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EQUESTRIAN RELIEF FROM PTOLEMAIS AND THE NISEAN HORSE

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the analysis of the proportions of the rider and horse shown on the Hellenistic relief found at the so-called ‘House of Leukaktios’, Ptolemais, Libya, this study supports the hypothesis that the aforementioned figure depicts a rare breed of exceptionally large horses – the Nisean chargers from the ancient Nisa in the Median Plain. The author argues that the rider shown on the relief performs a *levade*, an equestrian movement described in detail by Xenophon. As only exceptionally

large horses were able to perform the *levade* properly, and only the Seleucid dynasty had unrestricted access to such animals, the horse depicted on the relief in question must have arrived in Egypt as a result of a diplomatic contact. The history of relations between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties suggests that it would have occurred when the future Egyptian king, Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, governed Cyrenaica. If this was the case, the Ptolemais relief would have been sculpted before 145 BC.

Keywords: Nisean horses, Ptolemais relief, *levade*, Greek sculptures, Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II

In 2002, during excavations carried out by the Archaeological Mission of the University of Warsaw in Ptolemais, Cyrenaica (Libya), a limestone relief depicting a rider seated on a rearing horse was unearthed (Fig. 1). It was found inside the so-called ‘House of Leukaktios’, a villa from the Roman times. Even though the construction phase to which the monument belonged can be dated to before AD 262 – when an earthquake caused the collapse of some structures – it was sculpted earlier in the Hellenistic Period.¹ According to the publishers of the monument, the style of the representation is reminiscent of some earlier Attic works. The pose of the horseman riding the rearing horse resembles the well-known Athenian stela of Dexileos from Kerameikos.² However, the Athenian monument shows a warrior riding down a fallen foe.³ On the contrary, the relief from Ptolemais

was not intended to be a victory monument. Instead, the main figure, a mounted hero, was shown on the rearing horse standing before a young boy and a woman.⁴ The monument in question belongs to the broad category of ‘heros equitans’, representations widespread in the eastern Mediterranean and western Pontic region in the Hellenistic and Roman times, especially in Thracia and Dacia.⁵ The closest analogies come from Cyrenaica itself⁶ and are well understood, similarly to the votive character of the monument.⁷ The aim of the present paper is to focus on an important and overlooked aspect: the horse portrayed on the relief is exceptionally tall and quite stocky, while the rider appears to be of short stature. None of the horse representations from the region depicts that particular animal in such a manner.⁸ Moreover, the Roman author Aelian considered Libyan horses to

¹ Mikocki, Muszyńska-Mikocka 2009, 177–178.

² Mikocki, Muszyńska-Mikocka 2009, 180.

³ Grave relief of Dexileos, son of Lysanias of Thorikos (ca. 390 BC), Kerameikos Museum, Athens (see Knigge 1991, 169, fig. 3a). The rendering of the details of the horse’s anatomy are reminiscent of earlier works, like the Parthenon frieze, but the general dynamics of the representation are something new (see Markman 1969, 100).

⁴ Mikocki, Muszyńska-Mikocka 2009, 180.

⁵ Junkelmann 1990, 243–244; Mikocki, Muszyńska-Mikocka 2009, 180; Nemeti, Nemeti 2014, 241–242.

⁶ Pandolfi 1998, 449–455; Mikocki, Muszyńska-Mikocka 2009, 182–184.

⁷ Mikocki, Muszyńska-Mikocka 2009, 181–184.

⁸ Mikocki, Muszyńska-Mikocka 2009, 180–184; Abdelhamed 2023, figs. 1, 5.



Fig. 1. Horseman from the Ptolemais relief (drawing by R. A. Gawroński, after: Mikocki, Muszyńska-Mikocka 2009, fig. 2).

be rather slim.⁹ Therefore, one can hypothesise that the anonymous sculptor of the relief in question based his work on a real model and wanted to do justice to an exceptional and rare breed, likely imported from abroad. It should be emphasised that the sculpted horse was shown performing a special kind of equestrian evolution, difficult to achieve for an animal of a more slender built.

The issue should be addressed in detail: the depicted animal is shown performing a *levade*. According to the masters of Classical Dressage, *levade* is one of the “figures in the air” or “*Les airs relevés*” – using the convention introduced by the equerry of King Louis XV of France, *monsieur* François Robichon de La Guérinière.¹⁰ It can be described as a move during which the horse raises and draws in its forelegs standing in equilibrium

on its bent hind legs. *Levade* was known to the ancient Greeks. The well-known bronze statuette of Alexander the Great retrieved from the famous Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum depicts the Macedonian conqueror riding a horse, presumably Bucephalus, in such a pose.¹¹

The historian and military leader Xenophon described the *levade* in detail: “The opinion sometimes held, that a horse with free leg action will be able to lift its body too, is incorrect. Rather one with loins supple and short and strong (meaning not the part under the tail, but that between the ribs and the haunches, along the flank) will be able to bring his hindlegs further forward under him. And so, when he brings them under him, pull him up with the bit. He will then bend his legs with his hocks and lift his forehead, so that those in front of him will see his front and sexual parts. And when he does this you must give him rein, so that to the beholders he may appear to be doing of his own free will the finest actions proper to a horse”.¹² Exactly that phase of the performed figure, with reins held loose is recognisable on the monument from Ptolemais (Fig. 1). It is evident that the anonymous Greek sculptor wanted to represent a horsemanship exercise.

As it was said, the horse shown on the relief from Ptolemais seems to be exceptionally tall and quite stocky while the rider appears to be of short stature, resulting in proportions contradictory to the earlier Greek artistic tradition. Hellenic artists preferred showing lighter animals of slender conformation, as the famous bronze sculpture of ‘Artemision Jockey’ exemplifies.¹³ At the same time, the depicted riders were far more important and thus larger than horses. The sculptures from the Great Panathenaic Parthenon frieze are a good example of this convention: the horses shown on the frieze (Fig. 2) are too small in relation to their riders.¹⁴ Indeed, the sculptors of that work had depicted a horse that “was warm-blooded, smallheaded, and fine-boned, although its small stature when compared with the frieze’s riders

⁹ Aelian, *De natura animalium* 3, 2: “*graciles quoque nec corpulentos* – slim and not stocky” (author’s translation). See also Abdelhamed 2023.

¹⁰ de La Guérinière 1742, 129–136.

¹¹ However, we should bear in mind that the hind legs of the statuette and the left (rein) hand had been restored after the discovery (see Mattusch 2008, 250–251) for an accurate image and description. Nonetheless, judging from the rest of the work, it is safe to assume that showing the *levade* was the intention of the anonymous Greek sculptor.

¹² Xenophon, *De equis aiendis* 11. 2-3: “οὐ μέντοι ὃ γε οἴονται τινες τὸν τὰ σκέλη ὑγρὰ ἔχοντα καὶ τὸ σῶμα αἶρην δυνήσεσθαι, οὕτως ἔχει: ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ὃς ἂν τὴν ὀσφὺν ὑγρὰν τε καὶ βραχεῖαν καὶ ἰσχυρὰν ἔχη (καὶ οὐ τὴν κατ’ οὐρὰν

λέγομεν, ἀλλ’ ἢ πέφυκε μεταξύ τῶν πλευρῶν καὶ τῶν ἰσχυῶν κατὰ τὸν κενεῶνα), οὗτος δυνήσεται πόρρω ὑποτιθέναι τὰ ὀπίσθια σκέλη ὑπὸ τὰ ἐμπρόσθια. ἦν οὖν τις ὑποτιθέντος αὐτοῦ ἀνακρούῃ τῷ χαλινῷ, ὁκλάζει μὲν τὰ ὀπίσθια ἐν τοῖς ἀστραγάλοις, αἶρει δὲ τὸ πρόσθεν σῶμα, ὥστε τοῖς ἐξ ἐναντίας φαίνεσθαι τὴν γαστέρα καὶ τὰ αἰδοῖα. δεῖ δὲ καὶ ὅταν ταῦτα ποιῇ διδόναι αὐτῷ τὸν χαλινόν, ὅπως τὰ κάλλιστα ἵππου ἐκόντα ποιῆσαι δοκῇ τοῖς ὁρῶσιν” – trans. E. C. Marchant (1920), quoted after Anderson (1961, 123).

¹³ Hemingway 2004, 49–53, see esp. figs. 32–33. However, in the case of the Jockey of Artemision, there are some minor stylistic problems: the sculptor rendered the hind legs longer and shortened the front ones.

¹⁴ Ridgway 1981, 83.



Fig. 2. Horseman from the Parthenon frieze, British Museum, London (drawing by R. A. Gawroński, after: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cavalcade_west_frieze_Parthenon_BM.jpg – access 31.12.2024).

may be due to artistic license”.¹⁵ For example, the animals sculpted on the mounting scene are not taller than their rider’s belts,¹⁶ which is highly unlikely to happen in real life, even though ancient Greek horses were quite small.¹⁷ Also a late Classical or early Hellenistic marble relief, now on display at Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, shows a relatively tall horseman riding a rather small mount (Fig. 3).¹⁸ Therefore, one may hypothesize that the sculptor of the Ptolemais monument wanted to represent an exceptionally large and strong horse.

At this point, the present knowledge about the *levade*’s biomechanics becomes informative. According to modern research, only horses with strong muscles and well-developed hind legs can perform the *levade* correctly, since the horse raises his trunk from 16 degrees angle to about 36 degrees and remains in that position for 1 or 2 seconds. During the raising phase, the front limb force works in the upward and backward direction, as the animal retracts its front legs to the *levade* position. Simultaneously, the animal uses the muscles of its back and hindquarters to raise its forehead, rather than using the front limbs to push the forehead upward.¹⁹ Not sur-

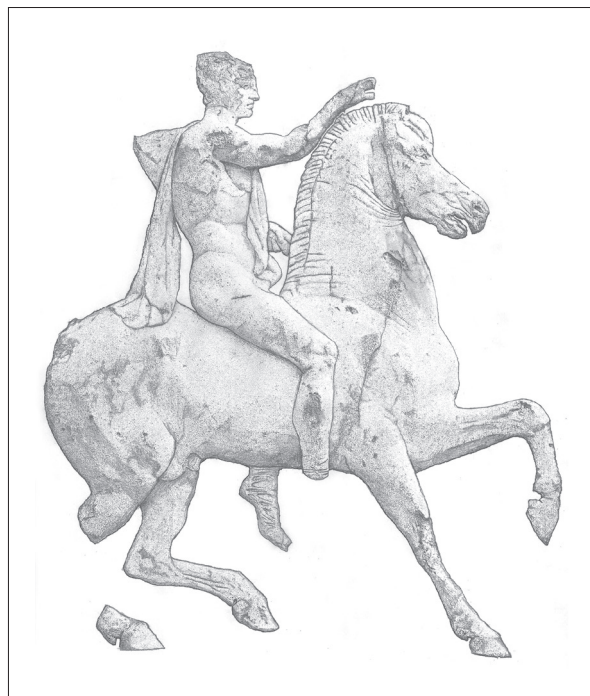


Fig. 3. Horseman from the marble relief, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (drawing by R. A. Gawroński, after: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/247989> – access 31.12.2024)

prisingly, “horses that perform a correct *levade* are few”.²⁰ The same may have been true also in Antiquity – horses capable of performing the *levade* must have been rare.

Moreover, contemporaneous Ptolemaic iconography indicates that the elite Macedonian, Thracian, and Greek horsemen used rather slender mounts. And so, some of the painted funerary limestone slabs preserved at the Ptolemaic capital, Alexandria,²¹ roughly dated to the 4th or 3rd century BC, depict horses. Obviously, the quality of the surviving evidence precludes categorical statements and there is a lot of artistic license involved, but some phenotypic features of the depicted animals can easily be recognised. For example, the funerary slab of Pelopides, the Thessalian, said to be found in 1884 in a tomb near Alexandria and now kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, shows a relatively tall and slender horse tamed by a man dressed in a pale yellow chiton.²²

¹⁵ White 2011, 26.

¹⁶ Jenkins 2006, 98, fig. 87.

¹⁷ The bone remains recovered from a Hellenistic tolos grave discovered near Pylos in Peloponnese show that ancient Greek horses stood some 137–155 cm at the withers (see Junkelmann 1990, 250). An average Greek male from the period in question was about 170–171 cm tall (see Kron 2005, 72).

¹⁸ Richter 1954, 80 and pl. CIV, fig. 142. Richter suggests a late 4th-century chronology for the New York relief.

¹⁹ Clayton 2003, 15.

²⁰ Clayton 2003, 14.

²¹ Cole 2019, 1.

²² Cole 2019, 2–3, fig. 1.



Fig. 4. Massive Scythian horse in the relief from Apadana, Persepolis (drawing by R. A. Gawroński, after: Head, Scollins 1992, 46, fig. 32c).

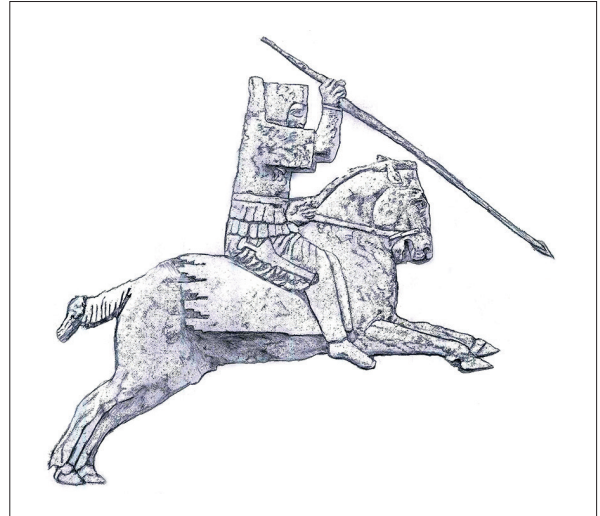


Fig. 5. Achaemenid horseman in the relief found at the Altıkulaç village, Turkey (drawing by R. A. Gawroński, after: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alt%C4%B1kula%C3%A7_Sarcophagus#/media/File:Alt%C4%B1kula%C3%A7_Sarcophagus_Combat_scene_\(detail\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alt%C4%B1kula%C3%A7_Sarcophagus#/media/File:Alt%C4%B1kula%C3%A7_Sarcophagus_Combat_scene_(detail).jpg) – access 31.12.2024).

Another limestone slab, said to come from the Hadra cemetery and now kept at the Graeco-Roman Museum, Alexandria, shows a rider mounted on a rather slender horse.²³ It appears that this particular artistic convention was common in Ptolemaic Alexandria. Both the funerary stela of an unknown Macedonian cavalryman, now on display at the Graeco-Roman Museum,²⁴ and the paintings from Moustapha Kamel Tomb I can be cited as further examples of such practice.²⁵ In that respect the relief from Ptolemais should be treated as something unusual. The horse shown on the monument seems to be too massive and too large for the Hellenic aesthetic taste. The only analogous depictions of massive horses in the Ptolemaic art are the numerous terracotta representations of mounted Harpocrates, but there the proportions are a consequence of the material used.²⁶

There are two possible explanations for such a situation. First, the sculptor of the Ptolemais relief could have made a mistake while calculating the proportions of the intended figures and thus 'spoiled' the final effect. Second, he could have drawn on earlier traditions or on some reality that differed from that of the Greeks.

Interestingly, such artistic manner was widespread among the Greeks' sworn enemies – in the conquered Persian Empire. Even a short glance at the Apadana reliefs from Persepolis reveals the fact that the representations of massive and muscular horses are predominant in the Achaemenid art (Fig. 4). Moreover, some of these animals were intentionally sculpted so as to look much larger than tribute horses brought to Persepolis by various subject nations: "They are the famous 'Great Nisean' horses, said by Classical writers to have been bred on the Median plain. They are depicted as long-bodied and ram-headed, with thick necks and heavy crests, and were the primary mounts of elite Persian horsemen".²⁷ Indeed, that particular feature, i.e. the great size of Nisean horses, is also confirmed by written accounts. Herodotus, while describing the marching order of Xerxes's invading army, made the following statement: "Next [came] ten of the sacred horses called Nisaeen, all daintily caparisoned. (Now these horses are called Nisaeen, because they come from the Nisaeen plain, a vast flat in Media, producing horses of unusual size".²⁸ Such a huge horse in a combat scene (Fig. 5) is clearly visible on the Achaemenid

²³ Cole 2019, 4–6, figs. 2–4.

²⁴ Cole 2019, 6–8, figs. 5–6.

²⁵ Sekunda 1995, 75–76 and figs. 108–110; Cole 2019, 9–10, figs. 8–9.

²⁶ See, for example, Sekunda, McBride 1995, 63, fig. 106, 75; Bailey 2008, 35, cat. no. 3068, pl. 12.

²⁷ Curtis, Tallis 2005, 211; Head, Scollins 1992, 46, fig. 32c.

²⁸ Herodotus, *Historiae* 7.40. 2–3: "μετὰ δὲ ἵπποι Νησαῖοι καλεόμενοι ἵπποι δέκα κεκοσμημένοι ὡς κάλλιστα. Νησαῖοι δὲ καλέονται ἵπποι ἐπὶ τοῦδε: ἔστι πεδίον μέγα τῆς Μηδικῆς τῷ ὄνόμα ἐστὶ Νήσαιον: τοὺς ὧν δὴ ἵππους τοὺς μεγάλους φέρει τὸ πεδίον τοῦτο" – translation after G. A. Rawlinson (1862, 33).

sarcophagus found at the Altıkulaç village located 10 km to the north-east to the town of Çan, Turkey.²⁹

It should be emphasised that the sculptor of the Ptolemais relief did not draw directly on Achaemenid artistic traditions. Most probably, he had limited access to old Persian art. Instead, we may suspect that he wanted to show a particular breed – he intended to create an accurate image of the heavy Nisean horse.

However, there is another clue: in Ptolemaic Egypt, Nisean chargers would have been a rare sight. It is not a coincidence that such horses were bred to fulfil the needs of heavy Achaemenid cavalry. The use of heavy armour required heavier and bigger mounts. The abundance of such tall animals was possible thanks to the improvements in horse breeding and the presence of rich pasturelands. One may suspect that access to taller and faster horses was an exclusive prerogative of the Persian state, presumably determined to protect the genetic pool at all costs. Indeed, in the Classical times no other state had the ability to field such heavily-armoured horsemen. As the famous Nisean chargers were specially created and bred for that kind of service, over time they would even increase in size and stature. According to one Chinese source, some of these famous Persian horses, or more precisely their later Parthian descendants, could reach up to 160 cm at the withers.³⁰ Nonetheless, the Persian supremacy in horse breeding collapsed after the conquests of Alexander the Great. In the Hellenistic times, these animals would have been available to armies of Macedonian successor states, as they became spoils of war. This adds weight to the hypothesis that the Ptolemais relief portrayed one of the descendants of these animals.

If the above hypothesis is true, then one of these mighty horses could have been transported to Egypt. Moreover, such an animal may have been used and ridden at Cyrenaica and then served as a model for the anonymous sculptor. The problematic detail, however, is that the surviving accounts attest to the presence of Nisean horses exclusively in the Seleucid armies. According to Polybios, when Antiochus IV Epiphanes tried to imitate and oust the splendour of the Roman triumph in 166 BC, in particular the celebration of Emilius Paulus's victory at the

Battle of Pydna, he organised a military parade at Daphne – which was a suburb of Antioch and a sacred grove dedicated to Apollo. During the parade, following the other prestigious units: “τούτων κατόπιν ἦσαν ἱππεῖς Νισαῖοι μὲν χίλιοι – next came a thousand Nisaeian cavalry”.³¹ It is noteworthy that even in the Seleucid army – which was still considered a mighty force despite the disaster at Magnesia – only a thousand horsemen could have been mounted on valuable Nisean chargers. The Seleucid monopoly can be easily explained – they still had some access to the Median Plain. We should also bear in mind that the bitter rivalry between the Seleucid and the Ptolemaic dynasties could have made the export of valuable horses nearly impossible. Especially since the aforementioned animals were bred specifically for military use. Therefore, in Egypt, not to mention the more distant Cyrenaica, access to such mounts may have been very limited.

However, there is another possibility. At the beginning of the year 193 BC, the Egyptian monarch, Ptolemy V Epiphanes, married the Seleucid princess Cleopatra, the daughter of Antiochus III. They had two sons: Ptolemy VI Philometor and Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II. Around 163 BC, after a dynastic struggle and a Roman diplomatic intervention, Euergetes was banned to Cyrene, where he reigned until his accession to the Egyptian throne in 145 BC. Despite conflicts with the Seleucids, such as the Sixth Syrian War, the sons of the first Cleopatra maintained close ties with the rulers of Antioch as relatives. If a certain amount of speculation is allowed, one may hypothesise that the relief in question could have been created before 145 BC, when Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II ruled Cyrene. Therefore, the horse which served as a model for the Ptolemais relief could have ended up in Cyrene as a diplomatic gift around that time.

We should bear in mind that the Egyptian Ptolemies had shown special interest in obtaining rare animals through diplomatic contacts. According to the poet Lucian, King Ptolemy I Soter paraded a black Bactrian camel before his subjects.³² The Greek geographer Strabo writes about the first Ptolemy's passion for study.³³ Judging from the titles of works credited to his tutor, Strato of Lampsakos, the king had shown a keen interest in zoology.³⁴

²⁹ Rose 2014, 136. See also, Shepherd 2012, 57 for an accurate image.

³⁰ See Hyland 1996, 18, 172, n. 4, where reference is made to a testimony from *Yang K'uan-Chun-Kuo Li-Tai Ch'in-yu-Kao* (A Study of the History of Measures). The reference is quoted after Creel 1965, 647–72. Yet, it is quite difficult to verify the reliability of that information, as all “western” horses were obviously described as much bigger in comparison to the smaller Chinese ponies, see Creel 1965, 655–656: “The horses of distant land, usually to the West or North, and even of their nomadic enemies near at hand [were] quite frankly, superior”. Moreover,

recent research shows that even the late medieval *destriers*, according to the measurements taken at the Royal Armoury, Leeds, had little more than 15 hh at the withers (approx. 150 cm), see Hyland 1998, 9–10. Therefore, the 160 cm mentioned by the Chinese source seems to be an exaggeration, as even the use of heavy late medieval armour did not require war-horses of this stature.

³¹ Polybios, *Historiae* 30. 25. 6.

³² Lucian, *Prometheus* 4.

³³ Strabo, *Geography* 17. 1. 5.

³⁴ Thomas 2021, 30.

His successor, Ptolemy II Philadelphos, had a similar interest in rare animals. According to philosopher and antiquarian Atheneus, who draws on earlier accounts – including that of the 2nd-century historian, Kallixeinos of Rhodes – on one occasion panthers, ostriches and other rare animals were paraded through the streets of Alexandria in a clear imitation of the triumph of Dionysius. The horse-drawn chariots and wild horses were also seen during these processions.³⁵ It is noteworthy that obtaining all such rare animals required a network of diplomatic connections.³⁶ Moreover, access to exceptionally large animals had strategic significance and was considered important.³⁷

One may argue that the Nisean horses were nothing special in comparison to panthers and ostriches. However, for someone interested in advanced horsemanship the very possession of such an animal offered new possibilities – one of which was mastering the skill of the *levade*. Certainly, one could consider the Nisean charger a valuable and prestigious property. The animal was also a curiosity and the Ptolemies had a long tradition of collecting zoological curiosities – we should remember that horses strong enough to perform the proper *levade* are as rare in our times as they were in Antiquity. At this point, we should note that the monument in question depicts the rider holding the rein loosely, which is congruent with Xenophon's description. Indeed, the artist wanted to show the animal to be capable of performing the *levade* and captured the final motion of the evolution. One may suspect that the sculptor used some life sketches as models. No doubt, the horse shown on the Ptolemais relief was important enough to be deemed worthy of an artistic representation showcasing one of its abilities.

The history of Seleucid-Ptolemaic relations may suggest that the sculpture could have been created after the marriage of Ptolemy V Epiphanes and Cleopatra I, because the Nisean chargers could have been brought to Egypt on this occasion. Bearing in mind that the sculpting workshop was located somewhere in Cyrene, one may suspect that Ptolemy VIII or one of his courtiers were the inspiration behind the artist's project. If that was the case, the relief would have been made after

163 BC and before 145 BC, that is, prior to Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II's ascension to the Egyptian throne and his departure from Cyrene.

Moreover, further support for such a hypothesis can be cited. The publishers of the Ptolemais relief emphasise that the rider sports a haircut similar to that seen in the famous Louvre portrait of Antiochus III. However, they favour an earlier dating suggesting the 3rd century BC, based on the iconography of earlier rulers, such as the two first Ptolemies, who are also depicted with similar haircuts.³⁸

The earlier chronology cannot be excluded, as many Persian settlers remained in Egypt under the Ptolemaic rule. Commonly referred to in various papyri as "Persians",³⁹ they were subjected to constant Hellenisation. But the horses they possessed during the Achaemenid rule could have left their offspring in Egypt and Cyrenaica. Thus, direct Seleucid-Ptolemaic contacts should not be considered a necessary prerequisite for obtaining Nisean horses. However, we have no direct evidence that testifies to the presence of Nisean horses in Egypt before Alexander the Great. At this point, we can present another argument: the aforementioned testimony of Aelian⁴⁰ shows that the local Libyan horses were rather slim. In Antiquity, only the rich and well-watered pasturelands of Media⁴¹ supported reliable breeding of exceptionally large horses. In medieval times, the rulers of England had to import warhorses from Europe, mostly from the Mantua region in Lombardy, as the meagre pasturelands of their homeland failed to support the breeding of larger animals.⁴² The problem remained unsolved until the late modern era, when agricultural techniques improved considerably. Similarly, the crusading Kingdom of Jerusalem had to import suitable warhorses from Europe by sea.⁴³ As a result, one can suspect that breeding large horses was likely impossible in ancient Libya.

Therefore, the scenario described in this article, although speculative, appears more plausible. The Seleucid-Ptolemaic connections, despite the endemic conflicts, remained strong after the diplomatic marriage of Ptolemy V. Horses, especially the prized Nisean chargers, could have been a part of the diplomatic exchange. Therefore, the similarities to the famous portrait

³⁵ Atheneus, *Deipnosophistae* 5. 200–201.

³⁶ Thomas 2021, 32.

³⁷ According to Livy (43.5), in the year 170 BC, Cincibulus, the king of the Transalpine Gauls, angry with the Romans over border disputes, was appeased with a gift of two horses with their harnesses. At the same time, the king's brothers obtained permission from the Senate to purchase and take abroad ten more animals. As can be seen, the Romans tried to maintain a monopoly on taller horses and permission to export them was

given as a great favour. The imported stallions undoubtedly improved the quality of the Gallic breeds (see Hyland 1990, 21).

³⁸ Mikocki, Muszyńska-Mikocka 2009, 184–185.

³⁹ See, for example, Clarysse 1994, 69–77; McCoskey 2002, 26.

⁴⁰ Aelian, *De natura animalium* 3, 2.

⁴¹ Davis 1989, 33. The aforementioned finds from Pylos at the Peloponnese may indicate that Hellenistic horses rarely exceeded 155 cm at the withers, see again Junkelmann 1990, 250.

⁴² Davis 1989, 64, 108, 112–113.

⁴³ Nicolle, Hook 1996, 14.

of Antiochus III, a grandfather of Ptolemy VIII, may suggest a later chronology for the work in question, perhaps the 2nd century.

The general conclusion is that the anonymous sculptor of the Ptolemais relief intended to create an image of the heavy Nisean horse. In all likelihood, he had seen such an animal in reality and worked with the help of some life sketches. The history of the Seleucid-Ptolemaic

contacts and the findspot of the Ptolemais relief together suggest that the monument had been sculpted somewhere in Cyrene before Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II ascended to the Egyptian throne.⁴⁴ Therefore, the relief in question may be cited as indirect evidence that some prestigious animals were exchanged as diplomatic gifts in the Hellenistic world, even though their military significance could be expected to preclude such use.

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⁴⁴ There is also a slight possibility that the sculpting was carried out after the beginning of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II's reign. If that was the case, the relief in question could have been pro-

duced in one of Alexandria's workshops and transported to Ptolemais at a somewhat later date.

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