

1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 22 — Ptolemies

Edwyn Robert Bevan



Exported from Wikisource on July 3, 2024

PTOLEMIES, a dynasty of Macedonian kings who ruled in Egypt from 323 to 30 B.C.

The founder, PTOLEMY (Πτολεμαῖος), son of Lagus, a Macedonian nobleman of Eordaea, was one of Alexander the Great's most trusted generals, and among the seven "body-guards" attached to his person. He plays a principal part in the later campaigns of Alexander in Afghanistan and India. At the Susa marriage festival in 324 Alexander caused him to marry the Persian princess Artacama; but there is no further mention of this Asiatic bride in the history of Ptolemy. When Alexander died in 323 the resettlement of the empire at Babylon is said to have been made at Ptolemy's instigation. At any rate he was now appointed satrap of Egypt under the nominal kings Philip Arrhidaeus and the young Alexander. He at once took a high hand in the province by killing Cleomenes, the financial controller appointed by Alexander the Great; he also subjugated Cyrenaïca. He contrived to get possession of Alexander's body which was to be interred with great pomp by the imperial government and placed it temporarily in Memphis. This act led to an open rupture between Ptolemy and the imperial regent Perdiccas. But Perdiccas perished in the attempt to invade Egypt (321). In the long wars between the different Macedonian chiefs which followed, Ptolemy's first object is to hold his position in Egypt securely, and secondly to possess the Cyrenaïca, Cyprus and Palestine (Coele-Syria). His first occupation of

Palestine was in 318, and he established at the same time a protectorate over the petty kings of Cyprus. When Antigonus, master of Asia in 315, showed dangerous ambitions, Ptolemy joined the coalition against him, and, on the outbreak of war, evacuated Palestine. In Cyprus he fought the partisans of Antigonus and reconquered the island (313). A revolt of Cyrene was crushed in the same year. In 312 Ptolemy, with Seleucus, the fugitive satrap of Babylonia, invaded Palestine and beat Demetrius, the son of Antigonus, in the great battle of Gaza. Again he occupied Palestine, and again a few months later, after Demetrius had won a battle over his general and Antigonus entered Syria in force, he evacuated it. In 311 a peace was concluded between the combatants, soon after which the surviving king Alexander was murdered in Macedonia, leaving the satrap of Egypt absolutely his own master. The peace did not last long, and in 309 Ptolemy commanded a fleet in person which detached the coast towns of Lycia and Caria from Antigonus and crossed to Greece, where Ptolemy took possession of Corinth, Sicyon and Megara (308). In 306 a great fleet under Demetrius attacked Cyprus, and Ptolemy's brother, Menelaus, was defeated and captured in the decisive battle of Salamis. The complete loss of Cyprus followed. Antigonus and Demetrius now assumed the title of kings; Ptolemy, as well as Cassander, Lysimachus and Seleucus, answered this challenge by doing the same. In the winter (306-5) Antigonus tried to follow up the victory of Cyprus by invading Egypt, but here Ptolemy was strong, and held the frontier successfully against him. Ptolemy led

no further expedition against Antigonus overseas. To the Rhodians, besieged by Demetrius (305-4), he sent such help as won him divine honours in Rhodes and the surname of Sotér (“ saviour ”). When the coalition was renewed against Antigonus in 302, Ptolemy joined it, and invaded Palestine a third time, whilst Antigonus was engaged with Lysimachus in Asia Minor. On a report that Antigonus had won a decisive victory, for a third time he evacuated the country. But when news came that Antigonus had been defeated and slain at Ipsus (301) by Lysimachus and Seleucus, Ptolemy occupied Palestine for the fourth time. The other members of the coalition had assigned Palestine to Seleucus after what they regarded as Ptolemy's desertion, and for the next hundred years the question of its ownership becomes the standing ground of enmity between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties. Henceforth, Ptolemy seems to have mingled as little as possible in the broils of Asia Minor and Greece; his possessions in Greece he did not retain, but Cyprus he reconquered in 295-4. Cyrene, after a series of rebellions, was finally subjugated about 300 and placed under his stepson Magas (Beloch, Griech. Gesch. III. [ii.], p. 134 seq.). In 285 he abdicated in favour of one of his younger sons by Berenice (q.v.), who bore his father's name of Ptolemy; his eldest (legitimate) son, Ptolemy Ceraunus, whose mother, Eurydice, the daughter of Antipater, had been repudiated, lied to the court of Lysimachus. Ptolemy I. Soter died in 283 at the age of 84. Shrewd and cautious, he had a compact and well-ordered realm to show at the end of fifty years of wars. His name

for bonhomie and liberality attached the floating soldier-class of Macedonians and Greeks to his service. Nor did he neglect conciliation of the natives. He was a ready patron of letters, and the great library, which was Alexandria's glory, owed to him its inception. He wrote himself a history of Alexander's campaigns, distinguished by its straightforward honesty and sobriety.

PTOLEMY II. Philadelphus (309~246), was of a delicate constitution, no Macedonian warrior-chief of the old style. His brother Ptolemy Ceraunus found compensation by becoming king in Macedonia in 281, and perished in the Gallic invasion of 280-79 (see BRENNUS). Ptolemy II. maintained a splendid court in Alexandria. Not that Egypt held aloof from wars. Magas of Cyrene opened war on his half-brother (274), and Antiochus I., the son of Seleucus, desiring Palestine, attacked soon after. Two or three years of war left Egypt the dominant naval power of the eastern Mediterranean; the Ptolemaic sphere of power extended over the Cyclades to Samothrace, and the harbours and coast towns of Cilicia Trachea (“ Rough Cilicia ”), Pamphylia, Lycia and Caria were largely in Ptolemy's hands (Theoc. Idyll. xvii. 86 seq.). The victory won by Antigonus, king of Macedonia, over his fleet at Cos (between 258-56; see Beloch, III. [ii.], p. 428 seq.) did not long interrupt his command of the Aegean. In a second war with the Seleucid kingdom, under Antiochus II. (after 260), Ptolemy sustained losses on the seaboard of Asia Minor and agreed to a peace by which Antiochus married his daughter Berenice (250?).

Ptolemy's first wife, Arsinoé (I.), daughter of Lysimachus, was the mother of his legitimate children. After her repudiation he married, probably for political reasons, his full-sister Arsinoé (II.), the widow of Lysimachus, by an Egyptian custom abhorrent to Greek morality. The material and literary splendour of the Alexandrian court was at its height under Ptolemy II. Poms and gay religions flourished. Ptolemy deified his parents as the Heal of, and his sister-wife, after her death (270), as Philadelphus. This surname was used in later generations to distinguish Ptolemy II. himself, but properly if belongs to Arsinoié only, not to the king. Callimachus, made keeper of the library, Theocritus, and a host of lesser poets, glorified the Ptolemaic family. Ptolemy himself was eager to increase the library and to patronize scientific research. ' He had the strange beasts of faroff lands sent to Alexandria. But, an enthusiast for Hellenic culture, he seems to have shown but little interest in the native religion. The tradition which connects the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek with his name is not historical. Ptolemy had many brilliant mistresses, and his court, magnificent and dissolute, intellectual and artificial, has been justly compared with the Versailles of Louis XIV. PTOLEMY III. Euergetes I. (reigned 246-°22I), son of Ptolemy II. and Arsinoé I. At the beginning of his reign he reunited the Cyrenaica to Egypt by marrying Berenice the daughter and successor of Magas (who had died about 2 50). At the same time he was obliged to open' war on the Seleucid kingdom, where Antiochus II. was dead and his sister Berenice had

been murdered, together with her infant son, by Antiochus's former wife, Laodice, who claimed the kingdom for her son Seleucus II. Ptolemy marched triumphantly into the heart of the Seleucid realm, as far at any rate as Babylonia, and received the formal submission of the provinces of Iran, while his fleets in the Aegean recovered what his father had lost upon the seaboard, and made fresh conquests as far as Thrace. This moment marks the zenith of the Ptolemaic power. After Ptolemy returned home, indeed, Seleucus regained northern Syria and the eastern provinces, but the naval predominance of Egypt in the Aegean remained, although there are traces of its being replaced locally, towards the end of Euergetes' reign, by that of Macedonia—in Amorgos, Naxos, Syros, Nisyros, Cos and parts of Crete (see Beloch, III. [ii.], p. 463). After his final peace with Seleucus, Ptolemy no longer engaged actively in war, although his forces might occasionally mingle in the broils of Asia Minor, and he supported the enemies of Macedonia in Greece. It 'seems probable that his internal policy differed from his father's in patronizing the native religion more liberally; he has left larger traces at any rate among the monuments that are known to-day. PTOLEMY IV. Philopator (reigned 221-204), son of the preceding, was a wretched debauchee under whom the decline of the Ptolemaic kingdom began. His reign was inaugurated by the murder of his mother, and he was always under the dominion of favourites, male and female, who indulged his vices and conducted the government as they pleased. Self-interest led his ministers to make serious preparations to

meet the attacks of Antiochus III. (the Great) on Palestine, and the great Egyptian victory of Raphia (217), at which Ptolemy himself was present, secured the province till the next reign. The arming of Egyptians in this campaign had a disturbing effect upon the native population of Egypt, so that rebellions were continuous for the next thirty years. Philopator was devoted to orgiastic forms of religion and literary dilettantism. He built a temple to Homer and composed a tragedy, to which his vile favourite Agathocles added a commentary. He married (about 215) his sister Arsinoé (III.), but continued to be ruled by his mistress Agathoclea, sister of Agathocles.

PTOLEMY V. Epiphanes reigned (204~181), son of Philopator and Arsinoé, was not more than five years old when he came to the throne, and under a series of regents the kingdom was paralysed. Antiochus III. and Philip V. of Macedonia made a compact to divide the Ptolemaic possessions overseas. Philip seized several islands and places in Caria and Thrace, whilst the battle of Panium (198) definitely transferred Palestine from the Ptolemies to the Seleucids. Antiochus after this concluded peace, giving his own daughter Cleopatra to Epiphanes to wife (193-192). Nevertheless, when war broke out between Antiochus and Rome Egypt ranged itself with the latter power. Epiphanes in manhood was chiefly remarkable as a passionate sportsman; he excelled in athletic exercises and the chase. Great cruelty and perfidy were displayed in the

suppression of the native rebellion, and some accounts represent him as personally tyrannical.

The elder of his two sons, PTOLEMY VI. Philometor (181-145), succeeded as an infant under the regency of his mother Cleopatra. Her death was followed by a rupture between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid courts, on the old question of Palestine. Antiochus IV. Epiphanes invaded Egypt (170) and captured Philometor.

The Alexandrians then put his younger brother PTOLEMY VII. *Euergetes II.* (afterwards nicknamed *Physkon*, on account of his bloated appearance) upon the throne. Antiochus professed to support Philometor, but, when he withdrew, the brothers agreed to be joint-kings with their sister Cleopatra as queen and wife of Philometor. Antiochus again invaded Egypt (168), but was compelled by the Roman intervention to retire. The double kingship led to quarrels between the two brothers in which fresh appeals were continually made to Rome. In 163 the Cyrenaïca was assigned under Roman arbitration to Euergetes as a separate kingdom. As he coveted Cyprus as well, the feud still went on, Rome continuing to interfere diplomatically but not effectively. In 154 Euergetes invaded Cyprus but was defeated and captured by Philometor. He found his brother, however, willing to pardon and was allowed to return as king to Cyrene. In 152 Philometor joined the coalition against the Seleucid king Demetrius I. and was the main agent in his destruction. The protégé of the coalition,

Alexander Balas, married Philometor's daughter Cleopatra (Thea), and reigned in Syria in practical subservience to him. But in 147 Philometor broke with him and transferred his support, together with the person of Cleopatra, to Demetrius II., the young son of Demetrius I. He himself at Antioch was entreated by the people to assume the Seleucid diadem, but he declined and installed Demetrius as king. In 145 in the battle on the Oenoparas near Antioch, in which Alexander Balas was finally defeated, Philometor received a mortal wound. Philometor was perhaps the best of the Ptolemies. Kindly and reasonable, his good nature seems sometimes to have verged on indolence, but he at any rate took personal part, and that bravely and successfully, in war.

Philometor's infant son, Ptolemy Philopator Neos (?)^[1], was proclaimed king in Alexandria under the regency of his mother Cleopatra. Euergetes however, swooping from Cyrene, seized the throne and married Cleopatra, making away with his nephew. He has left an odious picture of himself in the historians—a man untouched by benefits or natural affection, delighting in deeds of blood, his body as loathsome in its blown corpulence as his soul. Something must be allowed for the rhetorical habit of our authorities, but that Euergetes was ready enough to shed blood when policy required seems true. He soon found a more agreeable wife than Cleopatra in her daughter Cleopatra, and thenceforth antagonism between the two queens, the “sister” and the “wife,” was chronic. In 130–1 Cleopatra

succeeded in driving Euergetes for a time to Cyprus, when he revenged himself by murdering the son whom she had borne him (surnamed *Memphites*). Massacres inflicted upon the Alexandrians and the expulsion of the representatives of Hellenic culture are laid to his charge. On the other hand, the monument and papyri show him a liberal patron of the native religion and a considerable administrator. In fact, while hated by the Greeks, he seems to have had the steady support of the native population. But there are also records which show him, not as an enemy, but a friend, like his ancestors, to Greek culture. He himself published the fruit of his studies and travels in a voluminous collection of notebooks, in which he showed a lively eye for the oddities of his fellow kings. The old Ptolemaic realm was never again a unity after the death of Euergetes II. By his will he left the Cyrenaïca as a separate kingdom to his illegitimate son Ptolemy Apion (116–96), whilst Egypt and Cyprus were bequeathed to Cleopatra (Kokke) and whichever of his two sons by her, PTOLEMY VIII. *Soter II* (nicknamed Lathyros) and PTOLEMY IX. Alexander I., she might choose as her associate. The result was, of course, a long period of domestic strife. From 116 to 108 Soter reigned with his mother, and at enmity with her, in Egypt, whilst her favourite son, Alexander, ruled Cyprus. Cleopatra compelled Soter to divorce his sister-wife Cleopatra and marry another sister, Selene. Cleopatra plunged into the broils of the Seleucid house in Syria and perished. In 108 Cleopatra Kokke called Alexander to Egypt, and Soter flying to Cyprus took his brother's place and held the island

against his mother's forces. The attempts which Soter and Cleopatra respectively made in 104–3 to obtain a predominance in Palestine came to nothing. Alexander now shook off his mother's yoke and married Soter's daughter Berenice. Cleopatra Kokke died in 101 and from then till 89 Alexander reigned alone in Egypt. In 89 he was expelled by a popular uprising and perished the following year in a sea-fight with the Alexandrian ships off Cyprus. Soter was recalled (88) and reigned over Egypt and Cyprus, now reunited, in association with his daughter Berenice. This, his second, reign in Egypt (88–80), was marked by a native rebellion which issued in the destruction of Thebes. On his death Berenice assumed the government, but the son of Alexander I., PTOLEMY X. Alexander II., entering Alexandria under Roman patronage, married, and within twenty days assassinated, his elderly cousin and stepmother. He was at once killed by the enraged people and with him the Ptolemaic family in the legitimate male line became extinct. Ptolemy Apion meanwhile, dying in 96, had bequeathed the Cyrenaïca to Rome. The Alexandrian people now chose an illegitimate son of Soter II. to be their king, PTOLEMY XI. *Philopator Philadelphus Neos Dionysus*, nicknamed *Auletes*, the flute-player (80–51), setting his brother as king in Cyprus. The rights of these kings were doubtful, not only because of their illegitimate birth, but because it was claimed in Rome that Alexander II. had bequeathed his kingdom to the Roman people. Two Seleucid princes, children of Soter's sister Selene, appeared in Rome in 73 to urge their claim to the Ptolemaic throne.

Ptolemy Auletes was thus obliged to spend his reign in buying the support of the men in power in Rome. Cyprus was annexed by Rome in 58, its king committing suicide. From 58 to 55 Auletes was in exile, driven out by popular hatred, and worked by bribery and murder in Rome to get himself restored to Roman power. His daughter Berenice meanwhile reigned in Alexandria, a husband being found for her in the Pontic prince Archelaus. In 55 Auletes was restored by the proconsul of Syria, Aulus Gabinius. He killed Berenice and, dying in 51, bequeathed the kingdom to his eldest son, aged ten years, who was to take as wife his sister Cleopatra, aged seventeen. In the reign of PTOLEMY XII. *Philopator* (51–47) and Cleopatra Philopator, Egyptian history coalesces with the general history of the Roman world, owing to the murder of Pompey off Pelusium in 48 and the Alexandrine War of Julius Caesar (48–47). In that war the young king perished and a still younger brother, PTOLEMY XIII. *Philopator*, was associated with Cleopatra till 44, when he died, probably by Cleopatra's contriving. From then till her death in 30, her son, born in 47, and asserted by Cleopatra to be the child of Julius Caesar, was associated officially with her as PTOLEMY XIV. *Philopator Philometor Caesar*; he was known popularly as Caesarion. (For the incidents of Cleopatra's reign see [CLEOPATRA, ARSINOË](#).) After her death in 30 and Caesarion's murder Egypt was made a Roman province. Cleopatra's daughter by Antony (Cleopatra Selene) was married in 25 to Juba II. of Mauretania. Their son Ptolemy, who succeeded his father (A.D. 23–40), left no issue. ^[2]

See Mahaffy, *The Empire of the Ptolemies* (1895) and *Egypt under the Ptolemaic Dynasty* (1899); Strack, *Die Dynastie der Ptolemäer* (1897); Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire des Lagides* (1904, 1907); Meyer, *Das Heerwesen der Ptolemäer und Römer* (Leipzig, 1900). (E. R. B.)

1. ↑ Or, according to another view, Eupator. On the obscure questions raised by these two surnames, see L. Pareti, *Ricerche sui Tolemei Eupatore e Nea Filopatore* (Turin, 1908).
2. ↑ The Ptolemies were not in antiquity distinguished by the ordinal numbers affixed to their names by modern scholars and represented according to the usual convention by Roman figures. This is merely done for our convenience. In the case of the later Ptolemies different systems of notation prevail according as the problematic Eupator and Philopator Neos are reckoned in or not.

About this digital edition

This e-book comes from the online library [Wikisource](#). This multilingual digital library, built by volunteers, is committed to developing a free accessible collection of publications of every kind: novels, poems, magazines, letters...

We distribute our books for free, starting from works not copyrighted or published under a free license. You are free to use our e-books for any purpose (including commercial exploitation), under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Unported](#) license or, at your choice, those of the [GNU FDL](#).

Wikisource is constantly looking for new members. During the transcription and proofreading of this book, it's possible that we made some errors. You can report them at [this page](#).

The following users contributed to this book:

- LlywelynII
- Bob Burkhardt
- Slowking4
- Xover
- DivermanAU
- CalendulaAsteraceae
- Suslindisambiguator

- ShakespeareFan00
- Chrisguise
- Library Guy