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REORGANIZATION OF THE EPONYMOUS PRIESTHOOD OF CLEOPATRA I
IN 177–123 B.C.

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Abstract: *The article analyzes the transformation of priestly titles linked to Cleopatra I and their role in power legitimization in the 2nd century B.C. Egypt. It examines shifts in priesthood titlature as elements of a sacral and political strategy to stabilize power amid dynastic crises. The priesthood of Ptolemy and Cleopatra marked her unprecedented lifetime deification. This legitimized her regency for the underage Ptolemy VI, emphasizing maternal authority in dynastic succession. The titlature change in 164 B.C. may have been a response to the uprising in the Thebaid and an attempt by Ptolemy VI to strengthen his cult, while the change in 146 B.C. reflects the rivalry between Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VIII. In 164 B.C., separate priesthoods for Ptolemy VI and Cleopatra (identified as mother of Ptolemy V's son) sought to strengthen Ptolemy VI's legitimacy through the relation to Ptolemy V. By 146 B.C., the title had been simplified to "priestess of Cleopatra, the divine mother Epiphanes," likely part of Ptolemy VIII's efforts to diminish his brother's influence. Papyrological and archaeological sources reveal how religious narratives were adapted to redistribute power during political crises. These transformations illustrate the interplay between the sacral and the political in Hellenistic monarchies, where religious institutions acted as an adaptive language of power, responsive to circumstances. By aligning cultic honors, the Ptolemies reinforced legitimacy during instability. Cleopatra I's deification set a precedent for later queens – Cleopatra II and III, blending theology and statecraft to navigate succession conflicts. The study underscores how dynastic cults functioned as malleable tools, bridging divine sanction and temporal authority in a fragile political landscape.*

Keywords: Hellenism, Ptolemaic Egypt, Ptolemy VI, Cleopatra I, dynastic cult, priesthood, cult of queens

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The study of the dynastic cults of Ptolemaic Egypt is the key to understanding the mechanisms of power legitimization in Hellenistic monarchies, where religion and politics existed in an inseparable symbiosis. The cult of Cleopatra I, her deification during her lifetime, and the subsequent transformations of priestly titles serve as a unique example of how sacred institutions adapted to the challenges of political crisis, the gendered aspects of rule, and dynastic conflicts. The relevance of this research is driven not only by the need to reconstruct the historical context of the 2nd century B.C. but also by the importance of analyzing the role of female rulers in ancient societies, whose strategies of power often foreshadowed modern models of symbolic governance. In this regard, the role of Cleopatra I has not been sufficiently explored by contemporary scholars. Publications primarily focus on the historical portrait of the queen [Macurdy, 1975, p. 141–147; Pomeroy, 1990, p. 23–24; Whitehorne, 2006, p. 80–88], while her cult has received little attention.

At the same time, the transformation of the cult of Cleopatra I, from an innovative synthesis of motherhood and sacrality to its gradual archaization, reveals the dialectic of continuity and rupture in Hellenistic ideology. This process not only influenced the formation of cults of subsequent queens, such as Cleopatra II and III [Minas-Nerpel, 2011, p. 60–61], but also demonstrated how religious narratives became a tool for the redistribution of power in the context of elite fragmentation and external interference. The study of these processes through the lens of papyrological and archaeological sources not only allows for a more precise chronology of dynastic upheavals but also offers new interpretations of the interplay between the sacred and the political in Hellenistic Egypt.

A key feature of the priesthood of Cleopatra I was the dynamism of its titulature, in contrast to the static cults of her predecessors. For example, the kanephoros (κἀνηφόρος) – the priestess of Arsinoe II, first mentioned around 183 B.C. in Ptolemais and as early as 267 B.C. in Alexandria – remained unchanged for over two hundred years until the 70s–50s B.C. [Quaegebeur, 1971, p. 243]. The title of athlophoros (ἀθλοφόρος) – the priestess of Berenice II – was also remarkably consistent: it appears in dating formulas from around 211 B.C. and persists for more than a century [Hölbl, 2000, p. 170]. The priesthood of Cleopatra I, initially established as a joint cult of mother and son (177–176 B.C.): “priest of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, his mother” [Lanciers, 2020, p. 183], underwent transformation after the suppression of the revolt by Ptolemy VI in the Thebaid (164 B.C.). Two new separate positions were introduced: the priest of Ptolemy VI and the priestess of Cleopatra, the mother of Ptolemy [of] the god Epiphanes Eucharistos, as recorded in the papyrus P.Dryton. 1 [Vandorpe, 2002, p. 49–50]. The formula “[of] the god Epiphanes Eucharistos” (Θεοῦ Ἐπιφανοῦς Εὐχαρίστου) emphasized the connection of the legitimate heir, Ptolemy VI, with his father, Ptolemy V, who bore the epithet Eucharistos. The subsequent simplification of the title to “priestess of Cleopatra, the divine mother Epiphanes” in 146 B.C. [Cheshire, 2009, p. 381] reflected the policy of Ptolemy VIII, who sought to delegitimize his brother by minimizing references to him and emphasizing the maternal aspect of the cult. This allowed him to appeal to the image of Cleopatra I as a common predecessor for both Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II, his sister and wife.

The institutional flexibility of this priesthood, its adaptation to changing political realities, and its role as ideological machinery distinguish it from earlier cults. The priestesses acted not only as religious figures but also as conduits for the dynastic propaganda of Cleopatra I, promoting the idea of her divine right to regency and the legitimacy of her son, Ptolemy VI.

The establishment of the priesthood associated with Cleopatra I and her son Ptolemy VI in 177–176 B.C. was a response to the systemic crisis of power legitimacy in Hellenistic Egypt, caused by the minority of the heir to the throne and escalating intra-dynastic competition. In 180 B.C., King Ptolemy V died, allegedly poisoned according to one version (*Diod. Sic. XXIX.29*) [Bevan, 1927 p. 280], while his children were too young to assume the throne: Ptolemy VI was approximately six years old [Cheshire, 2009, p. 360], Cleopatra II was between four and six years old, and Ptolemy VIII was three to four years old [Hölbl, 2001, p. 142]. The question arose of appointing a regent, who could be one of Ptolemy V’s close advisors or his wife, Cleopatra I. A similar situation had already occurred in Egyptian history when Ptolemy IV died in 205 B.C., and his wife Arsinoe III was supposed to become regent for their underage son, Ptolemy V [Grimm, 1997]. However, the elites at the Ptolemaic court deemed this unacceptable, and as a result of a conspiracy, Arsinoe III was murdered [Ashton, 2003, p. 60]. Cleopatra I was not Arsinoe III [Macurdy, 1975, p. 146]; she assumed the role of regent for her son Ptolemy VI. In a context of instability and the absence of an adult king, her regency not only formally but also de facto secured her primacy in the ruling dyad [Hazzard, 2000, p. 125–126]. Thus, in the early stages of Ptolemy VI’s reign, Cleopatra I’s name appears first in the dating formulas of

papyri, where traditionally the king's name was listed first, symbolizing his leading political role [Macurdy, 1975, p. 145, Whitehorne, 2006, p. 86]. This is confirmed by a series of papyri, such as P.Freib. 3, created between 179 and 176 B.C. [Partsch, 1927, S. 6–46], as well as P.Trier 1.12 [Kramer, Sánchez-Moreno Ellart, 2017], where Cleopatra's name is listed first: “during the reign of Cleopatra, the mother, goddess Epiphanes, and Ptolemy, the son of Ptolemy, god Epiphanes” (*βασιλευόντων Κλεοπάτρας τῆς μητρὸς θεᾶς Ἐπιφανοῦς καὶ Πτολεμαίου τοῦ Πτολεμαίου θεοῦ Ἐπιφανοῦς*).

Thus, the political situation was characterized by dual power: Cleopatra I, as the regent, de facto concentrated military and administrative authority [Whitehorne, 2006, p. 86]. However, her position remained vulnerable because not everyone at court agreed with the regency of an adult woman and preferred to see one of the brothers – Ptolemy VI or his younger brother Ptolemy VIII – on the throne, in order to manipulate them for their own purposes. Consequently, Cleopatra I needed not only to maintain her grip on power despite the dissatisfaction of some members of the Alexandrian elite but also to demonstrate internal stability and the strength of the state in the face of external threats, such as Seleucid expansion and the growing interference of Rome in the affairs of Hellenistic states [Bevan, 1927, p. 282]. Accordingly, these political circumstances and challenges necessitated an innovative approach to the sacralization of power, which was expressed in the establishment of a new institution of priesthood for the dynastic cult of the Ptolemies.

The introduction of the priest of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, his mother in 177–176 B.C. [Pestman, 1967, p. 142] was an unprecedented act, as it signified the deification of the queen during her lifetime. This broke the tradition of posthumously establishing cults for women of the dynasty, as had been the case with Cleopatra I's predecessors [Pomeroy, 1990, p. 21–23; Hazzard, 2000, p. 114–115]. For example, the kanephoros (basket-bearer) priestess of Arsinoe II is first mentioned around 267 B.C. in Alexandria. In the Oxyrhynchus papyrus – P.Oxy 2465. fr. 2. col. 1 – which contains a fragment of the work *On the Demes of Alexandria* by the historian Satyrus of Callatis, there is a reference to a procession in honor of Arsinoe II led by her kanephoros priestess. In Ptolemais, the priesthood of Arsinoe II was established around 183–182 B.C. [Quaeghebeur, 1971, p. 243]. However, Arsinoe II had died in 270–268 B.C. [van Oppen, 2010, p. 139], meaning that the position of kanephoros priestess for her was established posthumously. Similarly, in 211–210 B.C., following the death of Berenice II in 221 B.C., her son Ptolemy IV established the priesthood of the athlophoros (prize-bearer) in Alexandria [Hölbl, 2000, p. 170]. Likewise, the position of a priestess for Arsinoe III, who had been assassinated in a conspiracy in 204 B.C., was established in 199–198 B.C. [Clarysse, 1983, p. 20]. This pattern of posthumous establishment of priesthoods for royal women underscores a deliberate practice of honoring deceased queens as part of the Ptolemaic dynastic cult. The case of Cleopatra I, however, represents a significant deviation from this tradition, as her priesthood was established in the last years of her life, reflecting a shift in the political and religious strategies of the Ptolemaic Dynasty. This change may indicate an effort to enhance the living queen's authority and integrate her more directly into the sacred framework of the royal cult. This step pursued a dual purpose: to legitimize Cleopatra I's regency through her sacred union with her son and to neutralize opposition, emphasizing the inseparability of dynastic succession – from husband to mother and eldest son in the family.

The composition of the cultic pair – mother and son – is also unique, as dynastic pairs were typically formed by husband and wife: Ptolemy I and Berenice I as the divine couple of the Soteres, Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II as the divine couple of the Adelphoi, and so on [Pomeroy, 1990, p. 16; van Oppen, 2007, p. 24]. The cult of mother and son, in contrast to the traditional spousal pairs of the Ptolemies, emphasized Cleopatra I's role as the guarantor of the heir's legitimacy, reflecting a reconfiguration of gender roles in Ptolemaic ideology. However, a critical analysis of the chronology reveals some debatable points: some scholars suggest that the cult might have

been established immediately after death of the queen by her supporters [Whitehorne, 2006, p. 87], yet the papyrological evidence from 177–176 B.C. confirms that the priesthood could have been established during Cleopatra I's lifetime, and thus with her sanction [Lanciers, 2020, p. 183]. Considering other political measures taken during her regency, the independent establishment of the priesthood does not appear extraordinary.

Cleopatra I appears to have played a significant role in shaping foreign policy, particularly in the matters related to Syria. Her husband, Ptolemy V, had plans for a military campaign against the Seleucids to reclaim Coele-Syria (*Diod. Sic.* XXIX.29), but after his death, these intentions were abandoned. It is possible that Cleopatra, as the sister of the Seleucid ruler Seleucus IV, did not wish to enter into conflict with her homeland and brother [Hölbl, 2001, p. 143]. Additionally, a war could have undermined Cleopatra I's position of power. Although the extent of her control over the situation remains not entirely clear, she certainly had the ability to block decisions unfavorable to her [Hazzard, 2000, p. 127], including preparations for war, which resumed only after the queen's death in 176 B.C. (*Liv.* XLII.29) [Macurdy, 1975, p. 145–146].

During the regency of Cleopatra I, the minting of coins featuring the queen was also established. Notably, on a gold octadrachmon from Alexandria, Cleopatra I is depicted on the obverse, while Ptolemy VI is shown on the reverse. Cleopatra I is portrayed wearing a diadem with a headdress known as a stephane (στέφανη) [Hazzard, 2000, p. 126; Whitehorne, 2006, p. 83; Cheshire, 2009, p. 379–380]. This headdress, along with the scepter placed above Cleopatra's portrait, are typical symbols found on coins depicting Arsinoe II [Gkikaki, 2021, p. 72]. It can be assumed that the iconography of Cleopatra I was influenced by traditional depictions of Arsinoe II, who, although not a de facto ruler, had the most successful and widely disseminated cult compared to Cleopatra I's other predecessors.

It is noteworthy that no ritual scenes on temples or stelae have survived to the present day where Cleopatra I stands behind her husband Ptolemy V or her son Ptolemy VI. Her status as regent is not reflected in Egyptian monumental art [Minas-Nerpel, 2011, p. 61]. This may be a consequence of the unstable internal political situation in Egypt [Bevan, 1927, p. 290], which made it impossible to organize the construction or reconstruction of temples with subsequent depictions of Cleopatra I. Thus, not all traditional directions of Ptolemaic policy were equally realized during Cleopatra I's regency. On the other hand, the cultural practices associated with the Ptolemaic Dynasty exhibited significant differences in their reception among the Greco-Macedonian elite and the local Egyptian population. These divergences in approaches to the sacralization of power are understandable, given the distinct objectives pursued within each group. For instance, depictions of a monarch participating in religious ceremonies should not be interpreted as an indication of their divine status; rather, they emphasize their role as an intermediary in sacred rituals. So, the absence of Cleopatra I in such visual narratives suggests a selective construction of her image: while her cult held significance for the Hellenized society, her ritual functions could be deliberately downplayed within the Egyptian tradition. This reflects the flexibility of propagandist strategies, which were adapted to the cultural specificities of different segments of the population.

Nevertheless, Cleopatra I pursued a firm foreign policy and took measures to strengthen her own power and the position of her son, Ptolemy VI. Among her initiatives, the establishment of the priesthood of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, his mother, proved to be the most enduring, as it continued to function for more than a decade after the queen's death around 176 B.C.

The preservation of the unchanged title “priest of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, his mother” for thirteen years after the death of Cleopatra I [Whitehorne, 2006, p. 87], despite the political chaos of the 2nd century B.C., represents a paradox explainable by a combination of ideological, pragmatic, and institutional factors. Despite the civil strife between Ptolemy VI and VIII,

Roman interference, and the fragmentation of elites, the static nature of the cult reflected the strategic conservation of symbolic capital in a state of perpetual crisis rather than stability in general. Firstly, the elites of Alexandria and Memphis, including the regency council under the underage Ptolemy VI, used the unchanging title as a tool of ritual stabilization, creating the illusion of continuity of power from Cleopatra I to Ptolemy VI. Political elites benefited from maintaining the appearance of Cleopatra I's patronage, now as a divine mother, allowing them to continue her policies "in her name" and "with her consent." Moreover, the formulation of this priestly title could symbolically emphasize the youth and immaturity of Ptolemy VI, highlighting his inability to independently represent the country both politically and religiously, which served the interests of the royal court elites. Secondly, Ptolemy VI himself, preoccupied with military campaigns and diplomatic missions, including visits to Rome, did not fully grasp the importance of establishing his own separate cult. Only after the uprising in the Thebaid in the late 160s B.C. Ptolemy VI likely realized the necessity of strengthening the king's status in the areas prone to rebellion. Thirdly, the conservatism of priestly institutions, for whom changes in titlature meant revising rituals and redistributing resources, may have played a role. The canonized cult of Cleopatra I, integrated into the dynastic cult, was perceived as a guarantor of cosmic order, and its revision could have been interpreted as a threat to the sacred balance. Thus, the conservation of the priesthood became a form of latent crisis management, where ritual stagnation masked political turbulence. This phenomenon illustrates a unique feature of the Ptolemaic system: sacred institutions, while serving as tools of legitimization, could become hostages to it, preserving archaic forms even in an era of radical transformations. The unchanging title, contrary to appearances, did not reflect stability but demonstrated how religious structures became a field of ideological compromise in conditions where open reforms threatened the fragile status quo.

The first change in the titlature of the priesthood of Cleopatra I, recorded in 164 B.C., is directly linked to a dramatic turn in the political history of Ptolemaic Egypt. In 164 B.C., a revolt broke out in the Thebaid. According to historical sources, Ptolemy VI personally led the campaign to suppress the rebellion [Hölbl, 2001, p. 181–182]. Despite the prolonged siege of the city of Panopolis, the king managed to successfully quell the uprising [Bevan, 1927, p. 290].

However, despite this military success, the situation in the region remained tense and unstable. Many inhabitants abandoned their villages, unable to pay the burdensome taxes, leading to the spread of the phenomenon known as *anachoresis* (flight from tax obligations) [Uebel, 1962, S. 147–162]. To address the emerging socio-economic problems, a series of measures were undertaken. In addition to the royal decree of 165 B.C., "On Agriculture," which mandated that farmers lease abandoned lands at reduced rates and that livestock owners provide their animals for the cultivation of royal lands, the *dioiketes* issued clarifying circulars in 164 B.C. These circulars specified that land allotments would be distributed according to each individual's capabilities. This helped to pacify the protests of the Egyptian soldiers, who were entirely exempted from compulsory leasing, as they even had to borrow money during the winter to ensure the cultivation of their plots [Westermann, 1938, p. 276–277].

Simultaneously with these economic measures, it appears that an attempt was made to strengthen the royal cult. In the same year, 164 B.C., while Ptolemy VI was suppressing the revolt in the Thebaid and besieging Panopolis, the priesthood in Ptolemais, located approximately 24 km from Panopolis (modern-day El-Monshah and Akhmim, respectively), underwent changes. A separate priest position was established for Ptolemy VI, and a priestess was appointed for his mother, Cleopatra I, emphasizing her status as a divine figure. The title of the priest was transformed: instead of the joint cult of "Ptolemy and Cleopatra, his mother," a divided formula emerged – "priest of Ptolemy VI" and "priestess of Cleopatra, the mother of Ptolemy, god

Epiphanes Eucharistos” [Vandorpe, 2022, p. 49–50]. These steps indicate the Ptolemies’ efforts to consolidate their power not only through administrative and economic reforms but also by enhancing the sacred authority of the royal family. Thus, the revolt of 164 B.C. may have contributed to the development of the cult of Ptolemy VI.

At first glance, one might assume that the epithet “god Epiphanes Eucharistos” refers to Ptolemy VI himself. However, this is not the case, as Ptolemy VI, although he bore the epithet “Epiphanes” in honor of his father, was never referred to as “Epiphanes Eucharistos.” This title traditionally belonged to Ptolemy V, the father of Ptolemy VI (OGIS 90). Thus, there is reason to believe that the translation of the title should read as “priestess of Cleopatra, the mother of Ptolemy [born of] the god Epiphanes Eucharistos.” This change in wording carries profound symbolic meaning and reflects a shift from the sacralization of motherhood to an emphasis on paternal succession. The mention of Ptolemy V (“god Epiphanes Eucharistos”) in the title of the priestess of Cleopatra I underscores that her son Ptolemy VI is not merely the heir of a regent mother but the legitimate successor of his father. The cultic role of Cleopatra I narrows: from an equal participant in a divine pair, she becomes a “channel” for transmitting sacred authority from Ptolemy V to his son. This leads to the hypothesis that in times of crisis, the dynastic cult became a genealogical tool, where female figures played a supporting role.

The second change in the titulature of the priesthood of Cleopatra I, recorded in 146 B.C., was a direct consequence of the radical restructuring of power following the death of Ptolemy VI in 146–145 B.C. and the final victory of Ptolemy VIII in the prolonged civil war. The updated title of the priestess of Cleopatra I appears in documents from 146 B.C., such as the Demotic papyri from Thebes, P.Paris BnF 218 [Zauzich, 1968, S. 43–146] and P.Berlin P 3119 [Buttmann, 1824, p. 89–115], where she is referred to as the priestess of Cleopatra I, the mother, goddess Epiphanes (ἱερεῖων Κλεοπάτρας τῆς μητρὸς θεᾶς Ἐπιφανοῦς).

The new king, known for his cruelty (*Just. Epit.* XXXVIII, 8) and his desire to eradicate the memory of his brother, conducted a systematic revision of the dynastic cult to assert his own legitimacy. The political context was further complicated by Ptolemy VIII’s marriage to Cleopatra II, the widow of Ptolemy VI, which elevated her to a key figure at court and necessitated a reconfiguration of sacred rhetoric. Under these circumstances, the title of the priestess of Cleopatra I was transformed into “priestess of Cleopatra, the mother, goddess Epiphanes,” as mentioned, for example, in the 140 B.C. papyrus P.Amh. II 45 [Grenfell, Hunt, 1901, p. 55–56], where the epithet “Thea Epiphanes” (Θεὰ Ἐπιφανής) now refers exclusively to her, rather than to her son or husband.

This revision marks the final alteration of the cult of Cleopatra I. Whereas her role had previously been associated with the transfer of power from Ptolemy V to Ptolemy VI, the emphasis now shifted to her status as a “divine ancestress,” allowing Ptolemy VIII to distance himself from his brother and father, whose will he had defied by seizing the throne, while simultaneously appealing to the image of his mother as a common predecessor for both himself and his wife. The cultic role of Cleopatra I was reduced to the symbolic function of a “progenitor,” contrasting with her lifetime influence as regent.

The last mentions of the updated title appear in papyri from 134–123 B.C., such as P.Adler 1 from Crocodilopolis [Adler et al., 1939, p. 2–13] and P.Lond. 3 879 from Gebelein [Kenyon, Bell, 1907, p. 5–8], where Cleopatra I is referred to as “the mother, goddess Epiphanes.” After 123 B.C., her name disappears from the formulas, which is linked to the rise of the cults of Cleopatra II and III, who took center stage in Ptolemaic propaganda. Archaeological evidence, including the stele from Memphis (I. Thebes 301), confirms that by 138 B.C., the title had been completely replaced by new formulas glorifying Ptolemy VIII and his wives. Thus, the revision of 146 B.C. completed the transformation of the cult of Cleopatra I from a tool for legitimizing

living rulers into an archaized symbol of dynastic succession, which had lost its relevance in the era of new political realities.

The changes in the titlature of the priesthood associated with Cleopatra I reflect the complex interplay of religious and political mechanisms of power legitimization in Hellenistic Egypt. From a religious perspective, the evolution of her cult demonstrates a transition from a syncretic sacred union of mother and son to the archaization of Cleopatra I's image as a "divine ancestress." The initial priesthood of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, his mother (177–176 B.C.), facilitated the integration of the queen into the pantheon of deified rulers, emphasizing the unique status of the regent mother. However, the subsequent transformations – the division of the cults of mother and son in 164 B.C. and simplification in 146 B.C. – reduced her role to a mediating function between generations.

From a political perspective, the changes in the priest titlature served as a tool for manipulations around the symbolic capital. The initial title of the priest mentioned the queen alongside her son Ptolemy VI, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of Cleopatra I's regency by creating the illusion of a sacred union that masked the king's minority. However, the division of the cult in 164 B.C., associated with the suppression of the Thebaid rebellion by Ptolemy VI, emphasized his connection with Ptolemy V, allowing the son to appeal to the authority of his father to strengthen his power. The final revision of the title in 146 B.C. ("priestess of Cleopatra, the divine mother Epiphanes") reflected the policy of Ptolemy VIII, who sought to erase any traces of his brother while preserving the motif of his own succession through the cult of his mother.

Thus, the transformations in the titlature of the priesthood of Cleopatra I illustrate the dialectic of the sacred and the political: the cult, initially serving as a tool for legitimizing her personal power, gradually turned into an archaic symbol used to justify new regimes. Religious rhetoric, subordinated to the pragmatics of power, evolved from an innovative synthesis (mother-son as a divine pair) to conservative clichés (dynastic progenitor), ultimately marking the loss of its historical relevance in favor of the cults of living rulers. This process demonstrates how Hellenistic monarchies exploited religious institutions, turning them into a flexible language of power, capable of adapting to any, even the most contradictory, political conditions.

The cult of Cleopatra I and its transformation significantly influenced the formation of sacral political models for the subsequent queens of the dynasty, particularly Cleopatra II and III, as reflected in both ritual practices and the strengthening of their political status [Minas-Nerpel, 2011, p. 62]. In the sacred aspect, the precedent of Cleopatra I's deification during her lifetime laid the groundwork for more daring experiments with female cults. Cleopatra II, first the wife of Ptolemy VI and later of Ptolemy VIII, not only inherited the title of "mother goddess" but was also integrated into the cult as the "goddess-loving mother" (θεὰ Φιλομήτωρ), directly referencing Cleopatra I's role as a guarantor of dynastic succession [Whitehorne, 2006, p. 127]. Even more indicative is the example of Cleopatra III, who during her lifetime received the title "benefactor goddess" (θεὰ Εὐεργέτις) and was declared co-ruler with her sons, Ptolemy IX and X [van Oppen, 2007, p. 138; Sewell-Lasater, 2020, p. 326–330] – a direct evolution of the idea of a sacred union between mother and son, first tested with Cleopatra I.

In political terms, the legacy of Cleopatra I manifested in the legitimization of female regency and co-regency. While Cleopatra I used the cult to consolidate power during the minority of the heir, Cleopatra II and III transformed it into a tool for independent rule [Sewell-Lasater, 2020, p. 303–304, 326–330]. Moreover, the division and subsequent archaization of the cult of Cleopatra I (164–146 B.C.) demonstrated that female cults could flexibly adapt to political needs. Cleopatra II, embroiled in conflict with Ptolemy VIII, used her cult to mobilize support: her title Thea Philometor Soteira emphasized her role as the protector of Egypt in contrast to the "tyranny" of her husband [Whitehorne, 2006, p. 118; Sewell-Lasater, 2020, p. 306]. After that, Cleopatra III,

drawing on the cult of Isis, which was associated with her predecessor, de facto ruled Egypt by deposing and appointing her sons to the throne [Whitehorne, 2006, p. 132–133; Otto, Bengtson, 1938, S. 73]. This phenomenon became possible because the transformations of Cleopatra I's cult normalized the sacred status of queens as bearers of administrative power.

However, the key difference lay in the institutionalization of female influence. While the cult of Cleopatra I remained tied to the figure of her son, her successors, particularly Cleopatra III, achieved the autonomy of their cults [van Oppen, 2007, p. 10–11; Sewell-Lasater, 2020, p. 319]. Temples in Kom Ombo and Dendera, where Cleopatra III was depicted as equal to the gods [Minas-Nerpel, 2011, p. 69], indicate that her cult was represented in the Egyptian environment, while Cleopatra I had not succeeded in this area. In general, the development of the cult of Cleopatra III as a mechanism for maintaining power became possible due to the precedents created in the era of Cleopatra I. Thus, the cult of Cleopatra I, having begun as a tool for crisis management, evolved into a sustainable model that allowed subsequent queens of the Ptolemaic house not only to participate in power but also to redefine its sacred foundations.

Overall, the evolution of the priesthood of Cleopatra I illustrates how sacred institutions became a “text” of political change, adapting to crises of power. This process, within the framework of P. Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital, demonstrates the conversion of religious authority into political authority [Bourdieu, 1984, p. 291], which was critically important for maintaining the legitimacy of the dynasty in the face of external threats and internal fragmentation. The cult of motherhood, introduced as a tool for crisis management, not only compensated for the absence of an adult monarch but also laid the groundwork for the further sacralization of female figures in the Ptolemaic tradition, as later manifested in the cults of Cleopatra II and III.

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