HERAKLEOPOLIS MAGNA UNDER PHIADELPHUS

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Herakleopolis Magna, in Egyptian (Hwt)-nn(y)-nswt, Coptic 𓊫NHC, modern Ihnasija el-Medina, was the nome capital of a quite densely populated area in middle Egypt. During the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2170/2120–2025/2020 BC), Herakleopolis was the seat of the ninth and tenth dynasties, and again during the Third Intermediate Period, the area around Herakleopolis was strategically important as a fortress for the rulers of the twenty-second Dynasty. The site was religiously important throughout the Pharaonic history, and what makes it, to my mind, interesting during the Ptolemaic period is that it represents a kind of traditional administrative unit along the Nile: it is not an exceptional area such as the Fayyum, and it is also not known to be the stronghold of the native Egyptian resistance of the Macedonian rulers as the Thebaid.

The Greek nome Herakleopolites corresponded approximately to the twentieth Upper Egyptian nome Naret-Khentet, near the border between Upper and Lower Egypt. The topography of this nome based on the Greek and Latin sources has been thoroughly studied by Maria Rosaria Falivene (= Falivene 1998). Her book, however, excludes the sources on the metropolis, but she notes that: “Even at the time when the Greeks called it Herakleopolis, this was an important town, deserv-

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1 Gomaà 1977, 1124–1127. The dates of the First Intermediate period follow Beck- erath 1997, 143–145; 188. About the 22nd Dynasty, see Kitchen 1986, chapters 7 and 18–20. The Spanish-Egyptian archaeologists have continued to work more or less continuously at the necropoleis of the First and Third Intermediate periods since the 1960’s, see, most recently, Pérez Die 2004, 63–88.
2 See further Mokhtar 1983.
3 See, for example, Thompson 2001, 1255.
4 The neighbouring nomes were Arsinoites to the north-west, Memphites to the north, Aphroditopolites to the north-east and Kynopolites to the south-east on the east bank of the Nile and Oxyrhynchites to the south. The northern border of the nome ran near Abu Sir al-Malaq (⟨ Bousiris ⟨ Pt-usir-mht-3bdiw⟩ both during the Pharaonic and the Graeco-Roman periods, cf. Montet 1957, 193; Falivene 1998, 21; Salmenkivi 2002, 13–15. About the southern border near al-Hiba, see further note 11 below.
5 Falivene 1998, xv.
ing a special study which cannot be attempted here.” On the other hand, Ulrich Wilcken noted, in his 1903 article on papyrus excavations in Herakleopolis Magna, that our knowledge of the Ptolemaic town is almost nonexistent. He wrote: “Doch wird Herakleopolis und der herakleopolitische Gau mehrfach in ptolemäischen Papyri erwähnt, freilich ohne daß wir über die Stadt selbst daraus Genaueres erführen.” My attempt in this paper (and especially in a forthcoming study on Hellenistic Herakleopolis Magna) is to challenge Wilcken’s statement and to study the evidence from the large number of Ptolemaic papyri that have been published during the past ca. 100 years and concern directly (or indirectly) this metropolis.

These papyri derive mostly from mummy cartonnages excavated (or plundered) from three different sites, that is, the necropolis near modern Abu Sir al-Malaq that has yielded mostly texts dating to the first century BC, that of ancient Tebtynis (which, from the administrative point of view, belonged to neighbouring Arsinoites to the north-west), and the necropolis near modern al-Hiba. More work is still needed on the first century BC documents, but the sophisticated control system of the central government in the Herakleopolite Nome is well attested in the official archives of the basilikoi grammateis who appear mostly in Berliner Griechische Urkunden VIII (published in 1933), and XVIII.1 (published in 2000). These officials worked at the nome level of the administration and thus, the logical place where the documents were written and filed is Herakleopolis Magna. The first and third volumes of the Tebtynis Papyri, as well as cartonnage texts that have found their way into various collections around the world, have yielded documents mostly from the second century BC. The bulk of the third century BC documents derive from the cartonnages that were excavated by Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt near modern al-Hiba at the beginning of

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6 Falivene 1998, xiii.
7 Wilcken 1903, 313.
8 Cartonnages are covers manufactured to protect the mummified deceased. The raw material used was recycled waste papyri, cf. D. Thompson’s article.
9 The term ‘archive’ is certainly justified in these cases. It is sometimes used to refer to a collection of papers only loosely connected with each other, cf., for example, Verhoogt 1998, 22ff. Such documents, however, should be referred to as a dossier, cf. Pestman 1995, 91–92.
10 See further Salmenkivi 2002, 54; Falivene 1998, 13; Habermann 1998, 149. About the role of the basilikos grammateus as a controlling official working at the Nome level of the administration, see Handrock 1967, 89–90; Oates 1995, esp. 95–100; cf. Sarischouli in BGU XVIII.1 Einleitung 24–34.