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Edward Anson ✦ Michael Fronda ✦ David Hollander
Timothy Howe ✦ Joseph Roisman ✦ John Vanderspoel
Pat Wheatley ✦ Sabine Müller



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Ptolemy III and the Dream of Reuniting Alexander's Empire *

Stanley M. Burstein

One of the clichés of early Hellenistic history is that the first three Ptolemies were immune to the dream of reuniting Alexander's Empire. Almost uniquely among Alexander's immediate successors they are supposed consciously to have refrained from seeking "leadership of the inhabited world ... just like Alexander" in the words of an anonymous Rhodian historian,¹ several columns of whose work are preserved in a recently published Cologne Papyrus. This thesis has attained the status of a cliché largely because of one of the peculiarities of Ptolemaic historiography. While scholarship concerning the social and institutional history of Ptolemaic Egypt has been dynamic and responsive to new evidence and developments in Greek historiography, the same has not been true of the history of Ptolemaic foreign policy. Despite an outpouring of scholarship on the subject, interpretation has changed little since the publication of the first histories of Ptolemaic Egypt in the late nineteenth century. So little, in fact, was the history of Ptolemaic foreign policy affected by developments in scholarship during the twentieth century that Ernst Bevan's *The House of Ptolemy*² was not replaced as the standard political history of Ptolemaic Egypt until 1994,³ sixty-seven years after it was first published! The interpretation of Ptolemaic foreign policy as presented in histories of Ptolemaic Egypt is simple and straightforward.

According to the accepted reconstruction, the first three Ptolemies successfully followed Alexander's example in consolidating their hold on Egypt. Like Alexander, they carefully avoided the alleged mistakes of the Persians by conciliating the Egyptian priesthood while building a government and creating an east Mediterranean empire that by the end of the reign of Ptolemy III in the late 220s BCE included Cyrene, northern Nubia, Cyprus, Coele Syria, large chunks of southern and western Anatolia, the islands of the central and northern Aegean, and part of Thrace.⁴ At the same time, unlike Alexander or most of the other Diadochoi, the early Ptolemies did not seek to gain an empire for its own sake. Instead, according to Polybius,⁵ they built their empire because "with so long an arm and so far advanced a fence of client states they were never in any alarm about the safety of their Egyptian dominions, and for this reason they naturally paid serious attention to foreign affairs."

* I would like to thank Professors Christelle Fischer Bovet of the University of Southern California and Frank Holt of the University of Houston for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this paper, and Professor W. L. Adams of the University of Utah for the invitation that made it possible.

¹ Lehmann 1988, 14: Col. 1, lines 24-27. The reference is to Antigonus the One Eyed.

² Bevan 1927.

³ Hölbl 2001, xii.

⁴ The fullest account of the Ptolemaic empire is Bagnall 1976.

⁵ Polybius 5.34.9. Translated by Robin Waterfield 2010.

In other words, the first three Ptolemies deliberately followed a policy of “defensive imperialism” in which they acquired an empire for the purpose of protecting Egypt by providing resources such as timber and metals that Egypt lacked, and advanced bases that were required to provide a buffer zone for Egypt against attacks by their Seleucid and Macedonian enemies. Édouard Will provided the clearest statement of the implications of this theory,⁶ maintaining that “there is one proposition...imposed by the history of Lagid foreign policy: none of the Ptolemies ever sought to gather together the whole of the Hellenistic World under his authority.”⁷ The purpose of this paper is to suggest that this interpretation requires reconsideration in the light of new evidence.

It is remarkable that the view that the early Ptolemies followed a policy of defensive imperialism has survived so long in scholarship despite obvious contradictions between it and Ptolemaic royal ideology. Without going into detail, three contradictions stand out. First, while Hellenistic kingship rested on the principle that “neither nature nor justice gives kingdoms to men, but to those able to lead an army and manage affairs intelligently such as was Philip and the successors of Alexander,”⁸ the Ptolemies alone supposedly ignored military glory, adopting instead a prudential strategy based on military restraint. Second, although the Ptolemies emphasized their connection on the human level to Alexander,⁹ whose body was their dynasty’s talisman, and on the divine level their descent from Dionysus,¹⁰ whom authors writing in Egypt and the kings themselves portrayed as a god of prosperity and conquest, the Ptolemies’ actual behavior supposedly bore no relation to either. Third and most remarkable, despite the Ptolemies’ supposed policy of military restraint, Ptolemaic royal ideology as reflected in monumental art and court historiography and poetry promoted the image of the king as a heroic warrior and conqueror like Alexander. The clearest example is Theocritus’ panegyric of Ptolemy II where the king is celebrated for taking “slices of Phoenicia and Arabia and Syria and Libya and the dark-skinned Ethiopians; all the Pamphylians and the warriors of Cilicia he commands, and the Lycians and the Carians, who delight in war, and the islands of the Cyclades” and ruling “all the sea and the land and the crashing rivers.”¹¹

Why then has the theory of Ptolemaic defensive imperialism survived so long despite its obvious problems? Two factors largely explain its survival: first, it was already formulated in antiquity by a historian of the stature of Polybius; and second, the paucity of evidence that would have forced scholars to reconsider their interpretation of Ptolemaic behavior in general and in particular of the event that most obviously contradicts the theory that no Ptolemy ever

⁶ Cf. Will 1979, 1, 153-208.

⁷ Will 1979, 1, 155. The applicability of Will’s view of Ptolemaic foreign policy to Ptolemy I has been questioned by Meeus 2014, 263-306.

⁸ *Suda* s.v. *Basileia*.

⁹ Kallixeinos *FGrHist* 627 F 2.33; cf. Rice 1983, 105-106. The literature on Alexander and the Ptolemies is vast; cf. Goukowsky 1978: 1, 131-135; and Huss 2001, 90-93.

¹⁰ Satyros, *FGrHist* 631 F 1. Kallixeinos, *FGrHist* 627 F 2.27-323; cf. Rice 1983, 82-99.

¹¹ Theocritus 17, lines 86-92. Translated by Richard Hunter 2003 with commentary *ad loc.* For the imperialistic overtones of Ptolemaic representations of Alexander see Stewart 1993, 260-262.

“sought to gather together the whole of the Hellenistic World under his authority”: the Asian campaign of Ptolemy III in 246/245 BC, the central event of the Third Syrian War.¹²

Until recently, of course, scholars had little incentive to reconsider the accepted interpretation of Ptolemy III's Asian campaign. Partly, this was because early scholars focused their attention on an essentially unanswerable question: the “character” of Ptolemy III.¹² Equally important, however, the extant sources are both scanty and difficult to interpret. No detailed narrative account of the campaign survives. Until recently, contemporary evidence has been limited to a remarkable but fragmentary papyrus from Gurob which seems to provide Ptolemy III's personal perspective on the opening phases of the war¹³ and a handful of poetic and epigraphic texts—both Greek and Egyptian—which provide valuable insight into Ptolemaic propaganda concerning the results of the campaign but little information about the campaign itself.

The surviving evidence for the ancient historiography of the campaign itself is also poor. Egyptian and Near Eastern sources are limited to *P. Haun* 6, a fragmentary papyrus that originally contained capsule biographies of third century Ptolemies and their families,¹⁴ and a brief passage in the book of *Daniel*.¹⁵ As for the Greek historical tradition, what little evidence there is suggests that the dominant historical tradition concerning the campaign originated with the third century BC Athenian historian Phylarchus¹⁶ and was favorable to the Ptolemies, although it is now represented only by a handful of passages in a variety of Latin and Greek sources including Trogus/Justin,¹⁷ Valerius Maximus,¹⁸ Athenaeus,¹⁹ and Porphyry²⁰ as quoted by Jerome in his commentary on the book of *Daniel*. The existence of an alternative pro-Seleucid tradition, however, is suggested by a stratagem in the collection of the second century CE rhetorician Polyaeus.²¹

One of the unfortunate realities of Hellenistic history is that even the most convincingly argued and widely accepted theory can be overthrown by the discovery of a single new piece of evidence, and that is true in the case of the accepted interpretation of the Third Syrian War. The fundamental problem was the lack of sources that provided details about the actual course of Ptolemy III's Asian campaign itself. That situation has changed, however, with the publication during the last decade of two new sources, one Egyptian and one Babylonian,

¹² Hölbl 2001, 66, for example, recognized the problem but offered no explanation beyond observing that Ptolemy III “strayed for a short time from the considerations of security and the striving for hegemony of his two predecessors.”

¹² For this aspect of the scholarship see the useful comments of Will 1979, 1, 255-256 and 261.

¹³ *P. Petrie* II, 45 and III, 144 = *FGrHist* 160. New edition by Piejko 1990, 13-27.

¹⁴ *P. Haun*. 6, 14-17. In Gallo (1975) 78.

¹⁵ *Daniel* 11:5-9.

¹⁶ Primo 2009, 35-36.

¹⁷ Justin 27.1.1-10.

¹⁸ Valerius Maximus 9.10. ext.1.

¹⁹ Phylarchos *FGrHist* 81 F 24 = Athen. 13.64, p. 593 B-D.

²⁰ Porphyrios *FGrHist* 260 F 43 = Hieron. *Com. i. Dan.* 11.6-9.

²¹ Polyaeus 8.50.

which change fundamentally our understanding of the course and goals of the campaign. First, however, the campaign has to be placed in its historical context.²²

The historical background of Ptolemy III's intervention in Seleucid Asia is a complicated mixture of intrigue, murder, and farce that would be at home in any melodrama. It began six years before Ptolemy III's Asian campaign in 252 BC, when Ptolemy II and his Seleucid rival, Antiochus II, agreed to the peace treaty ending the Second Syrian War. According to its terms, Antiochus II would divorce his current queen, Laodice, disinherit their two sons--the later Seleucus II and Antiochus Hierax--and marry Ptolemy's daughter Berenice and make any son by her his heir in return for a dowry so large that his bride was nicknamed "*Phernophoros*, the dowry bringer."

The inevitable result of such a marriage, however, would have been strong Ptolemaic influence in the Seleucid kingdom. It is not surprising, therefore, that the sources also contain evidence of rumors that Antiochus II had second thoughts and tried to reconcile with Laodice. Whatever the truth of those rumors, Antiochus was living at Ephesus near her residence, when he died in summer 246 BC under mysterious circumstances. Inevitably, it was believed in antiquity that Laodice murdered him and then fraudulently claimed that he had reinstated her sons as his heirs just before his death. Shortly thereafter, Laodice's partisans succeeded in murdering Berenice's young son and possibly Berenice herself. Frustratingly, the Gurob papyrus breaks off without revealing whether or not Berenice's murder had taken already taken place before Ptolemy III arrived in Antioch in response to appeals for help from Berenice's supporters. In fact, the two traditions differ radically concerning the fate of Berenice and her son and Ptolemy's actions subsequent to his arrival at Antioch.

According to Polyaeus, both Berenice and her son had already been killed, but her supporters succeeded in keeping their deaths secret until Ptolemy arrived and occupied the Seleucid capital in late 246 BC. Ptolemy then successfully maintained the deception, keeping the murders secret throughout the campaign while forging letters in Berenice's and her son's name to Seleucid officials, and that it was this fraud that accounted for the success of his campaign. According to the Phylarchan tradition, however, news of the murder of Berenice and her son quickly spread throughout the Seleucid kingdom and provoked widespread outrage and revolts against Laodice and her sons.²³ As a result, Seleucid cities, officials and satraps came over to Ptolemy III, enabling him to advance deep into Seleucid territory before news of the earliest attested native Egyptian revolt against Ptolemaic rule forced him to return to Egypt, although he left behind as governor to administer his "conquests" in Syria and Mesopotamia one of his friends named Xanthippos. With the benefit of hindsight, historians

²² Accounts of the Third Syrian War are numerous. The most recent narrative is Grainger 2010, 153-170. For surveys with full bibliographies and reviews of scholarship see Will 1979, 1, 248-261; and Huss 2001, 338-352. The sources for the campaign are collected and translated in El-Masry, Altenmüller, and Thissen 2012, 151-167.

²³ Polyaeus' (8.50) reference to the murderers of the son of Antiochus II introducing "to the people another rather similar looking child as though he were the king's son" suggests that Polyaeus' source was familiar with the tradition that Berenice openly proclaimed the death of her son in order to rally support to herself.

writing in the Phylarchan tradition even claimed that Ptolemy might even have conquered the Seleucid kingdom if he had not been forced to return to Egypt.²⁴

So radical a divergence in the interpretation of the campaign precludes any attempt to reconcile the two views found in the sources by simply smoothing over their differences. Scholars have had to choose between the two traditions, and ever since the publication of Walter Otto's classic study of the campaign in 1928,²⁵ the majority of scholars have rejected the Phylarchan tradition and based their reconstructions of the campaign on Polyaeus' account, portraying it as essentially an "opportunistic raid" that may have reached Babylon at most. Equally important, in these reconstructions Ptolemy's alleged "conquests" are assumed to have melted away as soon as he returned to Egypt. In support of this conclusion, a cuneiform tablet from July 245 BC from Uruk that is dated by the reign of Laodice's eldest son Seleucus II²⁶ is cited to prove that Seleucid rule in Mesopotamia was restored almost immediately after Ptolemy's return to Egypt. What is ignored in this reconstruction, however, are the Ptolemaic sources, which offer a totally different picture of the results of the campaign, indicating that after his return to Egypt Ptolemy not only claimed that he had conquered much of the Seleucid kingdom, but also that he still ruled those territories.

The earliest evidence of this claim is found in Callimachus' famous *Coma Berenices*. Written by sometime in the fall of 245 BC, the poem celebrated Ptolemy's victorious return to Egypt by supposedly recognizing in a new constellation the lock of hair Berenice II had dedicated on the departure of her husband for Syria the year before. While the relevant passages are unfortunately lost in the fragmentary Greek papyrus text of the poem,²⁷ they are preserved in Catullus' Latin translation according to which Ptolemy III "strengthened by his new marriage / set out to lay waste to the territory of the Assyrians (*nouo auctus hymenaeo / uastatum finis iuerat Assyrios*," and "In little time he'd added captive Asia to Egypt's lands (*Is haut in tempore / captam Asiam Aegypti finibus addiderat*)."²⁸ According to Callimachus, therefore, Ptolemy's goal was not to protect his sister, but to conquer Seleucid territory and he succeeded in doing so.

By themselves, these passages would not be conclusive evidence for the nature of Ptolemy III's goals and claims concerning his Asian campaign, but they are supported by two other contemporary and explicitly royal texts—one Greek and one Egyptian—that also portray Ptolemy as intending to conquer the Seleucid kingdom. The first is the so-called Adulis Inscription, a royal decree issued sometime between late 245 BC and 243 BC, that is now known only from a version copied by the sixth century CE traveler and merchant Cosmas Indicopleustes at the Red Sea port of Adulis in contemporary Eretrea. According to the decree,

²⁴ Cf. Justin 27.1.9: "if he was not recalled to Egypt by a domestic insurrection, he would have occupied the whole kingdom of Seleucus." That a similar judgment was offered in *P. Haun.* 6 is suggested by the clause "if at that time there was not a revolt in Egypt" in *P. Haun.* 6, 15-16 (Gallo). For the revolt see Huss 1978, 151-156; Hauben 1990, 29-37; and Veise 2004, 3-5. *P. Haun.* 6, 17 contains a reference to "garrisons," apparently left in Syria or Mesopotamia before he returned to Egypt. For Xanthippos see *Prosopographia Ptolemaica* Nr. 15060.

²⁵ Hauben 1990, 55-56.

²⁶ Pointed out by Otto 1928, 66.

²⁷ Callimachus F 110 (Harder). The surviving Greek text is from a version of the poem that was revised to form the conclusion of Callimachus' masterwork, the *Aetia* (cf. Harder 2012, 2, 799). For the historical context see Huss 2001, 353-354.

²⁸ Catullus 66, lines 11-12 and 35-36.

“the great king, Ptolemaios...marched out into Asia...and crossed the Euphrates River; and having made Mesopotamia and Babylonia and Sousiana and Persis and Media and all the rest as far as Baktriana his subjects, and after having sought out all the sacred objects which had been taken from Egypt by the Persians and returned (them) together with the other treasures from these places to Egypt, he sent his forces through the canals....”²⁹

The second piece of evidence is a hieroglyphic inscription seen and partially copied by Jean François Champollion in the temple of Khnum, Nebtu and Heqa at Esna that was built by Ptolemy III, but unfortunately destroyed soon after his visit by vandals ca. 1843. According to Champollion’s copy, the inscription included a series of crenelated ovals containing the names of regions in Europe and Asia including: Macedon, Thrace, Persia, Elam, and Susiana. Champollion, unfortunately, did not indicate the nature of the composition to which the ovals belonged.³⁰ The French Egyptologist Serge Sauneron,³¹ however, recognized that the lost inscription was copied in the second century AD on the north wall of the surviving portions of the temple of Khnum and Khonsu also at Esna.

The copy of the inscription is also fragmentary, but its remains are sufficient to reveal that each oval was surmounted by the image of a bound prisoner as was typical of royal “smiting” scenes. In other words the inscription seen by Champollion most likely depicted Ptolemy III as the conqueror of virtually the whole of Alexander’s empire from Macedon to deep into Persia. Moreover, such expansive claims were not limited to the court, but they seem to have been familiar in Egypt in general during Ptolemy III’s reign, since a petition from an individual named Aigyptos, possibly an application for a government job, that is preserved in the mid-third century BC Zenon archive addresses Ptolemy III as “the great king...you who rule the whole inhabited world (*oecumene*).”³²

As already mentioned, the accepted reconstruction of Ptolemy’s campaign is, however, based on Polyaeus 8.50 and more limited in its interpretation of his goals and achievements:

Ptolemy, the father [*sic*] of the assassinated Berenice, came [*sc. to Antioch*] and dispatched letters in the name of the murdered child and Berenice as though they were still alive. Relying on the stratagem of Panariste he conquered without war or military action the territory from the Taurus mountains as far as India.

As is clear from modern accounts of the Third Syrian War, scholars have accepted without question Polyaeus’ claim that Ptolemy managed to continue the concealment of the deaths of his sister and nephew for months, all the while forging letters in their name to Seleucid officials; and after deceiving the Seleucid satraps in this way and gaining control “of the territory from the Taurus Mountains to India without war or military action,” he collected an enormous booty and returned safely to Egypt from what John D. Grainger, the author of the most recent comprehensive study of the war, calls his “eastern stroll.”³³

²⁹ OGIS 54. Translated by Burstein 1985, 125-126.

³⁰ Champollion 1833, 204-205; 1973, 1,185. Sethe 1904, 2, 158. Cf. Abdel-Rahman Ali 2009, 2-5.

³¹ Sauneron 1952, 31-34.

³² PSI 5, 541.

³³ Grainger 2010, 163.

Central to this interpretation is Polyaeus' assertion that Ptolemy III gained control of this vast region "without war or military action." Still, if we ask why this reconstruction of events has proved so attractive despite its obvious implausibility—one need only think of the difficulty in maintaining the deception for at least the six months needed for Ptolemy's campaign—the answer is clear. The alternative—that Ptolemy actually aimed to annex the whole or, at least, a substantial part of the Seleucid kingdom and for a time succeeded in doing so—calls into question the scholarly consensus that Ptolemaic imperial policy was exclusively defensive in character. It is this consensus that the two new sources calls into question.

The first is a bilingual copy—hieroglyphic and demotic—of a decree issued in honor of Ptolemy III by a synod of Egyptian priests in Alexandria in December 243 BC that was discovered in Akhmim in the winter of 1999 / 2000 outside the ruins of a Ptolemaic period temple. Although space was left for it, the Greek version was not inscribed. The text of the Greek version, however, has been reconstructed on the basis of the new inscription from Akhmim from almost a hundred fragments of a copy that were discovered at Elephantine and are now preserved in Paris.³⁴

The section of the Alexandria decree dealing with Ptolemy III's Asian campaign occupies only a small portion of the text, whose primary purpose was to explain Ptolemy's success in retrieving Egyptian sacred images that had supposedly been looted by the Persians.³⁵

His Majesty went out of Egypt in his first year.... His Majesty subdued [...] which were in the possession of his enemies; he collected tributes (consisting of) perfect, wonderful, and numerous precious objects. His Majesty captured all their people, many horses, numerous elephants and the *kbnwt*-ships of the enemies, because his majesty was victorious in battle, he brought them all to Egypt as captives. His Majesty made [many benefits? for those] who are in Egypt. His Majesty himself took care for the statues of the gods, which had been taken away from their places in Egypt to (Syria, Phoenicia, Cilicia, Persia and Susa) at the time when the vile Asiatics of Persia did harm to the temples. He went around through all the foreign countries seeking them....

Despite the brevity of the new inscription's account of the Ptolemy III's Asian campaign, it is significant for three reasons. First, it confirms the Adulis inscription's claim that the campaign extended at least as far as Susa in western Iran, where Ptolemy recovered statues of Egyptian gods,³⁶ which he brought back to Egypt instead of stopping at Babylon and being limited to Mesopotamia as most scholars believe; second, its reference to Ptolemy's being "victorious in battle" and bringing "captives" back to Egypt contradicts Polyaeus' claim that his advance into the Seleucid interior occurred "without war or military action"; and third, it reveals that as late as the end of 243 BC the campaign was still considered a great success in Egypt.

³⁴ El-Masry, Altenmüller, and Thissen 2012 includes a critical edition with translation and commentary of the Hieroglyphic and Demotic texts and a reconstruction of the Greek text by F. Kayser.

³⁵ El-Masry, Altenmüller, and Thissen 2012, 23. The section concerning Ptolemy III's Asian campaign was published separately with commentary by Altenmüller 2010, 27-44.

³⁶ Cf. Winnicki 1994, 175-177.

The second new text is a fragmentary cuneiform tablet in the British Museum (BM 34428) that contains portions of a chronicle dealing with events in Babylonia between November, 246 BC and February, 245 BC.³⁶ While the Alexandria decree confirms the general outline of the campaign as found in the Adulis inscription, the new chronicle text, despite its severely fragmentary state, vividly illuminates conditions in Babylonia during Ptolemy's campaign. Specifically, the chronicle mentions the arrival of major reinforcements of Ptolemy's forces from Egypt and the siege of a city named Seleucia, possibly, Seleucia on the Tigris, the principal Seleucid administrative center in Mesopotamia. As is usual in Babylonian chronicle texts, however, the focus is on Babylon. The chronicle makes clear that Ptolemy did not occupy Babylon peacefully, but that the city was, in fact, besieged by Ptolemaic forces for most of January and February, 245 BC.

Equally important, despite its fragmentary state, the text leaves no doubt concerning the hostile attitude of the priestly chronicler toward Ptolemy's campaign. Specifically, the chronicle does not portray the Egyptian forces as being "welcomed," as Polyaeus' account suggests. Instead, the chronicler characterizes the Egyptian army as "Hanaean troops, who did not fear the gods," using an archaic ethnic term that was employed in the first millennium BC to describe foreign invaders.³⁷ Further, he describes the commander of the Egyptian forces as committing sacrilege by eating bread in Esagila, Marduk's chief temple in Babylon. Finally, the chronicle leaves no doubt that during the siege Babylon suffered all the horrors of urban warfare, noting the Ptolemaic force's success in breaking into the city, the confinement of the Seleucid garrison in the citadel, people being slaughtered in the streets, and the total destruction of a Seleucid relieving force. Although the account of the rest of the campaign is lost, it is clear that the chronicler was not describing an opportunistic raid carried out "without war or military action" as Polyaeus maintained, but a full-blown, hard fought campaign of conquest that was marked by sieges of the major cities of Mesopotamia and serious fighting against Seleucid forces that apparently doggedly resisted the Ptolemaic advance every step of the way.

The implications of the new Egyptian and Babylonian sources are twofold. First, the new contemporary evidence does not support Polyaeus' account of a peaceful incursion into the interior of the Seleucid kingdom, but is, in fact, contradicted by it. It cannot be considered, therefore, a secure basis for reconstructing the course of Ptolemy's campaign. Second, the description of conditions in Mesopotamia in the chronicle strongly suggests that the most likely explanation of the dating of the cuneiform text from Uruk by the reign of Seleucus II is not that Seleucus II had regained control of Ptolemy's conquests by July, 245 BC, but that Seleucid loyalists were still holding out in Uruk at that time.

In the absence of additional evidence, it is impossible to go further, although it is tempting to suggest that with Berenice and her son dead, Ptolemy was, in fact, recognized as king in the Seleucid territories he conquered. Be that as it may, what is clear is that Ptolemy III did entertain the dream of reuniting Alexander's empire, and for a short period he not only

³⁶ The preliminary edition of the text was published online by Bert van Spek, "Ptolemy III Chronicle (BCHP 11)" at: www.livius.org/cg-cm/chronicles/bchp-ptolemy_iii/bchp. Text and translation in El-Masry, Altemüller, and Thissen 2012, 155-159. For an analysis of the chronicle's contribution to understanding the geography of Ptolemy's march through Mesopotamia see Clancier 2012, 9-31.

³⁷ For the meaning of Hanaean in first millennium BC cuneiform chronicle texts see Glassner 2004, 39.

claimed to have conquered much of Alexander's empire, but he actually did do so. Ultimately, of course, Ptolemy's gains in Syria and Mesopotamia proved to be ephemeral, and virtually all of them had been lost by 241 BC when peace was made with the new Seleucid king, Seleucus II.³⁸

Not surprisingly, the story of Ptolemy III's Asian campaign was subsequently reinterpreted in Egypt to minimize the extent of the king's ultimate failure. So, in contrast to the Alexandria decree of 243 BC with its triumphal account of Ptolemy's march to Susa, where he recovered divine statues looted by the Persians, the Canopus Decree of 238 BC treats the repatriation of the statues as the highlight of the campaign while limiting reference to its military aspects to a vague allusion to Ptolemy "fighting on behalf of Egypt against many peoples and their rulers."³⁹ Nevertheless, the fact remains that when Ptolemy III saw an opportunity to reunite much of Alexander's empire, he took advantage of it; and that suggests that the seemingly more prudent foreign policies followed by Ptolemy III's successors did not result from their adherence to an abstract doctrine of defensive imperialism as Polybius and his modern followers maintain, but from the practical reality that such policies were the wisest, and often, the only course available to them in the difficult political circumstances they faced.

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³⁸ Seleucus II is supposed to have founded the city of Kallinikon in northern Mesopotamia in 244 BC to celebrate his recovery of territory conquered by Ptolemy III (cf. Cohen 2013, 77-79).

³⁹ *OGIS* 56, lines 10-12.

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