

Elizabeth Donnelly Carney, *Arsinoë of Egypt and Macedon. A Royal Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, XII, 215 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-536552-8, £64.00 (hb.) / ISBN 978-0-19-536551-1, £ 18.99 (pb.).

The academic series “Women in Antiquity” published by the Oxford University Press was expanded last year with the addition of a book about the famous Arsinoë II Philadelphus, the sibling-wife of Ptolemy II, less memorable for her earlier marriages with Lysimachus and her half-brother Ptolemy Ceraunus. The author, Elizabeth Donnelly CARNEY [= C.], is one of the leading experts in the history of Ancient Macedonia and Macedonian royal women in particular. This is the second biography of Arsinoë, after the book by G. LONGEGA¹. New treatment of this biographical theme is topical due to publications of new sources (e.g., the papyrus fragments of Posidippus) and some important discussions over recent decades (especially on the timing of Arsinoë’s death and her deification).

The book gives a very good idea of the family background for the events of Arsinoë’s life and her motives on various occasions. For instance, speaking of Arsinoë’s intrigues against Agathocles, Lysimachus’ senior son, C. mentions the motive of her “fear” (her anticipation that Agathocles becoming Lysimachus’ successor might menace her and her children by Lysimachus; p. 44). Contrary to that, two younger sons of Arsinoë perished after her shotgun marriage to Ceraunus. C. believes that the latter “probably planned the murders from the start” (p. 54); however, this is contradicted by an interesting proposal that the fate of Arsinoë’s sons was decided by the flight of the elder of them, Ptolemy, from Macedonia and his alliance against Ceraunus with the Illyrian king, Monounius (Pomp. Trog. *Prol.* XXIV)². C. also allows a motive of revenge from Ceraunus caused by the confrontation between the two lines of Ptolemy Soter’s descendants: he himself was the son of Eurydice while Arsinoë and Ptolemy II were given birth to by Berenice (pp. 61–62).

C. places the return of Arsinoë to Egypt between 279 and 276/275 (pp. 63, 66): a more precise dating is impossible. It is quite likely that, as author believes, Arsinoë stayed at Samothrace or somewhere else until ca 277/276, waiting for the outcome of her son Ptolemy’s struggle for Macedonia; after Antigonus Gonatas finally established himself over it, she would leave for her brother’s realm.

The key point in Arsinoë’s life is, certainly, her marriage to her brother Ptolemy II (between 276 and 273/272, most likely ca 275: p. 70). C. is right to state that, contrary to the judgment of many classicists³, “royal sibling marriage [...] was not the pharaonic norm” (p. 71). This is said by the author about the possible model for the famous marriage of Ptolemy II and Arsinoë in the half-sister or sibling royal marriages in the New Kingdom⁴; and this is certainly true but not quite sufficient. For such a model the Egyptian contemporaries of Ptolemy II would really have had to go back as far as the New Kingdom, as no royal marriage of the kind is known to have occurred in the 1st millennium BC. And at this point scholars tend to forget an important fact: as can be seen well

¹ G. LONGEGA, *Arsinoë II*, Roma 1968.

² Cf. H. HEINEN, *Untersuchungen zur hellenistischen Geschichte des 3. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* Wiesbaden 1972, pp. 81–83; R.A. HAZZARD, *Imagination of Monarchy: Studies in Ptolemaic Propaganda*, Toronto 2000, p. 84.

³ E.g. D. OGDEN, *Polygamy, Prostitutes and Death. The Hellenistic Dynasties*, London–Swansea 1999, pp. 77 f.

⁴ See, e.g., a convenient synopsis in: R. MIDDLETON, *Brother-Sister and Father-Daughter Marriage in Ancient Egypt*, *American Sociological Review* XXVII 1962, p. 602.

enough from Manetho's evidence⁵, under Ptolemy II the New Kingdom was for native Egyptians far in the past, and their knowledge of it was by far too inadequate to take such model from it (symptomatically Manetho does not seem to know about the consanguineous marriages of the New Kingdom kings). Turning to the sibling marriage of Osiris and Isis as another possible model for the marriage of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe, C. mentions that the cult of Isis "did not become prominent until Ptolemaic time" (p. 71). This is not true, for temple building honouring Isis started still in the mid-1st millennium BC and under Dynasty XXX, on the eve of the Macedonian period, it might be called quite important⁶. However, if the parallel with Isis might have worked for the acceptance of Arsinoe's marriage to Ptolemy by the Egyptians, it certainly could not have been a motive for it. C. is fairly critical towards the view attested in Classical sources that this marriage followed common, non-royal Egyptian practice (p. 74): as early as 1954 J. ČERNÝ showed the meagerness of brother-sister marriage among the Egyptian commoners of the pharaonic time and actually the non-existence of sibling marriage among them⁷; what came to be known later did not deflate his conclusion. Though sibling marriage seemed frequent among commoners in the late Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt⁸, this is certainly irrelevant for the case of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe. As for possible Greek models, C. mentions the mythological marriage of Zeus and Hera (p. 72), a subject topical in the poetic propaganda of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe (p. 79), though again it would be silly to see in this affinity a motive for their marriage. The conclusion that can be felt in C.'s arguments but deserves to be much better articulated is that in their marriage this brother and sister actually did not follow any dynastic or ideological pattern, but rather created a new one for themselves!

The question of a model for the marriage of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe borders on the question of its true motives. Among them C. eliminates childbirth, *eros* and, as it seems, romantic love (pp. 74 f.) tending to find a highly pragmatic explanation for this marriage. Arsinoe's pragmatism is defined with a highly desirable status she acquired by marrying her brother (pp. 80 f.); as for Ptolemy II, his motives must have depended on the acceptance of this marriage by his subjects. As already mentioned, a parallel with Osiris and Isis would make it acceptable for Egyptians; as for Greeks, C. is probably right to assert that a historiographical *topos* of their indignation against this marriage largely depended on the tradition about Sotades' salacious witticisms, though other evidence hardly gives grounds for it (pp. 73 f.). If so, then, to say the least, the neutral reaction of the Greeks to the marriage of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe is not excluded (C. is especially right to indicate as an argument for this "the tremendous success of the subsequent cult of Arsinoe II": p. 74). According to C., the benefit that the king acquired from this marriage was its role in the self-presentation of the dynasty: unlike a "foreign" alliance, it focused attention on domestic affairs and contributed to the presentation of the Ptolemaic dynasty as a lasting sequence of royal couples, stressing the stability of the country under their rule (pp. 76–78; these features of the royal couple seem to be replicated in the images of Alcinous and Arete in Apollonius' epic: pp. 103, 105). True, the idea of a Ptolemaic royal couple was coined rather under Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II than before

⁵ See now in general on Manetho's tradition: R. GOZZOLI, *The Writing of History in Ancient Egypt during the First Millennium bc (ca 1070–180 BC): Trends and Perspectives*, London 2006, pp. 191 f.

⁶ D. ARNOLD, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, New York–London 1999, pp. 86, 88 (Amasis), pp. 119 f. (Nectanebo I), pp. 125 f. (Nectanebo II); cf. the stress on Nectanebo II's sonship to Isis in his falcon statue from Tanis: P. MONTET, *Inscriptions de Basse Époque trouvées à Tanis*, Kêmi XV 1959, pp. 59 f.

⁷ J. ČERNÝ, *Consanguineous Marriages in Pharaonic Egypt*, JEA XL 1954, pp. 23–29.

⁸ S. HUEBNER, 'Brother-Sister' Marriage in Roman Egypt: A Curiosity of Humankind or a Widespread Family Strategy? JRS XCVII 2007, pp. 21–49; S. REMIJSEN, W. CLARYSSE, *Incest or Adoption? Brother-Sister Marriage in Roman Egypt Revisited*, JRS XCVIII 2008, pp. 53–61; J. ROWLANDSON, R. TAKAHASHI, *Brother-Sister Marriage and Inheritance Strategies in Greco-Roman Egypt*, JRS XCIX 2009, pp. 104–139.

them: however, the reasons to believe that to achieve this effect Ptolemy had necessarily to marry his sibling are weak. C. cannot think of any other pragmatic reason for this marriage; but if so, does it not mean that the king married his sister on her return to Egypt just because he wanted and intended to do so? Certainly, “if Ptolemy II wanted to sleep with his sister he did not need to marry her to do it”, and there are objections against “erotic bonds” between them (p. 75; though C. adds fairly that they can be neither proved nor denied; and Pausanias spoke about Ptolemy’s passion seriously: Paus. I 7, 1). Nevertheless, Ptolemy was eight years old when his sister, twice his age at most and, maybe, even younger (pp. 11, 23), left Egypt to marry Lysimachus – quite enough for a fraternal affection or admiration (possibly, void of sexual undercurrents) that would not be forgotten and could eventually lead the king to raise his sister’s status to the highest level. This simple explanation for the marriage of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe should not be discarded on the basis that the attempts to “pragmatize” its motives are feeble.

C. notices that Arsinoe is not mentioned in connection to the famous procession which took place at Alexandria and was described by Callixenus of Rhodes, whose account is reproduced by Athenaeus; among the possible dates for this event – 279, 275/274 and 271 – C. prefers the earliest and believes that the “absence” of Arsinoe indicates that she was still not in Egypt (pp. 86 f.). However, later dating of the procession is too easily discarded by C. One can add to the arguments for it⁹ Athenaeus’ mention of a pavilion decorated, among other things, with “silver” and “golden” (rather silver and gold-plated) *θυραίοι*, i.e. oblong Celtic shields (Athen. V 26, 196 F). They were not known in the Hellenistic East before the invasion of the Celts in Asia Minor in 278 BC; and their appearance in the processional apparel might be connected with the perishing of Philadelphus’ rebellious Celtic mercenaries on an island in the Nile Delta ca 275 BC. This event was topical in the propaganda of the king (Callim. *Hymn. Del.* 171–187 with scholia; cf. Paus. I 7, 2), and an allusion to it by Callixenus (quoted by Athenaeus) makes a date of 275/274 more likely.

C. is very careful in defining her position on the timing of Arsinoe’s death and deification. The traditional views that Arsinoe died in 270 BC and her cult of *Thea Philadelphus* was inaugurated after her death seem better accepted by the author than the alternatives that she died in 268 and could still have been deified in her lifetime¹⁰ (pp. 104, 106); however, C. does not present her own arguments for this debate. Deplorably C. does not concentrate on an important source for the ideology of Ptolemy II – *An Encomium to Ptolemy*, or *Idyll 17*, by Theocritus. The view that it was presented at the Ptolemaia feast of 271/270 BC is sometimes rejected¹¹; nevertheless Arsinoe is shown in it as Ptolemy’s wife and at the same time the poem has a definite aspect of military triumph. Such an atmosphere would have existed after the success of Ptolemy II in the Syrian War of Succession of 280–279 BC or in the First Syrian War of 274–271 BC; and the second option is more likely if *Encomium*’s mention of a firm defence of Egypt on the sea and in the Eastern Delta is not a general phrase but an allusion to a specific deed by Ptolemy II¹². In such a case, the poem should really be dated to ca 271 BC; and the rather moderate tone of Arsinoe’s appraisal in it makes it unlikely that her cult of *Thea Philadelphus* existed at that time.

⁹ V. FOERTMEYER, *The Dating of the Pompe of Ptolemy*, *Historia* XXXVII 1988, pp. 90–104.

¹⁰ The later dating of Arsinoe’s death was put forward by E. GRZYBEK (*Du calendrier macédonien au calendrier ptolémaïque: problèmes de chronologie hellénistique*, Bâle 1990, pp. 103–112) and later supported by a number of authors, including B. VAN OPPEN, who added it recently with a theory of Arsinoe’s lifetime worship as *Thea Philadelphus* (*The Death of Arsinoe II Philadelphus: Evidence Reconsidered*, ZPE CLXXIV [2010], pp. 139–149).

¹¹ R. HUNTER, *Theocritus’ Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus. Text and Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Berkeley 2003, p. 183.

¹² G. HÖBL, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, London–New York 2001, p. 40 (on these wars in general see pp. 37 f.).

C. opposes the view that Ptolemy II adopted Ptolemy, son of Lysimachus and Arsinoe, and that he was the mysterious “Ptolemy the Son”, the official co-ruler of Philadelphus in 267–259 BC (pp. 125, 136, 144 f.; p. 136: “I think he is more likely a son of Ptolemy II by another woman”). However, the argument of W. HUSS that the son of Lysimachus fits the role of “Ptolemy the Son” better than anyone else seems more convincing¹³. C. admits Arsinoe’s influence on the domestic and foreign policy of Ptolemy II, but does not exaggerate her role in unleashing the Chremonidean War. Until now it has been widely accepted that under her influence Philadelphus intended to put Ptolemy, son of Lysimachus, on the Macedonian throne, which resulted in the unsuccessful war against Antigonos Gonatas¹⁴. However, the only basis for such a view is the words of the *Decree of Chremonides* that Ptolemy II “following the policy (προαίρεσις) of his ancestor and of his sister conspicuously shows his zeal for the common freedom of the Greeks” (*Staatsverträge* III 476, ll. 16–18). These words reflected the Ptolemaic propaganda inspired by rivalry with the Antigonids in Greece, as well as the Greek perception of Arsinoe’s role at the Alexandrian court¹⁵. However, C. is right to state that the supposition about the planned elevation of the son of Lysimachus to the Macedonian throne is purely speculative (p. 125).

Summing up the impression made by the book, one can say that it reproduces the life of Arsinoe II as faithfully as the present knowledge of sources allows, gives a good idea of its historical background and a well-balanced consideration of the relevant earlier theories. The book contains a wide discussion of the queen’s motives at different points in her life, and at the same time the author refrains from a personal position on some important debatable questions (like the dates of Arsinoe’s death and deification). However, both these features are appropriate in a book destined for a wider readership, and reluctance to take part in a discussion is rather natural whenever the problem being considered does not belong to the author’s own well-thought-through research and its full resolution is unlikely.

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¹³ Cf. W. HUSS, *Ptolemaios der Sohn*, ZPE CXXI 1998, pp. 229–250.

¹⁴ E.g. W.W. TARN, *Antigonos Gonatas*, Oxford 1913, p. 444; J.L. O’NEIL, *A Re-examination of the Chremonidean War*, in: P. McKECHNIE, Ph. GUILLAUME (eds.), *Ptolemy II Philadelphus and his World*, Leiden–Boston 2008, pp. 66 f.; VAN OPPEN, *op. cit.* (n. 10), pp. 148 f.

¹⁵ See critical remarks on the concept of Arsinoe’s influence on the foreign policy of Philadelphus: P. PASCHIDIS, *Between City and King. Prosopographical Studies on the Intermediaries between the Cities of the Greek Mainland and the Aegean and the Royal Courts in the Hellenistic Period (322–190 BC)*, Athens 2008, pp. 167 f.