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(In)visible Ptolemaic Queens: A new Inclusive Approach to Ancient Chronologies and their Modern Use

ABSTRACT

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Chronologies are among the most frequently used tools in archaeological research and related disciplines. Most of the chronological divisions that are considered standard today were developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries on the basis of mainly written sources and have been little changed since then. The authors of the relevant testimonies were mostly men; the research on them was also dominated by men. Accordingly, the results focused on the deeds and dates of historically documented men. In the course of public debates on gender equality, a change in perspective is currently taking place, which, among other things, places greater emphasis on historically attested women and female achievements. Using the example of Ptolemaic Egypt, a new interpretation of the political chronology of this region and time was developed. This *Counter-Chronology* to the traditional classification fullfils, in addition to the usual tasks of a chronology, the purpose of creating a greater awareness of the work of historical women.

KEYWORDS

Egypt, Ptolemies, Chronology, Gender-Studies, History of Science

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The basis of the concept

1   In archaeology and historical scholarship, chronologies are used to date archaeological finds and/or events a) relative to each other, or b) absolute, which means with a specific date.[1] Thus, they belong to the most important tools for researchers who deal with our past, because in this field it is pivotal to relate things to each other – as well as to the present. In addition to this purpose, regional as well as thematic chronologies also serve to generate a context for the objects studied. Archaeological chronologies can rely on different types of sources and/or findings, as well as scientific methods. The use of a particular pottery chronology, for example, shows that finds assigned to it are of a specific genre, have a geographic relationship to other areas, or belong to a specific time period.[2] To emphasise the socio-political context, archaeological and especially historical scholarship tends to use political chronologies, which are arranged by officials, priests, rulers or whole dynasties belonging to a social and/or ethnic group.[3] Accordingly, the use of an ancient ruling dynasty for dating clearly indicates that, in

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1   In the following article, many terms are used which are related to ancient societies. Therefore, some short definitions should be given. First of all, the term 'ancient' is solely meant as "belonging to the (very) distant past; made, done, or existing long ago", *without* an automatic implication of the 'classical Mediterranean antiquity' (A.II.6.a). 'Egypt' always refers to the heart land between the Nile delta and the first cataract; adjacent regions, which temporarily may have been part of the Ptolemaic empire, are explicitly named. 'Political' is meant just as "having an organized form of government or society", without further implications concerning the particular form (A.4). The direct quotes were taken from the the online-edition of the Oxford English Dictionary [link retrieved on 2023-07-13]. In parantheses is the thereof used definition of the quoted term.

2   Jesse – Nowotnick 2021 provide a current example from the SPP research program, how to identify African pottery and date it chronologically.

3   The author understands the term 'ethnic' as a social construct which creates a sense of affinity among the members of a group resting on shared cultural practices, interpretive patterns and common ancestry in contrast to other groups. So the concept is not, as often perceived by the public, as well as academia, so much based on physical characteristics such as skin and hair colour or biological ancestry. Cf. only Jones 1997; for a similar up-to-date definition regarding ancient Egypt in particular Matić 2020, 6–10.

	Political events	Events from the history of ideology and religion	Construction of temples within the Egyptian territory (not in chronological order)
PTOLEMY II PHILADELPHOS	281: Battle of Korupedion: Ptolemy Keraunos murders Seleukos, becomes King of Macedonia and gives up his claims in Egypt.	Beginning of Ptolemy II's reign: Ptolemy I is elevated to *theos soter*.	UNDER PTOLEMY II: naos of the temple of Isis on Philae; Isis sanctuary at el-Qubaniye; Ptolemaic gate in the temple of Mut at Karnak; decorative work in the pre-Ptolemaic temple of Opet in Karnak; expansion of the older birth house in Dendera; temple of Min in Koptos.
	c. 280: Lighthouse tower Pharos is erected on a small island facing the harbour of Alexandria.		
	280–79: so-called 'Syrian War of Succession': Alliance of Ptolemy II with Meletos, acquisition of Samos, other cities in Caria (Stratonikeia, Amyzon, Halikarnassos), strengthening of Ptolemaic rule in Lycia (Ptolemy of Telmessos).		
	279: Ptolemy Keraunos is killed in a battle against the Celts.	279: Temple in Pithom dedicated by Ptolemy II.	
	c. 279: Return of Arsinoe II to Egypt; afterwards (before 274) marriage to Ptolemy II.	From 279/8: Celebration of the quadrennial festival of the Ptolemaia in Alexandria.	*Work on:* temple of Pnepheros in Theadelphia; temple of Isis-Renenutet in Medinet Madi; Anubieion in Saqqara; temple of Isis in Behbeit el-Hagar; temple of Onuris-Shu in Sebennytos; temple of Hibis in the Kharga oasis.
	early 270s: Magas assumes the title of King in Cyrenaica.		
	c. 275: Campaign of Magas against Alexandria: failure owing to the revolt of Libyan nomads; counter-attack by Ptolemy foiled by mutiny of Celtic mercenaries (these subsequently perish on an island in the Nile).		

addition to the epoch, possible objects can also be assigned to the cultural or regency area and that historical events were related to this particular empire.

2 The DFG-funded priority program (SPP) 2143 Entangled Africa[4] [link retrieved on 2023-07-13] of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), which aims to explore intra-African relations and networks of the last 6,000 years up to the beginning of the colonial period, uses several such specialised chronologies that overlap thematically and geographically with the research projects of the SPP. In order to bring them up to date with the latest research and make them accessible to a broad audience of researchers and the interested public, the FAIR.rdm project of the SPP revises relevant chronologies and maintains them in the open access data portal ChronOntology.[5] Chronological data and classifications are therefore interpreted and treated as archaeological research data. All datasets are created and processed by specialists (data scientists, computer scientists and archaeologists) according to precisely defined rules and have detailed metadata. Furthermore, they are hyperlinked with the other offerings of iDAI.world[6]. The curated and deposited chronological data therefore meet scientific standards, and are available to all researchers; consistent with the FAIR principles.[7] In the best case, this creates a reference collection of chronological datasets that can be applied by as wide an audience as possible, thus contributing to a more uniform use of such data.

3 The inspiration for the discussion presented here was work on the chronological arrangement of northeastern African for the SPP. The Nile Valley and its adjacent areas, as a contact zone, with their multitude of social groups and material cultures offer interesting insights into networking both within the continent as well as from there to the Mediterranean region and the Arabian Peninsula. In historical times, the large empires based in those areas played a particularly influential role in trade and exchange relations. Thus, they are often used for dating specific events, monuments or objects which share the same time and space configuration (Fig. 1). This usage is not restricted to scholarship and research. Content created by non-professional historians or enthusiasts often uses such chronologies, too.

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4 Link retrieved on 2023-07-13.

5 Links retrieved on 2023-07-13. For a brief description in terms of digital usage see Fless – Baumeister – Boyxen et al. 2021, 5.

6 Link retrieved on 2023-07-13.

7 Cf. the basic essay Wilkinson – Dumontier et al. 2016.

4   While working on the chronological-political classification of Ptolemaic Egypt (306–30 BCE) – the period in which the initially Hellenic successors of Alexander the Great ruled the empire on the Nile[8] – the question arose about the political significance that female rulers possessed. There were many influential Ptolemaic queens with a large amount of power, including the most famous, Cleopatra VII. Should not a chronological classification based on the political significance of the rulers, established according to modern standards, also include *all* for which such significance can be inferred from the sources? The possibility that their influence did not necessarily match the power of their male spouses should not be a selective criteria. Indeed the influence possessed is often hard to measure and therefore a matter for interpretation. Furthermore, there have also been Ptolemaic kings, as well as male rulers in general, who were not the most powerful deciders in their own empires – due to legal guardians, a strong elite or other circumstances. Nonetheless, they were and still are used for chronological arrangement.[9]

5   Thus, the traditional political chronology of Ptolemaic Egypt can be contrasted with a revised version that takes account of the role of Ptolemaic female rulers. The present article develops and applies a concept of such a revised version, which will be referred to below as the *Counter-Chronology*. The data portal *ChronOntology* offers the possibility to map different interpretations of time concepts or periodisations at the same time and to link them with each other.[10] In this way, the current research discourse can be reflected with the current emphasis on data processing and gender awareness. To implement this endeavour, a separate research group entitled *(In)Visible Women* was established within the SPP.[11] Visibility and availability are important aspects for establishing and promoting new ideas, especially in our digital age.[12]

6   The following discussion is divided into four parts. First, in the next section, the paper takes a brief look at the perception of ancient women in research. Above all, the historical sources give the impression that men only used to be in superior positions in ancient times. This circumstance, coupled with the structures in research and society that have emerged since the 19th century, is responsible for a systematic marginalization – though which need not have been intentional – as well as active suppression of female questions and topics, which has only been actively scrutinised in recent decades. In the following section, therefore, a short look at the research history of Ptolemaic chronology from the turn of the 20th century until today is presented. In this way it can be made clear which deficits and inconsistencies continue to characterise it until today. Thereupon, a direct look at the sources is undertaken, and the question is pursued as to whether the female Ptolemaic rulers are really as difficult to identify as traditional approaches suggest. The practical-technical elaboration of the *Counter-Chronology* with the help of research data and computer code then follows in the subsequent section. The conclusion of the study is an outlook on what can be achieved by this work, what still remains to be done, and to which areas the basic approach can still be applied.

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8   For some general informations about the Ptolemaic Period in Egypt cf. only Hölbl 2010; Manning 2010; Pfeiffer 2017.

9   To account for these varying and sometimes uncertain power relations, the authors adopts the term *(female) ruler* with a somewhat broader meaning as usual. In the following, this term will be used to refer to all Ptolemaic rulers who participated to a certain degree in political decision-making, without *necessarily having* the identical power as their counterparts at the same time.

10   https://chronontology.dainst.org/info/about [link retrieved on 2023-07-13].

11   The title is adapted from the same-titled book Criado-Perez 2020. In it, the author C. Criado-Perez addresses the relative invisibility of women in modern datasets and the resulting disadvantages in everyday life for them as group of people.

12   In the meantime, the newly revised chronology was presented at the 54th edition of the "Ständige Ägyptologiekonferenze" (*Recurring Conference of Egyptology*) which took place in Cologne between June 30th and July 2nd, 2023. The ideas were generally well received by the academic audience, who in particular were attracted by the more detailed periodisation. For a short report see: https://www.dainst.blog/entangled-africa/en/report_2023_08/ [link retrieved on 2023-07-13].

The perception of ancient female rulers

7   Since the beginning of their disciplines, archaeological and historical research has paid only limited attention to female rulers and other ancient women in positions of power. Of course, particularly prominent figures such as Cleopatra VII, Livia, or Boudica could not be ignored, but women who were somewhat less represented in the sources were often treated only in passing. Moreover, earlier research tended to portray well-known women either as imperious opportunists or as passive hangers-on. Notable achievements were thus attributed either to their 'inappropriate' hunger for power or to their male partners.[13] Women outside the historical elite, most of whom were invisible as individuals, were associated with the prevailing domestic role models of the 19th and 20th centuries, while crafts, arts, and overall seemingly more 'demanding' activities were attributed to men.[14]

8   It is not only in the public sphere that debates about equality and gender have become a prominent topic in recent years. The same applies to scientific fields. Part of this process is also a critical questioning of workflows, structures, and interpretive approaches, as well as of traditional research perspectives.[15]

9   Archaeological and scientific research data are, to a not inconsiderable extent, dependent on interpretation from past and present. Thus, who produced ancient sources, who provides information, and who processes and interprets it plays an important role. Unequal relations in both information science, as well as archaeological and historical studies from the very beginning of these disciplines, have certainly worked to the disadvantage of women in many ways, both ancient actors, and modern researchers. These conditions derive from the power structures of our ancient and contemporary Western societies, most of which were and still are dominated by men. The historical narratives regarding actions and agency of women have been 'silenced' more often – to use the words of M.-R. Trouillot (cf. Trouillot 2015). Regarding archaeology and ancient history, R. Günther aptly summarizes these processes, as follows:

"To expose stereotypes [sc.: concerning women in the past] […] as such makes problems because they are spread in the sources written by men as well as in the research largely dominated by men, although mostly [understated] […]. If individual assessments and ideals are presented in a reasonably discreet manner, they are soon regarded as true or as established knowledge, even if the methodological approach and one's own standpoint have not been reflected upon. At times it is difficult to determine whether it is really an ancient tradition or one of the 19th century. […] [The] attitude in a male-centered research forces today's studies on women's issues to always first subject the older literature to an ideology-critical scientific discourse if they want to be taken seriously."[16]

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13   Cf. Coşkun – McAuley 2016, 17; Draycott 2022, 27; Draycott 2019, 108; especially for Cleopatra VII. Ashton 2003, 49; for a modern, but quite critical, portrayal of a Ptolemaic queen (in this case Arsinoës II) see for instance Hölbl 2010, 35.

14   Cf. Günther 2009, 39 with the citation of Röder. A brief but very concise overview of gender stereotypes in archaeological disciplines is provided by Coltofean-Arizancu – Gaydarska – Matić et al. 2021.

15   Even though there is still much that can be improved, the achievements already made in archaeological scholarship concerning gender-aspects since the second half of the 20th century should not be underestimated here: cf. only Conkey – Gero 1997; Mol – Lodwick 2020 and recently the detailed work by Matić 2021.

16   Günther 2009, 39 (authors translation). The original quote reads, as follows: "Rollenklischees […] als solche zu entlarven, macht deshalb Probleme, weil sie sowohl in den von Männern verfassten Quellen als auch in der weitgehend von Männern beherrschten Forschung verbreitet werden, wenn auch meist [subtil] […]. Werden individuelle Einschätzungen und Wertvorstellungen einigermaßen dezent vorgetragen, gelten sie bald als wahr oder als gesicherte Erkenntnis, auch dann, wenn der methodische Zugang und der eigene Standort nicht reflektiert wurde. Zuweilen ist schwer auszumachen, ob es sich wirklich um eine antike Tradition oder um eine des 19. Jahrhunderts handelt. […] [Die] Einstellung in einer männerzentrierten Forschung zwingt bei heutigen Untersuchungen zu Frauenthemen dazu, immer erst die ältere Literatur einem ideologiekritischen Forschungsdiskurs zu unterziehen, wenn sie ernst genommen werden wollen."

10   J. Draycott puts it quite similarly:

"The literary, documentary, archaeological and even bioarchaeological evidence that one might attempt to use as source material is highly suspect. It is buried deep under thousands of years of chauvinism, sexism and even outright misogyny, and broad-brushed stereotypes based on ideas about what women should or should not be, and what they should or should not do, not on detailed information about how they were or what they actually did." (Draycott 2022, 13)

11   These quotes from two contemporary researchers illustrate the numerous obstacles that the study of historical women – individuals as well as women as a social group in general – has faced from ancient times to the present;[17] and in some cases still does.[18] Awareness of both the subject matter and the problems surrounding the history of research has, however, only been fostered in recent decades.[19] It is also still not fully present among many researchers as well as the interested public. In the information sciences, which are primarily concerned with the processing of generated scientific data, similar shortcomings prevail. As a heavily male-dominated field of work, a major focus is on the curation of data collected by male researchers, the majority of which reflect the worlds of men.[20] Not always is this done intentionally, but the consequences do not change much. It is only in recent years that there has been an increased rethinking and critical reflection on one's own discipline, including its methods.[21]

12   By creating a *Counter-Chronology* for Ptolemaic Egypt, the aim of the research group *(In)Visible Women* was to contribute to further raising awareness of these issues. Chronologies represent a frequently used tool and are therefore particularly pertinent. This is true not only for scientific research literature and data, but especially popular scientific works based on them and other media (film and television, knowledge collections on the Internet,[22] podcasts, videogames etc.). A stronger presence of women in chronologies can help make the move from *invisibilty* to *visibility*. The effect is further enhanced if the chronological periods are also searchable, linkable, and citable as open-access research data with a persistent identifier; as is guaranteed by the *iDAI.world* systems.

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17   A similar conclusion can be found in Matić 2021, 137.

18   Cf., for instance, only the negative examples cited by Wylie 2007, 210.

19   Cf. the up-to-date overviews by Fries – Gutsmiedl-Schümann 2020; Alberti – Back Danielsson 2020; Dommasnes 2020; each with an extensive bibliography related to the topic.

20   Cf. D'Ignazio – Klein 2020, Power Chapter with fig. 1.2. Furthermore, if a woman belongs to a discriminated social group, this has a double impact. In the US, for example, only 3 % of the employees in data science are women of colour, although they make up 22.5 % of the total population: D'Ignazio – Klein 2020, Power Chapter. For the designation of people and groups who do not correspond to the prevailing 'standard image' of the Western, White societies due to their appearance and/or origin, the authors sticks in the following to the recommended terms of the glossary of the *Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen*: https://glossar. neuemedienmacher.de/glossar/kategorie/01-wer-sind-wir/ [retrieved on 2023-07-13].

21   Cf. only the current work of Leurs 2017; D'Ignazio – Klein 2020; Criado-Perez 2020.

22   For example, both the english, and the german page of the *Wikipedia* on the Ptolemies is very inconsistent. Some of the female Ptolemaic rulers are mentioned in their role as sole rulers or co-rulers, while others are omitted. Considering how frequently this freely accessible online encyclopedia – in itself a very welcome approach – is consulted as a source of information, one realizes what better visibility of royal women in these contexts can mean for popular opinions in social memory. Only some *Wikipedia* entries that are clearly less frequently accessed offer more thorough informations: For instance, the Wikipedia page which claims to allegedly list most female ruler/monarchs of our past names nearly all Ptolemaic queens (Berenice I and Arsinoë III are the sole ones omitted), and only the "List of ancient Egyptian royal consorts" gives a complete overview of all Ptolemaic queens which are presented as co-rulers. Revising the relevant *Wikipedia* articles could, therefore, be another project for the research group [links retrieved on 2023-07-13]. Altogether, the page views in the past 30 days for the aforementioned *Wikipedia* entries count as follows (drawn from the 'page information'-tab on July 13, 2023): Ptolemies (English): 62.486; Ptolemies (German): 5.434; List of all female rulers (English): 835; List of Egyptian royal consorts (English): 1.730. Generally, English entries are accessed much more frequently than German entries.

Fig. 2: Excerpt of the *kanon basileion* listing the Ptolemaic rulers in Wachsmuth 1895. The only female ruler mentioned is Cleopatra VII (*Kleopatras*) at the bottom.

	Βασιλέων	ἔτη	ἐπισυν-αγωγή		Jahre vor Christus
	Ἀρταξέρξου δευτέρου	μϛ	τπδ		2. Dec. 405—20. Nov. 359
30	Ὤχου	κα	υι		21. Nov. 359—15. Nov. 338
	Ἀρωγοῦ	β	υιβ		16. Nov. 338—14. Nov. 336
	Δαρείου τρίτου	δ	υιϛ		15. Nov. 336—13. Nov. 332
	Ἀλεξάνδρου Μακε-δόνος	η	υκδ		14. Nov. 332—11. Nov. 324
	βασιλεῖς Μακεδόνων				
35	Φιλίππου τοῦ μετ᾽ Ἀλέξανδρον τὸν κτίστην	ζ	υλα	ζ	12. Nov. 324— 9. Nov. 317
	Ἀλεξάνδρου ἑτέρου	ιβ	υμγ	ιϑ	10. Nov. 317— 6. Nov. 305
	Πτολεμαίου Λάγου	κ	υξγ	λϑ	7. Nov. 305— 1. Nov. 285
	Φιλαδέλφου	λη	φα	οζ	2. Nov. 285—23. Okt. 247
	Εὐεργέτου	κε	φκϛ	ρβ	24. Okt. 247—17. Okt. 222
40	Φιλοπάτορος	ιζ	φμγ	ριϑ	18. Okt. 222—12. Okt. 205
	Ἐπιφάνους	κδ	φξζ	ρμγ	13. Okt. 205— 6. Okt. 180
	Φιλομήτορος	λε	χβ	ροη	7. Okt. 180—28. Sept. 146
	Εὐεργέτου δευτέρου	κϑ	χλα	σζ	29. Sept. 146—20. Sept. 117
	Σωτῆρος	λϛ	χξζ	σμγ	21. Sept. 117—11. Sept. 81
45	Διονύσου νέου	κϑ	χϟϛ	σοβ	12. Sept. 81— 4. Sept. 52
	Κλεοπάτρας	κβ	ψιη	σϟδ	5. Sept. 52—30. Aug. 30

The Ptolemaic chronology in scientific research since the 19th century

13   The traditional chronology of Ptolemaic Egypt had already been outlined by the beginning of the 19th century according to the then – still young – scientific rules.[23] The large number of archaeological, papyrological, and numismatic sources, together with the historical texts, provided a wide range of verifiable information. Moreover, researchers of the 18th and 19th centuries were fascinated by Egypt – albeit primarily by the Pharaonic period – and thus placed a special focus on this historical region. The basic source for the dynastic succession of the Ptolemies is the quite 'simple' *kanon basileion* (hereafter simply 'Canon') of the ancient astronomer Claudius (Cl.) Ptolemy (Fig. 2). He used the (adjusted) periods of the Egyptian rulers since the Babylonian occupation for the chronological classification of the astronomical phenomena observed by him.[24]

14   At the end of the 19th century, M. L. Strack commited himself to the study of the Ptolemaic dynasty, with a strong focus on the chronological ordering, of this era. He revised the Ptolemaic chronology with the designated goal of "producing a family chronicle […] that would provide the solid ground for new research."[25] He compared the known dates of the Ptolemaic kings with the lists of the Apis bulls, as well as with

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23   Strack 1897, V names the two-volume work *Annales de Lagides* by J.-J. Champollion-Figeac (Champollion-Figeac 1819) as the first scientific work dealing with this subject. Yet, the source situation at the beginning of the 19th century was much worse than towards its end – especially in the field of archaeological and papyrological finds.

24   Despite the age, a well arranged, edited presentation of the canon including explanations can be found in Wachsmuth 1895, 301–306.

25   Strack 1897, IX: "Als Hauptziel war die Herstellung einer Familienchronik ins Auge gefasst, die neuen Forschungen den festen Untergrund liefern sollte." All translations of M. L. Strack's work in the following are done by the auhtor. The original German paragraph is always cited in the respective footnote.

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funerary inscriptions of a Memphite high priestly family. The latter in particular provided an extremely accurate source of comparison. The priestly family can be traced from the Macedonian conquest of Egypt to the Roman period. In addition to exact birth and death dates, the tomb inscriptions also record the lifespan of each family member to the day. This helps to find and eliminate even the smallest discrepancies, such as those caused by inaccurate calendars in one of the other reference sources. M. L. Strack could show that the reliability of the Canon, related to the inaugural years of the kings, was very high. The exact dates of a change of reign, which the Canon always rounds to the beginning of the year, could be calculated exactly with the help of the mentioned reference sources (cf. Strack 1897, 154–168). Accordingly, the chronology of the Ptolemaic dynasty commonly used today largely maps the Canon of Cl. Ptolemy, which, apart from Cleopatra VII, names only male kings.[26]

15   It was recognised already by M. L. Strack that the Ptolemaic chronology could be extended by the addition of other important persons who had a traceable role in the political development of Ptolemaic Egypt: Divisions based purely on the kings and Cleopatra VII was "the simplest, what could be produced from the confused history of the Ptolemies" and offered a "poor picture", to which it was necessary "to give an increased interest by insertion of new lines" as well as to complete and enliven it in this way by enumerating of the remaining members.[27] Accordingly, the "names of co-rulers, counter-kingdoms and surrogates […] could enrich these Ptolemaic successions and make them more manifold". After all, the sources "in fact provided ample material for a finer division of the line of rulers".[28] Significantly, the queens do not come to his mind for this 'enrichment'[29] – neither do the presumably indigenous counter-kings from Upper Egypt.[30] Rather, he begins an attempt to incorporate some of the lesser male (co-)rulers into the chronology (Strack 1897, 171).

16   M. L. Strack's conclusions illustrate two important aspects that are of interest in the further course of this work: First, the already early recognised possibility and resulting benefit that an extension of the Ptolemaic chronology could bring. Second, the obvious prejudice in not considering the value of female rulers for such an extension, as R. Günther and J. Draycott also urge.

17   Even in the modern research literature that followed the work of M. L. Strack, the predecessors of Cleopatra VII are for the most part subordinated to male rulers – even if in recent decades there have been individual cases of deviation from this practice. A generally accepted consensus on the standard inclusion of female Ptolemaic rulers has not yet been reached; on the contrary, the portrayal of female rulers – especially in important introductory and standard works – is sometimes quite inconsistent. I. Shaw does address the importance of chronologies for archaeological and historical studies in the introduction to *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* and specifically discusses regency

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26   An example of this kind of presentation in a modern survey work on Egyptian history, belonging to a renowned and thus widely used book series, is provided by Shaw 2003a, 487.

27   Strack 1897, 171: "[Die] Chronologie […] ist das einfachste, was sich aus der wirren Geschichte der Ptolemäer herstellen liess. Mit wenigen Strichen ist ein dürftiges Bild gezeichnet. Es gilt der Zeichnung durch Einfügung neuer Linien ein erhöhtes Interesse zu verleihen, die Familienchronik der Lagiden durch Aufzählung der übrigen Mitglieder zu vervollständigen und zu beleben".

28   Strack 1897, 169: "Die Namen von Mitregenten, Gegenkönigen und Stellvertretern können diese Ptolemäerfolge bereichern und mannigfaltiger machen – die Quellen liefern ja in der That reichliches Material zu einer feineren Gliederung der Herrscherreihe".

29   This is all the more surprising since M. L. Strack begins his investigation by expressing – at least for his time – quite progressive thoughts regarding the participation of female Ptolemaic rulers in the reign: Strack 1897, 1–4.

30   Cf. basically to the counter-kingdoms in Thebes Török 2008, 391–400; Hölbl 2010, 153–159. Those are also included as part of the revised chronology of Ptolemaic Egypt, each as a separate ruling period in the database of *ChronOntology*.

lists, however, he too – similar to M. L. Strack – misses the opportunity to point out the possible importance of female rulers in this context (cf. Shaw 2003b, esp. 5–8).

18   The aforementioned inconsistency, with a tendency to give greater consideration to male rulers, is also found in other frequently cited works on the Ptolemaic Empire; for example, in the standard work by G. Hölbl, which is especially popular in the German-speaking countries. Although a section there is titled "Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II *and his Two Queens* Cleopatra II and III (145–116)", thus including two of the most powerful female rulers of the Ptolemaic dynasty, the following subsection is simply titled "The *reign of Ptolemy* VIII until 132" (Hölbl 2010, 194, my italics). J. G. Manning – to cite another exemplary work – also touches on female rulers only in passing in his comprehensive analysis of the political and economic circumstances of the Ptolemaic dynasty, as a glance at the index confirms.[31] The outline of the aforementioned introductory reference by S. Pfeiffer conveys a similar impression: the sections are ordered by the male kings, with the only exception, unsurprisingly, Cleopatra VII. (Pfeiffer 2017).

19   All these examples are not intended to criticise the authors directly, but rather to show how deeply rooted the chronological divisions according to male rulers are, as well as the fact of their modern use. On the other hand, this classification seems to be more inconsistent than suggested by chronological tables. This is at least indicated by the partly inconsistent use of rulers and also female rulers for classification in the running texts and headings of the research literature. This approach – especially in introductory standard works, which are particularly often used by students, young researchers, as well as interested amateurs as a first source of information – solidifies the prevailing view, and makes it more difficult to differentiate it more precisely afterwards. Only in some works of recent years is this practice being actively overturned.[32]

Revision of the Ptolemaic chronology

The source material on the female Ptolemaic rulers

20   Historical sources concerning the female Ptolemaic rulers, are by far not as bad as older research might suggest. They appear as women with great financial means, architects or priestesses. In numerous documents they are explicitly mentioned as rulers, with official functions as well as decrees attributed to them. They also left their mark in military affairs and on ancient battlefields. Cities were named after them, they have been honoured in literature and art objects, and they were also active as authors themselves.[33] Nevertheless, some of the predecessors of Cleopatra VII have been treated in detail only in the last decades.[34] In most introductory and standard works they are usually discussed only rather briefly. This may be due in part to the limited space available in this genre of literature, but it also illustrates once again the often subordinate importance of royal women in scholarship up to the last decades.

21   The first recorded mention of a female Ptolemaic ruler in a political context is found on an Attic inscription from the year 269/68 BCE, which records an alliance of the Greek poleis against Macedonia. Part of this alliance is also Ptolemy II, who, however, pledges his support only in agreement with his ancestors and his sister, Arsinoë II.[35]

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31   Cf. Manning 2010. There are only two references listed referring to named female rulers in the index as opposed to the nearly 40 references regarding male rulers.

32   E.g.: Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2016; Sewell-Lasater 2020.

33   Cf. for this as well as for a brief overview of the individual married couples Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2016; Roller 2018, 18–25; Sewell-Lasater 2020.

34   For an overview of the most important of these works see Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2021, 73 footnote 1.

35   IG II/III³ 1, 912: "[...] also the king Ptolemy in conformity with the attitude of his ancestors and *his sister* in a

Fig. 3: Golden pentadrachma of Berenice II; obverse: Portrait of Berenie II with diadem; reverse: cornucopia with surrounding text BERENIKES BASILISSES ([minted by] queen Berenice).

Although no official title for Arsinoë II has survived, the mention on the inscription can be understood as a sign of some influence.[36] In the cultic sphere, meanwhile, she had a prominent role during her lifetime, as part of the newly established *theoi Adelphoi* ('*sibling deities*').[37]

22   Her successor Berenice II is the first Ptolemaic queen to be given an official title. In total, she is explicitly referred to as female pharaoh – with a female Horus name – in nine demotic papyri. The papyri come mostly from Elephantine in Upper Egypt and date to both the beginning and end of her reign. She appears in each case in the opening protocol of the documents together with her husband Ptolemy III, designated as 'Pharaoh' (*pr-ꜥꜣ.t*).[38] In addition, she also appears on some hieroglyphic inscriptions with a long female horus title. On the Canopos decree, for instance, she is referred to as 'female Horus; ruler, born by a female ruler'.[39] Since Ptolemy III went off to fight the Third Syrian War against the Seleucids shortly after his enthronement, Berenice II ruled Egypt alone in his absence, which some scholars see as the reason for the transfer of the title of pharaoh.[40] The interpretation is supported by the coins which Berenice II had minted during that time, as well as later on (see Fig. 3, I.e ANS. 1967.152.563). Another interesting indication of Berenice's prominent role is provided by a mosaic originating from Thumis by the artist Sophilos. In this mosaic, the ruler is depicted in military clothing. She is wearing a typical Greek cloak, a so-called chlamys, over metal armour (Fig. 4). This can be interpreted as an indication that Berenike's prominent position was also acknowledged by parts of the Greek population.[41]

23   However, this whole interpretation is in parts not completely certain. It is also possible that the Horus name of Berenice II was only given by the Egyptian priests to transfer her role in the representation of the Ptolemies into an Egyptian reading. In this

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public way endeavors [...]" (English version after the German translation of K. Hallof, my italics).

36   Strack 1897, 2 sees in her even 'the most powerful woman of the Ptolemaic family which is not poor in great female figures'. Here again his already mentioned and for that time quite progressive esteem of the female Ptolemaic rulers is shown, which in the end, however, is not consistently reflected in his chronological order. The original quote reads as follows: "[O]bgleich [in dieser Zeit] wohl die gewaltigste der an grossen Frauengestalten wahrlich nicht armen Ptolemäerfamilie, die zweite Arsinoe, gelebt hat." Draycott 2022, 34 refers to Arsinoë II. as "co-ruler", without, however, citing any specific evidence to support this classification or to clarify what she exactly means by this term.

37   Cf. Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2021, 74; Pfeiffer 2021, 96. Minas-Nerpel 2019, 173 states that the 'cults of the Ptolemaic queens were innovative', also compared to the tradition of Pharaonic Egypt. The first documented mention of the *theoi adelphoi* is to be found on a papyrus from 271: TM, 2826.

38   Cf. for instance Spiegelberg 1908, 12 (TM, 43706). For an enumeration of all papyri in which Berenice II bears the title of pharaoh, see Bielman Sánchez – Joliton 2019, 72 note 21.

39   *Ḥr.t ḥqꜣ.t jr.t.n ḥqꜣ.t'*. For the text cf. Eldamaty 2011, 24 f. See also Minas-Nerpel 2019, 167 f.

40   Cf. for instance Bielman Sánchez – Joliton 2019, 72; Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2021, 75; each with further literature.

41   Cf. Minas-Nerpel 2019, 167. The depiction can be found by Grimm 1998, 79–81, Abb. 81a.c.

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Fig. 4: Berenice II depicted in armour with chlamys on the mosiac from Thumis.

case, actual governmental functions could not be derived from it.[42] This would explain, why she is not mentioned in Greek documents bearing such a title. But in the end, these mentions and ommissions may only reflect the different perceptions of Berenice II by her contemporaries, who did not necessarily share the same socio-cultural background, and, therefore, should not lead towards too quick and general conclusions. Certainly she was an important and powerful queen, at least for a significant part of the population.

24   In the case of her successor Arsinoë III, the sources show similar uncertainties about her official role. Great deeds and a certain influence are attributed to her. She is said to have personally encouraged the Egyptian troops before the Battle of Raphia and, after the victory, is addressed as pharaoh in the Decree of Raphia, which was displayed in temples throughout the country. In addition, she and her brother consort Ptolemy IV donated a large sum to the Boiot sanctuary of the Muses and the associated Mouseion Festival. However, evidence of official Egyptian documents in which she appears in the opening protocol is lacking.[43]

25   With her successor, the Seleucid princess Cleopatra I, who married Ptolemy V in 196 BCE, not only the famous name enters the Ptolemaic dynasty. She also becomes the first queen to whom the sources clearly assign a primary position of power compared to the king. When Ptolemy V died unexpectedly in 180 BCE, their son Ptolemy VI was only six years old. Cleopatra took over the guardianship and thus de facto the

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42   Cf. Müller 2021, 90 and below. Draycott 2022, 35 classifies the role of Berenice much more positively. At this passage she describes a mosaic from Thmuis, which presumably shows Berenice II. The queen is shown there as a personification of Alexandria with a variety of symbols and regal dress. J. Draycott finally describes her regency as "joint reign" with the king consort Ptolemy III.

43   Cf. for a detailed overview on the source material including further interesting information on Arsinoë III: Bielman Sánchez – Joliton 2019, 69–85; further cf. Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2021, 75.

regency in Egypt. Her superior position becomes clear in the protocol of a papyrus from the same year:

basileuonton basilisses Kleopatras
kai basileos Ptolemaiou tou huiou theon
Epiphanon etous a.

Under the rule of queen Cleopatra
and king Ptolemy, her son, the *theoi*
Epiphaneis; year one.[44]

26   The name of Cleopatra I is listed before that of her son. The order of the names in the strongly formalised protocols mostly reflects the hierarchy among the rulers (Sewell-Lasater 2020, 17. 446). That both are officially likewise in a ruling position is made clear at the very beginning of the paragraph: There it says *basileuonton*, which can be translated as "under the regency of …" followed by the names. This is the standardised participle indicating the ruler(s) in the protocols. For Demotic papyri the corresponding term in the protocols, as mentioned above, is *pr-ꜥꜣ.t* ('Pharaoh') (cf. Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2016, 158 f.). Another papyrus shows that Cleopatra I was also active in domestic politics and that her guardianship was not merely symbolic.[45] A. Bielman Sánchez and G. Lenzo identify three innovations in the concept of Ptolemaic regency with the reign of Cleopatra I: Introduction of joint rule; Inclusion of the queen; and Listing of Cleopatra I *ahead of* Ptolemy VI.

27   These innovations do not seem to have met with any opposition from the Hellenistic-Egyptian elite or the court.[46] From this point on, the vast majority of female Ptolemaic rulers participated in power in the form of an official joint rule (cf. generally Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2016).

28   After the death of Cleopatra I, Ptolemy VI married his sister Cleopatra II in 175 BCE. At first, two members of the court assumed guardianship of the rulers. In 170 BCE, an official joint rule was established that included the siblings and their brother Ptolemy VIII. From this point on, the siblings ruled in various combinations. After the death of Ptolemy VI in 145 BCE and the temporary exile of Ptolemy VIII, a joint rule was established between the latter and his sister Cleopatra II. In 140 BCE, Ptolemy VIII eventually married his niece, Cleopatra III, the daughter of his sister-regent, who was also officially part of the joint rule from that point on. The ruling trio appears also on largely formalised reliefs in Egyptian sanctuaries like Kom Ombo in Upper Egypt (Fig. 5).

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44   P. Ryl. Gr., 4, 589, line 92–94; TM, 65627 (authors translation). A further mention of both rulers in the same order is found in line 109 of the same text. The sacred epithet *Theoi Epiphaneis* used in this text refers to Cleopatra I as well as her son Ptolemy VI. From the following year, Ptolemy VI appears with his common epithet *Philometor* (the mother-loving one); cf. RE 23 (1959) 1703 s. v. Ptolemaios No. 24 (H. Volkmann).

45   TM, 5038; it is the letter of a man who considers himself wrongfully imprisoned for an offense related to tax rent, and points out that he is actually amnestied also by decree of Queen Cleopatra and King Ptolemy: 'But we were previously absolved by the dioiket Apollonios, and afterwards by Queen Cleopatra and King Ptolemy, from all charges and intentional as well as unintentional offenses except for the [mesore?] of the 25th year, and they decreed that no one should be allowed to go to court on any plea on account of the above facts.' The translation is prepared after the German one from the new edition of the text in Käppel 2017. The editor expresses there (p. 213) the assumption that Cleopatra I had issued such a general amnesty 'in order to set a sign of benevolence, but also of strength, as represented by such a comprehensive decree, after the inglorious end of the last reign, also in terms of foreign policy.' This seems quite plausible and would also clarify her knowledge about the political rules of the game as well as her calculation; cf. also in this sense Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2016, 165.

46   Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2021, 76. Totally different is the interpretation concerning these events in Strack 1897, 3, who suspects that Cleopatra I 'was content with the rights of a guardian and did not make herself the ruling sovereign'.

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Fig. 5: From left to right: Cleopatra III, Cleopatra II and Ptolemy VIII in front of Haroeris.
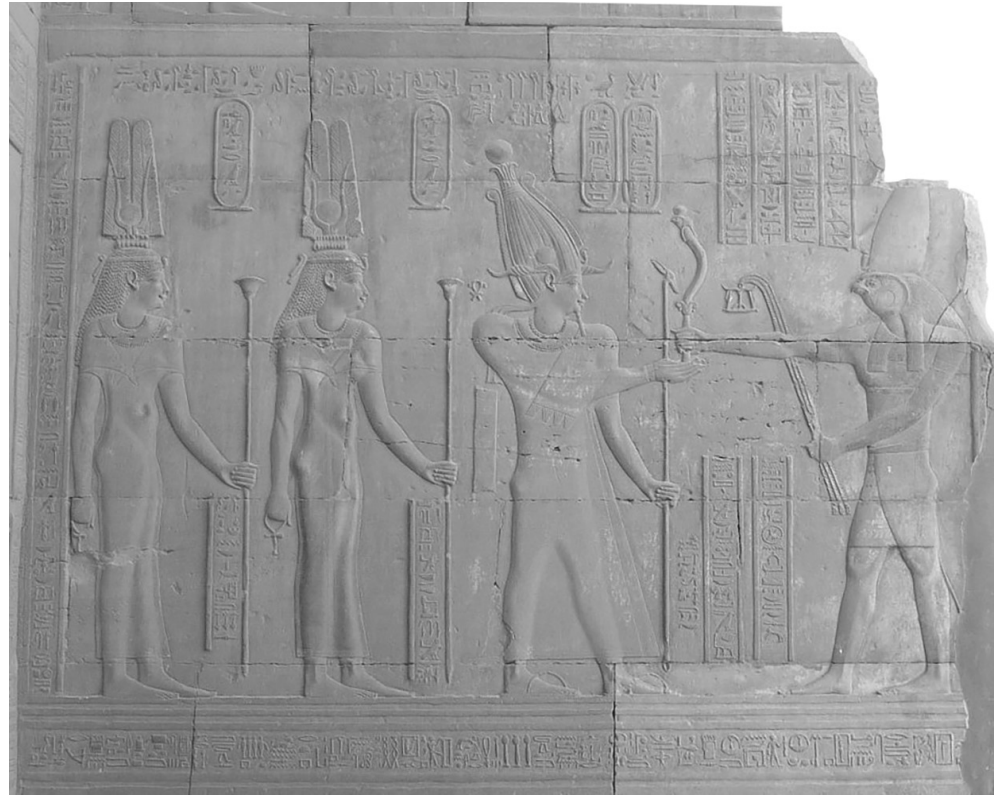
29 Their joint rule was interrupted by a civil war between the siblings in the late 130s BCE. For this period, there is evidence that Cleopatra II ruled parts of Egypt alone for a time.[47] In return, Cleopatra III established a cult of Isis for herself to strengthen her own pretensions to the throne (Gkikaki 2021, 76). After a short period, however, the triple reign was re-established and lasted until the death of Cleopatra II in 116 BCE. In the end, Cleopatra II, together with various joint rulers, had by far the longest regency of all Ptolemies, with almost 55 years of direct participation in power (Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2021, 76). When her mother had passed away, Cleopatra III was without question the dominant ruler in charge of power. Similar to her grandmother she appears in different contexts in front of the new co-ruler, her son Ptolemy IX. A relief from the Hathor temple of Deir al-Medina shows her in first position in front of Amun-Re followed by the king (Fig. 6). In the corresponding inscriptions she is also mentioned in the first place with her female Horus-name, only followed by title and name of Ptolemy IX.[48] The same applies to a slightly younger demotic papyrus from the year 107 BCE, on which a grain loan was established. For chronological classification, the text begins with a formalized passage in which Cleopatra III, designated in Demotic as *pr-ꜥꜣ.t* (female Pharaoh), is named before her son and co-ruler Ptolemy X (*pr-ꜥꜣ*, Pharaoh).[49] Thus, Cleopatra III seems to have presided both of her sons in their respective joint reign before the younger Ptolemy X had her assassinated in 101 BCE.

30 Altogether, the depiction of the female rulers, especially in highly formalised protocols and temple reliefs, but also on coins and other source material, underwent a traceable evolution since the beginning of the Ptolemaic reign.[50] As time went on, the

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47 TM, 8140. There it states directly in the first line: "In the third year of the reign of Cleopatra, the mother-loving *Thea Soteira*" (authors translation).

48 Minas 2005, 141–143 with a German translation of the Hieroglyphic inscription.

49 TLA IBUBd8SXf9GEj0yRlwry1g8KQHQ; Adler – Griffith 1974, 80–83, no. 6.

50 In contrast to official documents, however, the hieroglyphic descriptions of the queens corresponding to depictions in temples etc. in most cases seem not to have matched the male title *Pharao of Upper and Lower Egypt (nsw-bity)*: Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2016, 474. Furthermore, there are also reliefs and depictions

symbols connected with the queens generally depicted them as acting rulers more specific.[51] In the following decades, the Ptolemaic empire was still mainly ruled by several co-rulers until the accession of Cleopatra VII. In the hierarchy within the individual ruling periods, the female rulers in part, and in part the male rulers, took the dominant position.[52]

31   This brief overview is intended to show that the roles, actions, and influence of female Ptolemaic rulers go far beyond the passive role assigned to them by most scholars to date.[53] Furthermore, their political participation cannot be simply divided into 'present' or 'absent'. The underlying processes, as well as their echoes in the largely fragmentarily preserved sources were – unsurprisingly – clearly more complex and the role of female rulers went through different stages over time.[54] Thus, the mention in the opening protocol of official Egyptian documents is an important factor in evaluating their role and participation in power, but it is not the only aspect. As shown, the picture is not so clear-cut. Royal women are also present in different kind of sources, like reliefs, coins or inscriptions, which may reflect their reputation among other parts of the people and among other societies.

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where Ptolemy VIII seems to have exceeded his both wives, e.g. Minas-Nerpel 2014.

51   An informative overview on this evolution is provided, for instance, by Minas 2005; Gkikaki 2021; although the former is, in my opinion, too critical regarding the official amount of power which the queens possessed.

52   Cf. the table at Sewell-Lasater 2020, 439–442. Further detailed information on events, actions and sources of the individual regency pairs or trios can be found at Strack 1897; Pomeroy 1984; Hölbl 2010; Ashton 2003; Sewell-Lasater 2020; to mention just a few works which are often referenced in this article.

53   Of course, this overview does not claim to be exhaustive. The selection is largely based on the examples that are also discussed in the literature consulted, which has already dealt more intensively with the Ptolemaic queens. Even within this framework, a complete examination of all sources is not possible. Moreover, the author looked through accessible collections and thesauri, like the TLA for instance, and chose some revealing examples from those large collections.

54   The conclusion that fewer available informations about a group or some individuals are due to fewer available informations about them from the sources is a frequently occurring misinterpretation. It may be one possible reason, but often these sources are only referenced considerably less frequent. As a result, the particular groups or individuals become under-represented in scientific, as well as public memory. When this perception is established, it seems – erroneously – to be a historical truth; cf. Trouillot 2015, 53–55.

32   The concept of joint rule may only have been officially established with Cleopatra I. Prior to this, in most cases only the king is mentioned, while royal women appear in the protocol only in their role as his mother or sacred functions.[55] Nevertheless, there is evidence that royal women took on important political roles even before 180 BCE. The presentation of these queens differs depending on source category and origin. If, for instance, a queen is mentioned solely in an Egyptian papyrus or only on Greek inscriptions. This may be due against the background of the differing socio-cultural perceptions of the person and her position. Thus, if a single (or a few) source category would be used as an exclusion criterion for the inclusion of royal women in the Ptolemaic *Counter-Chronology*, personalities such as Arsinoë II, Berenice II, or Arsinoë III, who can be shown to have left a lasting mark, would be left out. Perhaps for some of these women the positive evidence in the sources is simply missing, as it has not survived, or they just acted in a time before the listing in the official protocols had been formalised in such a way. So, it should be possible to define some parameters that include royal women whose position was not as formalised or for whom positive evidence may be missing from the sources.[56]

Creation of a Counter-Chronology

33   How do we filter this information to create a *counter-chronology* of the Ptolemaic era? The aforementioned evidence in the Egyptian and Greek sources illustrates the important roles that women of the Ptolemaic dynasty played. They were not only active on a private or sacred level, but also intervened directly in daily political business. All this even before they appeared in official documents as equal rulers since the time of Cleopatra I in 180 BCE. In order to include also those royal women before the beginning of the 2nd century BCE into the *Counter-Chronology*, necessary parameters must be determined.

34   The aforementioned chronological table in T. Sewell-Lasater's work lists all male and female rulers with dates of arrival and departure – regardless of whether they were addressed as official co-rulers in the ancient documents or not (Sewell-Lasater 2020, 439–442). In addition, she defines various categories that describe what specific position each queen held (Fig. 7). For the rearrangement of the chronological periods it makes sense to consider all Ptolemaic women who, following the definition of T. Sewell-Lasater, held at least the position of a 'basilissa consort'. The use of this modern definition as a criterion of selection ensures that women of the royal household who possessed some influence, demonstrable in the sources – albeit in some cases minor – over the day-to-day political and/or sacral affairs are included in the *Counter-Chronology*, whereas those who possessed no direct power whatsoever do not appear in the reclassification. The term *basilissa* by itself, without explanatory addition, on the contrary, is

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55   Cf. the selection of opening protocols, which reflects well the evolution over time, at Sewell-Lasater 2020, 445–451.

56   Cf. the similar problem regarding Seleucid women (for whom the source situation is admittedly even more spotty than for the Ptolemaic women) described by Coşkun – McAuley 2016, 19: "We have, however, abstained from imposing strict terminological consistency and do occasionally allow royal women to be called 'queens' even without positive evidence for the title, when there is still reason to assume that they may have been *basilissai* at least at some point of their lives, or that they managed to establish effective monarchical rule." Müller 2021, 84. 89 is basically more skeptical about the surviving actions of the female Ptolemaic rulers – in this case particularly Berenice II. She sees the possibility that such actions could also have been exaggerated or interpolated as part of the Ptolemaic ruling ideology. In conclusion, this dilemma cannot be resolved due to the spotty nature of the sources. However, for me, the construction thesis of S. Müller seems in this case even a bit more dependent on unsecured assumptions. For, even though some of the actions of the female rulers – as well as then certainly of the male rulers – may be exaggerated, they at least reflect the public perception of their contemporaries and therefore lend themselves well to revise the traditional chronology.

Term	Definition	Examples
basilissa	General term for any royal woman, regardless of power	All rulers
basilissa-consort	Married to the king, middle to moderate politicla influence/power	Berenice I, Arsinoë I, Arsinoë II, Berenice II, Cleopatra IV, Cleopatra V Selene I
basilissa-regent	Ruling power as guradian to a male heir; This is depicted as joint rule, where the queen is the dominant partner	Cleopatra I
Co-ruler	Ruling power equal to or greater than that of a male spouse or relation (usually an adult son)	Cleopatra II, Cleopatra III, Cleopatra Berenice III
basilissa-regnant	Sole rule or female as the dominant ruling authority	Cleopatra II, Cleopatra Berenice III, Berenice IV, Cleopatra VII

Fig. 7: Definition of the different positions of the Ptolemaic queens after Sewell-Lasater.

too general.[57] This designation can also be used to name women of the royal household who had no influence or power – for example, other relatives of the ruling couple. The modern Greek-English compositum noun '*basilissa* consort' from Sewell-Lasater's work, used here to classify the roles of the Ptolemaic queens, should not obscure the fact that also the depiction in the Egyptian sources were used to determine these roles. Especially the term *pr-ꜥꜣ.t*, which occurs first in Ptolemaic times during the 3rd century BCE,[58] is an important marker for women of particular status. That does not mean necessarily that woman who were referred to as *pr-ꜥꜣ.t* always shared the same amount of power as their male spouses (which is vice versa also true for some kings). But at least this can be interpreted as a clear indication that the role of women designated like this went beyond that of a queen perceived merely as a passive wife.

35   The data obtained in this way can now be used to contrast the traditional Ptolemaic chronology with the revised and expanded version. The derivation of the new ruling periods can be easily illustrated graphically. The current data from the work of T. Sewell-Lasater can be visualised in the form of a timeline in which each bar represents the ruling period of a regent. The individual periods are separated into male and female regents for better differentiation. The result shows a timeline on which the overlaps of the respective period blocks of the regents make clear when several members of the Ptolemies held a ruling position.[59] From this picture it is possible to create new divided regency periods in a simple way. A new period of *Counter-Chronology* starts – running from left to right – with the next beginning and ends with the next following end of a single period; regardless on which level (height) it is located and whether it is a female ruler or a male ruler (Fig. 8). In the shown case three new periods are worked out with

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57   Cf. Sewell-Lasater 2020, 14–19, who emphasises that for the exact classification of the different *basilissa*-positions also material sources – such as images on pictures or reliefs, etc. – are consulted. This is important, in order to be able to classify also such royal women correctly, for whom on the basis of the source situation no title is handed down, but nevertheless is very probable (see above). Furthermore, T. Sewell-Lasater also assigns different *basileus* positions to the kings, depending on the amount of power of the individual ruler.

58   TLA d2003 with most of the known appearances. A short overview for both terms is given by Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2016, 473 f. The Egyptian term *pr-ꜥꜣ.t* is receiving somewhat too little attention in the discussion by Sewell-Lasater 2020, 14–19, even if the author calls Egyptian sources as important reference for her definition of her *basilissa* category (p. 18): 'Several types of evidence were used to determine which queens were assigned each *basilissa*-term, such as monumental depictions, contemporary titles in inscriptions, and papyri, *both Greek and Egyptian*, when possible.' (my Italics)

59   The timeline was created using the programming language **R** with the timevis package. Code and data used for creation of the *Counter-Chronology* can be found on GitLab. The inauguration and departure dates were taken Sewell-Lasater 2020, 439–442.
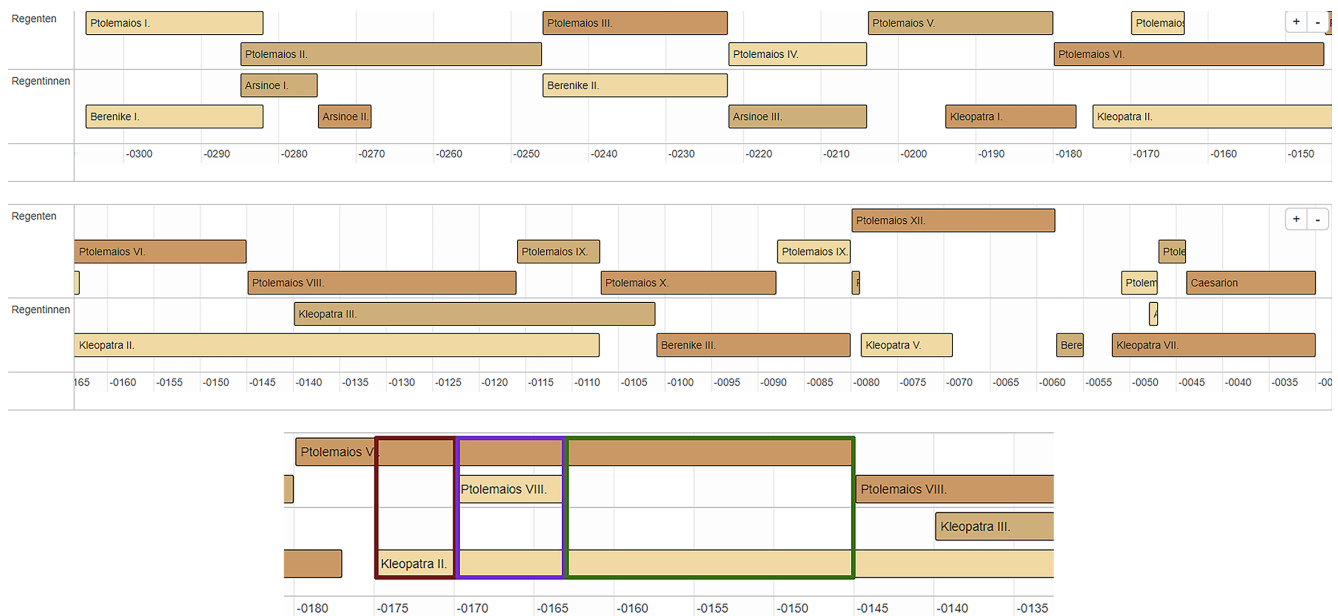
Fig. 8: Methodical procedure for the creation of the *Counter-Chronology*. Organisation of the new ruling periods based on the inauguration and departure dates of the individual rulers. Each new period includes the rulers who are within one of the colored rectangles.

consideration of the female rulers. The periods differ from the traditional arrangement in the canon of Cl. Ptolemy or the modern version[60] as follows[61]:

Traditional periodisation

- Ptolemy VI (180–145 BCE) (brown): Begins his reign as a minor under the guardianship of his mother, Cleopatra I. The period lasts until his death. Neither his mother, nor his later wife and sister, Cleopatra II, appear in the traditional division. His brother, Ptolemy VIII, is also not listed as a co-regent before 145 BCE in most publications.
- Ptolemy VIII (145–117 BCE) (beige): After the death of his brother in 145 BCE, he is listed in the traditional periodisation as sole ruler without taking into account his female co-rulers. His own co-rulership in the 160s BCE is included only to a limited extent, since he ruled only Cyprus and Cyrenaica from 163 BCE onward.

Revised periodisation[62]

- Ptolemy VI and Cleopatra II (under guardianship of Lenaios and Eulaios) (175–170 BCE) (dark brown): In 175 BCE, the minor Ptolemy VI married his younger sister Cleopatra II. From this time on they form the royal couple – although at first still under the guardianship of two so-called *philoi* from the court.
- Ptolemy VI, Cleopatra II and Ptolemy VIII (170–163 BCE) (purple): With the accession of their shared brother Ptolemy VIII, all three appear as co-rulers with equal rights. This marks the beginning of a new ruling period. A conflict with Ptolemy VIII leads to his expulsion to Cyrenaica, which ends the period.
- Ptolemy VI and Cleopatra II (163–145 BCE) (green): After the expulsion of Ptolemy VIII, Ptolemy VI and Cleopatra II ruled for another 18 years as officially equal co-rulers. The period ends with the death of Ptolemy VI, after
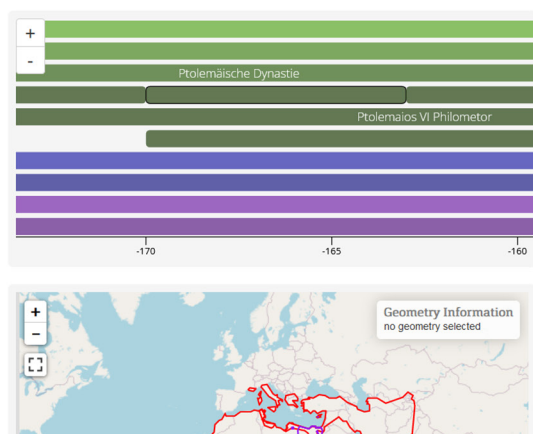
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60 For example, the version referred to by Shaw 2003a.

61 The colours behind the names of the rulers show the colour of the time bar or rectangle in Fig. 8.

62 For the explanations of the periods given hereafter, cf. only Bielman Sánchez – Lenzo 2021, 75–77; Sewell-Lasater 2020, 266–318; Hölbl 2010, 143–152, 181–204.

Fig. 9: New revised period and timeline in the *ChronOntology* web portal: The new period depicting the co-rule of Ptolemy VI, Cleopatra II and Ptolemy VIII. The timeline showing the new revised next to the traditional periodisation.

which Ptolemy VIII returns to the ruling circle – according to traditional discourse, this is where his regency begins – but without depriving Cleopatra II of her full powers.

36 The result is a new periodisation of the time span, which was previously grouped under the male kings, namely Ptolemy VI followed by Ptolemy VIII. In the data portal *ChronOntology*, the differences from the traditional chronology are expressed mainly in three points: The concrete designation of the respective period after all – male *and* female – regents; the mention of the official role and, where appropriate, actions also of the female rulers in the description of the respective period (Fig. 9); as well as the more detailed arrangement of the time span into several and smaller periods. In the portal, moreover, the time bars of the traditional chronology as well as of the *Counter-Chronology* can be contrasted on a timeline and thus directly compared.

37 Generally, the revised periods appear as separate data sets. On the one hand, these contain information about the period, such as definition, description, temporal and spatial extent, period type, or literature references. The particular content of these informations is linked to other systems of the *iDAI.world*, if possible. On the other hand, relations of the chosen period to other periods are presented with the help of links to these datasets. This includes information such as subdivisions, superior periods, preceding and succeeding periods, as well as comparable periods and different definitions. In case of the revised Ptolemaic periods, the entries provide an additional permanent link to the datasets that represent the traditional periodisation.

38 It is particularly important for direct use that all chronological records have a unique URI. Long-term availability is guaranteed by the DAI within the framework of the *iDAI.world*. The individual periods are thus citable. This makes it possible to refer to the time terms, for example in scientific works, and to use them for temporal as well as spatial classification of events.[63] Thus, future work on Ptolemaic Egypt could draw on the revised periods of the *Counter-Chronology* for specific chronological determination of *political* circumstances[64], rather than using the traditional periodisation. Because all

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63   Cf. https://chronontology.dainst.org/info/about (retrieved on 2023-07-13).

64   Of course, the revised periods can also be used to date non-political events. In these cases, however, they rather serve as a method to classify these events absolutely chronologically and, if necessary, to relate them to

revised periods also contain a link to the traditional period, no information is lost. Rather, a modern interpretation is added to the state of research in this way.

39   Of course, the application possibilities are not limited to purely scientific works. Popular science projects can also use and cite the portals and data of the *iDAI.world*. Therefore, it is definitely an option worth considering, for example, to update the corresponding Wikipedia articles to cite the data of the *Counter-Chronology* as an alternative interpretation and to link to the corresponding data sets at the portal *ChronOntology*.

Possible implications of the Counter-Chronology

40   The reasons for the revision are inherent mostly in the positive implications mentioned below based on the comprehensive applications provided by the online portal *in combination* with the traditional use of chronologies.

41   In our digital and highly interconnected world, the concept of 'range' is becoming increasingly important. This is because the more people that can be reached with a new concept – be it scientific, popular scientific, or entirely non-scientific – the higher the chance that it will be accepted as part of the collective memory and, in the best case, adopted into the fixed body of knowledge. Increased representation of royal women – of their actions, achievements, and accomplishments, as well as of their roles, functions, and powers – can, in this sense, help overcome long-held opinions and prejudices, and thus take into account the social reality in which women have always taken, and continue to take, many and important roles.

42   In the scientific sphere of the SPP, the process can be supported by the development of a *Counter-Chronology* presented here, which focuses on ancient royal women on an equal basis. This is accomplished primarily with the help of the revised periods in the form of datasets provided by the *ChronOntology* portal. If the revised periods are consulted, this is done primarily by means of their designation. Since the female rulers – together with male rulers – are eponymous of their respective periods, their mere use for a chronological classification of events contributes to the dissemination of the new approach. More detailed information can be obtained by people interested simply by following the reference to the data set with its further information. In this way, awareness could be raised that royal women have at all times taken on important roles in our historical and social development.

43   If one imagines this development a little further, this could help, first of all in the community of archaeological and historical studies, to increase the acknowledgment of women and their roles in the past and in the interpretation of the sources that have come down to us. In this way, "a glimpse into an alternative Roman Empire, where women could be empowered and influential", could be opened up and, in the best case, permanently anchored in scholarly memory (Draycott 2022, 26). The term 'Roman Empire' is likely to be replaced here by any other political as well as regional designations of groups and ruling entities – in the presented case probably 'Ptolemaic

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a region or cultural formation. Other types of chronological classifications cannot and should not be replaced by our *Counter-Chronology*, since in many cases there is no direct connection between political periodisations, which in comparison are sometimes very short-lived, and those based, for example, on archaeological finds or geological features. Whether it is also possible to include female actors in the course of a revision for chronologies that depict changes in material culture, for example, still needs to be examined against the background of the respective find genre. Initial considerations on this possibility have already been made within the framework of the *Working Group*. However, one thing is clear: especially outside the scientific community, political chronologies play a particularly prominent role. The vast majority of "historical" facts in popular science contexts, refer to this type of classification for dating; specialised chronologies, such as the aforementioned archaeological classifications, play a much smaller role here.

Empire' – or in the best case simply overarching by 'past'. In order to implement this for the individual disciplines of archaeological and historical studies, appropriate research questions need to be formulated and investigated. Hopefully, a further incentive for this has been created with the present work.

44   With regard to the information sciences, this broadening of horizons can reinforce the reflection on one's own working methods and data models that has already been initiated. Traditional 'male' perspectives and interpretations still predominate here. As a result, greater attention is paid to topics and data with this content. Our traditionally patriarchal Western societies further reinforces this effect. This affects *women of colour* even more, who are thereby subject to intersecting discrimination. To identify and name these inequities, as well as the power structures behind it, and then to address those issues, they must be questioned.[65] Increased awareness of this issue, also in other disciplines that rely on information science for their research data management, for example, can certainly help to accelerate this development.

45   If one looks beyond the boundaries of science, changes in these areas can contribute quite directly to improving the current living conditions of women and girls. That is especially significant because most people do not first come into contact with history in an academic setting. Rather, we encounter historical narratives frequently even in our youth – whether through the multitude of media, school, or people we know (Trouillot 2015, 20. 25). Here, power structures shaped in a more balanced way can contribute to get a little closer to an inclusive society. At first glance, this may seem far-fetched for the mere revision of a chronology on ancient Egypt. And, of course, the tangible part of the approach developed here is rather small. But as part of the big picture, it makes its valuable contribution. Increased visibility of historical women can also lead to support the self consciousness of young girls and women in the present.[66] This applies once again even more to women of colour, who in comparison have even fewer historical female role models to draw on.[67] Of course, this does not mean that ancient royal women should be adopted uncritically as positive role models. Like their

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65   Cf. D'Ignazio – Klein 2020, Power Chapter. These questions may be uncomfortable for some people, but they are necessary to initiate change. Catherine D'Ignazio und Lauren Klein list the following three questions as a basis for uncovering the power structures in and around data science:
Who is doing the work of data science (and *who is not*)?
Whose goals are prioritised in data science (and *whose are not*)?
Who benefits from data science (and *who is either overlooked or actively harmed*)?

66   A similar contribution is made by the project AktArcha [link retrieved on 2023-07-13], whose goal is to make 'innovative women and their research achievements in the archaeologies visible. To this end, the perspectives of archaeological gender research and the history of science will be brought together with the possibilities of the Digital Humanities' (authors translation). The results are presented to the public in an exhibition. A certain strengthening of their position would certainly benefit (aspiring) female archaeologists. Looking at the pure numbers, it is true that the proportion of men and women in archaeology is more or less equally distributed. In the higher positions, however, the share of male researchers predominates – in part still very significantly: Statistiken nach Lodwick 2020, 34.

67   Cf. Draycott 2022, 16; D'Ignazio – Klein 2020, Power Chapter. An interesting example, which goes into the same direction, came up in spring of 2023. Then the streaming portal *Netflix* started a second season of their documentary *African Queens*. Therein Cleopatra VII is represented as a black woman. The producer, Jada Pinkett Smith, said one of the main reasons producing the show was that "We don't often get to see or hear stories about Black queens, and that was really important for me, as well as for my daughter, and just for my community to be able to know those stories because there are tons of them" (Butler 2023, cf also Haley 1993). This is a good example how changed perceptions of the past can have an impact on everyday lives. Nevertheless, the show was hit by a hard backlash and great opposition, especially in Egypt due to rising ultranationalism and very problematic entanglements between the restrictive government, Egyptology as academic field and perception, as well as presentation of the own past (cf. the critical paper Jurman 2022 for a detailed analysis of these circumstances). The main disagreement was on the fact that Cleopatra is presented as a black woman. Beside some solid critic – from a scientific standpoint there is no way of knowing the detailed lineage of Cleopatra VII, cf. e.g. Beard 2021 –, the actress, director and producer had to withstand many often racist attacks and plain insults, mainly on social media. The main message seemed to be that Cleopatra was 'at least not black'. This example illustrates on the one hand the changes that can be initiated through approaches with a different perspective, and on the other hand the still prevailing discrimination and prejudices which members of marginalised groups are confronted with on a daily basis.

male counterparts, the Ptolemaic female rulers also acted in many situations in a way that, from today's perspective, we would judge as ethically questionable or even reprehensible. What is important in the first place – especially for discriminated women, but generally for everybody – is the presence of these queens in our historical perceptions to remind us that women of different origins in powerful positions have always been part of our societies and not only since the late 20th century.

46   A further step in regard with the *Entangled Africa* program could be to expand the general themes discussed here to further northeastern African civilisations such as Kush and Aksum, which, for example, offer many possibilities of similar research questions. During the Meroitic epoch of Kush, there were several well-known queens who shaped the history of their ruling sphere in many ways.[68] And the historical sources about Aksum tell us of a powerful warrior queen who is believed to have terminated the Aksumite dynasty and established a new line of rulers, known as Zagwe dynasty (cf. only Selassie 1972; Andersen 2000). Beyond such elites, archaeology also opens up insights which provide us a look at the every-day lives of the non-elite people in general, as well as women in particular. Moreover, shifting the focus of research towards these socio-historical groups and realms in modern day Sudan, Ethiopia, and other surrounding areas in northeast Africa can give more prominence to the histories of these societies, which are still rather a marginal note in Western historiography, and could improve our perception of their socio-historical development. And this is, after all, one of the main goals of the *Entangled Africa* priority program as well as the *Planet Africa* exhibition.

Acknowledgements

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68   The concrete amount of power they possessed and the roles those Kushite queens filled remain subject to discussions. Cf. e.g. Matić 2023 for a critical view, whereas Ashby 2021 interprets the deeds and powers of the queens in a much more positive way. Presentations of both authors can be found online on YouTube: Matić and Ashby [links retrieved on 2023-08-31]. A short overview can be found at Lohwasser – Phillips 2021.

48   Last but not least, I owe anything possible to my two powerful women at home, my wife and my little daughter! Thank you for all the support during homeoffice and all the good times I did not have to think about my research.

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Fig. 1: Hölbl 2010, 324

Fig. 2: Wachsmuth 1895, 306

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Fig. 7: F. Lukas after Sewell-Lasater 2020, 16 table 1

Fig. 8: F. Lukas

Fig. 9: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (iDAI.ChronOntology)

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