



## PTOLEMY II PHILADELPHUS AND THE DIONYSIAC MODEL OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*Throughout the Ptolemaic era, the Greek rulers of Egypt had to tackle complex issues pertaining to the nature of their dominion over peoples who were in many ways culturally, socially, and politically distinct. This paper examines how, despite these differences, Ptolemy II Philadelphus found a way to connect with both the Greek and Egyptian segments of his population by identifying himself with the god Dionysus. Although a Greek deity, Dionysus possessed specific associations that would have resonated with elements of Egyptian religion and culture. These connotations would have promoted the perception of Philadelphus as a legitimate and benevolent ruler capable of transcending cultural boundaries. The grand procession in the Ptolemaia festival has been characterized by Dorothy J. Thompson as a form of propaganda for the ruling family. Similarly, the various forms of evidence presented in this paper suggest that Dionysus would have been a convenient political vehicle in this syncretic environment. Such an approach on the part of Philadelphus was highly innovative and effective, and influenced the political identity assumed by later Ptolemaic rulers.*

When Ptolemy II Philadelphus became sole ruler of Ptolemaic Egypt in 283 BCE, he inherited an expansive kingdom of great social, ethnic, and religious diversity. Moreover, cultural exchange and interaction between the Greeks and Egyptians living within these boundaries contributed to the increasing formation of new sociopolitical institutions and identities, especially at the highest levels of bureaucracy. Philadelphus was thus faced with the thorny task of presiding over seemingly disparate yet coexisting peoples—and as only the second Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt, he did not have much precedent for maintaining stability in this new political environment. In order to sustain power and accomplish his goals, Philadelphus understood the necessity of bridging the complex cultural gaps between the Greeks and the Egyptians while appealing to the unique traditions of those cultures. This examination of Philadelphus' reign and political persona will unveil how the ruler's cultivation of an affinity with the god Dionysus was instrumental in his construction a new model of authority with broad cross-cultural appeal.

In the past, classical scholarship often dismissed regal identification with Dionysus as the stereotypical tendency of debauched Eastern potentates. While most scholars have moved beyond this kneejerk interpretation, there has still not been sufficient analysis of the motivations that compelled rulers such as Philadelphus to link themselves to Dionysus. Philadelphus' connections to Dionysus have been well-documented,<sup>2</sup> but studies have not adequately scrutinized the historical, social, and political reasons behind this affiliation. This article offers a new per-

spective on Philadelphus' administration, revealing that his associations with Dionysus served as an integral part of his political program. It will be demonstrated that this program reflected an awareness that Dionysus, as a dichotomous and intercultural deity who transcended conventional boundaries, could appeal to both Greeks and Egyptians while also accentuating their similarities and ongoing cultural intermingling. The god's syncretic nature mirrored the political and cultural reality of the Ptolemaic empire, and his resemblances to the Egyptian god Osiris would further allow Philadelphus to find a meeting point where he could address and relate to both cultures. Such interconnections enabled him to operate within the bounds of traditional Greek and Egyptian models of authority simultaneously, thus promoting popular acceptance of his regime. These notions are reinforced by contemporary historical, artistic, and literary evidence that demonstrate the political expediency of Philadelphus' alignment with the god Dionysus in particular.<sup>3</sup>

As relative newcomers and outsiders to Egypt, the Ptolemaic rulers were confronted with the problem of ruling over a society that was in many ways alien to their own. One of the Egyptian political institutions rather foreign to them was the longstanding idea of divine kingship, which established the Egyptian pharaoh as a god. While the Macedonian Greeks were, as W. W. Tarn points out, "accustomed to despotic rule,"<sup>4</sup> they did not typically equate their kings with gods. To be perceived as legitimate rulers by the Egyptians, the Ptolemies would need to style themselves as divine monarchs and "bring their regime in line with the ancient Egyptian royal ideology of the king."<sup>5</sup>

Being an astute politician, Philadelphus was acutely aware of the importance of respecting and acclimating himself to the Egyptians' deeply entrenched sociopolitical climate, especially its kingship model. He thus began to identify himself with the god Dionysus, most visibly in the procession staged at the Ptolemaia festival that he instituted in Alexandria. In 280, he also instituted the deification of his father Ptolemy I Soter, which created a divine lineage for the Ptolemies and served to legitimize their rulership in the eyes of the Egyptians. Philadelphus was the first of the Ptolemies to fully understand the political necessity of making such adaptations. As Tarn asserts, Ptolemy I Soter had been looked upon as a usurper "whose right was the right of the strongest and ablest; Ptolemy II made that right the gift of heaven; the king now ruled, not because he was a conqueror, but because he was a god."<sup>6</sup> By cultivating a divine identity and establishing divine origins, Philadelphus enabled himself to be viewed as a typical pharaonic ruler who had his own state cult and "bore the five names like any Pharaoh"<sup>7</sup> in official Egyptian documents.

Philadelphus' appropriation of an Egyptian bureaucratic structure would thus help him be perceived as credible by his Egyptian subjects. He did not intend to interfere with Egyptian social or religious customs, and realized that doing so would only hinder his goal of being politically efficient and deriving "the utmost value out of the country."<sup>8</sup> At the same time, a Ptolemaic ruler could not overlook the powerful Greek component of his empire, and needed to act according Greek concepts of authority and bureaucracy as well. Philadelphus' dilemma was to perform the Egyptian and Greek functions of office simultaneously<sup>9</sup>—a seemingly impossible task, given that the Greeks lacked a concept of divine kingship and differed with respect to many other features associated with Egyptian authority. Discussing the predicament facing the Ptolemies, Ludwig Koenen observes that "there was and could be no concept of . . . a Greek deity protecting Egypt and all her inhabitants. The traditional gods of the city hardly fitted into the new world . . ."<sup>10</sup> And one can surely see why it would seem impossible for the Greek Ptolemies to project their gods and religious traditions upon the Egyptians, who had their own unique and unfamiliar religious practices. However, the "western" world of the Greeks and "eastern" world of the Egyptians were not entirely dissimilar and should not be viewed as discrete polar opposites. Indeed, inherent cultural similarities and interactions would allow rulers like Philadelphus to find areas of common ground between the Greek and Egyptian peoples.

Recognizing the increasingly syncretic nature of Egyptian rulership and society in general, Philadelphus grasped the political need to "engraft the culture of Hellas . . . on to the bureaucratic absolutism of the orient."<sup>11</sup> His particular insight in combining Greek and Egyptian constructions of authority was to identify himself with the god Dionysus. In so doing, he adhered to the Egyptian ideology of divine kingship while still remaining familiar and inoffensive to the Greeks; such a strategy can be viewed as a form of political posturing aimed at a culturally

diverse audience.<sup>12</sup> Koenen describes this sort of maneuvering within Greek and Egyptian traditions as Janus-like in nature and popular perception; members of all social classes had to navigate the complex intercultural environment that was Ptolemaic Egypt, but the Ptolemaic kings were particularly keen examples of the phenomenon, as they strove to direct one face "toward [their] Macedonian and Greek subjects and the other, the pharaonic head, toward the Egyptians."<sup>13</sup>

In lieu of an overtly "Janus-faced" administration, Ptolemy II Philadelphus' identification with Dionysus was actually quite apt, given the latter god's dichotomous nature and cross-cultural appeal. One can compare the antitheses represented by Dionysus to the bifurcated condition of Ptolemaic rulership and Hellenistic society in general. While Janus is well known as the two-headed god of classical antiquity, the binary polarities and liminal qualities embodied by Dionysus situate him as an equally dualistic deity. Walter Burkert refers to his status as "ambivalent and indeed paradoxical" and says that he "eludes definition" and maintains a close relationship to "Hermes, the crosser of boundaries."<sup>14</sup> Philadelphus, of course, assumed this sort of ambivalent and seemingly paradoxical position in his transactions across cultural interfaces. While Koenen and others have discerned the Janus-faced nature of Ptolemaic rule, it has not previously been suggested that Dionysus could essentially represent the same model of syncretism and cultural interchange for the Ptolemaic rulers. In many ways, Dionysus might be considered an even more suitable symbol than Janus for a leader who was required to mediate within an ambiguous political setting. Furthermore, when one assesses some of the specific characteristics associated with Dionysus, it becomes clear that these traits were particularly applicable to the circumstances of Philadelphus' reign.

The aspect of Dionysus perhaps most obviously symbolic of Philadelphus' rule is the god's classification as both an eastern and western figure. Although he was fully accepted within the Greek pantheon and had been worshipped by Greeks for many centuries before the Hellenistic era, Dionysus retained the connotation of being a young, foreign god "who had emigrated from Thrace to Greece."<sup>15</sup> This characterization is reflected in Euripides' *Bacchae*, in which the god is represented as a newcomer with eastern origins despite being well-established in Greek tradition. This ambiguity regarding the god's geographical origins would be highly germane for a Ptolemaic ruler whose task it was to manage "eastern" and "western" political spheres and function within a blurry, culturally intermingled political context. Moreover, the representation of Dionysus as a far-venturing traveler familiar with distant places and influential over a broad range of people<sup>16</sup> is akin to the leadership situation in which the Ptolemies found themselves.

Although Philadelphus can be considered an innovator for identifying himself with a god who shared his unique position as a ruler of both "East" and "West," this sort of regal affiliation with Dionysus was not completely without precedent. In many

ways, Philadelphus was expanding upon Dionysiac associations earlier Macedonian leaders had begun to develop. In particular, Alexander himself had been linked to Dionysus through his ventures to the East.<sup>17</sup> Two of the most powerful of the “ancestors” Alexander claimed were Dionysus and Heracles, both known for traveling to the limits of civilization<sup>18</sup> and returning to Greece after triumphant visits to India.<sup>19</sup> According to Guy MacLean Rogers, Alexander envisioned his own expedition to and from the East as analogous to Dionysus’ voyage.<sup>20</sup> Beginning with Philadelphus, the Ptolemaic dynasty was eager to invoke these connections to both Dionysus and Alexander.<sup>21</sup> This can be seen in coins minted shortly after the death of Soter, in which the Ptolemy was depicted in a portrait style closely resembling Alexander and wearing an elephant headdress and diadem. These symbols of victory, which R. R. R. Smith designates as “central elements in Hellenistic royal ideology,”<sup>22</sup> evoke the eastern exploits of Alexander and Dionysus simultaneously. Those who donned this regalia, then, were effectively forging a style of kingship that looked back to the charismatic ways of Alexander and Dionysus, particularly with reference to their eastern conquests. Harkening back to the leadership of Alexander was a crucial part of the Ptolemies’ construction of authority, and identification with Dionysus was one of the ways in which they could create such associations with him.

Alexander also thought of himself as a descendant of Dionysus through his lineage in the Argead royal house.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, when Philadelphus emphasized his connections to Dionysus, he was also evoking an ancestral relationship to Alexander;<sup>24</sup> this can be seen as another means by which Philadelphus bolstered public perception of himself as the rightful heir to the kingdom Alexander had established.<sup>25</sup> Popular claims about Alexander’s ancestry would have resonated with both Greeks and Egyptians, since the details surrounding his conception “closely reflect the Egyptian myth of the theogamy.”<sup>26</sup> According to the accounts of Cleitarchus, who wrote a history of Alexander ca. 310–301 BCE, the Egyptian magician-king Nectanebo impregnated Alexander’s mother, Olympias—thus giving Alexander both a heavenly and earthly father (i.e., Philip). Nectanebo purportedly appeared to the sleeping Olympias in several different forms, including a snake, Heracles, Dionysus, and the Egyptian god Amun. Alan B. Lloyd finds these circumstances of conception highly comparable to the Egyptian doctrine that the king was a son of the god Amun-Ra, who was believed to visit the queen while incarnated as her husband, the pharaoh. Lloyd contends that these correspondences are no accident, but represent “an Egyptian claim that Alexander was conceived and born according to the ancient dogmas of kingship” and evince a “desire to reconcile the presence of a foreigner on the throne with the traditional Egyptian theory of kingship.”<sup>27</sup> These parallels also demonstrate that regal identification with gods and divine descent were not concepts entirely foreign to the Greeks before Philadelphus.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the fantastic origins attributed

to Alexander provided him with divine ancestry in both Greek and Egyptian traditions, enabling successors like Philadelphus to continue the double-faced project in their administrations.

Graham Shipley has described the reign of Alexander as “a blend of apparent deference to [the] traditions [of the Greek cities] with thinly veiled autocracy,”<sup>29</sup> much like the double-edged approach of Philadelphus and his successors. However, one can question the degree of political pragmatism Alexander actually had in mind when thinking of himself as a Dionysus-like figure. It has been argued that Alexander’s actions were often influenced by “personal, subjective inclinations [such as] religious and romantic heroism” rather than “rational and strategic military considerations.”<sup>30</sup> In many ways, the relationships he professed to have with gods like Dionysus seem to have been conceived more out of unbridled fervor than political foresight. Philadelphus’ associations with Dionysus, however, appear less whimsical and more calculated for political advantage. Despite Alexander’s undeniable influence on his model of leadership, Philadelphus went a step further by using his ties to Dionysus in order to address the dichotomies of his kingdom. The Macedonian court, as well as Alexander, had indeed recognized Dionysus as a deity with special significance, but Philadelphus was the first to apply the god’s considerable valence to governing a cross-cultural society.<sup>31</sup> Later Ptolemaic rulers would follow Philadelphus’ lead and draw attention to their ties to both Dionysus and Alexander. Indeed, one can observe paintings in the Faiyum region dating from the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometer that depict Alexander “in a Dionysiac guise, obviously in a triumphal scene of the god Dionysus.”<sup>32</sup> Such imagery can be regarded not only as an attempt to reinforce the legitimacy of Ptolemaic lineage, but also as a form of “religious propaganda”<sup>33</sup> intended to cast Hellenistic rulers in a mold relatable to both “eastern” and “western” audiences.

Let us turn away from Philadelphus’ immediate relationship to Alexander for the moment and evaluate other ways in which Dionysus’ two-sided nature would suit the situation of Philadelphus’ rule. Another paradox intrinsic to the god is his representation as both old and youthful<sup>34</sup> in different artistic and literary contexts. According to Burkert, Dionysus underwent a “rejuvenation”<sup>35</sup> in the mid-fifth century and was typically represented in a youthful fashion thereafter, although perceptions of him as an older deity were not completely lost. Such a dichotomy would have been very appropriate for Philadelphus to exploit. While he was eager for his reign to be regarded as a period of rebirth and renaissance in Egypt, affiliation with Dionysus would also enable him to lessen the risk of appearing *too* new and original in his administration, thus preventing any affront to the Greeks, who were often suspicious of political innovation. In this way, association with Dionysus could appeal to the Greeks’ reverence for tradition while simultaneously identifying Philadelphus with resurgence and revitalization.

Philadelphus’ identification with Dionysus was also fitting with respect to the standard Egyptian model of divine kingship.



Figure 1. Coin from Tenedos, ca. 500 BCE.

As we have observed, Philadelphus was, in deifying his father and himself, attempting to authorize his rule in the eyes of his Egyptian subjects. However, this deification would not have resonated with the Greek population in the same way. Since divine kingship was a concept rather new to the Greeks, they were not predisposed to look upon Philadelphus as a godly figure. To the contrary, they may well have thought it arrogant or even tyrannical to assert one's own divinity and equate oneself with the gods. Considering this, it was appropriate that Philadelphus chose to identify himself with Dionysus rather than a less humanistic deity. The son of a mortal woman, Semele, and known for his retinue of mortal followers, Dionysus possesses human attributes that separate him from many of the other Olympian deities. Indeed, he does not have a physically intimidating presence and cosmic power like Zeus or even Poseidon, but is grounded in part by his semi-mortal nature. This human quality of Dionysus could have appealed to the sensibilities of Philadelphus' Greek subjects, who were accustomed to strictly mortal rulers. If Philadelphus had directly associated himself with Zeus or a similarly omnipotent deity, he may have run the risk of being viewed by the Greeks as a despotic ruler who was pursuing absolute authority. Moreover, in building relations to the son of Zeus (but not Zeus himself), he reserved a powerful pedigree for himself while not making grandiose claims of equivalence to the Greeks' supreme deity.<sup>36</sup>

Yet Dionysus' status as the son of Zeus would also help to justify Philadelphus' dominion in the eyes of the Egyptian population. The ruler's identification with Dionysus would thus imply that his father, Ptolemy I Soter, should be connected with Zeus, therefore giving Philadelphus and each of his successors an

even greater claim to divine lineage. Indeed, Dionysus is often thought of as "a rebirth of Zeus"<sup>37</sup> who sprung from his father's thigh and presided over earthly affairs, while Zeus himself was "relegated to an Olympian heaven."<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, this division of the "king-god" into earthly and heavenly aspects—embodied by the incarnations of Dionysus and Zeus, respectively—can be likened to Philadelphus' attempts to operate within different socio-political settings. The coin in Figure 1 serves as an apt illustration of these dichotomies, presenting Dionysus-Zeus as a syncretic, bicephalous deity, with young and old aspects.<sup>39</sup> Such representations suggest that Dionysus was indeed envisioned as a Janus-like figure.<sup>40</sup>

Being in a position of great individual power, Philadelphus held considerable sway over the lives of his Greek and Egyptian subjects alike. For those living under his reign, the Ptolemy had the capacity to deliver either delightful prosperity or miserable ruin, and, like any ruler, he was looked upon as a primary cause of whichever outcome came about. This perception of the leader as a potential source of both well-being and despair mirrors Dionysus' mutual associations with liberation and destruction. As demonstrated in literary works like Euripides' *Bacchae*, Dionysus could bring blissful delights if honored appropriately, but would confer terrible consequences if not properly worshipped and respected.<sup>41</sup> By means of his connections to Dionysus, Philadelphus would be believed to have the same sort of binary qualities, indicating that he was capable of effecting joy and contentment<sup>42</sup> while still strong and vigilant enough to punish wrongdoers or detractors.

Cultivating such an image would seem to befit any ruler seeking to sustain power, and it suited Philadelphus well in particular due to his interests in economic and cultural affluence. Rather than seeking to demonstrate his power through an assertion of martial fortitude, as many of his Macedonian predecessors had done, Philadelphus preferred to make his influence and authority felt by employing lavish cultural pageantry. In many ways this was an innovation that "changed the monarchy from one stressing its military role to one stressing its civilian or cultural role,"<sup>43</sup> and reflects Philadelphus' correlation with Dionysus, whom R. A. Hazzard deems "the least martial of the Greek gods."<sup>44</sup> In this way, Dionysus conforms to not only the dualistic nature of Ptolemaic leadership, but Philadelphus' particular personality as well. One could scarcely imagine him being connected with Ares, Poseidon, or another god known for belligerence and displays of brute physical strength. Hazzard would seem to concur, stating that Philadelphus "stressed his Dionysiac pedigree in an effort to justify his absence from the field of battle."<sup>45</sup> But Philadelphus' affiliations with Dionysus were not intended simply as an explanation for his relative lack of militancy. Indeed, Dionysus' associations with regeneration and renewal would help Philadelphus propagate the image of himself as a conveyer of wealth and cultural resurgence—aspects of the regent that will be explored further in the context of Philadelphus' dynamic procession at Alexandria.

Another important feature of Dionysus that could help to negotiate cultural differences is the god's striking similarity to the Egyptian deity Osiris. The resemblance of these gods to each other was well-observed and attested in antiquity; as James Frazer notes, "Herodotus found the similarity between the rites of Osiris and Dionysus so great, that he thought it impossible the latter could have arisen independently; they must, he supposed, have been recently borrowed, with slight alterations, by the Greeks from the Egyptians."<sup>46</sup> Burkert also suggests that the Greeks may have drawn upon "the increasing influence of the Egyptian Osiris religion"<sup>47</sup> as early as the sixth century in constructing their conception of Dionysus. When one looks at the specific attributes of the two gods, their likeness becomes even more apparent, concerning both the details of their worship as well as their individual dichotomies. We shall proceed to examine some of these similarities, which would have given Philadelphus even more cultural currency amongst both the Greek and Egyptian peoples.<sup>48</sup>

Just as Dionysus embodies significant dualities applicable to the Janus-faced nature of Ptolemaic rule (and specifically appropriate to the situation of Philadelphus), Osiris in turn exhibits many comparable polarities of his own. Both are liminal deities who traverse and operate within contrasting milieus. Comparing the position of Osiris to the pharaoh, Jean Houston states that the god "dwells in both worlds and pulses both . . . realms with new meaning. [He] who has entered into his 'Osirification' is thus able to be a citizen of two worlds."<sup>49</sup> This twofold condition of the god's existence is akin to the Ptolemy's political situation as an intermediary amongst two cultures.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Osiris was known to "[leave] his house to travel throughout Egypt, teaching the secrets of the soil and the blissful fruits of the garden."<sup>51</sup> Such conduct of course recalls Dionysus' sojourns through Asia, and the itinerant quality of both gods characterizes them as figures who have experience dealing with disparate peoples. The specific manner in which Osiris interacts with those whom he encounters on his rambling excursions is also strikingly similar to the practices of Dionysus. In Egyptian myth he is connected with the making of wine and the ecstatic performance of music<sup>52</sup>—customs clearly reminiscent of Dionysian ritual that would also underscore the image of Philadelphus as a benevolent bringer of jubilation.

Osiris also reveals a dichotomous nature in his association with both rebirth and death, which of course parallels Dionysus' capacity to deliver both bliss and devastation. As a god who could instill feelings of euphoria through wine and music, it should not be surprising that Osiris is also associated with fertility and the "propagation of plants."<sup>53</sup> These connotations were visible in the ritual worship of the god, in which women roamed about singing songs in his praise and carrying phallic emblems at festivals<sup>54</sup>—practices also evident in Dionysian cult worship. Yet while Osiris could give life and reinvigorate, he also possessed a raw power to trigger demise. The death of crops and plant life was perceived as the god's death, until rejuvenation of

life occurred in the spring. Indeed, Egyptians believed that Osiris experienced a "yearly death and dismemberment [necessary] for the renewal of life."<sup>55</sup> Osiris' associations with dismemberment, elaborated upon by Houston,<sup>56</sup> of course conjure up thoughts of the rending suffered by Pentheus in the *Bacchae*.<sup>57</sup> Applied to the position of the Ptolemy, these associations call attention to Philadelphus' desire to be seen at once as an agent of deliverance as well as an authoritative figure capable of castigation or reprisal. Furthermore, Osiris' involvement in the realms of both the living and the dead reveals an ability to transcend boundaries and change forms in a way that closely corresponds to Dionysus' liminal nature.

Being a god associated with rebirth, it is fitting that Osiris was viewed as "twice-born,"<sup>58</sup> much like Dionysus. According to Egyptian myth, Osiris was killed by Seth but then resurrected by Isis using a spell she learned from her father, the earth-god Geb. In some versions of the myth, Seth employed a thunderbolt in this action,<sup>59</sup> which recalls Dionysus' separation from Hera via the thunderbolt of Zeus. After this "stillbirth," Dionysus was implanted into the thigh of Zeus and thus resurrected. In the same way, the body of Osiris was immediately revived by Isis and restored to a vivacious green color, symbolizing fertility. These correspondences between the Egyptian Osiris and the Greek Dionysus, with whom Philadelphus associated himself, may well have rendered the Ptolemy more familiar and acceptable to the region's native population.<sup>60</sup> In particular, these connections would align Philadelphus even more strongly with notions of regeneration and resurgence in the eyes of both his Greek and Egyptian subjects.

Another significant facet of Philadelphus' kingship model was the coregency he held with his sister-wife Arsinoe II. A similar marriage paradigm was also well-established in Egyptian religion, which held that the brother-sister gods Osiris and Isis were married.<sup>61</sup> Philadelphus' subscription to this divine marriage model would further connect him with Osiris, making his construction of authority even more recognizable to the Egyptians. In a recent dissertation, Branko van Oppen de Ruiter argues that the "incestuous union [of Philadelphus and Arsinoe II] insinuated the apotheosis of the royal siblings, by setting them apart from ordinary mortals, which eventually led to the official cult of the Sibling Gods."<sup>62</sup> Although he thinks that this means of deification may have exacerbated dynastic tensions rather than strengthening Philadelphus' position at court, van Oppen de Ruiter affirms that "a royal wedding is an undeniably political act."<sup>63</sup> This effect is also intimated from the perspective of Greek mythology, which held that its supreme deities Zeus and Hera were wedded as brother and sister. Philadelphus' marriage arrangement was thus familiar to the Greeks as well, being very much ingrained in their perceptions of absolute power. Such mythological precedents would help to confirm Philadelphus' authority and, arguably, reduce concerns about sibling marriage, which Greek culture considered taboo except apparently in cases like that of the powerful Zeus and Hera.



Figure 2. “Snake-legged,” atef-crowned Dionysus, from Naukratis.

Through his identification with Dionysus, who was in turn somewhat similar to the Egyptian god Osiris, Philadelphus cultivated an image of duality and syncretism. Both gods were characterized by a constellation of polarized traits crossing similar religious and cultural bounds and reflecting the age’s proclivities for cultural assimilation. By assuming this syncretic identity, Philadelphus was able to attain a cross-cultural appeal. One witnesses a similar blending of religious symbolism with the god Serapis, a new deity who combined aspects of “Osiris and Apis adapted to Hellenistic forms of worship and belief.”<sup>64</sup> Bell further describes Serapis as a “coalition deity, destined to form the meeting point of Greek and Egyptian,”<sup>65</sup> which seems to match the purposes Dionysus could serve for Philadelphus.<sup>66</sup> C. N. Deedes, in fact, refers to Serapis as a “Janiform”<sup>67</sup> god incorporating both Greek and Egyptian elements at once. This case illustrates that the syncretic identity Philadelphus had adopted was observable in other aspects of religion in Ptolemaic Egypt. And such cultural intermixing was evident in other spheres of life as well, including burial customs and intermarriage. Thus, Philadelphus’ cultivation of a Dionysiac identity was a reflection—and exploitation—of a broader phenomenon of cultural coalescence.

This blending of Greek and Egyptian religion and culture is vividly captured in Donald M. Bailey’s recent article, “A Snake-Legged Dionysos from Egypt, and Other Divine Snakes.” In this piece, Bailey analyzes a marble stele from Naukratis,<sup>68</sup> currently



Figure 3. Dionysus and Isis as entwined snakes.

housed at the British Museum, that depicts Dionysus bearing some of his usual Greek accoutrements: a fawn skin, bundle of grapes, and cornucopia.<sup>69</sup> Rather unexpectedly, however, the lower portion of the god’s body merges into the enormous coils of a snake (Figure 2).<sup>70</sup> Bailey explains the snake-legged deity as an Egyptian archetype, noting that Serapis and Osiris in particular were associated with such symbolism.<sup>71</sup> In addition, the figure on the stele is adorned with other Egyptian elements, including a complex version of the *atef* crown, which was worn primarily by Osiris.<sup>72</sup> By combining this curious mixture of Greek and Egyptian styles, the stele provides a visible example of the syncretism of Greek and Egyptian culture as well as the perception of an affinity between Osiris and Dionysus.<sup>73</sup> The donning of Egyptian symbolism by a Greek deity further illustrates the dualistic nature of both gods and parallels the double-faced nature of Philadelphus’ model of kingship.

In the same article, Bailey discusses another stele that strikingly conflates Greek and Egyptian religious iconography (Figure 3).<sup>74</sup> In this specimen, Dionysus is once again portrayed with the coils of a snake rather than legs, and now lacks a human torso as well. Only the deity’s head is represented, once more with an Egyptian crown resting atop it. The crown seen here, however, is the *hemhem* crown typically associated with Horus rather than Osiris.<sup>75</sup> Despite this difference, the merging of Greek and Egyptian symbols is just as prevalent, and also underscores Dionysus’ connection to Horus, another liminal Egyptian

god with his own sets of polarities.<sup>76</sup> One of the most essential aspects of this stele's amalgamation of Greek and Egyptian iconography is its pairing of this snake-bodied Dionysus with Isis. Due to his connections with Osiris, it should not seem surprising to find Dionysus coupled with Isis, the sister-wife of Osiris. This seems to imply an interchangeability of Dionysus and Osiris, as if the two gods were seen as so similar that Dionysus "may have been thought to be a fitting companion for Isis . . . [since] he was equated in Egypt with Osiris,"<sup>77</sup> as Bailey suggests. Indeed, the intertwining of the pair's tails accentuates the mingling of cultural and religious iconography at work in the piece of art. This fusion of styles is also evident in Dionysus' hairstyle, which has long curls in accordance with its usual representation in Greek art, but is also twisted into locks resembling those typically worn by Isis.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to welcoming the many apt connotations that Dionysus would have in this culturally intermixed political setting, Philadelphus actively sought to establish his connection with the god in his "grand procession" at the occasion of the Ptolemaia festival in Alexandria.<sup>79</sup> It may be tempting to dismiss this lavish display of pomp and revelry as little more than the wanton behavior stereotypically associated with eastern despots, but a more nuanced interpretation will unveil its propagandistic value. The procession was indeed opulent, and as such it would highlight Philadelphus' capacity to bring prosperity and renewal (like Dionysus), in addition to inspiring reverence and awe in both Greek and Egyptian bystanders. In this way, the spectacle was not a purposeless squandering of wealth, but an attempt by Philadelphus to impress his subjects and make a statement about his authority. As Thompson notes, "any spectator in the crowd would be left with no doubts as to who was putting on the show. It was a religious occasion . . . [but] at the same time it carried a political message."<sup>80</sup> The procession also had an (ostensibly) religious component conspicuous in a "15 foot statue of Dionysus which [mechanically] poured a libation from a golden vessel."<sup>81</sup> While being masqueraded as a religious image, this statue, situated near the head of the parade, more prominently served to display the burgeoning wealth and innovation of the period—which was meant to be directly traced to Philadelphus.<sup>82</sup>

Along these lines, Rice views the entire procession as a political act, stating that it "would emphasize the Ptolemaic claims [to authority] in a public way," casting the Ptolemies "as Alexander's heirs in Egypt."<sup>83</sup> The parading of elephants and other symbols reflecting "the Indian side of Dionysus"<sup>84</sup> served to recall Alexander's triumphant adventures in the East. By including imagery that established such connections between Dionysus and Alexander, Philadelphus could reassert to the entire crowd his rightful claim to inheritance of power over such a large empire. In this respect, the Ptolemaia festival communicated the raw power and brute force possessed by the king, and it should be noted that the parade culminated in a large military march. Not only would the procession draw attention to Philadelphus as a bringer of wealth and patron of the arts, it

would also showcase him as a "master of [both] Greek and barbarian cities."<sup>85</sup> This balance of magnanimity and command conveyed by the procession was fitting for a king who wanted to be viewed as akin to Dionysus, a god with the capacity both to liberate and devastate. In addition, the accentuation of the god's "eastern" qualities may have given the procession added appeal to non-Greek onlookers. For instance, Dionysus was intended to "personif[y] time and the passing of the years"<sup>86</sup> (accomplished by his situation near the start of the procession) in a way reminiscent of the cyclic quality of death and rebirth associated with Osiris. Susan A. Stephens submits that Dionysus' functional equivalence to Osiris was a major element of the festival and was meant to be stressed to the Egyptians in attendance.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the magnificent, dramatic, and protracted nature of the entire ceremony would seem to appeal to the Egyptians, whose ritual celebrations regularly possessed these extravagant qualities.<sup>88</sup>

In assessing the political implications of the procession, it is important to consider the extent to which Philadelphus himself was involved in its plans. This question concerns the degree of foresight Philadelphus had in devising the propagandistic messages and associations proliferated by the Ptolemaia festivities. Did he shrewdly plan and direct all the major elements of the procession, or did other bureaucrats contribute to this political pageantry (as a means of augmenting not only the power of Philadelphus, but of themselves as well)? It is also legitimate to ask whether or not the many politically expedient ideas expressed by the procession were conveyed intentionally. Were some of these timely and advantageous notions generated by accident or coincidence, rather than by politically adroit designs? Such questions could be posed about many of the connotations Philadelphus engendered by identifying himself with Dionysus. Regardless of the ruler's objectives (or lack thereof), however, any perceived connections with Dionysus or his Egyptian counterpart Osiris still would have possessed political utility and cultural significance. At this point, these are open questions requiring further evidence and investigation, but this cannot diminish the political impact of the procession and Philadelphus' identification with Dionysus. Indeed, later Ptolemies understood the value of these enterprises and imitated Philadelphus' model by instituting similar festivals and ceremonies celebrating Dionysus for their own political purposes. Ptolemy IV Philopator, for instance, maintained great interest in the powerful cult of Dionysus as one means of imposing control over his subjects,<sup>89</sup> and Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysus also sought to legitimize the divinity of his kingship in large part through his relationship with the god.<sup>90</sup>

Philadelphus' connections with Dionysus were also manifested in contemporary literary evidence, particularly Theocritus' *Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (*Idyll* 17). The poem showers apparently unsolicited praise upon Philadelphus,<sup>91</sup> showcasing the prosperous atmosphere surrounding the ruler. The poem's language also recalls both the affluence on display in Philadelphus' grand procession and the rejuvenating qualities he possessed vis-à-

vis his associations with Dionysus and Osiris. Championing Philadelphus' cultural and political excellence, the encomium depicts his reign as a sort of "Golden Age," as Richard Hunter has discerned.<sup>92</sup> Theocritus develops these themes of harmony and prosperity thoroughly in the following excerpt:<sup>93</sup>

Ὅλβω μὲν πάντας κε καταβρίθοι βασιλῆας·	95
τόσπον ἐπ' ἄμαρ ἕκαστον ἐς ἀφνέον ἔρχεται οἶκον	
πάντοθε. λαοὶ δ' ἔργα περιστέλλουσιν ἔκηλοι...	97
οὐδὲ τις αἰγιαλόνδε θοᾶς ἐξήλατο ναός	100
θωρηχθεὶς ἐπὶ βουσὶν ἀνάρισος Αἰγυπτίησιν·	
τοῖος ἀνήρ πλατέεσσιν ἐνίδρυται πεδίοισι	
ξανθοκόμας Πτολεμαῖος, ἐπιστάμενος δόρυ πάλλιν	
ᾧ ἐπίπαγχυ μέλει πατρώια πάντα φυλάσσειν	
οἷ' ἀγαθῷ βασιλῆϊ, τὰ δὲ κτεατίζεται αὐτός.	105
οὐ μὲν ἀχρεῖός γε δόμῳ ἐνὶ πίοι χρυσός	
μυρμάκων ἄτε πλοῦτος αἰεὶ κέχρυται μογεόντων·	
ἀλλὰ πολὺν μὲν ἔχοντι θεῶν ἐρικυδέες οἶκοι,	
αἰὲν ἀπαρχομένοιο σὺν ἄλλοισιν γεράεσσι,	
πολλὸν δ' ἰφθίμοισι δεδωρήται βασιλεῦσι,	110
πολλὸν δὲ πτολίεσσι, πολὺν δ' ἀγαθοῖσιν ἑταίροις.	
οὐδὲ Διωνύσου τις ἀνήρ ἱερούς κατ' ἀγῶνας	
ἵκετ' ἐπιστάμενος λιγυρὰν ἀναμέλψαι αἰοιδάν,	
ᾧ οὐ δωτίαν ἀντάξιον ὤπασε τέχνας.	114

He would outweigh all kings in wealth  
as riches so great come into his household  
each day and from everywhere. His people tend to their labors  
while at ease . . .

and no man girded in armor and hostile to Egyptian cattle  
is led from a swift ship to his shore.  
So great a man is set in the wide fields,  
fine-haired Ptolemy, experienced in poise with the spear,  
one who is fully invested in maintaining his entire patrimony—  
as befits a good king—as well as the things that he  
himself acquires.

Indeed, gold is not heaped up in his house without cause,  
like the wealth of ever-toiling ants;  
rather, the glorious abodes of the gods take in much,  
always receiving the choicest sacrifices along with other honors,  
and much is offered to powerful kings,  
much to cities, and much to his noble companions.  
Nor does any man, skilled in raising sweet song,  
enter into the holy contests of Dionysus  
to whom he does not bestow a gift worthy of his craft.

(*Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus*, 95–97, 100–114)

The hymn clearly marks Philadelphus' reign as one of great wealth and abundance, but the wealth is not accumulated selfishly or unfairly. Instead, the ruler is said to share his wealth and spread his riches to other kings and common men alike (106–111). Furthermore, he uses his wealth to appease the gods (108), an

action that would be seen as beneficial to the people as a whole—both Greek and Egyptian contingents.<sup>94</sup> Theocritus also alludes to Philadelphus' connection with Dionysus (112) and portrays him as a benevolent bearer of gifts. These associations with munificence and Dionysian charm fit the affluent image Philadelphus had tried to cultivate for himself. Since it does not appear that Theocritus was under commission or compulsion to sing the praises of the king in this encomium, it may in fact be the case that Philadelphus was perceived according to the Dionysiac political persona he had wished to promote.<sup>95</sup>

Like the grand procession at Alexandria, Theocritus' *Encomium* reinforces Philadelphus' image as a benign, civilian regent who wished to be associated with literature, the arts, science, and other cultural exploits (unlike his more militaristic father, Ptolemy I Soter).<sup>96</sup> This model of kingship strongly influenced the later Ptolemies, some of whom would take Philadelphus' cue and directly identify themselves with Dionysus. In particular, Ptolemy IV Philopator sought to fit this mold, recognizing the political utility of tracing his lineage to Dionysus and actively supporting the powerful cult of Dionysus.<sup>97</sup> Ptolemy XII would later emphasize this pedigree, calling himself Neos Dionysus and adopting the hybrid appearance of an "incarnation of the young Osiris-Dionysus."<sup>98</sup>

All the kings of Ptolemaic Egypt would be faced with the dilemma of presiding over two cultures that possessed significant differences in their social, political, and religious traditions. Despite increasing syncretism, these cultures remained rather distinct and retained many of their longstanding customs. Thus, any leader presiding over Greeks and Egyptians would have to find a middle way or shared standpoint that could be used as a forum to address and appeal to both cultures. In choosing to identify himself with Dionysus, Ptolemy II Philadelphus made a politically expedient move due to the god's broad, almost universal allure and his specific connotations in the Hellenistic world. These ties to Dionysus represent an important but under-examined component of the program that helped to legitimate Philadelphus' authority and maintain stability during his reign. In retrospect, this move appears highly shrewd and politically savvy; it allowed Philadelphus to straddle lines along which the two cultures could converge, dissolving seemingly impermeable boundaries—much like the liminal Dionysus. Philadelphus' successors seem to have sensed the pragmatism of this strategy, as they chose to adopt his model of divine kingship to varying degrees.<sup>99</sup> Philadelphus' lasting influence on the Ptolemies and other rulers of vast, culturally diverse territories in antiquity<sup>100</sup> suggests that the "Dionysus-faced" approach he pioneered effectively served the political needs of kingship in the recently established Ptolemaic empire.

## NOTES

1. This article was developed from a paper presented at the conference "Ancient Cultures in Contact: Catalysts for Changes," which was held at the University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Archaeology



and Anthropology, March 20–21, 2009. The author is grateful to Andrew Monson of New York University's Department of Classics and Rachel Kousser of Brooklyn College's Art History Department, whose invaluable suggestions and guidance have helped advance my work on this topic. I am also indebted to this journal's editor, Richard Wilkinson, for his patience and help during the development of this article; and to the anonymous reviewers from this journal for reading earlier drafts of my work and contributing useful criticism, especially about avenues for research that I had not discovered on my own.

2. P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria: Vol. I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 202–203.
3. Fraser also recognizes that “no Olympian deity was so easily accommodated to the requirements of the Ptolemies as was Dionysus” (Fraser, 206). However, he does not come to this conclusion by looking at each of the individual reasons (as observed in this paper) why Dionysus was exceptionally useful for Ptolemaic self-representation. Koenen also testifies to the importance of Dionysus in the construction of a syncretic form of royal authority, but this importance is also given to other gods (including Zeus Ammon and Helios), rather than focusing on Dionysus specifically, as this paper does. Cf. Ludwig Koenen, “Die Adaptation Ägyptischer Königsideologie Am Ptolemäerhof,” in E. van ‘t Dack, P. van Dessel, and W. van Gucht (eds.), *Egypt and the Hellenistic World*, (Louvain: n.p., 1983), 153.
4. W. W. Tarn, “Ptolemy II,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 14.3 (Nov. 1928): 259.
5. Günther Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (London: Routledge, 2001), 257. The Greek ruling elites had recognized the necessity of observing deeply ingrained Egyptian sociopolitical structures and traditions even prior to the reign of Ptolemy I Soter. Greek officers living in Egypt before the invasion of Alexander the Great, for instance, “put their knowledge of Egypt and of the Egyptians at the disposal of the conqueror and the new Graeco-Macedonian immigrants.” Cf. Jean Bingen, *Hellenistic Egypt: Monarchy, Society, Economy, Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 162. The Ptolemies followed this cue, retaining various other institutions that were firmly entrenched in Egyptian society before their arrival, especially conventions pertaining to the bureaucratic realm. Cf. Denise Eileen McCoskey, “Race Before ‘Whiteness’: Studying Identity in Ptolemaic Egypt,” *Critical Sociology* 28 (2002): 18.
6. Tarn, 248.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Tarn, 259.
9. Ludwig Koenen, “The Ptolemaic King as a Religious Figure,” *Images* (1993): 43.
10. Koenen 1993, 44.
11. Idris H. Bell, “Hellenic Culture in Egypt,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 8.3 (Oct. 1922): 145. Johnson describes Ptolemaic bureaucracy similarly as “a continuation and hellenization of Oriental bureaucracy” that had already been initiated by Alexander and earlier Greek colonizers. Cf. Janet H. Johnson, “Ptolemaic Bureaucracy from an Egyptian Point of View,” *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations* 46 (1987): 145.
12. Hölbl would seem to agree with this interpretation, characterizing such use of Dionysiac associations as “an expression of the political and religious propaganda aimed at the mixed Egyptian-Greek population” (Hölbl, 289). Further evidence of the intermixing of Greek and Egyptian approaches in Ptolemaic rulership and society at large can be observed in the newly developing economic strategies adopted by the Ptolemies and their associates. In striving to obtain fortune, leaders found that they needed to adapt the “deep-rooted [economic] tendencies in the Greek world of the fourth century to the realities of a new political system and a new agricultural situation” (Bingen, 188). As with the political situation, stubbornly applying old, conventional methods without modification would not be fruitful. This underscores the Greeks’ need to adjust their traditional methods of management and administration to their new Egyptian surroundings. Similarly, in evaluating the complex issue of race in Ptolemaic Egypt, McCoskey discusses the strategic use of “double names,” a phenomenon in which people would employ “a Greek name in one context and an Egyptian name in another context” (McCoskey, 24).
13. Koenen 1993, 26. Evidence for this situation is also provided by Bell, who discusses the Greeks’ challenge to maintain the dominance of Hellenic language, religion, and culture in an environment with an Egyptian majority. Cf. Bell, 141. In their attempts to wield influence over both cultures, the Ptolemies made use of an amalgam of Greek and Egyptian symbols that could be clearly interpreted by both segments of the population. For instance, the queen Arsinoe II was depicted on coins wearing Greek dress and diadem along with the “stem of a papyrus plant encircled by a snake” (Koenen 1993, 28) that was viewed as a mark of Egyptian kingship. Koenen also states that “Ptolemaic kings and queens were assimilated to and identified with specific Greek as well as Egyptian gods” (Koenen 1993, 70), noting that the kings in particular were frequently associated with Dionysus. Such an example epitomizes the efforts of the Ptolemaic ruling class to fit its conventional administrative style and culture to the new Egyptian political environment.
14. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 222.
15. Burkert, 162. As Burkert also notes here, Dionysus’ name appears on Linear B tablets found at Pylos, despite his aura of “newness.”
16. Cf. *Bacchae* 13–22.
17. E. E. Rice, *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 67. Rice later goes on to describe how both Dionysus and Alexander are depicted as “eastern conquerors” (85) in the context of Philadelphus’ grand procession, with Dionysus perched “on an elephant followed by a retinue which includes elephant quadrigae,” along with a statue of Alexander that “later appears in his own procession in a chariot drawn by elephants” (Rice, 85).
18. Susan A. Stephens, *Seeing Double: Intercultural Poetics in Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 132.

19. Guy MacLean Rogers, *Alexander: The Ambiguity of Greatness* (New York: Random House, 2004), 184.
20. Rogers, 239.
21. Fraser, 205.
22. R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 37. Smith contends that although one cannot be certain whether or not this diadem was purposefully adapted from the headband of Dionysus, it still would have been familiar enough to resonate with this ornamentation. Cf. Smith, 38, 41, 44.
23. Graham Shipley, *The Greek World After Alexander: 323–30 bce* (London: Routledge, 2000), 38. Furthermore, Shipley states that Alexander's belief that he was descended from gods helped to create new religious and political models "against which later kings measured themselves." One of the models established by Alexander that Philadelphus and the Ptolemies followed directly is the claim of descent, or "fabricated genealogy," from the Argæad house. Cf. Fraser, 205, 202.
24. Rice, 85. Philadelphus and his successors could thus attempt "to associate themselves by blood as closely as possible with Dionysus and Alexander," as Rice also points out here.
25. Dorothy J. Thompson, "Philadelphus' Procession: Dynastic Power in a Mediterranean Context," *Studia Hellenistica* 36 (2000): 377–378. According to Thompson, "Philadelphus was continuing a general claim to rightful inheritance of at least some of the territory of Alexander's conquests."
26. Alan B. Lloyd, "Nationalist Propaganda in Ptolemaic Egypt," *Historia Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 31.1 (1st Qtr., 1982): 48.
27. Lloyd, 48. Cf. John Dillery, "The First Egyptian Narrative History: Manetho and Greek Historiography," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 127, (1999): 104–105. Cf. Stephens, 70.
28. Stephens is one scholar who argues that Alexander had begun to set the stage for a monarchy in which cultural boundaries would be diminished through the use of religious assimilation. Cf. Stephens, 14–15, 245.
29. Shipley, 38.
30. Edmund F. Bloedow, "Egypt in Alexander's Scheme of Things," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 77.2 (2004): 99.
31. It is also important to note that despite his own notions of immortal descent, Alexander was not honored as a god until the latter parts of Soter's reign, circa the 290s bce. Cf. Shipley, 159; Fraser, 213. The divinity of Philadelphus, on the other hand, was recognized by others during his own lifetime, representing another original aspect of his rulership.
32. Hölbl, 289.
33. Hölbl, 289.
34. C. N. Deedes, "The Double-Headed God," *Folklore* 46.3 (Sept. 1935): 218.
35. Burkert, 167.
36. It is also worth noting that Alexander also viewed himself as the son of Zeus (cf. Bloedow, 97), revealing yet another parallel between his legendary genealogy and Philadelphus' status as a "son of Zeus" via identification with Dionysus.
37. Deedes, 217.
38. Deedes, 218.
39. Cf. Deedes, 21.
40. In addition to presenting the father-son dichotomy inherent to Dionysus, the coin also reflects the old-young duality simultaneously associated with tradition and rebirth.
41. Cf. *Bacchae* 861–862.
42. Smith comments that Dionysus was appealing to kings in the Hellenistic world because he was perceived to have the promise of a "popular, Utopian mystery figure, offering swift release from the cares of the world." (Smith, 123)
43. R. A. Hazzard, *Imagination of a Monarchy: Studies in Ptolemaic Propaganda* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 108.
44. Hazzard, 107.
45. Hazzard, 115.
46. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: Part IV, Vol. II (Adonis, Attis, Osiris)* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), 127. Cf. Herodotus, 2.22, 2.49. In addition, Plutarch, whom Frazer calls "a very keen student of comparative religion" (127), also noted their resemblance in his work *Isis and Osiris* (Cf. 356.13.b).
47. Burkert, 163.
48. Cf. Lloyd, 34. In framing his analysis of propaganda in the Ptolemaic Period, Lloyd emphasizes that political messages must be conveyed in "familiar media and familiar genres" in order to impact the intended audience. For this reason, it is especially significant that Philadelphus related himself to a deity who was recognizable to both of the major segments of his population.
49. Jean Houston, *The Passion of Isis and Osiris* (New York: Random House, 1995), 337.
50. Similarly, when Marc Antony tried to establish his own "eastern empire" centered in Egypt, he took Dionysus as his patron deity in part because of the god's likeness to Osiris and his ability to appeal to transcend conventional geo-political boundaries. Cf. Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40.
51. Houston, 37.
52. Houston, 37. Recounting the marriage of Isis and Osiris, Houston informs us that Osiris "stomped the grape [and] brewed the barley . . . By night he taught his people the song of his mother, the music of Heaven . . . playing reed pipes to the heartbeat of the drum and the quiver of strings upon the lyre."
53. Donald M. Bailey, "A Snake-Legged Dionysos from Egypt, and Other Divine Snakes," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 93 (2007): 265.
54. Frazer, 112. Cf. Herodotus 2.48; Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 12, 18, 36, 51.
55. Deedes, 219. In concluding his discussion of the near-Eastern tradition of double-headed deities, Deedes comments on the pervasive archetype of the "king-god" who undergoes death and resurgence: "Throughout its travels in time and space the double head continued to be associated only with gods, or with kings who were divine and who suffered the ritual death and rebirth for the welfare of their people" (Deedes, 243). This interpretation almost seems to bestow a sort of martyrdom upon these figures, which

- could constitute yet another quality that might have been politically appealing to Philadelphus.
56. Houston, 56.
  57. Cf. *Bacchae* 1125–1136. It is also noteworthy that the eating of raw flesh can be observed in cult worship of both deities, as Burkert observes regarding Dionysus (cf. 223) and Frazer in reference to Osiris (cf. 113, n. 1). Commenting on the overall similarity of the worship of the two gods, Frazer claims that the Greeks intentionally “adopt[ed] a like symbolism in their Dionysiac festivals . . .” (cf. 113).
  58. Houston, 55.
  59. Houston, 55.
  60. Cf. Stephens, 15.
  61. Tarn, 248.
  62. van Oppen de Ruiter, Branko Fredde. *The Religious Identifications of Ptolemaic Queens with Aphrodite, Demeter, Hathor, and Isis*. Diss. The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (2007), 219.
  63. Van Oppen de Ruiter, 219. Cf. 214.
  64. Bell, 144.
  65. Bell, 144.
  66. Pinch also regards Serapis as an intercultural deity with whom the Ptolemies connected themselves because they were acutely aware that they were ruling a bifurcated society. Moreover, she notes that Serapis embodied features of both Dionysus and Osiris. Cf. Pinch, 36; Stephens 15; Gunther Grimm, “Les premiers Ptolémées et l’urbanisme alexandrine: Le Sérapéion,” in *La Gloire d’Alexandrie* (Paris: Paris Musées, 1998), 94.
  67. Deedes, 228.
  68. British Museum reg. no. GR 2005.9-19.I. It should be noted that this stele and the stele in Figure 3 are both dated to the first century bce. As such, they are *not* meant to comment on art trends contemporary to Philadelphus but to illustrate the phenomenon of cultural syncretism (particularly with regard to Dionysus and Osiris).
  69. The cornucopia also features prominently in representations of Arsinoe II, purportedly at the request of Philadelphus. This symbol would evoke not only filiations with Dionysus, but also notions of wealth and abundance, which Philadelphus was eager to promote during his reign. Cf. Paul Edmund Stanwick, *Portraits of the Ptolemies: Greek Kings as Egyptian Pharaohs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 37.
  70. Bailey, 266. Bailey also points out that snakes in the classical world were often associated with regeneration and healing (e.g. the snakes of the Greek medicine-god Asclepius). Such connotations would of course be appropriate to the characteristics of renewal and rebirth cultivated by Philadelphus through his connections with Dionysus (and hence Osiris).
  71. Bailey, 265. Koenen discusses a similar assimilation of Greek and Egyptian insignia evident in the dress of Philadelphus’ wife Arsinoe II as represented on coins minted after her death. This coinage contains emblems associated with her Egyptian cult worship, but also retains the queen’s “Greek face and dress [along] with the Greek diadem . . . thus [being] combined with a symbol of Egyptian kingship” (Koenen 1993, 28–29). Such imagery once again reflects bureaucratic attempt to address Greek and Egyptian audiences simultaneously.
  72. Indeed, Bailey directly identifies the figure on this stele as “another manifestation of the god [i.e. Dionysus] in Egypt” (Bailey, 269).
  73. Cf. Bailey, 264. British Museum registration number 2005.0919.1.
  74. Bailey, 268.
  75. Hölbl comments on the relationship between Dionysus and Horus, acknowledging the latter god’s connection to “annual rejuvenation” (Hölbl, 275), which is akin to one of the primary roles played by Osiris. It is also appropriate that Dionysus bears certain resemblances to Horus, since he was the king god of the Egyptians and the pharaohs were believed to be incarnations of him.
  76. Bailey, 266.
  77. Bailey, 268. Isis’ coiffure on the stele is nearly identical to that of Dionysus, further demonstrating the cultural interaction and assimilation at work in the piece.
  78. Cf. Bailey, 267. British Museum registration number 1911.0617.22.
  79. Cf. Robert S. Bianchi, Richard A. Fazzini, Jan Quaegebeur, *Cleopatra’s Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies* (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1988), 156; Michel Chauveau, “Les premiers Ptolémées et l’urbanisme alexandrine: Ptolémée Sôter et Ptolémée Philadelphé,” in *La Gloire d’Alexandrie* (Paris: Paris Musées, 1998), 76.
  80. Thompson, 379.
  81. Thompson, 376.
  82. Shipley, however, disagrees with finding a political motive in rituals like the Ptolemaia festival. He contends that the staging of such festivals were “much more sensible than imposing one’s will by force; but it would probably be wrong to imagine them taking conscious decisions to exploit existing ritual cynically. Rather than a calculated strategy, it may simply have seemed to them the most natural way of performing their role” (Shipley, 68). While it is indeed difficult to determine the extent to which Philadelphus and his successors were cognizant of the political significance of the rituals like the Ptolemaia, the great lengths and expense they went to in staging this lavish—and newly created—festival suggests that they were not simply keeping with tradition oblivious to political concerns. Moreover, it would seem to be extraordinarily coincidental for Dionysus to have so many apt connotations in this political context if Ptolemaic identification with the god was merely a result of following “the most natural way of performing their role.”
  83. Rice, 85.
  84. Thompson, 377. Cf. Pascale Ballet, “La société alexandrine: Cultes et croyances,” in *La Gloire d’Alexandrie* (Paris: Paris Musées, 1998), 243.
  85. Céline Marquaille, “The Foreign Policy of Ptolemy II,” in Paul McKechnie and Philippe Guillaume (eds.), *Ptolemy II Philadelphus and His World* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 56.
  86. Thompson, 375.
  87. Stephens, 245.
  88. Thompson, 374. As an example of such “lengthy celebrations,” Thompson cites the Opet festival at Karnak, which lasted twenty-seven days.

89. Hölbl, 171. Philopator's concern for Dionysian worship is also mentioned in a papyrus in Bagnall and Derow (261–262).
90. Hölbl, 274–275.
91. Richard Hunter, *Theocritus: Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 28. It does not appear that the poet ever maintained a political relationship with Philadelphus or worked under royal patronage or protection (like other Hellenistic poets such as Callimachus and Apollonius), yet Theocritus' portrayal of the regent is still flattering and seems to be in accordance with the ruler's own perception of his reign and the nature of his authority.
92. Hunter, 2.
93. The translation provided for this excerpt is my own rendering.
94. Hunter also discusses the encomium's attempt to address a mixed audience by applying both Greek and Egyptian motifs. He claims that this strategy may "be determined by the poet's desire to reflect the particular position of Philadelphus as both Greek king and Egyptian pharaoh . . ." (Hunter, 53). Earlier in his commentary on the encomium, Hunter states that Hellenistic poets like Theocritus were attuned to the dichotomous nature of their culture and thus able to shape "the Greek material of their poems in such a way as to allow Egyptian patterns, as well as Greek, to resonate . . ." (Hunter, 49). Such intricate maneuvering between cultural boundaries in the literary sphere mirrors the complex jockeying that the Ptolemies had to perform in the political realm, and reveals the "Janus-faced" constitution of Ptolemaic society in general.
95. At the same time, one must exercise caution when judging the extent to which this text represents the sentiments of Theocritus himself. Given the limitations of "free speech" in an autocratic political environment, the poet may not have had much choice but to write in a way agreeable to the king, even if he was not a direct member of Philadelphus' court. It is also possible that the encomium denotes popular perceptions of Philadelphus, but not necessarily the views of the poet.
96. Noting Philadelphus' emphasis on "civilian merits," Hazzard claims that his successors "preferred [his] model of kingship to the first [i.e. Soter's]" (Hazzard, 155).
97. Hazzard, 122.
98. Hölbl, 289
99. Hazzard asserts that "Ptolemy II gradually succeeded in building a model of kingship for the Hellenistic age" (Hazzard, 155) based upon his simultaneous identification with Dionysus and Alexander as related figures.
100. This pragmatic approach of bridging cultural gaps appears to have influenced not only Philadelphus' Ptolemaic successors, but even Roman rulers like Marc Antony and Augustus, who also found themselves in the tricky position of ruling over vast and disparate civilizations. While the latter ruler did not try to link himself with Dionysus specifically, the influence of Philadelphus' model of authority can be discerned in the program of self-deification Augustus adopted as a means of consolidating power over a diverse new empire. Philadelphus' influence upon these later heads of state, as well as the similarities and differences of their situations, merits further research and investigation.

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