

Floating Palace on the Nile: A Study on the Luxury Ship of Ptolemy IV Philopator

Yuichiro Habe

Introduction

In his *About Alexandria*, Callixeinus of Rhodes mentions the creation by Ptolemy IV Philopator of two magnificent ships: the first was called ‘*The Forty (Tessarekontéres)*’, which would have been used as a warship. The second was a Nile cargo boat, called ‘*Thalamegos*’.¹ According to Callixeinus’ description, the two ships were among the largest of the Hellenistic period, and had characteristic structures. While the description of *The Forty* is extremely brief, Callixeinus mentions that the *Thalamegos* had various cabins decorated with magnificent ornaments, i.e. reliefs, pictures and statues. This boat has therefore attracted the interest not only of ship-engineers, but also of architectural historians.

On the other hand, Ptolemy IV’s splendid ships have also been considered as examples of the king’s luxurious and idle tendencies. In his *Life of Demetrius*, Plutarch noted that *The Forty* was difficult to navigate, and it rose as stately as an immovable building.² Historians have blamed *The Forty*’s instability on the inconsistency of builder. Similarly, they have considered the *Thalamegos* to be useless, and considered Ptolemy IV a megalomaniac, and too flamboyant.³

However, recent studies have tended to revise the evaluation of Ptolemy IV’s two ships. *The Forty* and the *Thalamegos* have been considered symbols of Ptolemaic sea-power.⁴

Particularly in the case of the *Thalamegos*, one needs to discuss the purpose of its construction. The ship had various rooms inside; private rooms for the king, the queen and their inner circle. It also had some banqueting rooms. Polybius tells us negatively that Ptolemy IV indulged himself with banquets.⁵ The *Thalamegos* was

¹ Athen. 5.203e-204d (*The Forty*); 204e-206d (*Thalamegos*).

² Plut. *Demt.* 43.3-4.

³ For historical assessment of the construction of Philopator’s gigantic ship, Huss, W., *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit 332-30 v. Chr.* München 2001, 469-470.

⁴ Habe, Y., Naval Construction in Hellenistic Period. *Review of Western History* 34 (2012), 45-61 (in Japanese); Thompson, D. J., Hellenistic Royal Barges. Buraselis, K., Stefanos, M. and Thompson, D. J. (eds.), *The Ptolemies, the Sea and the Nile: Studies in Waterborne Power.* Cambridge 2013, 189-192.

⁵ Polyb. 5.34.10-11.

also equipped with a room devoted to the Greek Gods and the deified Ptolemaic royal family. In other words, it had almost all the facilities that the king, his family and their aides would need to spend ordinary life as they did in their Alexandrian palaces. One needs to consider the *Thalamegos* as a symbol of Hellenistic rulers, like a study on the royal palaces, monuments in those days.

Moreover, as Callixeinus mentions, if we regard it as king's river boat, Ptolemy IV could have intended to use the *Thalamegos* for cruising the Nile. From literary, Epigraphic and Papyrological evidences, it is well known that the Ptolemaic kings often visited the Egyptian countryside, the *chôra*. For what reason did Ptolemy IV construct such a magnificent river ship? By examining the reason for the king's visits to the Egyptian *chôra*, we may be able to know the condition of Ptolemaic rule over Egypt, at least under Ptolemy IV.

This article aims to understand the kingship ideology and power structure in the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator, through analysing the description of Callixeinus. After analyzing the reliability of Callixeinus' description and overviewing the structure of the *Thalamegos*, my consideration will focus on the following points:

Firstly, I will consider the *Thalamegos*, regarding it as a Hellenistic royal palace. Comparing it with a Ptolemaic royal palace in Alexandria, it will be considered to have had the function of a royal ship. I will take some equipment inside the ship, a tent used for the roof and the banqueting rooms. By considering these things, we will understand the feature of the royal court under Ptolemy IV.

Secondly, focus will be turned to the Ptolemaic ruler cult. Inside the *Thalamegos*, there were sanctuaries devoted to Aphrodite, Dionysus and the deified Ptolemaic family. It is well known that the Ptolemies attached importance to Aphrodite and Dionysus and that the Ptolemaic dynasty had already established the institution of a dynastic cult under Ptolemy II deifying the king and queen during their lifetime, with epithets. I will clarify the royal ideology of Ptolemy IV by considering the intention of these sanctuaries inside the *Thalamegos*.

Finally, I will consider the aim of the Ptolemaic royal visits to the Egyptian *chôra* and understand the construction of the the *Thalamegos* in the context of the Ptolemaic inner policy.

Callixeinus of Rhodes and the *Thalamegos*

First of all, I consider the credibility of Callixeinus of Rhodes. Unfortunately, his *About Alexandria* was not preserved in its entirety, but we can read a few

fragments in sections of Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistai*.⁶ Nothing is known about his life and other works, but his writing is presumed to date to the end of the third century BC.⁷ In the description of the Grand Procession of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, Callixeinus mentions that he referred to the *pentetêridôn graphê*.⁸ Many scholars think that Ptolemy II's Grand Procession was held as an event in the Ptolemaic Royal cult festival *Ptolemaea*. If that is the case, it is thought that the *pentetêridôn graphê* is the official record of the Ptolemies.⁹ For his description of the *Thalamegos*, Callixeinus says nothing about his source. But it is fact that he could have referred to this royal record, and his information would have been highly reliable.

Next, I will examine the appearance and structure of the *Thalamegos*. Its size reported as follows: it had a maximum width of 30 metres, was 87 metres in full length from bow to stern, and was about 18 metres in height.¹⁰ Like *The Forty*, the ship's bow and stern both had double shape, and the ship's bottom had the shallow, flat shape peculiar to river ships.¹¹

The *Thalamegos* was on two levels. Callixeinus mentions that the entrance was set at the stern, and a visitor would have entered from the main gate (*propylon*). Adjoining the *propylon* was a large hall, wide enough to fit 20 couches, where sculptures and splendid ornaments were displayed. This hall was connected to the bedroom, which could accommodate seven beds. Proceeding inside, the room for women (*oikos gynaikos*) was found.¹² It has been thought that the *oikos gynaikos* was the room for the high-ranking women who served the queen and the Ptolemaic court.¹³

⁶ Athen. 5.196-203e; 209f-210a; 9.387d; 9.472a; 474e; 483f; 15.677d.

⁷ For the date of Callixeinus' descriptions, scholars assume to the end of the third century BC, because of the writing style. See Fraser, P. M., *Ptolemaic Alexandria*. Oxford 1972, vol. 2, 738-739; Rice, E. E., *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus*. Oxford 1983, 169-171. On the other hand, Hazzard notes that Ptolemy IV was called 'Ptolemy Philopator' on the text, and points that these descriptions of Ptolemaic kings have been generalised on Ptolemaic official documents after the second century BC. So, he dates Callixeinus' work after the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (180-145 BC), see Hazzard, R. A., *Imagination of Monarchy: Studies in Ptolemaic Propaganda*. Toronto 2000, 75-79. However, the association of the Ptolemaic king with his Epithet appeared on votive inscriptions from the third century BC. As Fraser and Rice conclude, it is appropriate to date Callixeinus' writing to the end of the third century BC.

⁸ Athen. 5.197d.

⁹ Rice (1983), 170-171; Hazzard (2000), 75-79.

¹⁰ Athen. 5.204e.

¹¹ Athen. 5.204a.

¹² Athen. 5.204f-205d.

¹³ Some scholars compare the *oikos gynaikos* in the *Thalamegos* with Vitruvius' structure of Greek house (Vitr. 6.7), regarding it as a 'private space', and the other rooms 'official spaces', Raeder, J.,

Following the grand floor, Callixeinus describes the second floor. The first floor was connected to the upper floor by three spiral staircases.¹⁴ The upper floor contained Aphrodite's shrine (*tholos*); her statue was surrounded by several pillars and was covered by a domed roof.¹⁵ Next to Aphrodite's room there was an Indian room and a room for Bacchus. Callixeinus posited that the ceiling of the Bacchic room was painted in the Dionysiac style, but this is not known. The most important feature was the display of statues of the royal family.¹⁶ Into the depths of the Bacchic room, there was the banqueting room which was covered by a deep purple tent. The next room was built in Egyptian style, and featured Egyptian ornamentation.¹⁷

Although Callixeinus ends his short introduction of the *Thalamegos* here, there are still many questions about the structure of Ptolemy IV's Nile ship: Was Callixeinus' description historical fact? Was the ship built in the Greek or Egyptian style? Why did Ptolemy IV build it? And what role was the *Thalamegos* expected to play?

Caspari is the first scholar to consider the structure and ornamentation of the ship. Analysing from the viewpoint of ship's engineering, he illustrated Callixeinus' description, and recognised that it would have been possible to construct a ship of that scale.¹⁸ He considered its rooms, ornaments, and architectural styles by comparing them to Greek and Egyptian buildings, including temples. He concluded that the *Thalamegos* was strongly influenced by Greek, rather than Egyptian culture.¹⁹

The *Thalamegos* tended to be minimally referred to from the viewpoint of Nile transport, or of the history of Ancient vessels.²⁰ Scholars have been influenced by Polybius' views, which regarded Ptolemy IV as a corrupt, lazy king displaying gigantomania. Until recently, they regarded the construction of the *Thalamegos* as a symbol of Philopator's ostentatious life-style and overlooked the underlying intention. However, as mentioned above, such views are becoming outdated, so we should re-consider consideration of the *Thalamegos*.

Vitruv. De architectura VI 7 und die hellenistische Wohnhaus. *Gymnasion* 95 (1988), 310-368; Nielsen, I., *Hellenistic Palaces*. Aarhus 1994, 136.

¹⁴ Athen. 5.205a; 205d; 206a.

¹⁵ Athen. 5.205d-e.

¹⁶ Athen. 5.205e-f.

¹⁷ Athen. 5.206a-c.

¹⁸ Caspari, F., Das Nilschiff Ptolemaios IV. *JDAI* 39 (1916), 1-74.

¹⁹ For Egyptian room, while he accepts the influence of Egyptian culture, he points to Greek interest in Egyptian art and architecture, Caspari (1916), 66-69.

²⁰ Köster, A., *Studien zur Geschichte des antiken Seewesens*. Wiesbaden 1934, 22-53.

Recent studies on Hellenistic royal architecture provide new perspectives on Ptolemy IV's *Thalamegos*.

In his analyses of Hellenistic royal palaces, Nielsen indicates the similarities between the construction of the *Thalamegos* with the construction of Hellenistic royal palaces, such as Pella in Macedonia. There are grand halls, a room for the sacrifice, esplanades, and a room with pillars. He also found similarities with the construction of the sanctuary of Zeus, at Labraunda in Asia Minor, and concluded that Ptolemy IV adopted the architectural modes of the late Classical and early Hellenistic Periods.²¹

Pfrommer also considers the *Thalamegos* should be placed among the Hellenistic royal structures, and agrees on the similarities between the ship and other Hellenistic constructions, especially the grand hall and the capital's style. While describing the Egyptian room, Callixeinus suggested that native Egyptian plants are depicted in the ornaments, and noted that the pillar was constructed with a stack of alternating black and white stones. Pfrommer regards this as a traditional Greek style.²² Putting together the views of Nielsen and Pfrommer, we may surmise that Ptolemy IV built the *Thalamegos* imitating the royal palaces of the Hellenistic period, just like the 'Sailing king's palace'. Thompson views Ptolemy IV's *Thalamegos* in the context of a gigantic ship-building competition between the Hellenistic kings and she supposed it be the last of these giant ships of the Hellenistic kings.²³

After the middle of the third century BC, ship construction in the Hellenistic kingdoms began to have another meaning. This occurred with the move from the building of large warships to the construction of splendid royal boats. It was Hieron II of Syracuse who built the first gigantic royal ship, preceding Ptolemy IV²⁴. According to Athenaeus, Hieron's ship *Syrakosia* was designed by Archimedes under the patronage of the Sicilian court. It had royal spaces, the Gymnasion, temples, baths and a stone-throwing machine, so it is supposed to have functioned as

²¹ Nielsen (1994), 137. For the sanctuary of Zeus Labraunda in Caria, Höllstrom, P., *Hellenistic Architecture in light of late Classical Period. Akten des XIII Internationalen Kongresse*. Mainz 1990, 243-252.

²² Pfrommer, M., *Fassade und Heiligtum. Betrachtungen zur architektonischen Repräsentation des vierten Ptolemäers*. Hoepfner, W. & Brands, G. (eds.), *Basileia: die Paläste der hellenistische Könige*. Mainz am Rhein 1996, 97-108.

²³ Thompson (2013), 189.

²⁴ Athen. 5.206d-209e; Lehmler, C., *Syrakus unter Agathokles und Hieron II. Die Verbindung von Kultur und Macht in einer hellenistischen Metropole*. Frankfurt am Main 2005, 210-232.

a warship and as a royal ship.²⁵ It is supposed that the construction of the *Thalamegos* was influenced by Hieron II's *Syrakosia*.

However, we should focus on the difference between the *Thalamegos* and other Hellenistic royal ships. The former would be constructed for cruising; the latter for sea-battle. In comparison to the *Thalamegos*, I look at a splendid boat of Kleopatra VII. In his *Life of Antony*, Plutarch mentions that Kleopatra travelled to Cilicia to meet Antony, taking this boat whose stern was decorated with gold, and was equipped with a canopy set with gold. It had scarlet sails and the crew rowed with silver-tipped oars.²⁶ Kleopatra's boat was as splendid as Ptolemy IV's *Thalamegos*, but it wasn't equipped like a royal house, as were the *Thalamegos* and Hieron II's *Syrakosia*.

Nielsen and Pfrommer stated that the *Thalamegos* functioned as a Hellenistic royal palace, while Thompson insisted it was constructed as a symbol of Hellenistic kingship. However, among the arguments involving the *Thalamegos*, it is still not clear why Ptolemy IV built his splendid river ship at the same huge scale as his *Forty*. Moreover, we must consider again the Egyptian and the Indian rooms set up in the ship. Especially regarding the Egyptian room, in the last period of Ptolemy IV, the Great Egyptian revolt broke out in Thebaide, and the southern parts of Egypt became independent from Ptolemaic rule, until about 185 BC.²⁷ Considering the circumstances, it is probable that Ptolemy IV used traditional Egyptian architecture in his ship for a specific purpose. Simultaneously, we must also consider the meaning of 'the temple of Aphrodite' and 'the Bacchic room' on the second floor of the *Thalamegos*. Callixeinus mentions that the statues of the Ptolemaic royal house were enshrined in the Bacchic room. I think this passage is important, from the viewpoint of the Ptolemaic dynastic cult and their worship of Dionysus.

Floating Royal court?

²⁵ According to a passage by Moschion, there were no ports which could have accommodated *Syrakosia*, so Hieron sent it to Alexandria, where it could be accommodated, and then donated it to Ptolemy III.

²⁶ Plut. *Ant.* 26.

²⁷ As usual, the Great Revolt has been regarded as staged by Egyptian soldiers, which Polybius writes were recruited in the time of the Fourth Syrian War, Polyb. 5.65. 9-10, 107. 1-3; Huss (1976), 86-87. However, it is suggested to distinguish Polybius's rebel Egyptians from the Great Revolt, which seems to have been led by indigenous Egyptian leaders. O'Neil pointed out that the Ptolemaic concentrated suppression of the Revolt led to the invasion of Antiochus III to Coile-Syria, and to Ptolemaic possessions in Asia Minor, see O'Neil, J., Native Revolt against the Ptolemies (206-185 BC): Achievement and Limitations. *CE* 86 (2012), 133-149.

Next, for declaring the character of the *Thalamegos* as a royal palace, I compare it with the Alexandrian palace of the Ptolemies and other Hellenistic (and pre-Hellenistic) palaces.

Archaeologically, most Hellenistic royal quarters are now under the sea, so we must obtain information about Ptolemaic palaces in Alexandria from Polybius, Strabo, and other ancient literary sources. Strabo mentions that the Alexandrian palace occupied one-third or one-fourth of the city, and was composed of many buildings, including the famous *Mouseion* and *Sêma*, the mausoleum of Alexander the Great and of Ptolemaic kings.²⁸ But Strabo only describes the larger plan of the palace, without mentioning any details.

In fact, Polybius visited Alexandria at the latter half of the second century BC, and described the structure of the Ptolemaic palace in some detail. In his story of the Alexandrian riot, when soldiers and Alexandrian mobs reacted against the exclusive power of a close aide of Ptolemy IV, Agathokles and his family after the accession of Ptolemy V in 203 BC, Polybius reports that Macedonian soldiers stormed into the royal palace from the peristyle (*peristyloi*) adjoining the palaestra, the entrance of the theatre, and the garden.²⁹ Agathokles set up a stage on the peristyle and tried to give a speech to the rebels.³⁰ It is presumed from Polybius' passage that the royal palace in Alexandria had an inner peristyle which adjoined various other buildings. Other Hellenistic palaces had a peristyle of this same style; according to Nielsen, the palace of Vergina at Macedonia featured an inner colonnaded peristyle which was surrounded by other buildings.³¹ On the other hand, the peristyle of the *Thalamegos* was set up outside its rooms: it surrounds the building on the first and second floors of the ship. Such outer peristyles can be found in the Eastern part of the Hellenistic World. From his reading of a passage by Polybius, Morgan insists that the palace at Ecbatana had an outer peristyle.³² But in such a limited space as the interior of a ship, it seems it would be difficult to construct an inner peristyle.

Strabo's and Polybius' descriptions of the palace complex at Alexandria show differences between it and the *Thalamegos*; the former had many various buildings, like a theatre, mausoleum, and palaestra, and thus would be rather similar to the

²⁸ Strabo, 17.1.8.

²⁹ Polyb. 15.30.6-7; 31.2-3.

³⁰ Polyb. 15.31.3.

³¹ Nielsen (1994), 81-84.

³² Janett, M., At home with royalty: re-viewing the Hellenistic palace. Erskine, L. L.-J. & Wallace, S., (eds.), *The Hellenistic Court: Monarchic Power and Elite Society from Alexander to Cleopatra*. Swansea 2017, 48; Polyb. 10.27.3.

Syrakosia of Hieron II. The *Thalamegos* did not include such buildings. Nielsen and Pfrommer say that the *Thalamegos* was not a simple palace. But is this true?

I will turn to another point: on the second floor of the *Thalamegos*, next to the Bacchic room, there is a room for *symposion*. It is the biggest room in the ship and looks like a ceremonial place.³³ This room does not have a roof but is set up with a deep purple cloth when the ship sails. In other words, this room had a tent. In other passages by Athenaeus, we find the tent made by Ptolemy II. Prior to the Grand Procession of *Ptolemaea* held at Alexandria, Callixeinus (via Athenaeus) tells us that Ptolemy II constructed a huge tent for invited foreign envoys; it was about 22 metres high and could accommodate 130 couches arranged in a circle. The walls were decorated with pictures of Sicyon painters, marble reliefs, and precious metals, and despite the winter season, fresh flowers were spread over the floor.³⁴

Preceded by the Ptolemies, Alexander the Great also used tents, under which he held the feast. In his expedition to the East, Alexander held his court under the tent. In his *Life of Alexander*, Chares mentions that at the wedding at Susa in 324 BC, he possibly constructed a tent large enough to accommodate 92 rooms.³⁵ Aelian shares the same anecdote.³⁶ After the invasion of India, Alexander built a tent. When he was injured in the battle against indigenous Indians, he ordered the construction of a tent to connect two ships, and another on the top to show himself to both his soldiers and his enemies.³⁷ Next, it is thought that he built a tent to entertain those who surrendered; large enough to arrange 100 gold couches in a circle.³⁸ Thus, Alexander built tents on many sites, not only for stationing, but for holding ceremonies, and displaying his own power. In addition, Spawforth points out that Alexander managed his business transactions and made his judgements in his tents.³⁹

Ptolemy IV also used tents. On the eve of Battle of Raphia in 217 BC, Theodotus the Aetolian, who crossed from the Ptolemaic side to Antiochus III, tried to assassinate Ptolemy IV. However, he failed, because he attacked the tent where

³³ Athen. 5.205f-206a.

³⁴ Athen. 5.196a-197c; Pfrommer, M., *Alexandria: Im Schatten Pyramide*. Mainz am Rhein 1999, 120.

³⁵ Athen. 12.538b-539a.

³⁶ Aelian. *VH*. 8.7.

³⁷ Curt. 9.6.1.

³⁸ Curt. 9.7.15.

³⁹ Spawforth, T., *The court of Alexander the Great between Europe and Asia*, Spawforth, A., (ed.) *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies* Cambridge 2007, 97-99. Darius III brought a tent composed of three parts to Issus: one for Darius' private use, another for feast, the last for Darius' mother and wife (Curt. 3.13.11). Spawforth points out that Alexander continued these Persian traditions for the use of royal tents.

Ptolemy IV ordinarily transacted affairs of state and had his meals, but the king was not there, instead resting at another site.⁴⁰ It is difficult to know details of the structure of the Hellenistic king's tent, but it seems to have been extensive and complex; and also suitable for the king's use conducting ordinary business transactions in the battlefield. The magnificent scale of the *Thalamegos* and its use of the deep purple tent were inherited from the tradition of Persia, through Alexander. The king held both everyday business and formal ceremonies in the tent, when he was outside of his palace.

Turning to another problem concerning the *Thalamegos*; the feast. In Callixeinus' description of the *Thalamegos*, although the number of couches is indicated in order to show the size of the rooms, there were also some rooms used for feasting; on the first floor, we can confirm two feasting rooms. One of these rooms could accommodate twenty couches, and was brilliantly appointed.⁴¹ The second room accommodated nine couches, and was recorded as a feasting room for the women.⁴² On the second floor, as mentioned above, there was the Grand Hall for both feasts and ceremonies, above which the deep purple tent was stretched. In other words, the Ptolemaic kings tended to construct tents in or near their residences, and it seems that they attached great importance to feasts. As Murray indicates, however, a feast has been regarded as a negative action, reflecting pleasure or laziness by ancient authors.⁴³ In his *Agesilaos*, Xenophon mentions that the Persian king enjoyed a luxurious life through feasting, in comparison with the modest life of Agesilaos.⁴⁴ So, was Ptolemy IV lazy? I will consider the meaning of the Ptolemaic symposium.

Pseud Aristeas, an unknown Jewish author who seems to have written in the form of letters at the end of the second century BC, reports on the Ptolemaic royal feast at court.⁴⁵ In his letter, when 72 Jewish elders were invited to Alexandria by Ptolemy to translate the Old Testament into Greek, the king spoke with them at the

⁴⁰ Polyb. 5.81.4-7.

⁴¹ Athen. 5.205c-d.

⁴² Athen. 5.205d.

⁴³ Murray, O., *Hellenistic Royal Symposia*. Bilde, P., Engberg-Pedersen, T., Hannestad, L. and Zahle, J. (eds.), *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship*. Aarhus 1996, 20-21.

⁴⁴ Athen. 4.144b-c. For the luxurious feast of Persian king, Athen. 4.143a-144a; 145a-b. And see Schmitt Pantel, P., *La cite au banquet. Histoire des repas publics dans les cites grecques*. Paris 1992, 430-435.

⁴⁵ Scholars generally agree that the *Letter from Aristeas to Philocrates*, is dated to either the end of the second century BC, or to the beginning of the first century BC, according to its writing style. See Pelletier, A., (ed.) *Lettre d'Aristée à Philocrate; introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes*. Paris 1962, 57-59.

royal feast about Jewish tradition, ideal kingship, and other themes. At the feast of Ptolemy II, the king's couch is cited as being in the middle of the room, with 72 Jewish visitors, 36 elders arranged on each side in the order of their age.⁴⁶ We can suppose this from the short passage. From the arrangement of participants at the feast, it is thought that they formed the court hierarchy there, with the king at the top. The age order reflects the hierarchy of Jewish priests, and the feast was held according to Jewish traditional law.⁴⁷ Furthermore, it does not seem that the feast of Ptolemy II was only for laziness and pleasure; the author of the *Letter* says that he based his description of the feast on quotes from the royal record of the king's audience.⁴⁸ In other words, the feast was important business for such a dynasty. It is possible that by using the opportunity of this feast, the king met subjects from each place in order to confirm their loyalty to him.

Moreover, it seems that the banquet was also an opportunity to display the king's authority in front of foreign delegations and court officials. Cameron asserts the possibility that a hymn, composed by Callimachus and other court poets, may have been recited at the feast.⁴⁹

As mentioned above, I have considered the *Thalamegos* from the viewpoint of the royal court, particularly with reference to the royal tent and the feasting held on the ship. Compared to the *Syrakosia* of Hieron II, though it is hard to regard it as a 'completely miniaturised royal palace', it was at least fully equipped with facilities in which the king could spend his daily life, as if in a royal palace. The ship inherited Persian and Macedonian traditions of the feast, held in a splendid tent, and Ptolemy IV also practiced the feast as an everyday event of the court. It was by no means pleasure-seeking, as whenever a king reigned over a kingdom, banqueting was required business.

Dionysus and the Ptolemaic dynastic cult

Callixeinus reports that two sanctuaries for Gods were installed in the *Thalamegos*: one for Aphrodite, and the other for Dionysus. About the sanctuary for Aphrodite, we know only that it had a domed roof, and displayed a marble statue of the Goddess.⁵⁰ I submit that the statue and sanctuary for Aphrodite had two meanings: the first was as a symbol of navigation. It is known that Aphrodite was

⁴⁶ *Pseud. Aristetas*. 182-187.

⁴⁷ *Pseud. Aristetas*. 181.

⁴⁸ *Pseud. Aristetas*. 297-300.

⁴⁹ Cameron, A., *Callimachus and his critics*. Princeton 1996, 71-104.

⁵⁰ Athen. 5.205 e.

worshipped as the protector of navigation by seamen in the Greek World. Just as on the *Thalamegos*, Hieron II of Sicily also installed a sanctuary for Aphrodite.⁵¹

Secondly, Aphrodite was an important divinity for the Ptolemies. Since Arsinoe II, the sister-wife of Ptolemy II, Ptolemaic queens were identified with the Goddess. According to epigrams of Callimachus and Posidippus, after the death of Arsinoe, the Ptolemaic admiral Callicrates dedicated the sanctuary at Cape Zephyrion, in the east of Alexandria, identifying it with Aphrodite.⁵² Just as Ptolemy II deified Arsinoe in 272/1 BC and instituted the dynastic cult for Theoi Adelphoi, obligating her worship to the temples in his kingdom, it is thought that the newly-created Arsinoe-Aphrodite became the protector of the Ptolemaic fleet.⁵³

Ptolemy IV's two giant ships, *The Forty* and the *Thalamegos*, were also closely connected with Dionysus.⁵⁴ A sanctuary for Dionysus was installed in the *Thalamegos*. According to Callixeinus, it consisted of 13 couches, surrounded by pillars, with a hollow made with artifacts of jewellery and gold. In this room, statues of royal families, made of Parian marble, were enshrined.⁵⁵ The Ptolemaic kings and queens were identified as various Greek deities. For example, the Ptolemies had Zeus engraved on their coins, while court poets like Callimachus and Theocritus honoured Ptolemy II, identifying him with Zeus or Apollo.⁵⁶ I consider the question of why Ptolemy IV devoted specific honours to Dionysus by constructing the Dionysiac sanctuary in his boat.

It is well-known that the Ptolemies devoted enthusiastic worship to Dionysus. Scholars have interpreted this as protection of the theatrical arts, such as tragedy, comedy, poetry, and music. Recently, it was proposed that granting these images of wealth and prosperity to Dionysus connected them with Ptolemaic economic power.⁵⁷ However, these images and connections between the Ptolemies and

⁵¹ Athen. 5.207e. Moschion, an unknown historian from whose descriptions Athenaeus quoted, mentions that this sanctuary accommodated three couches in extent, and that the floor was paved with agate and ores. He also relates that the walls and ceiling were made of cypress, and the door was made of *tyon* and ivory.

⁵² Athen. 7.318d; Callim. *Epigram*. 6.

⁵³ Robert, L., Sur un décret d'Illion et sur un papyrus concernant des cultes royaux. *Essays in Honor of C. Bradford Welles*. New Haven 1966, 175-211; Hauben, H., Arsinoë II et la politique extérieure de l'Égypte. Vant Dack, E., (ed.), *Egypt in Hellenistic World: Proceedings of the International Colloquium Leuven: 24-26 May 1982*. Leuven 1993, 111-114.

⁵⁴ Callixeinus mentions that the bodies of both ships were decorated with designs of ivy and *thyrsos*, attributes of Dionysus Athen. 5.204 b.

⁵⁵ Athen. 5. 205e-f.

⁵⁶ Callim. *Hymn*. 1.72-90; Theoc. *Idyll*. 17.131-132.

⁵⁷ Heinen, H., Aspects et problèmes de la monarchie ptolémaïque, *Ktema* 3 (1978), 191-195; Hazzard (2000), 59-79.

Dionysus have been regarded as negative images, laziness, extravagance, and weakness, as with Ptolemy VIII.⁵⁸ What then, for the early Ptolemaic kings who ruled the coastal area of the eastern Mediterranean?

At the *Ptolemaea*, held at Alexandria in 271/0 BC, Ptolemy II celebrated the Grand Procession devoted to Dionysus.⁵⁹ In the Grand Procession, Ptolemy II displayed his power and wealth; colossal statues were brought in procession to recreate the myth of Dionysus, making full use of the technology developed in Alexandrian scholarship.⁶⁰ Also involved were exotic animals from Asia, Africa, and Europe;⁶¹ and decorations, jewellery, and other apparatus made of gold, silver and precious metals amounting to 2239 talents and 50 mna.⁶² Ptolemy II connected his dynasty with Dionysus in the Grand Procession: a statue, throne and crown of Alexander the Great and Ptolemy I have often appeared together.⁶³ By insisting on the link between Dionysus, Alexander and Ptolemy I, it is thought that Ptolemy II claimed his kingship as legitimate to the Greek World.⁶⁴

Although Ptolemy II's claim about his relationship with Dionysus remains ambiguous, Ptolemy III shows it clearly. In his victorious report of the Third Syrian War, handed down through the manuscript of Cosmas the monk, Ptolemy III insisted

⁵⁸ Heinen, H., Die Tryphé des Ptolemaios VIII Euergetes II. Beobachtungen zum ptolemaïschen Herrscherideal und einer römischen Gesandtschaft in Ägypten (140/39 v. Chr.), Heinen, H. (ed.), *Althistorische Studien zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von Kollegen und Schülern*. Wiesbaden 1983, 116-128.

⁵⁹ Athen. 5.197c- 203b. Scholars do not agree about its date. Fraser, Walbank and Thompson date Dionysus' Procession to *Ptolemaea* of 279/8 BC. They insist that this *Ptolemaea* was first held after the death of Ptolemy I, see Fraser, P. M., The Foundation Date of the Alexandrian Ptolemaieia. *HTThR* 54 (1961), 141-145; Walbank, F. W., Two Hellenistic Processions: A Matter of Self-Definition. *SCI* 15 (1996), 121-122; Thompson, Philadelphus' Procession: Dynastic Power in a Mediterranean Context, Mooren, L. (ed.), *Politics, Administration and Society in the Hellenistic and Roman World: Proceedings of the International Colloquium, Bertinoro, 19-24 July 1997*. Leuven 2000, 381-388. Other scholars insist on dating the Grand Procession to 271/0 BC, because its meaning would have been connected to victorious celebrations after the First Syrian War against Antiochus I, see Otto, W., *Beiträge zur Seleukidengeschichte*. München 1938, 9; Dunand, F., Fêtes et propagande à Alexandrie sous les Lagides. *La fête, pratique et discours: d'Alexandrie hellénistique à la Mission de Besançon*. Paris 1981, 14. In his descriptions of the Grand Procession, Callixenus never mentioned Arsinoe II, the sister-wife of Ptolemy II, who died around 272/1 BC. Thus I have dated Ptolemy II's Procession to 271/0 BC.

⁶⁰ Athen. 5.198b-f.

⁶¹ Athen. 5.200e-201c.

⁶² For total amount of the Grand Procession, Athen. 5.203b.

⁶³ Athen. 5.201d-e; 202a-b.

⁶⁴ Habe, Y., The Grand Procession of Ptolemy II Philadelphos: The Formation of Hellenistic Kingship Ideology *The Studies in Western History* 234 (2009), 20-27 (in Japanese).

that he was descended from Zeus via Herakles on his father side, via Dionysus on his mother side.⁶⁵

Ptolemy IV was more enthusiastic about worship for Dionysus than his ancestors.⁶⁶ According to a third-century-BC historian Satyrus' *Peri Alexandreias*, Ptolemy IV founded a new *demos* named Dionysia.⁶⁷ During his reign, images of Dionysus started to be inscribed on Ptolemaic coins, which circulated in Egypt and Cyprus.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it is said that he had a tattoo of an ivy leaf, a symbol of Dionysus, put onto his body.⁶⁹ In other words, Ptolemy IV strongly identified himself with Dionysus.

Considering the history of Dionysiac worship by the Ptolemies, it is easy to understand the meanings that Ptolemy IV intended while constructing the sanctuary for Dionysus in his *Thalamegos*. They were designated as 'statues of the royal family (*tês tôn basileôn suggeneias agalmata eikonika*)' in this room.⁷⁰ As mentioned above, the Ptolemies instituted a dynastic cult in their kingdom, deifying the kings and queens and co-honouring them in each temple and sanctuary. Ptolemy IV included Dionysus within his ancestors, just as Ptolemy III had insisted. It is supposed that the Ptolemaic king oversaw ordinary royal cult practices at his palace in Alexandria. The rooms for Aphrodite and Dionysus seem to have been considered necessary for the king when he visited the Egyptian *Chôra*.

Ptolemaic kings visiting the Egyptian *chôra*

It had been thought that the Ptolemaic kings governed the *chôra* in Egypt, with the exception of Alexandria, through detailed administrative structures. However, because such images were influenced in the first half of the twentieth century by the stereo-typical views regarding Ptolemaic administration over Egypt as a centralised bureaucratic state, we should now reconsider this, based on Epigraphic and Papyrological sources.

The prejudice that the Ptolemaic kings rarely moved from their capital - including the Pharaohs before the Hellenistic Period - is supposed to be mainly inspired by passages of Pliny the Elder. Regarding the topographies of Egypt, he wrote that the Ancient Egyptian kings were prohibited from travelling throughout

⁶⁵ OGIS 54.4-6.

⁶⁶ Plut. *Cleom.* 33.

⁶⁷ FrGH 631.F1.

⁶⁸ Tondriau, J. L., Rois lagides compares ou identifiés à divinités. *CE* 23 (1948), 141-143.

⁶⁹ *Etumologicum Magnum*, s. v. 'Gallos'. 3; Fraser (1972), vol. 1, 348-349.

⁷⁰ Athen. 5.205f.

the country during the seasons of the Nile's rising waters.⁷¹ However, his testimony is doubtful because he never mentions its reason. Bonneau denies Pliny's credibility, clarifying that the Egyptian kings and Roman emperors travelled to the Egyptian -countryside even as the Nile was rising.⁷²

Clarysse has considered the aim of the Ptolemaic kings' visits to the Egyptian *chôra*.⁷³ Analysing not only Greek Epigraphical and Papyrological documents but Hieroglyphic inscriptions erected in Egyptian sanctuaries, he found 26 testimonies about visits by Ptolemaic kings, indicating a variety of purposes. These visits are classified to the attendance of religious cults held at Egyptian temples and to the inspection of the administrative system. Furthermore, after the second century BC, it is confirmed that they frequented Memphis, because the Ptolemies introduced the Egyptian traditional ceremony of accession to the throne, held by priests serviced to Ptah after Ptolemy V.⁷⁴

Among the lists Clarysse collected, there are two visits from Ptolemy IV. Polybius mentions that Ptolemy IV visited Raphia, and it is assumed this was to prepare the defense against the invasion of the Seleucid king Antiochus III in the Forth Syrian War.⁷⁵ Additionally, we know that Ptolemy IV visited Memphis, from the trilingual (Hieroglyphic, Demotic and Greek) inscription in honour of the king decreed by Egyptian priests.⁷⁶ According to the decree, after defeating Antiochus III, Ptolemy IV would have made an expedition to Syria-Palestine and participated in the meeting of Egyptian priests after his return. Although its date is unknown, it is thought to be dated to his visit to Memphis during the period between the end of 217-215 BC.⁷⁷ Dating the construction of the *Thalamegos*, as *The Forty*, to the years after the Forth Syrian War, it is possible that Ptolemy IV did not use the gigantic ship to visit Raphia and Memphis. However, we are not able to confirm a visit to the *chôra* by Ptolemy IV outside of Clarysse's list. As he says, that might have been prevented because of the Great Revolt which broke out from Southern Egypt at the end of Ptolemy IV's reign. In other words, although Ptolemy IV built his splendid Nile river ship, which was equipped with palatial functions, he only visited the

⁷¹ Pliny. *NH*. 5.9-10. Pliny mentions only Egyptian kings did not travel because of 'religious reasons'.

⁷² Bonneau, D., *Le souverain d'Égypte voyageait-il sur le Nil en crue?* *CE* 64 (1964), 377- 385.

⁷³ Clarysse, W., *The Ptolemies visiting the Egyptian Chora*. Mooren, L. (ed.), *Politics, Administration and Society in the Hellenistic and Roman World*. Leuven 2000, 29-53.

⁷⁴ For the ceremony of accession at Memphis, see Thompson, D. J., *Memphis under the Ptolemies*. Princeton 1988, 46-88.

⁷⁵ Polyb. 5.3-37.

⁷⁶ *OGIS* 61; Thissen, H. J., *Studien zum Raphiadekret*. Meisenheim am Rhein 1966, 10-25.

⁷⁷ Clarysse (2000), 49.

chôra a few times, so we can hardly confirm that he made sufficient use of it. To seek the aim of Ptolemy IV's ship building, I will try to analyse the visits to the Egyptian *chôra* of former Ptolemaic kings.

From Greek-Egyptian documents, we find that Ptolemy II visited the *chôra* four times. In the middle of his early reign, probably between 263 and 257 BC, he visited Mendes, in the Delta; this is known from the Hieroglyphic inscription devoted in its sanctuary.⁷⁸ According to the inscription, he participated in an Egyptian traditional religious ceremony that included the cult towing a sacred ship, and promised the priest that he would reconstruct the temple, which foreigners - perhaps the Persians - had destroyed. In 258 BC, he visited unknown sites in the eastern Delta. Estimating the date and destination, it is assumed that the response to the Second Syrian War against the Seleukid king Antiochus II broke out from 259 BC.⁷⁹ In regard to the Second Syrian War, we take another testimony of Ptolemy II's visit: in 253 BC, he visited Fayum. On this occasion, he inspected the allotments of land to the prisoners of war from the Seleukid forces; they had been transferred to the Ptolemaic military colonies.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Horos the Egyptian, had a meeting with Ptolemy II at the royal river ship named 'holding silver stern (*argyroprumnon*)' and pleaded directly to the king to resolve the dispute over the possession of the orchard.⁸¹

We have only one example involving Ptolemy III: around 240 BC, he visited the Isis temple on Philae, with his wife Berenice II and his young son Ptolemy, and participated in festivals.⁸²

As mentioned above, though the second and third Ptolemies visited the *chôra* only a few times, we can classify their visits into two types: First, as Clarysse already pointed out, the kings visited in order to participate in religious ceremonies at Egyptian temples. By presenting cult ceremonies at important sanctuaries, the Ptolemaic kings pretended to pay respect to Egyptian culture and indigenous cults. Second, the Ptolemies maintained their rule and social order in Egypt. On the

⁷⁸ De Meulenaere, H. and MacKay, P., *Mendes 2*. Warminster 1976, 174-177; Clarysse (2000), 52; Schäfer, D., *Makedonische Pharaonen und hieroglyphische Stelen: historische Untersuchungen zur Satrapenstele und verwandten Denkmälern*. Leuven 2011, 244-253. For hieroglyphic text, I refer to the German translation by Schäfer.

⁷⁹ Bresciani, E., *Registrazione catastale e ideologia politica nell'Egitto tolemaica*. *EVO* 6 (1983), 116.

⁸⁰ *PSI* IV. 354; Clarysse, W., *A Royal Visit to Memphis and the End of the Second Syrian War*. Crawford, D. J., Quaegebeur, J. and Clarysse, W., (eds.), *Studies on Ptolemaic Memphis*. Leuven 1981, 83-89.

⁸¹ *P. Lond.* 7.2056; *P. Cairo. Zen.* 3.59538.

⁸² *OGIS* 61; Bingen, J., *I. Philae 4, un moment d'un règne, d'un temple et d'un culte*. *Akten des XIV congress des Papyrologie*. Berlin 1997, 88-97.

occasion of his visit to Fayum in 253 BC, Ptolemy II directly confirmed the progress of the military colony there, in order to console the prisoners of war and seriously consider the maintenance of the social order. On the other side, it may be important that Ptolemy II met Horos on his royal ship. From the documents, Horos was an Egyptian estate-holder; it is assumed that he would have been an indigenous, influential figure. It is probable that the king granted audiences with the Greeks, Macedonians, and Egyptians dwelling in the *chôra* on the occasion of his visit; he might have made sure of their loyalty towards him.

In the inner structure of the *Thalamegos*, we find a clue that the kings met with indigenous Egyptians there; that is, the ‘Egyptian room’. Callixeinus only mentions its interior decorations. Columns were made of alternate black and white stones.⁸³ Its capital, which had ornamental designs of flowers and fruits of Lotus or Date Palm, was different from Greek style. We cannot confirm whether such a style was generally used for Egyptian temples. However, it is confirmed that decorations of Lotus were used for Egyptian sanctuaries.⁸⁴ As Callixeinus introduced the ‘Egyptian room’ as a feasting hall, Ptolemy IV would have constructed the room as a meeting room and not as a religious sanctuary. It is assumed that Ptolemy IV granted audiences with Egyptian priests or powerful indigenous individuals. In Memphis, where the late Ptolemaic kings’ accession to the throne was celebrated, Ptolemy IV set up a ceremonial gate (*propylon*) in Egyptian style, dedicated to the temple of Ptah. It is assumed that it was built for audiences; the Ptolemaic king would have shown himself to the indigenous people there and accepted their petitions.⁸⁵

In addition to participating in Egyptian cults and confirming the administration, the Ptolemaic kings enjoyed Nile cruises, accompanying foreign delegations. Returning to the *Letter of Aristeas*, delegations who visited Alexandria to meet the king, had to wait for five days or more than a month for a royal audience.⁸⁶ The king had to meet so many delegations that they accompanied him when he visited the Egyptian countryside. As an example, Eudoxus of Cyzicus, who visited Ptolemy VIII as a sacred envoy (*theôros*), participated in a Nile cruise.⁸⁷ Other documents tell us about foreign delegation visits to the Egyptian *chôra*. In 254 BC, Apollonius, the minister of Ptolemy II, sent a letter to Zenon, who was an estate manager, and

⁸³ Athen. 5.206a-c.

⁸⁴ Goede, B., Lotus und Seerosen in Ägypten, teil 1: Ein Nachweis des Roten Lotos in ägyptischer Glaskunst ptolemäischer-römischer Zeit, *GM* 207 (2005), 49-67.

⁸⁵ Thompson (1988), 17.

⁸⁶ *Pseud. Aristeas*. 175.

⁸⁷ Strabo. 2.3.4.

reported that sacred envoys from Argos and the Bosphorus Kingdom would visit Ptolemais, a Greek city in southern Egypt.⁸⁸ Later, in 112 BC, Roman senator Lucius Memmius visited the sanctuary of Petesouchos, an Egyptian crocodile God, and the Labyrinth at the Fayum for sightseeing.⁸⁹ Although we cannot confirm whether the king accompanied the delegations on these occasions, it is reasonable to assume that Ptolemy IV constructed several feasting rooms in his *Thalamegos* for receptions.

Conclusion

As recent research show, Ptolemy IV's reign seems to have been comparatively stable. In this paper, by considering the royal Nile boat, the *Thalamegos*, I have analysed Ptolemy IV's rule over his kingdom, and the dynastic cult under his reign. His construction of a gigantic Nile boat does not prove that the king was never lazy or apathetic. The *Thalamegos* was constructed for a specific goal: the royal visit to the Egyptian *chôra*.

In other words, though never completed, the *Thalamegos* was supposed to be a 'floating royal palace on the Nile'. It was constructed according to Persian-Macedonian royal architectural traditions. For the roof, the deep purple tent was used; the king, his family, and the courtiers could live inside the ship, just like at the Alexandrian palace. It seems that they could have dealt with domestic and foreign affairs and practiced dynastic cults at the sanctuaries for Aphrodite and Dionysus.

From the study of the *Thalamegos*, the following points could be pointed out:

First, it seems that Ptolemy IV fundamentally followed the policies of his ancestors. The purpose of constructing the *Thalamegos* was to visit the Egyptian *chôra*. From Epigraphical and Papyrological documents, we can verify that Ptolemy IV visited the *chôra* only a few times. In fact, his ancestors, Ptolemy II and Ptolemy III, also visited the Egyptian *chôra*. By visiting the countryside of Egypt, they made inspections of their administration, and by holding and accepting indigenous petitions, they confirmed their royalty to Greek and Egyptian inhabitants. It is possible that Ptolemy IV tried to visit the Egyptian countryside to present himself as accepting petitions from indigenous people. As I mentioned above, we could only confirm a few examples of Ptolemy IV visiting the Egyptian countryside.

⁸⁸ *P. Lond.* 7.1973.

⁸⁹ *P. Tebt.* 1.33. Labyrinth is thought to be the ruins adjacent to the pyramid of Ammenemes III of Twelfth. dynasty, Bagnall, R. S. & Derow, P. (eds) *The Hellenistic Period: Historical Sources in Translation*. 2nd. ed., Oxford 2003, 283.

Second, along with maintaining the social order, it was important for the Ptolemaic kings to participate in indigenous cults at Egyptian temples. According to Huss, Egyptian temples that Ptolemy IV constructed, repaired, and devoted during his reign amount to thirty-eight examples.⁹⁰ This number is far more than other Ptolemaic kings. By participating in indigenous cults at Egyptian temples and constructing temples, was Ptolemy IV Egyptianized? As Hölbl insists, later Ptolemaic kings are considered to have been influenced by Egyptian culture.⁹¹ However, if we regard the *Thalamegos* as a temporary royal residence, we would deny the Egyptianization, at least under Ptolemy IV. Although the *Thalamegos* had ‘Egyptian style rooms’, this does not prove that Ptolemy IV was influenced by Egyptian culture; the purpose of the rooms was to receive indigenous Egyptians.

It is assumed that Ptolemy IV maintained Greek religious culture. He succeeded in his father’s policy to include Dionysus in his family group. Furthermore, he identified himself with the God. The room for Dionysus inside the *Thalamegos* enabled him to practice ordinal Ptolemaic dynastic cults while he visited the *chôra*.

Third, we should hold Ptolemy IV’s construction of the *Thalamegos* in high regard. Ancient authors and recent scholars have often regarded him as negative, because of his tendency to feast. In this paper, I have re-examined the meaning of the royal feast in the Hellenistic period; the focus was not the party, but the place, where important discussions took place. The space holding the royal feast reflected the hierarchy of the Hellenistic royal courts. Tracing back to the Hellenistic age or even earlier, the gorgeous tent that was built was reappraised by this paper to denote the positive significance of a feast. Although many feasting halls were established in the *Thalamegos*, they should be considered as corresponding to various guests. Ptolemy IV should be regarded as someone who responded seriously, not as someone inconsistent.

Yuichiro Habe
habetch@hotmail.co.jp

⁹⁰ Huss, W., *Der makedonische König und die ägyptischen Priester: Studien zur Geschichte des ptolemäischen Ägypten*. Stuttgart 1994, 31-32.

⁹¹ Hölbl (2000), 304-311.