

Kings Don't Lie: Truth-telling and Ptolemy I.

When Ptolemy took control of Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, the only basis for his rule was his position as satrap (governor) on behalf of the co-kings Philip III and Alexander IV. But once Ptolemy abandoned ideas of wider empire (around 311 BCE), he focused on making Egypt an independent and secure base. A pivotal part of his plan involved securing support from the Egyptian elites by stressing his legitimate succession from Alexander and his reverence for Egyptian tradition (Baines 2004; Howe 2008). To do this, Ptolemy, like many other invaders such as Kashta of Kush, his son Piankhy (Tökök 1995, 2009; Morkot 2000, 150-153), and Darius I of Persia (Wasmuth 2015), acknowledged and invested in Egypt's cultural legacies. Backward looking texts like the Satrap Stele and the Demotic Chronicle signaled to the Egyptian elites that they and their traditions mattered and that there was room in Ptolemy's system for them (Felber 2002; Schäfer 2011). A key component of this seems to have been the Egyptian king's traditional duty to uphold and preserve *ma'at*, "truth/justice" (Assman 1990).

In his preface to the *Anabasis Alexandri* (echoed by Synesius in his treatise on baldness, *En. Cal.* 15-16), Arrian gives special authority to Ptolemy I of Egypt as a source because Ptolemy is a king and, as a king, would consequently never lie. This statement has confounded generations of ancient historians (i.e., Wirth 1959, 2467-71; Bosworth 1980, 43; Stadter 1980, 67-76), largely because of its seeming naiveté that some aspect of kingliness makes kings more truthful than ordinary folk. Working from Gorteman's argument (1958) that this comment about truth derives from Ptolemy himself, this paper analyzes the fragments of the Ptolemy's *History of Alexander* and his public decrees to explore an alternative interpretation: Arrian and Synesius

are not superficially equating royal prestige with truthfulness but rather responding to Ptolemy's own Egyptian-orientated propaganda that good kings are only good if they uphold *ma 'at*, "truth."