

Arsinoë Philadelphos as Chthonic Goddess?: A New Perspective on the Faience *Oinochoai*
and the Horned Altars

This paper explores how the worship of Arsinoë Philadelphos (c. 316 – 268) was incorporated into the mortuary customs of communities within the Ptolemaic kingdom. I argue that since a certain level of religious freedom was given to the general population under Ptolemaic rule, worship of the goddess Arsinoë Philadelphos was integrated by the populace into funerary practices at Alexandria. The perspective adopted here is one endorsed by S.G. Caneva in a recent article, which maintains that the Ptolemaic administration understood the need for potential worshippers to possess a degree of autonomy and initiative in order to secure the continuation of royal cult in the political climate in which it began. Two types of artefacts associated with Arsinoë Philadelphos can further our understanding of the presence of this royal goddess in the mortuary customs of Alexandrian communities: the faience *oinochoai* and the horned altars.

The faience *oinochoai*, which were manufactured in Egypt during the early 3rd to early 2nd centuries BCE, are a type of wine jug made of glazed non-clay ceramic material typically blue-green in colour. They have distinct iconography: on the belly of the vase is the image of a woman standing between two pillars; in one hand, she holds a *phiale* above a horned altar, over which she will pour a libation; she holds a cornucopia in her other arm. A dedicatory inscription identifies the queen, who is not only represented on the *oinochoe*, but is also the vase's recipient. The provenience of these vessels suggests a mortuary function: 30% were discovered in the Alexandrian cemeteries Chatby and Hadra. Yet, the funerary connotations of these artefacts has often been overlooked or dismissed by scholarship.

Another significant artefact associated with the worship of Arsinoë Philadelphos are the horned altars. Constructed of limestone, these objects are square in shape and have

attached at each top corner four right triangles, the so-called ‘horns.’ A number of these artefacts were uncovered at Alexandria and Cyprus and are engraved with dedications to Arsinoë Philadelphos. There is an iconographic and epigraphic link between the horned altars and the faience *oinochoai*. Given that the horned altar is included in the scenes portrayed on the faience *oinochoai* with mortuary contexts, this paper demonstrates the connection between horned altars and *oinochoai* as ritual objects used during the funerary practices performed by the general population.

By analysing the iconographic, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence provided by the *oinochoai* and altars, the chthonic characteristics of this royal goddess will become apparent. Given that the surviving artefacts are primarily at Alexandria and Cyprus, this paper uncovers the ritual performances associated with Arsinoë Philadelphos in these two areas of the Ptolemaic kingdom. This paper will contribute to our understanding of Ptolemaic ruler cult because it emphasizes how the populace incorporated this new royal goddess into their personal religious lives while simultaneously connecting themselves to the larger shared religious and political identities espoused by the Ptolemaic administration.

Bibliography:

- Ashton, S.-A. (2002), ‘Faience and the Ptolemaic Ruler Cult’, in N. Bonacasa (ed.), *Faraoni come dei, Tolemei come Faraoni. Atti del V Congresso Internazionale Italo-Egiziano, Torino, Archivio di Stato, 8–12 dicembre 2001*, Torino, 334-9.
- Caneva, S.B. (2014), ‘Ruler Cults in Practice: Sacrifices and Libations for Arsinoë Philadelphos from Alexandria and Beyond’, in T. Gnoli and F. Muccioli (eds), *Divinizzazione, culto del sovrano e apoteosi: Tra Antichità e Medioevo*, Bologna, 85-115.

Koiner, G. (2012), 'Ptolemies and Cypriots: Imitation and Distinction in Cypriote Portrait Sculpture', in P. Scherrer, G. Koiner, and A. Ulbrich (eds), *Hellenistisches Zypern und weitere Beiträge zur Antike / Hellenistic Cyprus and further Studies in Antiquity. Proceedings of the International Conference, Department of Archaeology, University of Graz, 14 October 2010*, Graz, 120-58.

Thompson, D.B. (1973), *Ptolemaic Oinochoai and Portraits in Faience: Aspects of Ruler-Cult*, Oxford.