

“Soter” and Divine Honors for Ptolemy I, Again

Pausanias (1.8.6) says that the Rhodians gave Ptolemy I (367/6-282 BC) his title Soter. But Pausanias is the only source for this idea, which is now hotly debated. Ptolemy I did have a cult at Rhodes: Diodoros (20.11.3-4) says that the Rhodians in 304 built a Ptolemaion and a *temenos* in his name (Higbie 2003:137). Gorgōn of Rhodes *FGrH/BNJ* 515 F 19 (=Athen. 15.52, 696F) (2nd -1st c.) says in *On the Festivals at Rhodes* that the *paian* was sung in his honor, which indicates cult honors and a festival. But Ptolemy I never used Soter as an official title.

Some insist that the Rhodians bestowed the title/epithet (Caneva 2020a; Johnson 2000; Hauben and van Dessel 1977:339 and n.145). But Hazzard 1992 and Hazzard 2000:3-24 called this assertion into question. Hazzard 1992 points out that if the Rhodians had granted Ptolemy I the epithet of Soter, the Rhodian inscriptions would have mentioned it, but since they do not, Soter was not a cult title at Rhodes. Hazzard 2000:18-24, Tables 1 & 2 points out that the coins of Ptolemy II indicate that he only began styling himself Ptolemy the son of Ptolemy Soter in 261/0 and that Greek, demotic, and Phoenician texts show that Ptolemy II called himself the son of Ptolemy Soter only from 259 to the end of his reign in 246. Hazzard 2000:15 thinks that since Ptolemy II called his parents Theoi Soteres in 282, he used Soter later of his father.

Nevertheless, Hauben and vanDessel 1977:339 and n.145 wrongly cite Gorgon as evidence that the Rhodians bestowed Soter on Ptolemy I even though “Soter” is not in the fragment. Hauben 2010 argued that the change from cult honors on Rhodes to an official title occurred “when the Aegean cities unified in the Nesiote League again [i.e., after Rhodes] used the denomination Soter as part of the cultic honors they decreed to Ptolemy I” in the last years of Ptolemy I’s reign (288-286 BC) “when he took over the control of the Aegean from the defeated

Demetrios” (Caneva 2000a:26 & n.4, speaking of Hauben 2010:109). But Worthington 2016a:129 argues that the origin was in Egypt and that it was secular in nature (also Worthington 2016b:168-169). Johnson 2000:103-105 thinks that the Rhodians bestowed the epithet Soter in their cult but the official title Soter was secular. Alternatively, Caneva 2020a thinks that the Rhodians did give a cult epithet to Ptolemy, dismissing the lack of mention of Soter in Rhodian inscriptions and misinterpreting the Lindian Chronicle; he argues that Pausanias confused a cult epithet with the official title, but he also believes that the cult title led to the official one.

I argue first that there is no evidence for a cult title Soter on Rhodes. The inscriptions are silent and the Lindian Chronicle, which mentions Ptolemy I three times in the fourth epiphany (D.95-116, never calls him Soter even though it is dated 99 BC. The Ptolemy who made an offering at the temple of Athena Lindia (Lindian Chronicle C § XXXIX.110-115; Higbie 2003, 137) was likely Ptolemy I after Demetrios Poliorketes’ siege of Rhodes (Hazard 1992:55), but Soter is not used. But Ptolemy II is called Philadelphos (Lindian Chronicle C § XXXVII.98-99). While it is possible that Soter was used on Rhodes spontaneously in thanksgiving after the siege, it was not a cult epithet. Second, the historian Gorgon of Rhodes (Athenaios 15.52, 696F) used temple records for his history but does not mention Soter, and Athenaios does not in quoting Gorgon (although he does elsewhere, 5.71). Third, I argue that the possibility of cult honors by the islanders does not matter. Fourth, I argue that Pausanias attributed the official title to the Rhodians because he was not sure of its origin and he knew Ptolemy I had saved them.

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