, τῶ[ν]
 ἀρχισωματοφυλάκων, ὁ ἀπεσταλ- 5
 μένος ὑπὸ Παῶτος τοῦ συγγενοῦς κα[ῖ]
 στρατηγοῦ τῆς Θηβαΐδος ἐπὶ τὴν συναγ[ω]-
 γὴν τῆς πολυτ[ε]λοῦς λιθείας καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν
 πλῶν καὶ παρεξόμενος τὴν ἀσφάλειαν το[ῖς]
 κατακομίζουσι ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ Κοπτῶν ὄρου[ς] 10
 τὰ λιβανωτικά φορτία καὶ ἄλλα ξένια
 Πανὶ Εὐόδῳ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις θεοῖς
 πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις, ν. (ἔτους) μα', Θῶθ ι'.

Apparatus 1 KA [lapis | κα[ῖ] Strack, quem omnes seqq. || 2 ΓΥΝΑΙ[ῖ] lapis; iotae dimidium superest | ΓΥΝΑΙΚ[ῖ] ed. pr. | γυναι[κός] Strack | γυναι[κός] Dittenberger | γυναι[κός] Bernand || 3 ΤΕΚΝΩΝΑ [lapis | ἀ[ύτῶν] Strack, quem omnes seqq. || 4 ΣΩΤΗΡΙΚΟΣ ed. pr. | Σωτήριχος Strack | ΤΩ[ῖ] lapis; omega pes tantum superest | τ[ῶν] Strack | τῶ[ν] Bernand || 5-6 ΑΡΧΙΣΩΜΑΤΟΦΥΛΑΚΩΝΑΠΕΣΤΑ[ῖ]-]ΜΕΝΟΣ ed. pr., Mahaffy || 5 lambdae dimidium superest || 5-6 ὁ ἀπεσταλ[λ]όμενος Strack | ὁ ἀπεσταλ[λ]όμενος Bernand || 6 ΣΥΝΓΕΝΟΥΣ lapis | ΚΑ[ῖ] [lapis | κα[ῖ] Strack, quem omnes seqq. || 7-8 συναγ[ω]γὴν Strack, Dittenberger | συναγ[ω]γὴν Bernand, gammae linea verticalis tantum superest || 9 ΤΟ[ῖ] lapis | το[ῖς] Strack, quem omnes seqq. || 10 Κοπτῶν ut in Strabone habetur (ex Vallarino) | ΟΡΟΥ ed. pr. | ὄρου[ς] Strack, quem omnes seqq. || 11 ΞΕΝΙΑ ed. pr. | ξένια Strack, Michel | ξένια Wilcken, Dittenberger, Breccia, et cf. Meredith 1953, 104 | ξένια Bernand | A certissimum || 13 LMA lapis | ΘΩΘ[ῖ] lapis | θυθ Mahaffy.

Traduction On behalf of King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra the wife, the Benefactor Gods, and of their children, the chief bodyguard Soterichos son of Ikadion of Gortyn – sent by Paos, kinsman (of the king) and *strategos* of the Thebaid, in order to take charge of the gathering of precious stones, to tend to the ships, and to provide security for those conveying incense and other cargoes of foreign goods from the mountain opposite Coptos –, (made this dedication) to Pan of Fair Paths and all the other gods and goddesses. Year 41, Thoth 1.

Links

Trismegistos (TM) Places: <https://www.trismegistos.org/geo/index.php>.

Commentary

1 Introduction

Signs of popular and personal piety along crucial paths – one might think of mountain trails with their wayside shrines, or European bridges guarded by statues of the Nepomucene – are not only a modern trait. As exemplified by the mid-Hellenistic dedication examined here, ancient travellers passing through the hostile wilderness of the Egyptian Eastern Desert, and not only it, hoped above all to *euodoun* ('to have a successful journey').¹ Therefore, they might find a friend in a complex, stratified, and rather peculiar deity whose raised arm was poised ready to defend and to smite:² a trusting relationship of which most surviving examples are private devotional inscriptions from the Greco-Roman times.³

Having a successful journey was not all that the Cretan *archisomatophylax* Soterichos son of Ikadion,⁴ an officer⁵ with a career in the service of the Ptolemaic state, was wishing for when he was

ὁ ἀπεσταλ|μένος [...] ἐπὶ τὴν συναγ[ω]|γὴν τῆς πολυτ[ε]λοῦς
λιθείας καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν | πλῶν καὶ παρεξόμενος τὴν ἀσφάλειαν
το[ῖς] | κατακομίζουσι ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ Κοπτὸν ὄρου[ς] | τὰ λιβανωτικὰ
φορτία καὶ τᾶλλα ξένια (ll. 5-11)

sent [...] in order to take charge of the gathering of precious stones, to tend to the ships, and to provide security for those conveying incense and other cargoes of foreign goods from the mountain opposite Coptos.⁶

¹ See Liddell, Scott, Jones 1996, s.v. “εὐοδόω”.

² See Wilkinson 1991-92.

³ See, in general, Adams 2007 and Mairs 2010.

⁴ *Pros. Ptol.* I no. 205; II nos. 2138 and 4321; VI no. 16310, X no. E370. See also Fitzler 1910, 49-50; Reinach 1911, 410 fn. 5; Heichelheim 1925, 56, 88; Peremans 1946, 152-3; van Effenterre 1948, 196 fn. 1 (erroneously); Launey 1949-50, I: 272-3; Guarducci, *I.Cret.* IV, 25 (“quem Thebaidis praetor miserat ad gemmas in meridianis regni partibus colligendas atque ad illos custodiendos qui aromata aliasque merces a monte Copto ad sinum Arabicum transferrent”); Fraser 1972, I: 180; Mooren 1975, 158-9 no. 0225, 222 no. 0082; Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 255 no. 86 with prev. bibl.; Spyridakis 1981, no. 121 and Hennig 2003, 171 fn. 127. For his title(s), see *infra*.

⁵ A mercenary captain? So Walbank 1993, 204. See also *infra*.

⁶ If not otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.

On 2 October 130 BC,⁷ Soterichos left this dedication to Pan of Fair Paths (*Euodos*) and all the other gods and goddesses⁸ on behalf (*hyper*)⁹ of King Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, his second wife Cleopatra III, “the younger daughter of his sister and wife who was thus his own niece and step-daughter”,¹⁰ and their children. These *tekna* were: the future Ptolemy IX Soter II, Ptolemy X Alexander, Tryphaena, Cleopatra IV, and Cleopatra V Selene, all born between the end of the 140s and the mid-130s.¹¹

The noisy absence of Ptolemy’s sister-wife Cleopatra II, then living and breathing, will be discussed in detail *infra*.

Fortunately for our understanding, Soterichos’ inscription is, in Gates-Foster’s words, an actual and “full-fledged catalogue of responsibilities” with concrete “references to mining, to the watching of maritime shipping, and to the existence of caravans bound for Coptos”.¹² Therefore, Soterichos’ testimony is fully included among the important documents¹³ of Ptolemy VIII’s second reign (145-116 BC).¹⁴

Expanding on this concept, as will be seen, my opinion is that the document examined here can be defined as a sort of autobiographical statement, and that its religious profile is likely to show interesting links to its historical content, whereas the only thing we know for certain about Soterichos’ political feeling is his loyalty to King Ptolemy VIII during the internecine war of 132/131-125/124 BC.¹⁵

It is also in the light of this fact that, for instance, Bielman Sánchez has recently reconsidered Soterichos’ dedication within her reassess-

⁷ I follow Bernard’s dating (*I.Pan du désert*, 254 no. 86) (also followed by e.g. Lajtar 1999, 62; Aufrère 1998, 13 and De Romanis 1996, 132). For the alternative 4 October 130 BC, see e.g. Fitzler 1910, 48; Mooren 1975, 158 no. 0225; Thomas 1975, 59 fn. 35, 92 n. 63; Hennig 2003, 170 and Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 299, 311, 330. For a discussion of the date, see Lajtar 1999, 65-6.

⁸ See *infra*.

⁹ Fassa (2015) and Caneva (2016) have thoroughly examined this kind of dedications. See also the reflections in Bingen 1989, 31-2. See also Jim 2014, with a broader scope.

¹⁰ Hölbl 2001, 195.

¹¹ See Bernard, *I.Pan du désert*, 255 no. 86. See also Dittenberger, *OGIS* I, 213 no. 132. In general, see e.g. Mooren 1988.

¹² Gates-Foster 2012, 201.

¹³ Gates-Foster 2012, 201.

¹⁴ Euergetes II ruled Egypt from 170/169 to 163 BC and, again, from 145 to 116; he also ruled Cyprus and Cyrene from 170/169 to 116. For the chronology of his reign, see Samuel 1962, 140-3, 145-7; Pestman 1967, 48-65 and Skeat 1969, 13-15.

¹⁵ 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; Mittag 2003, 179-81; 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; Lanciers 2020 and Honigman, Veisse 2021, 323-6.

ment of Ptolemaic queenship as well as of its perception and recognition during the violent dynastic/marital crisis that marked the central years of Ptolemy VIII's second reign.¹⁶ This crucial state of affairs is the surest key to understanding this inscription's major point of interest from a historical and local perspective. In Bielman Sánchez's words, in fact, this stone "témoigne de la perte de contrôle de Cléopâtre II sur la Thébaïde dès la deuxième année de la guerre civile".¹⁷

2 Description

The rectangular stele bearing Soterichos' dedication is a grey-flecked, white marble¹⁸ slab of contained size (33 to 35 cm wide, 24 cm high, 1 to 3 cm deep). It has belonged to the collection of the Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria (no. inv. 41) since its foundation in 1892.

Fortunately, such an "extraordinarily descriptive"¹⁹ text insists on a well-preserved support. The upper, left, and lower sides, and thus the corresponding characters, have suffered no major damage; they are lightly bumped. Only ll. 7-8 and the lower left corner are affected by some unimportant holes and scratches. The right side is entirely broken in a jagged way. The little monument has thus the shape of a flag. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that only a few, easily reconstructed characters are lost (only one letter at the end of ll. 1, 4, 6, 7, and 10; two at l. 9; three at l. 2; four at l. 3; ll. 8 and 11-13 are complete), also thanks to the space left between the upper (2,5 cm) and left (3 cm) edges and the corresponding portion of text.²⁰ There is reason to believe that only a few centimetres have been lost.

The text is written all over the slab. Generally speaking, the letters are correctly as well as deeply engraved, with an average height of 1 cm (compare the *maximum* of l. 5 to the *minimum* on l. 10). The line spacing is about 0,4 cm. The design and the layout of the lines as a whole are regular and accurate. The sensibly descending writing, which is more evident in the first half of the text, is counterbalanced by the perfect alignment of ll. 1-11. Ll. 12-13 are equally neatly indented by 2 cm, so as to highlight the dative Πανὶ Εὐόδωι κτλ. and the date. The latter is preceded by a small *vacat*, roughly the

¹⁶ Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 299-300, 311, 330.

¹⁷ Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 311. So already Will 1982, 431 (but "de la Haute-Égypte").

¹⁸ Some studies say it is a limestone slab (e.g. Łajtar 1999, 62 and Bowman, Crowther 2020, 308 no. 590). I rely on the autopsy descriptions by Botti, Breccia, and Bernand.

¹⁹ Gates-Foster 2012, 200.

²⁰ It reduces to about 1 cm in the lower edge.

size of one letter, no doubt to further emphasise the graphic presence of the deities.

On a closer inspection, *alpha* has an angled crossbar; *epsilon* and *sigma* are broad; *zeta* has a perpendicular medial stroke; *theta* is a point in a circle; the *omicron*'s size varies from small (e.g. l. 1: Πτολεμαίου) to very small (e.g. l. 11: φορτία), as does its distance from the baseline; in a few cases, the *pi*'s upper bar is sensibly protruding to the right (l. 1: the royal name, and l. 9: πλῶν and παρεξόμενος); *rho* is generally small; *phi* has a small loop. *Omega* was the stone-cutter's weak point, as it is not very roundish nor elegant, and sometimes not even symmetrical.

3 History

As mentioned above, Soterichos' dedication made its appearance in the history of the studies as a direct consequence of the foundation of the Greco-Roman Museum (Musée Greco-Romain) of Alexandria in 1892²¹ (a "phenomenon of local euergetism").²² In fact, our primary source of information for (the immediate aftermath of) this stele's coming to light is the concise entry that the Italian Egyptologist Giuseppe Botti, then director of the Museum, inserted in his *Notice des monuments exposés au Musée Greco-Romain d'Alexandrie* (1893).²³

The important "Avant-propos" to this volume only informs us that

la première collection publique d'antiquités grecques et romaines à Alexandrie fut réunie par l'Institut Egyptien; elle provenait de dons de généreux particuliers. Elle comprenait une collection de monnaies dûment classifiées, un certain nombre d'inscriptions latines et grecques provenant de la nécropole orientale, [...] etc. On put voir cette collection jusqu'en 1878, et, si elle ne constituait pas un Musée proprement dit, elle en était certainement le noyau. [...] Lorsque l'Institut Égyptien se transporta au Caire, la ville d'Alexandrie perdit cette collection. [...] Auguste Mariette [...] avait, il est vrai, réservé dans l'étroit Musée de Boulaq [*scil.* in Cairo] une pièce pour les antiquités grecques et romaines; mais son activité, qui s'était portée de préférence sur les monuments colossaux de l'Égypte ancienne, s'affaiblissait désormais [...]. [Gaston Maspero] enrichit et augmenta le département gré-

²¹ For this too little known collection, see Botti 1893, iii-ix (reprinted in Botti 1900, iii-ix); Empereur 2000; Seif el-Din 2010; Savvopoulos, Bianchi 2012, 11-14; Chiti 2018 and Piacentini 2018. In general, see also Bonacasa 1989. 292-4.

²² Chiti 2018, 72 with prev. bibl.

²³ Botti 1893.

co-romain créé par Mariette en y appliquant, entre autres, les résultats des fouilles d'Alexandrie, de Naucratis, de Daphné, d'Antinoé et de Ptolémaïs. [...] ces collections, réunies par l'activité de M. Maspero et de M.E. Grébaut, son successeur à la Direction générale des Antiquités, ne semblaient pas être à leur vraie place; elles étaient comme écrasées par les masses monolithes et les colosses des anciens Pharaons; Alexandrie [...] semblait de son côté désignée pour devenir le siège d'un Musée Gréco-Romain.²⁴

Botti inserted Soterichos' dedication among the Ptolemaic *actes publics*, as the first of only two inscriptions belonging to Ptolemy VIII's reign.²⁵ The diplomatic transcript is followed by a few lines of commentary (or better, a paraphrase):

Sous le règne de Ptolémée VII[I] et de la reine Cléopâtre, sa femme, dieux bienfaisants, et de leurs enfants, le nommé *Sotêrikos*, fils de *Ikadiôn*, natif de Gortynie (Crète) et l'un des commandants de la Garde royale, envoyé en mission au Synai par Paotis stratège de la Thébaïde, ayant accompli à souhait sa tâche, a dédié cette pierre à Pan, *dieu du bon chemin*, et aux autres dieux, et aux autres déesses.²⁶

The first to comment extensively on the stone was the eminent Ptolemaic scholar Max Strack. In an 1894 article in the *Mitteilungen* of the German Archaeological Institut at Athens, he shared an improved version of Botti's text (e.g. Σωτήρικος > Σωτήριχος), along with the first critical transcription and translation.²⁷ The former also appeared in his seminal 1897 book *Die Dynastie der Ptolemäer*²⁸ (but had already been printed in another famous work of that time: Mahaffy's *The Empire of the Ptolemies*).²⁹

²⁴ Botti 1893, iii-v (reprinted in Botti 1900, iii-v).

²⁵ Botti 1893, no. 2461.

²⁶ Reprinted, without the Greek text, in Botti 1900, 258 no. 21 (italics in the original).

²⁷ Strack 1894, 229-30 no. 5. Strack's diplomatic transcription also reproduces the original layout (but the indenting of l. 11 is incorrect).

²⁸ Strack 1897, 257 no. 109.

²⁹ Mahaffy 1895, 394 fn. 1 (also discussed at pp. 185, 394-6).

3.1 The Dynastic Conflict

We know today that the text is our first direct reference, since the mid-3rd century BC,³⁰ to the Ptolemaic administration of the Egyptian Eastern Desert.³¹

From a more political point of view, however, Strack immediately acknowledged this inscription's historical value thus ascribing it to the cultural and political climate of the 132/131-125/124 BC dynastic struggle,³² which he could already outline with some confidence.³³ In fact, Strack was the first to ascribe it to those vicissitudes - on a not merely chronological but factual level. He knew that, by the year 41, Thoth 1 (l. 13), the reconciliation between the royal siblings had not yet taken place.³⁴

However, it should be noted that those were years when Mahaffy could still interpret Cleopatra II's absence in the following way: the "sister, whom he [*scil.* Ptolemy VIII] had so maltreated, must have been either in exile or dead, for if not, she would have been mentioned along with her daughter"!³⁵ This makes it clear that both him and Strack³⁶ deemed Soterichos' dedication not as a detail in the mixed picture of the country during the dynastic struggle, but as a proof in favour of Ptolemy's full control of Egypt in 130/129 BC and against the traditional date (127/126) of his return to Alexandria.³⁷ Actually, a point of interest of Soterichos' inscription is precisely the attention it attracted during this phase of Ptolemaic studies.

Now we know better. An inscription from Delos informs us of Ptolemy VIII's capture of Alexandria in 127 BC, when Cleopatra II had already left the city.³⁸ This is not the only reason why this text fits into the study of the 130 BC dedication. It also attests that Ῥωμαίων [...] ναύκληροι | καὶ ἔμποροι (ll. 1-2) frequented the port of Alexandria at least three years after Soterichos' mission. Thanks to this coincidence in time, De Romanis linked the 127 BC inscription to Soterichos' account as a proof of the interest of Roman and Italic (*Rhoma-*

³⁰ See the interesting texts examined in Gates-Foster 2012, 198-9 with prev. bibl.

³¹ So De Romanis 1996, 132 and Gates-Foster 2012, 201. For the Eastern Desert under the Ptolemies, see in general Redon 2018.

³² See *supra*.

³³ Strack 1894, 230-1.

³⁴ Strack 1894, 231.

³⁵ Mahaffy 1895, 395.

³⁶ Strack 1894, 230.

³⁷ See also Mahaffy 1895, 395 fn. 1.

³⁸ *I.Délos* IV no. 1526. For a recent commentary, see Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 304-5.

ioi) merchants for the goods exported from the Red Sea area.³⁹ In this sense, it could also be regarded as a piece in the history of late-Republican *luxus* (*gemmae, unguenta exotica, murra*,⁴⁰ ornamental *testudines*, etc.).⁴¹

The selective mention of the royal family has attracted relatively less critical attention than the mission narrated. It must be stressed that Soterichos' pious thoughts⁴² only addressed to Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra III 'the wife' (*he gyne*) - not to Cleopatra II, commonly referred to as 'the sister' (*he adelphe*). Therefore, as is the case with other inscriptions,⁴³ Soterichos' act of piety clearly testifies a breakup of the peculiar "trio au pouvoir".⁴⁴ Bielman Sánchez, for one, has 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 *stasis*.⁴⁵

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 sœur, 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.⁴⁶

By the early 30s, Ptolemy VIII Benefactor (*Euergetes*)⁴⁷ was reigning with Cleopatra II 'the sister' and, in third place, Cleopatra III 'the wife'. 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. In the case examined, l. 2 is entirely and somewhat neatly occupied by the full formula βασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας τῆς γυναι[κός].

³⁹ De Romanis 1996, 162-3. See already Kortenbeutel 1931, 44.

⁴⁰ See e.g. *I.Kanaïs* no. 72.

⁴¹ De Romanis 1996, 164-5 with prev. bibl.

⁴² For the religious and social implications of such intercessions, see in general Caneva 2016, 126-34.

⁴³ See Rossini 2022b.

⁴⁴ 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).

⁴⁵ Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 215-71 *passim*.

⁴⁶ Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 245.

⁴⁷ See Muccioli 2013, 184-9 with prev. bibl. For the time when Ptolemy VIII adopted this epithet, see Lanciers 1988 and, *contra*, Huss 2001, 599 fn. 18; Nadig 2007, 35-9 (also pp. 52-7).

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".⁴⁸ Searching for a possible cause, Lanciers has now actualised the hypothesis about the sudden explosion of a pent-up tension with a focus on the installation of a special male priest (the *hieros polos*) for Cleopatra III just before the breakup.⁴⁹

According to Justin's vivid resume, the people of Alexandria turned against Ptolemy VIII and *statuas eius et imagines detrahit*.⁵⁰ 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,⁵¹ while Ptolemy *clam Cypron profugit*⁵² with Cleopatra III.

According to some, Cleopatra II was supported by "les forces vives de l'hellénisme"⁵³ as she distanced herself from the rivals by leaving them out of dynastic cult and protocols. Of course, she got the same treatment.⁵⁴ 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)⁵⁵ with related cult.⁵⁶ Savalli-Lestrade interpreted this new course as "une sorte de *damnatio memoriae* préventive et durable"⁵⁷ perfected by much more concrete interventions wherever the unyielding sister had supporters. Here is the case of the 135 BC epigraphic dossier from Omboi (Upper Egypt):⁵⁸ a much less puzzling inscription

⁴⁸ Hölbl 2001, 195. For this rivalry, see Minas-Nerpel 2011.

⁴⁹ Lanciers 2020, 23-9. See also Minas-Nerpel 2011, 67 with prev. bibl.

⁵⁰ Just. *Epit.* 38.8.12.

⁵¹ Apart from Alexandria, she was recognized 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.

⁵² Liv. *Per.* 49.14.

⁵³ Will 1982, 433.

⁵⁴ 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.

⁵⁵ See Minas 2000, 150-1; Minas-Nerpel 2011, 67 and Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 296-8.

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ Savalli-Lestrade 2009, 146.

⁵⁸ See Rossini 2022b.

when compared to deliberate absences such as, for instance, those of Cleopatra III in a dedication from Dakka (Lower Nubia)⁵⁹ and of Ptolemy XII's *basilissa* in a recently re-examined *proskynema* from Philae.⁶⁰

While the elder Cleopatra is absent from this inscription, at l. 3 the couple Ptolemy VIII-Cleopatra III is correctly referred to as Benefactor Gods (*theoi Euergetai*).⁶¹ Strack interpreted this dedication as an evidence that, at the height of the dynastic *stasis*, Ptolemy VIII enjoyed loyalty⁶² and power recognition across the country.⁶³ Soterichos left it years before the king regained Alexandria (127/126 BC) and reconciled with his sister (124).⁶⁴

To Strack's eyes, this was historically new: a career official would certainly not have left a dedication for the king expelled and in open warfare against the queen currently ruling the capital.⁶⁵ In this regard, I exclude that Bernard's suspicion about the extension of the dedication to all the other gods and goddesses (ll. 12-13) should also be understood as a political insinuation:

Dans son souci de se rallier une province éloignée et d'accès difficile, Sotérichos ne veut oublier personne, en ces années difficiles, et peut-être est-ce pour cette raison qu'il s'adresse non seulement à Pan, mais καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις θεοῖς | πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις.⁶⁶

The inscription, in fact, opens in the name/is made on behalf of the two *theoi Euergetai*.

⁵⁹ OGIS I no. 131 (= SB V no. 7907 = Dakke III no. Gr. W): Ὑπὲρ βασιλείῳς Πτολεμ[αίου καὶ βασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας τῆς ἀδ]ελφῆς | θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν [καὶ τῶν τέκνων, θεῶν μεγίστων Ἑρμῆι τῶν] καὶ | Πασοπνούφι[δι καὶ τοῖς συννάοις θεοῖς (ἔτους)] λε'. See Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 191-2 fn. 2, 253-4, 259.

⁶⁰ *I.Philae* I no. 55. See Rossini 2021.

⁶¹ For the three *theoi Euergetai*, see Otto, Bengtson 1938, 24-5 fn. 3, 31-2 fn. 2, 33 fn. 1, 141-2 fn. 3, 222 (Ptol. VIII and Cl. II); 31-2 fn. 2, 33, 36 fn. 1, 61, 106-7, 126, 136-7, 141-2 fn 3 (Ptol. VIII, Cl. II, and Cl. III); 36 fn. 1, 73 (Ptol. VIII and Cl. III); Nadig 2007, 39-44.

⁶² We can define it as loyalty, solidarity, or proximity: see Bingen 1989, 32 ("Peut-être y trouvons-nous une forme de la solidarité autour du roi, peut-être aussi y trouvons-nous une forme de courtoisie qui s'est cristallisée en un discours épigraphique obligatoire") and Caneva 2016, 133 ("a suitable linguistic and ritual device to express reciprocity and proximity between the members of the Ptolemaic social hierarchy, from its top represented by the royal house in Alexandria down to the members of local communities").

⁶³ Strack 1894, 231.

⁶⁴ See Otto, Bengtson 1938, 103-5; 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; Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2016, 170; Bielman Sánchez 2017, 103-5; Pfeiffer 2017, 161 and Lanciers 2020, 49-52.

⁶⁵ Strack 1894, 230.

⁶⁶ Bernard, *I.Pan du désert*, 261 no. 86.

Although the turmoil in the country can definitely be added to the perils of the journey,⁶⁷ such a mental reservation or escape clause would have seemed at least unlikely. Nor is Bernand's erudite list of names of possible 'other gods and goddesses' (Hathor, Harpocrates, Apollo, Isis, Triphis, i.e. Repyt, Sarapis etc.)⁶⁸ entirely persuasive. Had Soterichos had any names in mind, he would have limited himself to writing τοῖς ἄλλοις θεοῖς, i.e. he would not have specified πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις with such a degree of completeness. At any rate, a very similar 133 BC dedication kept in Warsaw (discussed *infra*) was made Διὶ Σωτήρι Σαράπιδι, | Ἰσιδι Μεγάλῃ Μητρὶ Θεῶν, Ἄρποχράτει, Πανὶ | Εὐόδωι, Κρόνῳ, Διονύσωι, Διοσκούροισι, Ἡρακλεῖ | Καλλίνικωι (ll. 10-13).⁶⁹

Let us go back to the events narrated and to the history of the studies on Soterichos' text.

In 1894, Strack saw these lines almost as a confirmation of von Gutschmid's view (opposed to Samuel Sharpe's harsh criticism of Ptolemy VIII's conduct) that the vilified king indeed took rational measures to increase the trade.⁷⁰ In the same footnote to the German translation of Sharpe's 1838 history of Egypt, von Gutschmid had also recalled the not unjustified⁷¹ extermination of the insubordinate Macedonian nobility;⁷² an observation Strack promptly linked to Paos' high position as "kinsman (of the king)" and *strategos* of the Thebaid in ll. 6-7. Paos was quite a common name; it is theophoric ('of Hor'),⁷³ unquestionably Egyptian,⁷⁴ and has no patronymic.⁷⁵

According to some, this state of affairs is presumably to be connected with the consequences of Cleopatra II's struggle against Euergetes II.⁷⁶ Paos' predecessor, the Greek *strategos* Boethos son of

⁶⁷ See Bielman Sánchez, Lenzo 2015, 300.

⁶⁸ Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 261 no. 86. For Aphrodite and Isis in this context, see Aufrère 1998, 14-15.

⁶⁹ Lajtar 1999, 53-4. The presence of some of these deities has been interpreted as a clue in favour of this inscription's Coptite origin. As for Herakles *Kallinikos*, see the reference to victory. See *infra*.

⁷⁰ Von Gutschmid *ap.* Sharpe 1862, 266-7 fn. 2.

⁷¹ Von Gutschmid maintained, in fact, that Ptolemy VIII "den unbotmäßigen Makedonischen Abel, der unter den schwachen vormundschaftlichen Regierungen immer mehr verwildert, aber auch immer mächtiger geworden war, ausrottete".

⁷² It is a reference to Plb. 34.14.6-7, although this passage itself is less than clear.

⁷³ See Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 256 no. 86 with prev. bibl.

⁷⁴ See Thomas 1975, 96 and fn. 70 with prev. bibl.

⁷⁵ For Paos, see *Pros. Ptol.* I nos. 197 and 302; Peremans 1946, 134-7; Mooren 1975, 91-2 no. 054, 116 no. 0120; Thomas 1975, 44, 94-6; Vandorpe 1988, 48; Hölbl 2001, 198-9; Huss 2001, 610, 619, 621, 663; O'Neil 2006, 17 (esp. about his origin) and Lanciers 2018, 378-9 (esp. about his title of *syngenes*).

⁷⁶ Thomas 1975, 95.

Nikostratos, appears for example in the aforementioned Omboi dossier, where the subsequent erasure of Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra III's names stands out right next to the intact memory of Cleopatra II and Boethos himself.⁷⁷

Ptolemy VIII's long-disputed attitude towards Greeks and Egyptians falls outside the scope of this commentary.⁷⁸ I exclude that his favor was prejudicial and unjustified: Nadig's historical evaluation of his provisions, concessions etc. about Egypt is a useful tool in this sense.⁷⁹ At any rate, Strack's reconstruction is reflected by Hölbl's more recent scenario, which will be useful in contextualising Soterichos' dedication within the *stasis*. During this conflict, in fact,

Cleopatra II's main support came from the Greeks and Jews of the capital as well as from the Greek and Jewish population in the chora. She never succeeded, however, in bringing all of Egypt under her sway, since the native Egyptians in particular remained on Euergetes' side because of the favour he had always shown them. The most important of these was the Egyptian Paos who was the strategos of all the nomes of the Thebaïd [...]. By virtue of his position, he was the head of the civil and military administration. Hence Euergetes had placed an entire army, including the Greek soldiers and officers, under the command of an Egyptian; in addition, the entire administrative body, from the lowest Egyptians to the highest Greek civil servants, were obedient to him. It is clear that in January of 130 the followers of Euergetes were in control at Thebes, since Paos was preparing to put down a revolt in Hermonthis just south of the city.⁸⁰

3.2 Soterichos' Mission

Von Gutschmid's insubordination notwithstanding, Strack rightly introduced Soterichos as Paos' full-fledged (and effective) subordinate. Our dedicant calls himself ὁ ἀπεσταλλόμενος (ll. 5-6) with the perfect

⁷⁷ On the other hand, Boethos' eventual fall from grace, once Ptolemy VIII had prevailed in his district, remains in doubt. See Rossini 2022b, 126, 134 with prev. bibl. For Boethos, I refer to the bibl. there (p. 117, fn. 6) - to which Peremans 1946, 134-7; Vandorpe 1988 and Mairs, Fischer-Bovet 2021, 75-8, 82, 84 are to be added.

⁷⁸ Consider, for one, Meyer (1900, 77), who defined Ptolemy VIII the "ausgesprochener Kandidat der ägyptischen Volkspartei im Gegensatz zu der makedonischen Hofpartei". When opposing the idea that Euergetes II favoured Paos precisely because he was Egyptian, Bernand (*I.Pan du désert*, 256 no. 86) quoted this exact page by Meyer.

⁷⁹ Nadig 2007, § V. See esp. the Conclusions (pp. 119-21), stressing Ptolemy's lack of idealism.

⁸⁰ Hölbl 2001, 198.

passive participle of *apostello*, a verb commonly used to designate a subordinate sent by his superior⁸¹ (of course, think of *apostolos*). In this sense, in a remarkable study on the communication routes between Ethiopia and Hellenistic Egypt, Claire Préaux considered the ll. 7-11 as an actual title as well as a proof against Strabo's supposed belittlement of the Ptolemaic achievements in matters of southern and western trade (in the case he aimed at bringing out the results of the expeditions of the first prefects of Egypt).⁸²

Soterichos son of Ikadion was indeed a career official, as the title of *archisomatophylax* ('chief bodyguard')⁸³ placed him only a few steps below the *syngenes* Paos.⁸⁴ The Egyptian *strategos* of the Thebaid was thus his superior also according to the Ptolemaic aulic titulature.⁸⁵

Paos' envoy was stationed at Coptos, between present-day Qena and Luxor.⁸⁶ This Upper Egyptian city was a terminal point of the great caravan routes which connected the Nile Valley (and thus the Mediterranean) with Ethiopia, Arabia, India etc. In this sense, Strack supposed, the Cretan soldier probably held the post of field commander and administrator at the same time, being primarily entrusted with trade and shipping, for the protection of which he had troops at his disposal.⁸⁷ J. David Thomas was basically of the same opinion: the Egyptian *strategos* sent one of his men, a Cretan, to look after the road across the desert to Coptos and to exercise something more than the police powers that an ordinary nome *strategos* would have had: "something much more akin to military power".⁸⁸

Interestingly enough, Adolphe Reinach linked Soterichos to 1,000 Cretan soldiers whom, according to an unclear notice by Polybius,⁸⁹ Ptolemy VIII had raised against his brother Ptolemy VI back in 162 BC.⁹⁰ Of course, 32 years is not a trifle, and the scholar was likely re-

⁸¹ See Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 256 no. 86 (with the pragmatic example of *I.Kanaïs* no. 12, ll. 2-6: [ἀ]πεστά|λι Δημήτριος παρὰ τοῦ | βασιλέως ἀνακαθάραι | τὸ ὕδρμα τὸ ἐπὶ τοῦ Πανεί|ου).

⁸² Préaux 1952, 274-5.

⁸³ See Gibbs 2022.

⁸⁴ Here is the system of court titles established during Ptolemy V's reign (205-180 BC): *syngenes*, *ton proton philon*, *archisomatophylax* (the plural form we see on the stela had appeared under Ptolemy VI), *ton philon*, *ton diadochon*, *ton somatophylakon*. Under his son Ptolemy VIII, *ton homotimon tois syngenesin* and *ton isotimon tois protois philois* were added. See Huss 2001, 524, 630 with prev. bibl. and now Wackener 2022.

⁸⁵ See Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 255 no. 86.

⁸⁶ See, in general, Ruffing 1995; Bonnet 2000, 390-1; Pantalacci 2012 and 2018.

⁸⁷ Strack 1894, 232.

⁸⁸ Thomas 1975, 58-9.

⁸⁹ Plb. 31.17.8.

⁹⁰ Reinach 1911, 410 fn. 5.

ferring to different *xenologiai*. What is sure is that the Cretan dedicant was not the *strategos* of the Thebaid at the head of an escort of archers, as a recent book on Berenice represents him.⁹¹ Fraser, among others, called him “a Cretan commander of ships operating in the Red Sea”.⁹²

As early as 1911, Breccia wondered whether the stele once stood in the city mentioned in l. 10.⁹³ Later on, Meredith and Łajtar thought that Coptos was the most probable original site.⁹⁴ Not everyone was of this opinion, however. Fraser suspected that it adorned the Paneion near the small rock-cut temple of King Seti I (13th century BC) at El-Kanayis, some 50 km from Edfu.⁹⁵ In his *Pan du désert*, Bernand cautiously placed this text among the inscriptions of unknown provenance. In his commentary to a 133 BC dedication very close to the one examined here (see *infra*), Łajtar in turn noted that Cronus’ presence among the gods honoured⁹⁶ may be a clue in favour of both inscriptions’ Coptite origin. Being the *interpretatio Graeca* of the Egyptian earth god Geb, Cronus was highly revered in that city (where he had a Kroneion) as a patron of travellers and a protector against serpents; the same applies to Herakles Kallinikos, *interpretatus* as the moon god Khonsu, but also as Geb in the area of Coptos.⁹⁷

What is certain is that the dedicant had ‘to provide security’ (παρεξόμενος⁹⁸ τὴν ἀσφάλειαν) (l. 9) for those conveying goods of various kinds ‘from the mountain opposite Coptos’ (ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ Κοπτὸν ὄρου[ς]) (l. 10). *Asphaleia* requires no further explanation. It is meant as the very practical antithesis of the landscape anthologised by the downward movement (το[ῖς] | κατακομίζουσι) from *to kata Kopton oros*⁹⁹ – an expression reminiscent, according to De Romanis, of the equivalent Egyptian formula *ḥst qbty*.¹⁰⁰

In the earliest exegesis, the *oros* was summarily as well as collectively identified with “die arabische Bergkette”¹⁰¹ (it is no coincidence that Strack did not propose Coptos at all as the original stand-

⁹¹ Sidebotham 2011, 12-13, 30, 35.

⁹² Fraser 1972, I: 180. So also Gallo 2018, 299. *Contra*, see Hennig 2003, 171 fn. 127.

⁹³ *I. Breccia*, 19 no. 37[b].

⁹⁴ Meredith 1953, 104 and Łajtar 1999, 57, 61.

⁹⁵ Fraser 1972, II: 309 fn. 377. See Strack 1897, 47 and, in general, Mairs 2010.

⁹⁶ See also Préaux 1939, 258: “et aux divinités locales”.

⁹⁷ Łajtar 1999, 59-60. See also Bingen, *BE* 2000, no 713.

⁹⁸ For the meaning of this future participle, see *infra*.

⁹⁹ For the translation, see now Vallarino 2023, 80-1 and fn. 1 (*ex* Liddell, Scott, Jones 1996, s.v. “κατά” B.I.3).

¹⁰⁰ De Romanis 1996, 133-4 fn. 33.

¹⁰¹ Strack 1894, 233. But see also Botti 1893, 133 no. 2461: “envoyé en mission au Synai” (not reprinted in Botti 1900, 258 no. 21).

ing place of the stele), but, according to Bernand, it probably refers to a mountain plateau east of Coptos and its steep surroundings.¹⁰² From translation to interpretation, Aufrère was openly dissatisfied with the literal exegesis. According to him,

this expression refers to all mining areas which can be reached via the wadis extending from Coptos [...]. It is quite clear that the expression refers to the road which leads to the gold mines of Gebel Fawâkhîr on the way to Quseir as well as to the one reaching Berenike.¹⁰³

Dittenberger, in turn, had mentioned the way leading from Coptos to the sea “per montes desertos et saxosos”,¹⁰⁴ and it is no wonder that Soterichos turned his mind to a god also associated with the heights (*Oreios*) and walking in the mountains (*Oreobates*).¹⁰⁵

This was probably not the only dangerous stretch that the carriers of the goods mentioned had to cross: some critics mentioned the Red Sea pirates, the countless cliffs and shallows, and even the obstacles presented by extensive coral reefs.¹⁰⁶ As already noted, the civil war itself could pose a threat in that period.

Chaniotis’ view that Soterichos and others like him left this and similar inscriptions in Egypt as they were “deeply impressed by the[ir] experiences” in the Ptolemaic Kingdom¹⁰⁷ is certainly correct. And yet, our Cretan’s experience seems to give an even stronger

¹⁰² See Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 259 no. 86 (commented in Drew-Bear 1980, 156 fn. 5). See also Guarducci, *I.Cret.* IV, 25 (“a monte Copto”); Hennig 2003, 171 (“vom Wüstenplateau bei Koptos”); De Romanis 1996, 132 (“dal deserto di Coptos”) and Evers 2016, 109 (“those coming down from the Eastern Desert plateau to Koptos”). But see now Vallarino 2023, 80-1 fn. 1 (*contra* Bernand)

¹⁰³ Aufrère 1998, 13-14. In spite of being quoted *in extenso* (royal names included), the dedication is there dated “130 CE” and considered more recent than an Augustan one. Vallarino (2023, 80-1 fn. 1), too, notes that “l’uso di κατά con accusativo ha qui l’accezione, geografica e non solo, di ‘antistante’ [...] che rende preferibile questa identificazione rispetto a quella proposta in *I.Pan du désert* [...] dove si riconduce l’ὄρος [...] a un ‘plateau montagneux à l’Est de Koptos’. I rilievi al di là del Nilo sono molto più scabri e scoscesi rispetto a questi ultimi e giustificano meglio l’utilizzo del termine ὄρος”.

¹⁰⁴ Dittenberger, *OGIS* I, 213-14 no. 132.

¹⁰⁵ See *infra* and Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 259 no. 86 with prev. bibl. See also *I.Egypte métriques* no. 114, col. IV, ll. 2-3 (but now Criscuolo 2000, 284): *Pan oressinomos*.

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. Wilcken 1925, 101. For piracy in relation to this inscription, see also Kortenbeutel 1931, 45; Otto, Bengtson 1938, 215; Sidebotham 1986, 30 and fn. 30 (according to him, the inscription “shows how the Ptolemies protected their merchants”); Sidebotham 2011, 12-13, 35, 63, 209 fn. 15 and Gallo 2018, 299 and fn. 33. For ancient piracy in the Indian Ocean as well as in the Red Sea, see Schneider 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Chaniotis 2005, 151.

connotation to this “impression”¹⁰⁸ expressed in a regular and shared communication code. Behind the choice of *Euodos* (an apt synonym should be *Asphaleios*) we can see, as said, the hope to *euodoun*. A successful journey from the wilderness to the safe valley, from danger to deliverance, may also be perceived as an actual victory.¹⁰⁹ More generally, in Jim’s words, *Euodos* and *Soter* were “different ways of expressing a similar concern”.¹¹⁰

It has been noted that these lines display an interestingly asymmetrical structure: ὁ ἀπεσταλμένος (perfect participle) ἐπὶ τὴν συναγωγὴν (*epi* + accusative) καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν πλῶν (*epi* + genitive) καὶ παρεξόμενος (future participle) κτλ. The first participle and the first *epi* express nothing but Paos’ order; the second participle is the story of its fulfilment by Soterichos; the second *epi* is Soterichos’ stable duty, or authority, within the Ptolemaic state system.¹¹¹ In this sense, the syntactic structure underlies, perhaps deliberately, the power structure to which Soterichos belonged and which he honoured in this way.

It is possible that Soterichos’ inscription and the subsequent ones making reference to the Indian and Red Seas may simply be claiming a supervisory role over continuous, if not regular activities operating independently from governmental control.¹¹² What seems sure is that no surviving document related to Paos’ predecessor Boethos seems to concern that border area¹¹³ that was the Eastern Desert. It may be a coincidence, as classical scholars well know, or the result of “the extension of governmental oversight into a new arena”¹¹⁴ of which the Cretan captain is our first inadvertent witness. In my opinion, this would subtly imply a return to von Gutschmid’s reassessment of Ptolemy’s rational measures, and to its application to Soterichos’ case (Strack):¹¹⁵ even more so if we follow Łajtar’s opin-

108 Jim (2022, 93) spoke of “frightening” experiences. See already Adams 2007, 216-17.

109 See *I.Koptos Kosseir* no. 159: Πανὶ Εὐόδοι | νίκητι [...]. In relation to Pan, see Adams 2007, 218 with prev. bibl. and Moralee 2019, esp. 95-7.

110 Jim 2022, 95.

111 See Bernard, *I.Pan du désert*, 257 no. 86 with many existing parallels (ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν ὀπλων, etc.).

112 Gates-Foster 2012, 201. See also Cobb 2018, 35 fn. 14.

113 For this aspect, see Adams 2007.

114 Gates-Foster 2012, 201. See already De Romanis 1996, 133-4: “L’attestarsi a Coptos (e non più a Edfu, come ai tempi dei primi Tolemei) delle carovaniere che collegano la valle del Nilo e il mar Rosso, dipende da un riassetto della geografia economica del deserto orientale, che certamente si connette anche a un più intenso sfruttamento delle risorse minerarie di quell’area – ciò è evidente, tra l’altro, dalla stessa somma di competenze affidate a Soterichos”.

115 On the face of it, piracy could indeed pose a threat. See Kortenbeutel 1931, 45: “Unter Euergetes II. ist der Verkehr so stark, daß er die Nabatäer zu Räubereien rei-

ion that the mission had an official, state character, that it had to be financed by the king, and that the goods brought from abroad were destined directly for him.¹¹⁶

In this regard, Posidonius' testimony about the Arabian Gulf coastguards (*phylakai*) under Ptolemy VIII deserves special attention.¹¹⁷

However, we cannot be entirely sure whether Soterichos was sent to this post for a long period of time or for a one-time specific purpose¹¹⁸ (and whether, in the latter case, there was a connection with the civil war turmoil).¹¹⁹ Strack translated τᾶλλα ξένια (l. 11) as "die anderen Geschenke" without hesitation and found it unlikely that a long, institutional mission would deal with mere friendly gifts.¹²⁰ To Meredith (who did not mention the *ploi*, but only the *oros*), this reference seemed applicable neither to the products of the beryl mines area in the Eastern Desert nor to the desert area at all.¹²¹ The *Greek-English Lexikon* cites this very inscription as an example of interpreting *xenia* as 'tribute'.¹²² However, as persuasively pointed out by André Bernand, nothing suggests that these *xenia* were taxes levied by the king, but simply products imported from abroad (Arabia, Ethiopia, Persia, the Far East?) through caravan routes.¹²³

Wilcken and Dittenberger were thinking exactly about this when they proposed the reading ξενικ>ά referred to φορτία ("cum substantivum ξένια nihil significare possit nisi dona hospitalia, quae notio ab huius tituli argumento aliena est"),¹²⁴ accepted also by Breccia and others.¹²⁵ Bernand simply found the emendation unnecessary, as he relied on Preisigke's authority in admitting the identity of *xenios* and *xenikos*. Palaeographically, the word in question is far from uncertain: its *alpha* is *in limine lacunae*, yet very evident.

Bernand's exegesis found confirmation in a 1999 study by Adam Łajtar. The Polish epigraphist confronted Soterichos' text with a 133

zen konnte". See also *supra*.

116 Łajtar 1999, 62.

117 Posidon. *BNJ* 87 F 28 (*ap.* Strabo II 3, 4). See Kortenbeutel 1931, 45; Angelucci 2012, 220 and Cobb 2018, 18, 20.

118 For the latter option, see explicitly Thomas 1975, 72 fn. 132. See also Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 275.

119 So Hennig 2003, 172.

120 Strack 1894, 232. For the translation, see Liddell, Scott, Jones 1996, s.v. "ξενιος". See also the literary examples in Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 259 fn. 113, no. 86.

121 Meredith 1953, 104.

122 Liddell, Scott, Jones 1996, s.v. "ξενιος".

123 Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 259-60 no. 86. See also Gates-Foster's (2012, 201) translation: "strange things". See also Schneider 2018, 153 fn. 17.

124 Wilcken 1906, 325 and *OGIS* II, 544 (not in *OGIS* I no. 132).

125 *I.Breccia* no. 37[b]; Fraser 1972, II: 309 fn. 377 and Mooren, 159 no. 0225.

BC inscription of the same kind (kept in the Warsaw National Museum)¹²⁶ and interpreted them both with the help of the anthropological theory of the gift and of the ancient Egyptian concept of *jnw* ('local produce, tribute of subject lands, gifts from palace').¹²⁷ There we read that two men, Ptolemy and Tryphon, τῶν ἀρχισωματοφυλάκων καὶ ἀρχιθυρωρῶν | καὶ εἰσαγγελέων (ll. 5-6), were sent (ἀποσταλέντες) by Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra II, and Cleopatra III ἐπὶ τὴν παράληψιν καὶ κατακομιδὴν | τῶν παρακεκομισμένων πάντων ἐκ τῆς | Ἀροματοφόρου ξενίων (ll. 8-10). In both cases, *xenia* - like *jnw* - appears in connection with the sovereigns.

According to Łajtar, Ptolemy VIII may have followed the pattern of earlier Egyptian kings in considering the goods imported from the aromatic land as gifts of friendship.¹²⁸ In Gauthier's words,

le terme doit avoir la *connotation* [italics added] de "tribut fourni par des populations rencontrées" au cours des expéditions lancées vers la côte somalie, sans que cela veuille probablement dire autre chose que "produits précieux exotiques".¹²⁹

Dittenberger identified τὰ λιβανωτικὰ φορτία of l. 11 with the Arabian ἀρώματα of Strabo 16.4.22.¹³⁰ We know that *libanos* refers to the frankincense-tree (*Boswellia sacra*), a plant typical of the Horn of Africa and of the Arabian Peninsula, but also to its aromatic resin itself (= *libanotos*).¹³¹ Of course, the Horn included the land - loosely, from the shore of the Red Sea inland into the eastern Sudan - that the Egyptians called Punt (*pwnt*) since remote times. It is no wonder that Łajtar compared Soterichos' journey to Queen Hatshepsut's famous Punt expedition in the 15th century BC.¹³²

As for 'the gathering of precious stones' (τὴν συναγ[ω]γὴν τῆς πολυτ[ε]λοῦς λιθείας) (ll. 7-8) that Soterichos had to ensure,¹³³ the

126 Text, photo, translation, and extensive commentary: Łajtar 1999, 57, 53-60. See also Bingen, *BE* 2000, no. 713. Palaeographically, according to Łajtar (1999, 62), both inscriptions share much in common. He concluded that Soterichos' and Ptolemy and Tryphon's stelae were engraved in the same workshop at Coptos and were placed there in a sanctuary, possibly the Paneion (in this sense, see also Chaniotis 2005, 151).

127 Łajtar 1999, 57, 63-5. For *jnw*, see Gordon 1983.

128 Łajtar 1999, 64-5. See also Hennig 2003, 171 fn. 128.

129 Bingen, *BE* 2000, no. 713.

130 Dittenberger, *OGIS* I, 214 no. 132. See e.g. also Guarducci, *I.Cret.* IV, 25; Bernard, *I.Pan du désert*, 258 no. 86 and Angelucci 2012, 220.

131 See Liddell, Scott, Jones 1996, s.v. "λίβανος".

132 See Łajtar 1999, 64-5. Punt had a connection with the god honoured by Soterichos: see Pirelli 2017, 196. But see now Vallarino 2023, 80-1.

133 Perhaps, the standard translation of *synagoge* as 'gathering' was not as automatic as it may appear. If we follow Bernard (*I.Pan du désert*, 256-7 no. 86) who, in turn,

first exegete immediately ruled out that these words refer to valuable building materials such as the granite often employed in buildings from Philae to Aswan.¹³⁴ It was quarried right near the latter location,¹³⁵ hundreds of kilometres south of Coptos. Rather, Strack thought about emeralds mined in the Egyptian Eastern Desert,¹³⁶ not far from the Red Sea port of Myos Hormos¹³⁷ – probably at Senskis (Sikkait)¹³⁸ and Smaragdos (Gebel Zabara),¹³⁹ as suggested by De Romanis.

Dittenberger was the first to quote Strabo's useful passage according to which, between Coptos and Myos Hormos, τὰ τῆς σμαράγδου μέταλλά ἐστι [...] καὶ ἄλλων λίθων πολυτελῶν.¹⁴⁰ Bernand, in turn, listed various kinds of precious stones from the Egyptian Eastern Desert: onyx, serpentine, jasper, peridot, chalcedony, rock crystal, amethyst, and topaz,¹⁴¹ but also the emeralds, again the topazes, and the pearls¹⁴² recorded in two later inscriptions from the Wadis Semna¹⁴³ and Hammamat.¹⁴⁴ It is no wonder that Fitzler spoke of caravans laden with foreign treasures (“Auslandsschätzen”).¹⁴⁵

quoted Preisigke, the question may have arisen whether (this) *synagoge* should not rather be translated as ‘extraction’, ‘shipping’, or ‘transport’. Bernand mentioned Préaux’s (1939, 258) hesitation between ‘gathering’ and ‘convoy’. Yet he bluntly accepted the former (and least complicated) translation. A few lines below, however, he remarked that “aussi voit-on assez mal un fonctionnaire chargé de *récolter* et de *convoyer* les pierres précieuses s’occuper des bateaux de mer” (italics added). The obvious does not necessarily lie in every word of an inscription. See also Guarducci, *I.Cret.* IV, 25 (“ad gemmas [...] colligendas”) and Redon 2018, fn. 20 (“the harvest of gems”).

134 Strack 1894, 233.

135 See Kelany et al. 2009 and Harrell, Storemyr 2009.

136 Iub. *BNJ* 276 F 77; Strabo 17.1.45 and Ptol. *Geog.* 4.5.8.

137 However, the few *loci paralleli* quoted by Strack are about the usage of *lithoi polytheis/litheia polytheles*, not about emeralds. See also Dittenberger, *OGIS* I, 213 no. 132 and, about emeralds, Fitzler 1910, 48; Martin 1911, 62 and De Romanis 1996, 132 fn. 32 (and 134-6 fn. 34 for Myos Hormos in relation to this inscription).

138 TM Places 2810.

139 TM Places 5062.

140 Dittenberger, *OGIS* I, 213 no. 132; Strabo 17.1.45. Bernand also quoted Strabo 15.1.67 (φέρει δὲ καὶ λιθείαν ἢ χώρα [*scil.* India] πολυτελή κρυστάλλων καὶ ἀνθράκων παντοίων, καθάπερ τῶν μαργαριτῶν), as Strack (1894, 233) had already done, and 16.4.22 (πρὸς ἄργυρον καὶ χρυσὸν τὰ ἀρώματα διατιθεμένουσ [*scil.* the Arabians] καὶ τὴν πολυτελεστάτην λιθείαν), in addition to Diod. Sic. 1.33.3 (about Meroë) and 1.46.4, and to *Peripl. M. Rubr.* 56 (see Casson 1989, 84-5) about precious stones.

141 Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 256 no. 86 (“Les bijoux alexandrins furent souvent faits de ces pierres”). It was just because of the adjective *polytheles* that Bernand excluded that the Cretan envoy had to deal with building materials. See also Molina Marín 2010, 166 fn. 48 and Schneider 2018, 138. In general, see Aufrère 1997.

142 So also Schneider 2018, 138.

143 *I.Pan du désert* no. 51, ll. 7-8 (11 AD).

144 *I.Koptos Kosseir* no. 41, ll. 2-3 (Tiberius’ principate).

145 Fitzler 1910, 50.

Soterichos ‘tend[ed] to the ships’ (ἐπι τῶν | πλῶν) (ll. 8-9). The first exegete had no doubts that these *ploi* were actual Nile boats and that the dedicant had been sent to supervise the sailors of the upper Nile (namely, those of Coptos).¹⁴⁶ Rostovtzeff, on the other hand, put him at the command of an actual war fleet,¹⁴⁷ as well as to inspect the mining of topaz “auf der Topaseninsel”¹⁴⁸ (the Red Sea island off the coast of Berenice that Pliny calls *Topazum insulam in Rubro mari*,¹⁴⁹ modern St. John’s Island or Zabargad). Although sceptical about the war fleet,¹⁵⁰ Fitzler too considered Soterichos as a purely military official and compared him with the Roman *Praefectus montis Berenicensidis*.¹⁵¹ According to him, Soterichos had to collect precious stones mined in the desert, bring them under military protection to the Nile – probably to Coptos –, and transport them further along the Nile to Alexandria.¹⁵²

Therefore, once the Egyptian Eastern Desert was passed, Soterichos was also meant to act as a *potamophylax* in charge with that particular task called *potamophylakia* (‘river guard’).¹⁵³ According to Bernand, a Cretan captain would have faced the watery environment with greater confidence.¹⁵⁴

As said, it was an effort fraught with difficulties, from the waves to the sand.¹⁵⁵ In his commentary, Bernand found both an epigraphic and a poetic parallel in a late-III century BC epigram from the Paneion at El-Kanayis, where Pan *Euagros* and *Epekoos* (see *infra*) is thanked with beautiful words for having saved the dedicant from shipwreck:

[I dedicate] this to Pan of the Successful Hunt, who listens to prayers, who brought me safe from the land of the Trogodytai when I suffered greatly with double toils [...]. And having saved us when we were wandering on the Red Sea, and having sent a fair wind for the ships turning round and round on the sea, whistling with

¹⁴⁶ Strack 1894, 232.

¹⁴⁷ As an escort for merchant ships? See Martin 1911, 63 and Rostovtzeff 1941, 924.

¹⁴⁸ Rostovtzeff 1906, 305.

¹⁴⁹ Plin. *HN* 37.32.108. See Molina Marín 2010, 166.

¹⁵⁰ So also Otto, Bengtson 1938, 215 fn. 2 and De Romanis 1996, 132 fn. 32 with prev. bibl.

¹⁵¹ Fitzler 1910, 49-50. See also Woźniak 2019, 399.

¹⁵² See also Mooren 1975, 159 no. 0225: the routes leading from Berenice, Myos Hormos, and Leukos Limen, via Coptos, to the Nile. *Contra*, see Wilcken 1912, 264 fn. 4 (also Wilcken 2010, 415 fn. 66), according to whom Soterichos’ ships headed south. But see now Vallarino 2023, 80-1.

¹⁵³ See Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 258 no. 86 and Liddell, Scott, Jones 1996, s.v. “ποταμοφυλακία”. See, in general, Kruse 2013 and Rossi 2016.

¹⁵⁴ Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 258 no. 86.

¹⁵⁵ See also the vivid account in Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 258-9 no. 86 with prev. bibl.

shrill breaths from your pipes, you yourself led us right up to the harbour of Ptolemais steering with your hands most eager for the hunt. Now, friend, save the city of Alexander which once he, first, built near Egypt, most famous of cities. And I shall proclaim your power, O friend Pan, because I was brought safely to Ptolemy(?).¹⁵⁶

4 Soterichos and His Pan: A Religious Contextualisation

In the Conclusions to his 1977 collection of inscriptions related to Pan and the Egyptian Eastern Desert, between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea,¹⁵⁷ as well as in some unyielding *marginalia* (1978), André Bernand shared significant considerations about Pan's form as the protector of those who had to face the dangers of the desert.¹⁵⁸ In spite of both writings' often polemical tone, which does not concern this study, Bernand's words about this divine character are worth re-considering and complementing with more recent results.

Pan's cult appeared in Egypt under the first Ptolemies¹⁵⁹ and began to decline in the 1st/2nd century AD.¹⁶⁰ In reference to this god's sphere of action, the French epigraphist called him Pan of the Desert in a broad sense. As we can find in a fair amount of texts like the one examined here, this Egyptian Pan of the sandy expanses was more than often invoked under the epiclesis of *Euodos* (of Fair Paths, of Fair Journeys, or the like).¹⁶¹

Being a saviour god¹⁶² associated *ipso facto* with dangerous paths, in point of fact, Pan of the Desert was not always explicitly invoked as *Euodos*. Somehow, naming Pan *Euodos* was naming the context.¹⁶³

It is known that Pan of the Desert was none other than the Egyptian god Min (*Mnw*) or Min of Coptos (*Mnw Gbtjw*).¹⁶⁴ Min, in turn,

¹⁵⁶ Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 258 no. 86: *I.Egypte métriques* no. 164 [= *I.Kanaïs* no. 8]. I quote the translation in *New Doc. Early Christ.*, 114 no. 26. See also Mairs 2010, 160 and Moralee 2019, 95. See also the second inscription (*I.Kanaïs* no. 42) examined in Struffolino 2020.

¹⁵⁷ *I.Pan du désert*. Bernand had already included several documents of the same inspiration in *De Koptos à Kosseir* and *Le Paneion d'el-Kanaïs*, both published in 1972.

¹⁵⁸ Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 269-78 and Bernand 1978, 162-3.

¹⁵⁹ See Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 269 and Adams 2007.

¹⁶⁰ See Cuvigny 1997 and Pirelli 2017, 200 fn. 62.

¹⁶¹ See Liddell, Scott, Jones 1996, sv. "εὐδοος".

¹⁶² For the saviour gods and the concept of *soteria*, see now Jim 2022 (discussing Pan *Euodos* at pp. 93-6, 150).

¹⁶³ I borrow this sentence from Bonnet, Galoppin 2021, 11.

¹⁶⁴ For this *interpretatio Graeca*, see the important Conclusions in Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 269-78 (but *I.Kanaïs* and *I.Pan du désert*, with all the material contained therein, are seminal works in this sense); Bernand 1978, 162-3; Aufrère 1998, 9-14; Mairs

was a fully anthropomorphic, protective deity¹⁶⁵ worshipped as the lord of Coptos and Panopolis¹⁶⁶ (*nb Gbtjw, nb Ipw*) as well as of “the roads leading from these places through the Eastern Desert to the Red Sea”.¹⁶⁷

A stele from the Wadi Allaqi (now at the Cairo Museum) depicts Pan of the Desert exactly as Min:¹⁶⁸ he is ithyphallic, covered in shrouds, with the raised right arm and the classic double-plume head-dress. A better image accompanies the aforementioned dedication made by P. Iuventius Agathopous of a shrine Πανὶ θεῶϊ μεγίστῳ (l. 12) at the Wadi Semna (11 AD).¹⁶⁹ This is how Soterichos must have imagined his *Euodos*. “When stationed in Egypt far away from home and civilization, Greek soldiers and officers saw in the local Min the familiar god Pan”.¹⁷⁰

Notably, Yoyotte regarded Min’s Egyptian determinative *nʿj* (the boat on water), related to travelling, as the prototype of the epithet *Euodos*.¹⁷¹ In the same study, the French Egyptologist wondered whether the epithet *sr bj*; (Revealing Wonders, i.e. Prospector),¹⁷² often attributed to Min in Ptolemaic texts, was related to the aforementioned intensification of mining activity in the period concerned.¹⁷³ ‘Uncovering wonders’ is nothing but a definition of ‘mining activity’.

2010, 158-61; Volokhine 2011, 627-8; Pirelli 2017, esp. 198-203; Parker 2017, 74, 105, 200; Struffolino 2020, 165; Bonnet, Galoppin 2021, 9 and Jim 2022, 93-6, 150.

165 For the development of Min’s cult, see in general McFarlane 1995. Three more focused contributions: Yoyotte 1952; Cuvigny 1997 and Goedicke 2002 (an original contribution discussed e.g. in Pirelli 2017, 194-5 with prev. bibl.). The concise entries in Hart 1986, 121-6; Bonnet 2000, 461-7 and Wilkinson 2017, 115-17 are also useful. He is one of Egypt’s oldest attested deities, as his cult predates the first historical dynasties. No less archaic is Min’s association with Coptos. The fragments of three predynastic or archaic colossi of him (now at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) were notably discovered at Qift by Flinders Petrie (see e.g. Baqué Manzano 2004). Drawing on his Middle Kingdom association with the god Hor, Plutarch explained Min’s name has ‘Seen, for the *kosmos* is perceptible as well as visible’ (*De Is. et Os.* 56.374b: τὸν μὲν οὖν ὄρων εἰώθασι καὶ Μὴν προσαγορεύειν, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ὀρώμενον· αἰσθητὸν γὰρ καὶ ὀρατὸν ὁ κόσμος).

166 Whose Greek name means, of course, City of Pan. For the early Greek presence there, see Hdt. 2.91. For Min’s ancient worship in both cities, see also the references in Goedicke 2002, 247 fn. 4. See also Łajtar 1999, 59 and Pirelli 2017, 192.

167 Heinen 1980, 758.

168 See *I. Pan du désert* no. 83, pl. 68, no. 4 and Bernand 1983, pl. XIII, no. 4. See also Pirelli 2017, 199.

169 *I. Pan du désert* no. 51, pl. 50. See also Aufrère 1998, 12-13 and Pirelli 2017, 199.

170 Jim 2022, 93.

171 See Yoyotte 1952, 133 fn. 6. See also Parker 2017, 105 (but also p. 200) and, *contra*, Pirelli 2017, 200.

172 See Yoyotte 1952, 130-1.

173 See also De Romanis 1996, 133 fn 32 and Pirelli 2017, 201-3.

In 1939, Préaux had no doubt that Soterichos' inscription was "une des dédicaces vouées au dieu Pan-Min, patron de Coptos".¹⁷⁴ Even though the little monument has been ascribed to Coptos' civic context, it is Pan-Min's out-of-town patronage (including Dittenberger's aforementioned "montes deserti et saxosi") that interests us most regarding the epigraphic content.

du point de vue iconographique, c'est un Pan égyptien qui n'a rien à voir avec le Pan grec, ou alors le Pan qui apparaît dans la poésie française, l'homme aux pieds fourchus etc.¹⁷⁵

Son ithyphallisme n'est pas agressif, mais prophylactique. C'est l'ami de voyageur, c'est un dieu de bon augure, il protège contre les mauvaises rencontres et contre les dangers du pays ou les rigueurs du climat.¹⁷⁶

Other than being the protector deity of Coptos and Panopolis and the lord of the Desert (*nb ḥ₃swt*),¹⁷⁷ where he saved travellers from dying of thirst in that terribly dry environment,¹⁷⁸ the ithyphallic Min is also traditionally considered the god of male sexual procreativity and fertility in a broad sense.¹⁷⁹ This was, according to some, a dynastic notion alien to the desertic sphere.¹⁸⁰ His later forms as Min-Hor (*Mnw-Ḥr*), Min-Hor the Strong (*Mnw-Ḥr nḥt*),¹⁸¹ and Min-Amun Bull of His Mother (*Mnw-Jmn k₃-mw.t=f*)¹⁸² also made him an entity with kingly contours.¹⁸³ Indeed, the original Panic landscapes were Greek and Pan's

¹⁷⁴ Préaux 1939, 258.

¹⁷⁵ Bernand 1978, 164.

¹⁷⁶ Bernand 1978, 162.

¹⁷⁷ See Pirelli 2017, 192-3.

¹⁷⁸ See Pirelli 2017, 196-7, 200. See also the aforementioned inscription *I.Kanaïs* no. 12; Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 270-1; Mairs 2010, 158 and Struffolino 2020, 166-7 and fn. 8.

¹⁷⁹ See e.g. Volokhine 2011, 628. This aspect has been questioned: see Wilkinson 1991-2.

¹⁸⁰ Pirelli 2017, 195.

¹⁸¹ See Bonnet 2000, 465.

¹⁸² See Bonnet 2000, 364-5 and Pirelli 2017, 193 fn. 18.

¹⁸³ In 1948, Frankfort already thought that "there is no reason to deny that Min, too, may have been thought to animate the king in certain circumstances. [...] Min personifies the fertility of fields, beasts, and plants, and Egyptian kingship insured the benefits of nature's abundance for society. Min, then, might be an aspect of Pharaoh" (now Frankfort 1978, 189). See also Pirelli 2017, 191 fn. 4 with prev. bibl. For Pan's connections with royalty, see e.g. the Hellenistic study-case in Laubscher 1985.

sexual drive indiscriminating.¹⁸⁴ In spite of this, Min's association both with unnerving landscapes and an immodest depiction, whereas "Egyptian representations in general and deities in particular display all modesty",¹⁸⁵ makes his *interpretatio Graeca* quite eloquent.¹⁸⁶

According to Bingen's remarkable assessment, in the 2nd century BC

les équations des divinités grecques et égyptiennes avaient été faites depuis longtemps, et, le Grec ayant toujours accordé dans son propre panthéon la part de l'abord ontologique du divin et l'abord quotidien polymorphe des divinités et des démons, le dieu égyptien assimilé était à la fois une translittération exotique et un voisinage permanent dont le caractère divin n'était pas discutable.¹⁸⁷

Reviewing this god's sphere of action (or *Kulttopographie*), Bernard mentioned a precise Upper Egyptian context: the Wadi Bir El-Ain¹⁸⁸ near Panopolis, the Gebel Tuh near Ptolemais in the Thebaid, the Gebel Abu Foda,¹⁸⁹ the roads from Qena¹⁹⁰ to Hurghada¹⁹¹ on the Red Sea coast, the Wadis Semna¹⁹² and Abu Diyeiba,¹⁹³ and the road from to Coptos to the southern seaport of Berenice.¹⁹⁴ Plus, Pirelli has recently considered¹⁹⁵ the Wadis Hammamat,¹⁹⁶ Gawasis, and Gasus¹⁹⁷ along with the Red Sea harbor of Marsa Gawasis.¹⁹⁸

It is, indeed, an interesting devotional geography. Being the tutelary deity of these roads and mountains, "Pan a pris la physiono-

¹⁸⁴ For Panic landscapes, see Cardete del Olmo 2016. For the Egyptian Pan worshipped in Mendes (Eastern Nile Delta), see Volokhine 2011. Borgeaud's general study on Pan (1988) is now a classic.

¹⁸⁵ Goedicke 2002, 249.

¹⁸⁶ Min was also *interpretatus* as Priapus (*Suda* π 2276, s.v. "Πρίαπος"), for obvious reasons. See Bonnet 2000, 464.

¹⁸⁷ Bingen 1989, 20.

¹⁸⁸ TM Places 2845.

¹⁸⁹ TM Places 11670.

¹⁹⁰ TM Places 952.

¹⁹¹ TM Places 55176.

¹⁹² TM Places 2844.

¹⁹³ TM Places 698. See Harrell et al. 2006.

¹⁹⁴ Bernard, *I. Pan du désert*, 269-71 and Bernard 1978, 162. For Berenice, see Sidebotham 2011.

¹⁹⁵ Pirelli 2017, 191-2, 196 with prev. bibl.

¹⁹⁶ TM Places 2839.

¹⁹⁷ TM Places 2838. Some lost 26th Dynasty inscriptions from this place explicitly linked Min to the concept of 'fair path': *wjt nfr(t)*. See Pirelli 2017, 192, 201-2 and fn. 77.

¹⁹⁸ TM Places 5055.

mie même de la région dans laquelle on l'honore":¹⁹⁹ a hunting territory, a mining area, an outpost... As for the human landscape of these roads, Bernand recalled a whole multitude of soldiers, hunters, merchants, quarrymen, desert guides, and caravaneers,²⁰⁰ but also people who were born and lived in this desert, yet so inhospitable. The epigraphy of this vast area hands down the names, the devotional habits, and sometimes the stories of those who put trust in this form of Min.

Comme ces aventuriers du désert, Pan ne pouvait avoir de demeures fastueuses: il ne dispose donc que de temples à demi enfouis, comme à Sikkait (l'ancienne Senskis), de chapelles rupestres, de creux de rocher. C'est donc la nature, plus que la culture, qui lui ménage ces retraites. En un mot, c'est un dieu "bédouin".²⁰¹

To Soterichos' eyes, the god honoured had taken the physiognomy of those places: but *e contrario*, as befitted his apotropaic power. Min-Pan's kind epithets²⁰² such as Of Fair Paths (*Euodos*),²⁰³ Savior (*Soter*),²⁰⁴ Listening to Prayers (*Epekoos*),²⁰⁵ Beneficent (*Eucharistos*),²⁰⁶ and Of the Good Chase (*Euagros*)²⁰⁷ are therefore explained by contrast with impervious, life-threatening, and empty landscapes. He was also the god Of the Mountains (*Oreios*)²⁰⁸ Walking in the Mountains (*Oreobates*),²⁰⁹ Comrade in Arms (*Synstrateuomenos*),²¹⁰ and even Gold-Giving (*Chrysodotes*)²¹¹ with a clear Coptite connotation.²¹²

¹⁹⁹ Bernand 1978, 162.

²⁰⁰ See also Adams 2007, 216-18 and Jim 2022, 93. For the hunters, see Bonnet, Galoppin 2021, 8-11.

²⁰¹ Bernand 1978, 162.

²⁰² See Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 276; Adams 2007, 216; Mairs 2010, 159; Volokhine 2011, 627 and Pirelli 2017, 199.

²⁰³ See e.g., from the Paneion at El-Kanayis, *I.Kanaïs* nos. 1, 2, 10, 21-2, 27-8, 36-8, 43-4, 47-50, 54, 61-2, 72, 78, 88. See also Parker 2017, 109, 200.

²⁰⁴ E.g. *I.Kanaïs* nos. 25, 39, 43. See also Jim 2022, 93-6, 150.

²⁰⁵ E.g. *I.Kanaïs* nos. 8, 36-8.

²⁰⁶ *I.Pan du désert* no. 60; now also Harrell, Sidebotham, Bagnall, Marchand, Gates, Rivard 2006, nos. 1, 5. All from the Wadi Abu Diyeiba.

²⁰⁷ E.g. *I.Kanaïs* nos. 8, 26, 29, 66. In general, see also Bernand, *I.Pan du désert*, 276 and Parker 2017, 109.

²⁰⁸ *I.Koptos Kosseir* no. 150 (El-Buweib).

²⁰⁹ *I.Pan du désert* no. 4 (Wadi Bir El-Ain). See also Aufrère 1998, 12, 14 and Bonnet, Galoppin 2021, 9-10.

²¹⁰ *I.Pan du désert* no. 3 (Wadi Bir El-Ain). See also Bonnet, Galoppin 2021, 7-11.

²¹¹ See e.g. *I.Koptos Kosseir* nos. 158, 163, 166, 171, 181 (?) (all from El-Buweib). See also De Romanis 1996, 133 fn. 32 and Parker 2017, 109.

²¹² See Aufrère 1998, 12.

Some Egyptian parallels (though not actual translations?) have been proposed.²¹³

On the other hand, Pan-Min's unique assimilation with the saviour god Sarapis in a late inscription from Senskis - a thanksgiving τῷ Σαράπιδι [= Pan?] τῷ Μινί - was accepted by Bernard, but eventually rejected by Sijpesteijn and Cuvigny.²¹⁴

It goes without saying that, at the time of the Ptolemies and beyond, the traditional Min was not an obsolete deity of forgotten lore. Rather, the walls of the great temples (Dendera, Edfu, Kom Ombo)²¹⁵ frequently extolled his kingly contours as well as his role as a divine guide and prospector: Yoyotte's 1952 analysis in *Revue d'Égyptologie* remains in this regard irreplaceable.²¹⁶ As for Min and Pan-Min's worship, the Valley and the Desert were certainly distinct,²¹⁷ but more due to their respective conformations than to a precise pattern. In some of those temples, the pharaoh can be found acting, in Aufrère's words, "as an image of Min".²¹⁸

The Ptolemaic (and Roman) rulers were thus identified²¹⁹ with the great god in a way not impermeable to the influences of desert religiosity:

Ne emerge un quadro complesso in cui miti antichi²²⁰ vengono rilette alla luce della nuova immagine che si vuole costruire intorno al sovrano straniero, per far meglio coincidere passato e presente, ma nel contempo attribuire ai 'nuovi faraoni' prerogative non considerate necessarie in passato. Il sovrano è in altre parole as-

²¹³ See Aufrère 1998, 12 and Pirelli 2017, 200.

²¹⁴ *I.Pan du désert* no. 69, l. 13 (262/268 AD); see also pp. 276-8. See Sijpesteijn 1977, 344 and Cuvigny 1997, 144 fn. 28.

²¹⁵ See also the late-Hellenistic study-case examined in Leitz 2008.

²¹⁶ See Yoyotte 1952.

²¹⁷ See Pirelli 2017, 200-1.

²¹⁸ Aufrère 1998, 10.

²¹⁹ So Aufrère 1998, 9.

²²⁰ See Seti I's dedicatory inscription in the rock-cut temple at El-Kanayis, in the Eastern Desert: "He [*scil.* Seti I] said: 'How painful is a way that has no water! What are travelers to do to relieve the parching of their throats? What quenches their thirst, the homeland being far and the desert wide? Woe to the man who thirsts in the wilderness! Now I will plan for them. I will make for them the means to sustain them, so that they may bless my name in the future, in years to come; that generations yet to be may come to glory in me for my energy. For I am indeed considerate and compassionate toward travelers'. Now after his majesty had spoken these words to his own heart, he went about on the desert seeking a place to make a watering station. And God was guiding him, so as to grant the request of one whom he loved. Stone workers were ordered to dig a well in the mountains, in order that it might uplift the weary and refresh the heart of him who burns in the summer heat" (quoted by Mairs 2010, 158). Divine interventions of this kind will always be successful: see the famous late-Hellenistic example examined in Rossini 2022a.

similato a Min, che viene definito: *Md₃ nfr n ḥ₃swt ḏ₃btt*, Buon Medja²²¹ della terra orientale; *Md₃ nfr n Pwnt*, Buon Medja di Punt e *Md₃ n Pwnt*, Medja di Punt. È inoltre *nww* ‘cacciatore’, *n₃j* ‘viaggiatore’ e *sr bj₃* [...] ‘esploratore’.²²²

The picture is indeed complex. One would think of the highly royal connotation of the epithet Hor Who Protects the Road to Punt,²²³ so consonant with both Min’s character and *to eudoun*. In this sense, the goods listed in ll. 8 and 11 – among them, the *xenia* that Łajtar compared to the traditional concept of *jnw* – “had to be the result of divine activity”.²²⁴

In other words, the loyal Soterichos found himself on temporal, geographic, and religious coordinates where the image of the sovereign often overlapped with that of Min and “the personality of Pan of the Desert, based on concepts and religious beliefs originating from the Nile Valley, merged with that of the ancient deity from Coptos”.²²⁵ He was not an everyman chasing profits across the desert: on the contrary, he could boast closeness to the *fons honorum* – the king – as well as a dose of political awareness and self-awareness.

5 Conclusions

Because of its detailedness, I think that we can define this ‘full-fledged catalogue of responsibilities’ as a miniature autobiographical statement.²²⁶ In this sense, the result of a historical, content-related, and religious contextualisation is that Soterichos made a loyalty certificate. He carefully expressed it in a regular and shared communication code, but not without personal involvement, as Chanotis argued about deep personal impressions conveyed by inscriptions like this.

Those impressions were tied to experience. In the case analysed here, the impression-experience connection found epigraphic expres-

²²¹ That is, a ‘trusted guide’ (the Medjai were both a desert people and expert guides). See Aufrère 1998, 10-11.

²²² Pirelli 2017, 198 (adapted). See also Aufrère 1998, 9-12. Pirelli compared *n₃j*, *nww*, and *Md₃* to *Oreobatēs*, *Euagros*, and *Synstrateuomenos* respectively.

²²³ See Aufrère 1998, 11.

²²⁴ Aufrère 1998, 9.

²²⁵ Aufrère 1998, 12.

²²⁶ For this aspect, see already Moralee 2019, 92-8 with prev. bibl. (with the aforementioned case-study of *I.Egypte métriques* no. 164 = *I.Kanaïs* no. 8): “These little autobiographies [...] can address a desideratum expressed so well by Arnaldo Momigliano for ‘personal stories’ and ‘personal experience’ in the study of ancient Mediterranean religions, and for the ‘religious education’ of individuals”.

sion at a politically crucial time. Soterichos' loyalty might seem self-evident, as the dedication is on behalf of Ptolemy VIII, Cleopatra III, and their children. However, these lines seem to suggest that Cleopatra II's supporters were losing ground in the region, as argued e.g. by Will and Bielman Sánchez.²²⁷ Therefore, it is easy to suspect that the lord of the Desert who opened the way to Soterichos had the strong face of Ptolemy *theos Euergetes* (l. 3) himself, as in a game of mirrors, or cultural transfer, which combined piety and allegiance, impression and experience, divine and worldly power, and the dialectic of danger and deliverance.

As seen, the syncretic god was also invoked by some as *Chryso-dotes* and *Eucharistos* – a concept, the latter, close to *Soter* as well as an alternative form of *Euergetes*.²²⁸ From the point of view of the dedicant, the king was the material benefactor *par excellence*,²²⁹ and the fact that they (often) identified him (also) with Min in the safe valley beyond the wilderness should definitely be taken into account. Of course, the ordinary *hyper*-formula draws the line between two very concrete types of salvation. In those troubled years, in fact, there was more than one way a career officer could put his foot down.

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²²⁷ See *supra*.

²²⁸ See Muccioli 2013, 178, 183.

²²⁹ See Muccioli 2013, 179-80.

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