

PTOLEMY'S ZOO: ANIMALS IN HELLENISTIC EGYPT

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Project's executive: Maja MIZIUR-MOŹDZIOCH, PhD

The project was started in September 2016 and is still ongoing. Its first aim is to re-examine the testimony of Callixeinus of Rhodes (as quoted by Athenaeus) who describes a religious parade organised by Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Alexandria, in which exotic breeds of animals were displayed. This leads to the primary scope of the project: a reconsideration of the so-called "Ptolemy's zoo"; whether such an institution actually existed in Ptolemaic Alexandria; and where it was located (if indeed all the animals were in one place). Further, it leads to a discussion on the king's intentions in gathering the animals and the impact it had on Ptolemaic culture.

Over the past 15 months I have been collecting and analysing most of the relevant testimonies referring to animals brought to and bred in Ptolemaic Egypt (papyri, inscriptions, literary and iconographic evidence) which make it possible to answer the research questions.

The starting point are the animals listed in the description of Ptolemy's procession as described by Callixeinus of Rhodes. However, I have also included other animals whose presence is attested in Hellenistic Egypt. For the purpose of lucidity I divided animals into three chapters: the animals of air, the animals of land, and water animals. Each animal species¹ is discussed in the context of its presence in Ptolemaic Egypt. Unexpected results occurred *inter alia* for such

¹ Pigeons, peacocks, parrots, pheasants, chicken, equids, cattle and small cattle, camels, antelopes, ostriches, hounds, felines, bears, giraffe, rhinoceros, elephants, fish, hippopotami, crocodiles, dolphins and other animals the presence of which is more than probable.

species as ostriches, antelopes, giraffes and lions in regards to their appearance in Ptolemaic sources. An especially useful source, as I anticipated when submitting my application for the project, proved to be the papyri known as the Zenon Archive. This collection helped me to determine the role of certain animal species in both an economic and cultural sense.

The analysis of particular species enabled me to conduct more in-depth studies in the following steps of my project. I have analysed Egyptian bestiaries pictured in fresco (Marisa frieze), mosaic (Shatby, Palestrina mosaics), stone (Memphite Sarapeum exedra sculptures) and clay (terracotta animals). The view of animals in Ptolemaic Egypt from a material culture point of view helped me to determine to a greater extent the presence and significance of particular species in Ptolemaic culture. It showed that the presence of elephants in Egypt was much more important than their employment in the army.

A key feature of my studies is that I have managed to investigate how the animals (especially those of Ptolemy II Philadelphus) were captured and transported to Alexandria. This required enormous scientific, economic and human resources. One of my aims here is to identify how long, difficult and dangerous the journey was to-and-from the elephant-hunting grounds. I also describe the ways by which the Ptolemaic expeditions could get to these areas. Further, I have adopted an interdisciplinary approach. Beginning with the study of papyri and inscriptions referring to elephant hunting expeditions, I supplement information gathered from literary descriptions and archaeological finds, which proves how wild animals were captured in the past in the regions of East Africa and the Levant. This sheds new light on Ptolemaic hunting methods. Moreover, I have managed to reveal entirely new facts by studying 19th century methods of capturing animals in East Africa for menageries. The accounts of such expeditions show that certain methods remained identical for centuries. Also of importance in this part of my research is who and how took care of and trained the animals brought to Egypt. Papyri confirm the names of animal caretakers and it seems there were people specialising in individual species. The management and subduing of wild creatures performed during the time of Ptolemy II is attested in several ancient testimonies.

The discussion of the abovementioned subjects has led me to an attempt at understanding the reasons for such costly and long lasting ventures in order to bring a variety of wild creatures, especially the elephants, to Egypt. What is most surprising is that war does not happen to be the main reason proclaimed by the sources and by the propaganda of Ptolemy II. This in turn leads the discussion to the question where were the animals mentioned Callixeinus' account destined. The sources reveal some specific places in and around Alexandria and in other Egyptian sites. The research I am currently undertaking concerns the topography of Alexandria, in particular during the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus, and the route that the procession as described by Callixeinus followed. This research is not fully developed as yet.

All these points lead to the final stage of my project: to research what comprised a 'zoo' or 'menagerie' in antiquity, and to discover how and where wild animals could be kept by Ptolemy Philadelphus. To fully understand these topics I will study ancient descriptions and names of menageries and try to answer if and how the collection of Philadelphus was maintained. The last step will be a careful analysis of the testimonies to verify whether the successors of Ptolemy II Philadelphus continued his animal policy.

Hitherto conducted research has provided very promising results so far as to the final outcome of the Project which is expected to bring interesting answers for the research questions. These will hopefully be published in a book form.

*Maja Miziur-Moździoch
Wrocław*