



ARTICOLO

# On a spring full moon, observations on the date of death of Arsinoe II Philadelphus

Adalberto Magnelli e Giulia Senesi

La possibile rilettura, con conseguente nuova interpretazione, di uno *scholium* alla *ἐκθέωσις* di Arsinoe di Callimaco (Fr. 228 Pfeiffer *ad* l.7) potrebbe consentire di formulare una nuova ipotesi sulla dibattuta data di morte della regina Arsinoe II Filadelfo, forse avvenuta durante il plenilunio fra 16 e 17 giugno del 268 a.C.

*Thanks to a re-interpretation of a scholium to the ἐκθέωσις of Arsinoes by Callimachus (Fr. 228 Pfeiffer ad l.7) it could be possible to put forward a new hypothesis on the date of death of Queen Arsinoe II Philadelphus, which may have occurred during the full moon between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> June 268 BC.*

**Parole chiave:** Data di morte di Arsinoe II Filadelfo, Callimaco Fr. 228 Pfeiffer, *scholium*, gli anni di regno di Tolomeo II Filadelfo, calendario macedone

**Keywords:** date of death of Arsinoe II Philadelphus, Callimachus Fr. 228 Pfeiffer, *scholium*, Ptolemy II Philadelphus' regnal years, Macedonian Calendar

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However, the Pithom *stele*<sup>12</sup> contradicts the Mendes *stele*'s data and reports that Arsinoe II was still alive during the 16<sup>th</sup> year of Ptolemy II and it dates her death back to 268 BC<sup>13</sup>.

In 1990, Grzybek put forward a new interpretation regarding the different dating provided by the two *stelai*<sup>14</sup> and, at the same time, he also suggested a new reading of the *scholium* and thus provided a new date. Grzybek, therefore, proposed to read:

(v.6) κλεπτομέν]α παρέθει σελάνα

*Schol.* «ὥς ἔτι<sup>15</sup> πάσ(ης) σελήν(ης) ἥρπασμένης, c'est-à-dire: tute la lune était encore dérobée<sup>16</sup>».

However, scholars question Grzybek's reading due to paleographic, linguistic, and interpretative problems<sup>17</sup>.

He combines the evidence and places the death during a new moon, claiming that Arsinoe passed away on the 1<sup>st</sup> July or the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 268 BC<sup>18</sup>.

On the other hand, van Oppen de Ruiter<sup>19</sup> meticulously reconstructs all the clues that lead us to the two different dates that scholars proposed, by examining the data provided by the two *stelai*, taking into account also numismatic evidence, and analysing other historical issues. Regarding the papyrus evidence, he accepts Diels's reading:

(v.6) κλεπτομέν]α παρέθει σελάνα

*Schol.* ὥς ἐν παρσελήν(ῳ) ἥρπασμένης, as «the only possible reading of the *scholion*»<sup>20</sup>.

In conclusion, van Oppen de Ruiter points to further evidence that could support the hypothesis of a later date of Arsinoe's death. He, indeed, refers to the Chremonides' decree (*IG* II<sup>2</sup> 687 = *Sylloge*<sup>3</sup> I 434-435), dated 269/268<sup>21</sup>, which mentions Arsinoe in concert with her brother and husband:

«[...] King Ptolemaios in accordance with the predilection both of his ancestors and of his sister is manifest in his concern for the common freedom of the Greeks [...]»<sup>22</sup>.

Van Oppen de Ruiter, therefore, presents two possible interpretations of the above-mentioned clause: Arsinoe might have died two summers earlier and thus her mention within the decree could be a form of homage to Ptolemy, or if she had died just before the decree, the news might not have reached Athens yet and thus her mention would indicate her support for the alliance against Antigonos<sup>23</sup>.

Finally, he argues that « [...] although the evidence is inconclusive»<sup>24</sup>, the death of Arsinoe II may have occurred on the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> July 268 BC.

Reconsidering the matter, it becomes evident that there is a disagreement about the date of Queen Lagid's death in the three main sources, probably because the two inscriptions follow a different chronology of the years of Ptolemy II's reign, while the testimony of the aforementioned *scholium* remains vaguer. In this regard, without claiming to arrive at an unambiguous and definitive solution, it may be necessary to reconsider the *ductus* employed by the scribe in tracing the characters of the text and the *scholium*.

Assuming that the one who reproduced the Callimachean verses is the same copyist as the one who made the marginal notes<sup>25</sup>, it seems, at first, that the sequence read by the first editors as EN, or ETI according to Grzybek's interpretation, cannot be conclusively identified in this way. It is enough to observe the tracing of the letter N in the line preceding the *scholium* and throughout the papyri fragment to realise that it has little to do with the relevant traces in our initial pericope. Grzybek's supposed TI ligature poses just as many problems of interpretation.

The letter *tau* would have an unusual inclination to the right, in stark contrast to the *usus scribendi* of the copyist. Furthermore, the final *iota* would exhibit a strange bulge at the top, slanting to the right, which is never seen in such letters in the entire papyrus fragment. Otherwise, we emphasise the fact that the letter positioned after the first E of the sequence, would seem similar in *ductus* to a cursive *alpha* in connection with a vertical letter whose upper slightly round part could only belong to the loop of *rho* traced quickly, in a neglected manner as, for example, it is visible in the line above our *scholium* and *passim* on the *verso*. It has also been debated whether the extended upper stroke of the first *alpha* is a circumflex<sup>26</sup>. However, it appears to be only a curly stroke of the letter, which is also repeated in other parts of the text.

Therefore, as a pure working hypothesis open to subsequent verification, we propose to identify the term EAP in the trilateral sequence, probably in abbreviation, and to reconstruct the entire commentary pericope to verse (6) as follows:

ὥς (ἔαρ)ος/(ἔαρ)ινῇ παρσελήν(ῳ) ἡρπασμένης

“When, during a spring full moon, she was kidnapped (*scil.* Arsinoe II Philadelphus)”.

Briefly, we can assume that the author of the *scholium* did not know the exact date of the Queen's death, but merely recalled that the mourning occurred in spring, on a full moon night. Van Oppen de Ruiter pointed to the dates 27<sup>th</sup> June 270 BC, 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> June 268 BC or 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> July 268 BC as possible elements to identify the astronomical

phenomenon, opting for the latter, the only one that would respond to the indication of the two *stelai* concerning the month of Pachon, the first summer month of the Egyptian calendar. However, it cannot be excluded that the author of the papyrus *scholium* was referring to the Macedonian calendar, which, as verified in many other cases by the sources, does not always faithfully reproduce the sequence of days of the Egyptian months. In conclusion, supposing that the date of Queen Lagid's disappearance was set between spring and early summer (ἔαρινῃ), according to the Macedonian calendar, we could only identify it with the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> June 268 BC<sup>27</sup>, which is the night of the full moon.

## Note

1. CG 2181; *Urk.* II 28-54; See Grzybek 1990; van Oppen de Ruiter 2010.
2. For further information on the dating of the regnal years of Ptolemy II Philadelphus see Samuel 1962 p. 26 ff. and Hazzard 1987.
3. Pfeiffer 1922; Austin 2006.
4. For a comprehensive overview of the commentators' observations on the issues surrounding the date of death of Arsinoe II see: Bennet, *Arsinoe II, Egyptian Royal Genealogy*, <https://www.instonebrewer.com/TyndaleSites/Egypt/index.htm>. (Here are collected all the contributions citing alternative documentation, yet inconclusive, including mainly numismatic data).
5. Wilamowitz 1912.
6. Ivi Wilamowitz chooses κλεπομέν]α, Pfeiffer 1922 instead opts for κλεπομέν]α pointing out in the *apparatus* «κλεπομέν]α ad κελάν]α falso Wil. [...]». This last reading is the one chosen by other scholars. For further details see Lehnus 2006.
7. Wilamowitz 1912, p. 528.
8. Wilamowitz 1914, p. 222; see also on other linguistic problems Wilamowitz 1924, pp. 194-195.
9. Van Oppen de Ruiter states that ἐν is « [...] unnecessary with παντέληνος»: Van Oppen de Ruiter 2010, p. 143 n. 37; see also *LSJ* (s.v.).
10. Pfeiffer 1922, see also Wilamowitz 1924 p. 29.
11. See Goldstine 1972.
12. CG 22183; *Urk.* II 81-105.
13. Van Oppen de Ruiter 2010, p. 145, summarises the possible solutions that emerge regarding the problem of the different dating of the two inscriptions, i.e. the Mendes *stele* and the Pithom *stele*: either the references to Arsinoe in the year 16<sup>th</sup> are merely spiritual, or the two *stelai* follow a different chronological order, related to the counting of the years of Ptolemy II's reign from the co-optation in 285 BC or from the beginning of the reign after the death of his father Ptolemy I Soter.

14. Grzybek 1990. On the issue and the conclusions drawn by Grzybek see further critical remarks by Criscuolo 1991, pp. 282-289 and Cadell 1998, pp. 1-3. Minas 1994, pp. 207-209, although accepting Grzybek's interpretation of the *scholium* of the *P.Berol.* 13417 A, nevertheless criticises the dating to 268.
15. A possible reading of ETI is not excluded by Francesca Maltomini (personal communication).
16. Grzybek 1990, p. 111.
17. On the linguistic problems of this reading of the *scholium*, see the accurate considerations provided by D'Alessio 1996, p. 661 n. 12: « [...] Una nuova lettura è ora proposta da Grzybek, cit (n. all'*argomento*), 111: ὥς ἔτι πάς(ης) ἐλήν(ης) ἥραπαμένης («in quanto tutta la luna era ancora rapita»), da intendere in riferimento al novilunio, in base al confronto con l'uso di ἀρπαγμαία in *sch.* Arat. 735, p. 473 s. Maass. Non trovo però tale ricostruzione linguisticamente persuasiva: ci si aspetterebbe infatti piuttosto πάς(ης) <της> ἐλήν(ης). (Il participio era connesso alla luna in una diversa ricostruzione, basata su revisione del papiro di W. Schubart, da S. Witkowski, «BPhW» 36 [1916], 1990 s.)». Van Oppen de Ruiter 2010, p. 142 adds: « [...] But grammar and paleography aside, the real problem with Grzybek's interpretation is that it makes no sense in the context of Callimachus' poem. For in the poem Arsinoe herself is snatched away (κλεπτομένα) by the Dioscuri».
18. Grzybek 1990, p. 112.
19. Van Oppen de Ruiter 2010.
20. *Ivi*, p. 143.
21. However, the date is still a matter of debate and controversy. See O'Neil 2008 *passim*; Carney 2013, p. 92.
22. Transl. by Sean Byrne.
23. See Van Oppen de Ruiter 2010, p. 149.
24. *Ibidem*.
25. See Wilamowitz 1912, p. 524 on the subject: « [...] er ist allem Anscheine nach mit dem Diorthoten identisch, der noch meht Lesezeichen eingetragen und die Scholien geschrieben hat, wie seine Fehler zeigen, nach einer Vorlage».
26. For references to παντέληνος used with reference to seasons e.g. «κατὰ τὴν πρώτην παντέληνον τοῦ ἔαρος» in Georgius Cedrenus Chronogr., 1838; «δὲ <β> ἐβδομάς μέχρι παντέληνου θερινῆ παραπλήσιος» in Aëtius Med., Iatricorum liber, III. κατὰ τὴν πρώτην παντέληνον τοῦ ἔαρος
27. It has been pointed out (Cameron 1990, pp. 301-302) that Arsinoe II's death may have occurred a few months before the Olympic victory of the *hetaera* Bilistiche, the concubine of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, in the *quadriga* race of 268 BC (*FGrHist* 257a F6= *P.Oxy.* 2082 F6 ll. 6-8). Since Arsinoe II herself had won the first prize in the previous Olympiad in the same competition, according to the Macedonian tradition, it seems clear that in the summer of 268 BC Arsinoe must have passed away, thus allowing the *hetaera* to stand out in the competition. At the same time if, following Cameron, one opts for 268 BC, it seems to be ruled out that the death of the Queen/sister could have occurred in early July, a date too close to the start of the Olympic Games, while a date in mid-June would be more appropriate. See also Ogden 2008, 382 ff. On the subject see also Kosmetatou 2004a, pp. 225 ff.; Kosmetatou 2004b, pp. 18, 34 where, however, is still suggested a date around July 270 BC.

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