

The transmission of pre-Islamic Egyptian-Hellenic
history in Pre-Modern Arabic Historiography:
The Ptolemies

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1. Introduction

Baghdad's tradition in translating ancient Greek texts was unique indeed. This rich Mesopotamian city became a fertile ground in order the "translation movement", as D. Gutas¹ named it, to bloom. The members of the early Muslim-era intellectual communities of the Abbasid capital translated from about the middle of the 8th century to the end of the 10th, almost all non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and the broader Syrian region into Arabic. Because of great zeal in translating different types of texts from various scientific fields, some texts of famous philosophers like Aristotle have been saved in Arabic although the Greek text has been lost. According to D. Gutas, the first steps of this movement was made by Syriac speakers who were fluent in Greek because their Christian tradition but they have been educated in Arabic because of the area they were living. This process lasted for centuries, being described as a continuous interaction that engaged more complex socio-economic relations.

Through the centuries, more and more intellectual and commerce centers started developing around the Mediterranean Sea, following the rapid military conquest and the political scenery that was changing in fast rhythms. From the distant lands of the Islamic Caliphates in Persia to the Iberian Peninsula, Muslim intellectuals are participating in a race of knowledge safeguarding and transmission. The interest of the Muslim scholars on the classical Greek civilization and the conquests of Alexander is reflected on the extensive chapters that were dedicated to him. A new type of texts is slowly being shaped within the Islamic world and becomes popular between the scholars of the period. This type creates a new genre in traditional Muslim historiography. The aims of these texts are to narrate the accomplishments of the kings of the past or in other words, to respond to the question "who were those that ruled world during Pre-Islamic era?". Historians like Ibn Khurdhābih (d. 912 CE) and his historiographical work 'Kitāb al-Masālik wa-al-Mamālik' (The book of Kings and Highways) attempts to create a collective work, combining geography, names of the kings and the knowledge that accompanies the kingdoms of antiquity.² The same exact title can be found in works of Iṣṭakhrī (d. 934 CE)³, Abu

¹ Gutas 1998, p.4.

² Zadeh, Travis. 'Ibn Khurdādhbih'. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE. (Accessed June 4, 2020) .

³ Abū iṣḥāk: ibrahīm b. muḥammad al-fārisī al-karkhī a Muslim scholar that, according to Encyclopedia of Islam, he became known for representing the new methods that Muslim scholars developed, and his works are of significant importance concerning the geography in the 10th century CE or 4th AH. His biography is almost unknown.

‘Ubayd al-Bakrī (d. 1094 CE)⁴ and some centuries later, with a slightly different title, “Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār” (“Sight paths in the kingdoms of the lands”) by Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-‘Umarī (d. 1349 CE)⁵.

Beside of these works that were utterly dedicated to the rulers of the ancient civilizations, list of kings and emperors can be found in more broader works, in an encyclopedic form like one of the earliest “Mafātīḥ al-‘Ulūm” (Key of the Sciences) by al-Khwārizmī (d. 850 CE) that aims to provide to the reader a summary of knowledge on various sciences⁶ or in works that were written to narrate the history of a region like “Ta’rīkh Ḥalab” (History of Aleppo), by the Aleppan scholar, Ibn al-‘Adīm (d. 1262 CE) that focuses mainly on the history of his city and the broader area of Syria⁷. Attending to write about the kings of the past can be a challenging task, especially when those kings reigned over remote lands, carrying names and title in different languages that can be even unknown to the authors. The Greek kings that succeeded Alexander’s reign, known in history as *Diadochi* (Successors) and the dynasties they established, deserve to be part of these works. One of these successors, a person very close to Alexander himself, was Ptolemy I son of *Lagos*⁸ the Savior (*Soter* in Greek). Ptolemy I established a dynasty that

Source: Miquel, A. ‘Al-Iṣṭakhrī’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 13, 2020.)

⁴Abū ‘Ubayd ‘Abdallāh al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094) was an Andalusian Muslim scholar of the 5th/11th century, famous for his literary and geographical works. He was a descendant of a wealthy family who ruled over the principality of Huelva and Saltés during a period of instability that has been caused by the fall of the Umayyad rulers in Spain, in 422 AH/1031 CE. Although he was a geographer, Abū ‘Ubayd ‘Abdallāh al-Bakrī has not being famous for his journeys.

Source: Lévi-Provençal, E. ‘Abū ‘Ubayd Al-Bakrī’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 13, 2020)

⁵Shihāb al-Dīn Abu ‘l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Yahyā Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-Ḳurashī al-‘Adawī al-‘Umarī was born in Damascus in 1301 CE, being a member of family known for their distinguishing civil services in the Mamlūk state. His encyclopedic work “Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār” includes numerous subjects like literature, history, geography, religion and law, politics and administration, and is written to serve the same purpose as al-Ta’rīf. The two works continued to be considered as authoritative on the subject of administration during the Mamlūk period, and were imitated, being referred properly, by al-Ḳalkashandī [q.v.] in his well-known *Ṣubḥ al-aṣḥā fī kitābat al-inṣhā*.

Source: Salibi, K.S. ‘Ibn Faḍl Allāh Al-‘Umarī’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 13, 2020.)

⁶Al-Ḳhwārazmī is a key-scholar because of his experience in the Bayt al-ḥikma during his young ages, an important agency of the first arabic translations, created by the caliphate of al-Ma’mun. However, his biography is not fully known.

Sabra, A.I. ‘Al-Ḳhwārazmī’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Accessed June 7, 2020.

⁷Ibn Al-‘Adīm was an Aleppan historian and public servants, holding different positions of political importance in the city of Aleppo. His historiographical work is very critical because of the numerous scholars that referred to him in their works. For more details see chapter 3.

Source: Eddé, Anne-Marie. ‘Ibn Al-‘Adīm’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE. Accessed June 4, 2020.

⁸The word *Lagus* (Λαγός m.G./Λαγῶς a.G.) or *Lagu* (Λαγού/Λάγου)-genitive case of the first- means hare in modern and ancient Greek. There are many cases that are presented in the next chapters where the translators Syriac, Hebrew and Arabic translated it literally as “son of the hare” while others just transcribed it. Source:

would last for nearly three centuries, being the most long-lived kingdom from the rest of the successors. Ptolemaic Dynasty ruled over Egypt from the death of Alexander in 333 BCE and up to the death of its last member, Cleopatra, in 30 BCE when the Roman empire was marching to its glory. The importance of the Ptolemaic rule over Egypt is notable from many perspectives. Although the opinions between the contemporary scholars varying, others considering it as occupation and exploitation of the locals⁹ and for others a peaceful co-existence¹⁰, none can disagree that the cultural interplay, and its products, were not present in this relation.

The sources that we can consider accurate today are mainly papyri, ostraca and wall sculptures of the Ptolemaic period, and as the *Cambridge Ancient History* argues, that not all the regions of the Ptolemaic Egypt provided us with enough papyri, making the documentation about the Ptolemies deficient in some subjects.¹¹ However there is a plethora of archaeological findings that present us the first most well-documented state in history.¹² The historian J.G. Manning explains that this rich documentation among the archaeological findings sometimes creates other issues like the difficulty to assess their value or to clarify their origin between them and the findings of the older kingdoms.¹³ A positive practice that Manning brings to light is the re-used of the same papyri by the Ptolemies. It is not clear why the recycling of the papyrus started, but the archaeologist suggests that it could be a way of making profits the local records offices by selling the papyri, a state monopoly product, to priests, mummifiers and other factors who were engaged to the financial activities of the Ptolemaic society. This recycle is considered as critical for the preservation of many documents.

Numerous Muslim scholars from different regions of the Islamic Caliphates indeed included in their works references to the Ptolemaic dynasty. Although they are problematic, as this thesis will argue, they outnumber the byzantine or other contemporary Greek sources. The references can be categorized in three groups, concerning the way of

Liddell, Scott, Jones, Barber, Mckenzie, Maas, Scott, Robert, Jones, Henry Stuart, Barber, Eric Arthur, Mckenzie, Roderick, and Maas, Paul. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Repr. of the 9th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978. p.1023

⁹ Ellis, Walter M. 1994. Chapter 4 "Ptolemy as Satrap", p.27-33

¹⁰ Manning, J.G. 2010. Chapter 4 "Shaping a new state", p. 73-116.

¹¹ Walbank, Frank William, 1984. Chapter 5, p. 118-119

¹² Manning, J.G., 2012. p. 6

¹³ Ibidem p.8.

the lemma was inserted in a work and the information that contains. This is probably connected with the information accessibility of the Muslims scholars. The first category is the Lists, the second are form of Anecdotes- *Akhhbār*¹⁴ that sometimes include a list too, and the last, very short reference in a couple of lines. An absence from a work can have important meaning for this research, especially if the work's target to mention the kings is not accomplished.

The Ptolemaic dynasty consisted of multiple members with all the male members to be called "Ptolemaeus" and the number of his ruling order and a title that characterized them (e.g. "Soter" – Saviour, "Philadelphus" – Who loved his siblings etc.) The female names are limited too, Selene, Berenike, Arsinoe and the most common Cleopatra. The opinions about the family tree are collide to each other, that's why a conventional genealogical tree will be used for this thesis, according to the *Cambridge Ancient History* (Image 1 p. 39) that is one of the most analytical. The data in the Muslim scholar texts often disagree with this genealogical lineage but this is an issue that will be investigated in the following chapters. Some of the data in the Arabic texts could be used as the lost pieces of this "historiographical puzzle" or simply as a false transmission. A very common characteristic in the Arab texts, as will be seen in the later analysis, is the reference exclusively to the male members of the family. The only exception is the reference of the last female member, Cleopatra.

The problematic part of those citations starts with the name itself. The possible ways that someone can find the name "Ptolemaeus" written are four: *Baṭlamus* or *Baṭlimus* (بطلموس), *Baṭlamūs* or *Baṭlimūs* (بطلميوس) or *Baṭlīmūs* (بطليموس). Concerning the name of the dynasty and period, the authors seems to agree on the term *Baṭālisa* (بطالسة), which is translated as "Ptolemaic". The titles of every king are an even more complicate problem. Some scholars present the title only translated into Arabic, others keep the Greek words transcribed in Arabic letters and some others keep the both Greek and its Arabic translation. An interesting fact is that we can understand if they had any knowledge of Greek because in some cases the Arabic translation that follows the Greek transcription is

¹⁴ "Khabar" is the typical way of chaptering in the Pre-Modern arabic works. Usually after the word "Khabar" or "Akhhbār"-plural form- the author gives the title of the chapter. It is translated as "report" or "piece of information".

Source: Wensinck, A.J. 'Khabar'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. (Accessed June 2, 2020).

wrong.¹⁵ A last detail that has to be mentioned is the name of the last member of the Dynasty, queen Cleopatra, that can be found written with the letter kaf or qaf, and random vowels, for example, Qliubātra, Kliubātra, Qliübātra, Qliūbatra and many other variations that have been well explained by D. El-Okasha. These variations occurred from three main factors, the Greek alchemy texts, the Arabic transmitters and the modern editors.¹⁶

This difficulty of memorizing the name by the Muslim speaking world was the tinder of a historiographical confusion. The name *Ptolemaeus*, as the Latins used to write it, was shared with another great personality, the Claudius Ptolemaeus. A Greek polymath-astronomer who lived also in Egypt but in 100 CE, in Roman, at that time, Alexandria. Claudius Ptolemy in many cases is presented as member of the Ptolemaic dynasty, and there is a motif in the way he is presented by setting him in the place of Ptolemy III or Ptolemy IV. According to an assumption, this could be a possible false transmission between Latin translators and the Arabic scholars¹⁷ but this is an issue that started years before the translations in Spain. The roots of this false transmission lie in the older Syriac translations as the third chapter argues. A simple disarray because of the similar names could be a logical explanation too, especially for historians that their goal was to narrate a story that they heard or read from someone who continued the same story before him. The fact that Claudius Ptolemaeus wrote himself a famous astronomical chart that is combined with the reigns of Greek and Persian kings of the Hellenistic era, known as the “*Royal Canon*”¹⁸ made the problem even bigger. This minor mistake of including Claudius Ptolemaeus in the Ptolemaic family will turn into a totally new narrative, in which Claudius Ptolemy was detached from the Ptolemies and continued carrying the title “King”.¹⁹

¹⁵ An example is in al-Maqrīzī’s (d. 1442CE) work “Al-Mawā‘iz wa-al-I’tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār”, while he names a Ptolemy “Epephanes” (بطليموس أسفاميش) in a more abstract Arabic transcription, he translated it to “Muḥib al-Umm” (محب الأم) that actually means “Philometor”.

Primary text: Al-Maqrīzī, “al-Khiṭaṭ”, 1998. p.434

¹⁶ Daly, Okasha El., 2005. p. 131-132

¹⁷ Burnett, Charles. *Annals of science* 55.4, 1998. p. 340-343.

¹⁸ Ptolemy, Latin in full Claudius Ptolemaeus, born in 100 CE, 130 years after the death of queen Cleopatra (30 BCE) and died in 170 CE, was an Egyptian astronomer, mathematician, and geographer of Greek descent who spent his life in Alexandria during the 2nd century CE. His work is the tinder for an exploration of the Mesopotamian chronology, and it is known as *Ptolemy’s Canon*. This kings-list covers a period of about 1,000 years, beginning with the kings of Babylon after the accession of Nabonassar in 747 BC and ends with the Roman Augustus Caesar.

Source: Jones, A. ‘Ptolemy’ (astronomer, mathematician). In *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, 2012. (Accessed 13 June, 2020.)

¹⁹ Burnett, Charles. *Annals of science* 55.4 (1998): 341-342.

Hypothesis

A name that is never absent from any important historiographical work of the great Muslim caliphates is Alexander the great. Important historians like al-Ya‘qūbī, al-Ṭabarī and Al-Mas‘ūdī dedicated extended texts in their works, dedicated to him, narrating his accomplishments, starting even from his father Philipos. The same extended references exist about the Persian kings Darius, Xerxes and the later Sassanid kings²⁰. On the other hand, the references about what happened after the death of Alexander in 333 B.C.E. are notably shorter and the information about the kingdoms of the Successors of Alexander (“*Diadochi*”) are often conflicting in the Arabic pre-modern historiographical works. The question that is raised is, do Arabic historiographers consider the Ptolemaic dynasty as part of the pre-Islamic tradition of the region that their conquest to the whole Mediterranean Sea was based on? ²¹ And if yes, were they able to separate them from the Pharaonic past of Egypt?²² And last but not least, what did they want to keep in their memory-transmission works in order the future generations to know?

In order to investigate the Arabic sources correctly, the research has to start from the earlier and contemporary to the Muslim scholars, Byzantine Greek sources. Someone would think that the Greek speaking scholars had easier access to the ancient Greek sources because of their good knowledge of ancient Greek language that was widely used in works of their era, but the reality was different. Their Christian beliefs influenced their works heavily and led them in basing their works on Syriac and Hebrew sources-not necessary translated from other languages, but original too- because of the language connection with the Abrahamic religions, and the language of the bible. The Muslim Scholars on the other hand, had on their disposal mostly translations of Greek works, many of them being retranslated from Greek to Syriac and from Syriac to Arabic. Having said that, we cannot judge harshly the Muslim scholars for probable false transmissions, while

²⁰ The Persian kings had even whole works dedicated to them, for example the “*Kitāb jamharat ansāb al-Furs wa-l-nawāqil*” of Ibn Khurdādhbih (d. 913 CE), which is an analytical genealogy of Persian dynasties.

Source: Zadeh, Travis. ‘Ibn Khurdādhbih’. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE. (Accessed June 4, 2020).

²¹ The city of al-Fustāt, was the first Muslim city to be founded in Egypt by the Arab conquerors. Today its is known as old Cairo, and it was the starting point of many Muslim conquests around the Mediterranean coast. The city lies on the East bank of the Nile and started as an encampment while the Arab assaults to conquer Alexandria were in process. It gradually turned into a town and today is a quarter of Cairo city.

Source: Jomier, J. ‘Al-Fustāt’. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. (Accessed June 15, 2020).

²² The Ptolemaic dynasty expressed their interest in adapting the Egyptian local way of life depicting themselves in Pharaonic ways, merging Greek and Egyptian deities and even proceed to pharaonic practices like marriages between siblings in order to keep the purity, something that was highly criticized by the rest of the Hellenistic world.

Source: Walbank, Frank William. *The Cambridge Ancient History. Vol. 7*, 1984. p. 136-137

their predecessors Greek speaking historians started the circle of this false reproduction. In many cases the Muslim scholars prove themselves less influenced from their beliefs and simply present the events that they read from somewhere, as chapters 2 and 3 argue.

In a second level of analysis, the Arabs as the new commanders of Egypt would definitely have noticed some epic architectural structures that were made by the Ptolemies. Ibn Hawqal, a Muslim geographer and traveler of the Mesopotamian region, have noticed that there are Alexandrian buildings carrying Greek epigraphs²³ and other later scholars wrote the existence of the mythical lighthouse and library, connected to Ptolemy II as we will see in the following chapters. What is missing from the works of the Egyptian historians is the connection between the well-preserved temples of Edfu, Denderah, Kom Ombo, Philae and the Ptolemaic dynasty to who they owe their re-built or the whole construction from the beginning. Even though they are well camouflaged in the general pharaonic landscape, did they find the difference?

Structure

Concerning the structure of the thesis, the chapters definition has been organized, based on the 4 different periods. (Chapter 2) As first period includes mainly early and later-Byzantine Greek sources that have been written until the end of the 6th century. The historians that referred to the Ptolemies are not many and the works of some of them are partially saved. (Chapter 3) The second period starts with the Arabic translation movement that took place in the Abbasid capital Baghdad and ends just before al-Mas'ūdī's works, in 900CE. Texts of the early Arabic literature from historians like al-Khwārizmī (d. 850 CE), Al-Ya'qūbī (d. 897 CE) and al-Ṭabarī (923 CE) are further investigated in this chapter. (Chapter 4) The first decades of 900 C.E. the work of the famous historian al-Mas'ūdī has to be considered as a springboard of a new way of listing the Ptolemaic Dynasty, with small new details that shows a probable better access to an older source, although not all the information he provided were correct. The influence of his work is notably influencing his precedents. Two hundred years after al-Mas'ūdī the Muslim scholars had a different story to tell, and this is the fourth period. (Chapter 5) Fifth and last one, the scholars of the Mamluk era showed great interest in the past of their country, making long references and citing their sources, especially historian al-Maqrīzī. The interest of this chapter towards the end focuses on the Egyptian scholar's interest in describing ancient Egyptian sights in their accounts.

²³ Iṣṭakhrī, Ibrahim, and Muhammad Ibn Hawqal, London: Printed, at the Oriental Press ,1800. p. 33-34 (English translation)

Methodology

The main research will be based on the primary sources of different Muslim Scholars from various time periods and regions. From a big number of scholars, some of them will be highlighted more than the others. The criteria for this categorization were made depending on the new elements that a scholar adds to the Ptolemaic narrative through his work. Taking into consideration the fluid term of a scholar at the pre-Modern Arab world, with the term “polymath” being more suitable to many of them, references to scholars that are not absolutely historians will be made in order to shape a more spherical scope on the topic.

Secondary literature will be used on the one hand to shed light to the Ptolemaic period itself and on the other hand in order to help framing the background of the authors, Greek speakers or Arabic, that have been chosen in this thesis. Their lives, their interests and the period they lived triggers many times a whole philological discussion that lasts even until our times, for example about Ioannes Malalas trustworthiness in chapter 2.

Brief Literature Review

The books that were used for the completion of this thesis are mainly found from the University of Leiden Library Catalogue, from online sites that provide free-of-charge editions of classical Arabic literature and other online academic encyclopedias that Leiden University gives us access to. Concerning the primary sources, Greek and Arabic, I tried to find editions that had been trusted by other, recognized by the academic community, publications. Most of these editions are old, being published by publishers in Cairo, Beirut and some of them in Leiden University. Most of them are available online but not very modern editions. The secondary literature consists of contemporary works on the topics needed, like articles, lemmas from Encyclopedias (e.g. Encyclopedia of Islam 2&3 for Islamic issues, Wiley’s Library’s Encyclopedia of Ancient history and Cambridge Encyclopedia of Ancient History etc.).

2. The Ptolemies In Byzantine Greek Sources

Byzantine Greek historians according to the modern Greek philologists, with the most famous amongst them Helene G. Arweiler, can be categorized in four groups, the Early Byzantine period historians, Mid-Byzantine, Late Byzantine and the historians of the Fall of Constantinople depending on major events that occurred periodically, like significant changes in the borders of the empire.²⁴ Before we proceed to the various narratives presented by the Greek speakers of the period, we have first to understand the Byzantine historians and their period. From the 9th century and up to 13th, the influence of Christianity in the Byzantine scholar works was so strong that secular writers were not preferred by the elite, intellectual or economical, in the empire²⁵ and this is the reason of creating a byzantine genre in their writings.

This religious influence did not leave historiographical works of the era uninfluenced. Depending on the subcategories that the scholars were belonging, the works could be rated with higher or lower percentage of secularity. The authors were classified in two broad categories, the historians and the chroniclers.²⁶ The difference that lies between those two is that the first scholars adopted an analytical and strict approach in their works while the second aimed to create narratives, connecting different events, giving only an outline form. In order to merge these events and make the narration entertaining they add facts that derive from religion and tradition, familiar to their readers. Many of the chroniclers have been accused of copying verbatim their predecessors²⁷, and this is a practice that we have to keep in mind even for the later Arabic works in the next chapters. Chronicles usually start the narration of their histories from the Genesis, and for many centuries, this type of narratives would remain a text genre which would pass to the Islamic world the following centuries. It would be wise to start the investigation by a late-Roman period work because is the last work similar to the ancient of Polybius and Diodorus in structure, and will set a base to understand how the Ptolemaic History turned slowly to a narrative.

The Byzantine scholars received the baton of this historiographical “relay race” from a different genre that the classical antiquity historians were used to. The narratives of the

²⁴ Glykatzi-Ahrweiler, Helen. "Γιατί το Βυζάντιο [EN: Why Byzantium]." Athens: Ellinika Grammata (2009), p. 26-55

²⁵ Jenkins, Romilly. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17, 1963. p. 40

²⁶ Jeffreys, Elizabeth M., 1979. p. 199

²⁷ *Ibidem* p. 201

Ptolemaic dynasty started circulating most probably from Polybius (200-118 BCE)²⁸ and Diodorus of Sicily (1st century BCE)²⁹, being the only contemporary with the Ptolemies historiographical works. Explaining shortly, the works of Polybius and Diodorus followed the patterns of great historians like Herodotus and Xenophon, focusing in the greater cause of their subject called as “magnification theme”, that can lead to some exaggerations and obvious favor towards the Greeks, in a racial way, but this doesn’t mean that it is not the most reliable source of his period.³⁰ They both follow Thucydides way of presenting the events preventing any narratives that abstain from reality to be advanced concerning the Ptolemies. The way he presents the events that concern the Greek rulers of Egypt, agree to a form of a report than to a narrative.³¹ In the same category of works, and towards the end of the era that this historiographical genre was dominating historiography, are the works of Arrian (d. 160 CE) and Porphyry of Tyre (d. 305 CE).

Arrian’s and Porphyry’s works brought the history of the Ptolemies closer to an imaginative intellectual center of the Ptolemaic narratives circulation that is slowly shaped in the broader area of Syria. The first, Roman politician and historian, born in Nicomedia and living long periods of his life in Cappadocia where his was governor, followed a great political career in the Roman empire, reaching the highest ranks possible, expressed his passion for Xenophon by writing his own historiographical work in Greek³², the latter Neoplatonist philosopher and polyglot scholar of multiple sciences, author of numerous famous works. Arrian’s work is mainly focused on Alexander’s campaign and has being accused for presenting inaccuracies and for his archaic use of the language that derives from his love towards the classical historians³³, and it cannot be considered as an analytical source about the Ptolemaic dynasty, but more about Ptolemy I Soter as companion of

²⁸Polybius, a Greek politician and historian, lived during Ptolemy V Epiphanes reign. His work provides us precious information about the Hellenistic world and the beginning of the Roman conquest.

Source: Thornton, J. ‘Polybius’. In *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, 2012. (Accessed 9 June, 2020).

²⁹ Diodorus, or “Diodorus Siculus” was a historian of the 1st century BCE. Although his biography is almost unknown, his historiographical work is between the most precious for the rise of Rome and the fall of Alexander’s successor’s kingdoms. Diodorus historiographical works was highly influenced by the famous historians Xenophon and Thucydides.

Source: Fronza, M.P. ‘Diodorus of Sicily’. In *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, 2012. Accessed 9 June, 2020.

³⁰ Magnification Theme:

Source: Champion, Craig B., 2004. (Accessed June 4, 2020.)

³¹ Major reverences to the Ptolemies can be found in volumes III & IV.

Source: Polybius, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

³² Source: Popov-Reynolds. ‘Arrian (Arrianus, Lucius Flavius)’. In *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* 2012. (Accessed 14 June 2020).

³³ Bosworth, A. B., 1976: 117-139.

Alexander.³⁴ Arrian had in his disposal the historiographical work of Ptolemy I himself, drawing the necessary information for his work on Alexander's campaign to the East.³⁵

Arrian's work is a sign that in Roman Empire's periphery there are intellectuals that are interested in the transmission of Alexander's stories and his successors. Two and a half centuries after him, and some hundred kilometers South-East of Cappadocia, an invaluable and very critical historiographical work has been written by Porphyry, in modern Lebanon. Being a non-Greek, but Greek speaker, Porphyry of Tyre (original name Malchus in Syriac), scholar of Syrian descends. The combination of his multicultural and multilingual background with his antichristian ideas make his works even more relevant. His narrative about the Ptolemies is the last, before Byzantine era begins, that faces the events similar to the ancient authors like Polybius and Diodorus. To set it in a different way, Porphyry work is the last modern, relatively to the Hellenistic authors, before the religious ideas interfere to the narrative of the *Diadochi* and *Epigoni*³⁶ stories. His personal stance against Christians has been the cause of condemning him and some of his works the precedent years.³⁷ What he wrote about the Ptolemies is a combination of king lists and accounts about several events like wars. A more detailed investigation of his work will help us follow the narratives both of Byzantines and Arabs in their future works. His work can be traced withing much later arabic works of Ibn al-Nadīm and Ibn-al-Qiftī.³⁸

In his historiographical work a chapter entitled as “Kings of Macedonians”³⁹ written in ancient Greek language, where he narrates the Macedonian leadership from its first Kings to the fall of Alexander the Great and his Successors' conflicts. As he mentions, after the death of Alexander, his body was sent to Alexandria by his brother from his father side Aridaios and the Macedonian generals split the empire accordingly: Ptolemy of Lagus gained the Kingdom of “Aegyptus”, Seleucus the Nikator gained from Syria and Frygia to Babylonia, Perdikkas only the personal stamp-ring (*daktilidion*) of Alexander, Lysimachus

³⁴ Arrianus, Brunt, and Brunt, P.A. Arrian. I: Anabasis Alexandri: Books I-IV. Rev. [ed.] / with New Intro., Notes and Appendixes by P.A. Brunt. ed. The Loeb Classical Library; 236 820586609. Cambridge, Mass.: London: Harvard University Press; Heinemann, 1976.

³⁵ Source: Popov-Reynolds. ‘Arrian (Arrianus, Lucius Flavius)’. In The Encyclopedia of Ancient History 2012. (Accessed 14 June 2020).

³⁶ *Epigonos* (pl. *Epigoni*) means “offspring” and is the word that have been used to describe the generations that started from the “*Diadochi*”, the companions and successors of Alexander the Great.

³⁷ Barnes, T.D., 1994. p. 53-65.

³⁸ More specifically, in Ibn al-Nadīm's work “*Fihrist*” and Ibn-al-Qiftī's “*Ta'rīkh al-ḥukama*”. A second important note is that only one of Porphyry Greek works has been saved fully in arabic is a philosophical work-commentary to Aristotle.

Source: Walzer, R. ‘*Furfūriyūs*’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 15, 2020).

³⁹ Müller, Karl, and Theodor Müller, 1883. p.688 (Ancient Greek text with Latin translation)

the territory “on your right on your way floating to Pontic Sea”⁴⁰ , Antigonus reigned over Frygia, small Pamphylia and Lykia, Eumenes Paflagonias received Cappadocia and last and important successor Kassander of Antipatros, ruled over the fatherland of Alexander and Aridaioi in Macedonia and Greece. (image 2, p. 40)

The Porphyry description continues with the conflicts between the successors while their Kingdoms have been established. The first king of Egypt is Ptolemy of Lagus, known also as “Keraunos” (Thunder), who ruled for 40 years, and he signed an alliance with Dimitrius of Antigonus gaining a victory against Seleucus. A third way of calling the first Ptolemy is “child of Lagus and Euridice” and he had a brother called Meleagros who ruled for a short period in the region of Macedonia, where Porphyry is citing the historian Diodorus, that he is probably his main source. Porphyry spends much of his texts analyzing the numerous weddings and alliances between the successor families that affected the power balance between the kingdoms. As he mentions, the Ptolemaic family member stayed in Macedonia were still active members in the politics of Thessalonica, having even two short-term kings, Meleagros and Ptolemy Keraunos, who was a son of the Ptolemy I and Euridice. The next ruler of the Ptolemaic Egypt is Ptolemy the Philadelphus, “the one who loves his siblings”, and as the Cambridge Encyclopedia of ancient history argues, the title most probably was attributed to him after his death. Ptolemy II Philadelphus, was the son of Ptolemy I Soter, that is translated as “savior” and is the fourth and most famous title of his. He ruled for 38 years over Egypt and more information about him will be provided by the next historian, Epiphanius of Salamis because there is not more information in Porphyry’s writings about him.

The kings listing continues nominally, with Ptolemy III *Euergetes* (benefactor) who ruled for 25 years, Ptolemy IV *Philopator* (beloved of the father) 17 years, Ptolemy V *Epephanes* (prominent) 24 years and later his 2 children, the elder Ptolemy VI *Philometor* (beloved of the mother) and then Ptolemy VII *Euergetes II*. Porphyrius writes, that 64 years are attributed to their rule and that there is a great confusion about their reign,

⁴⁰ Declaration: All translations, names or quotations, from Porphyry’s work in Greek, have been made by me, from Ancient Greek to English, after being confirmed by Oxfords Greek-English Lexicon. In every verbatim quotation, the original text will be always provided in a footnote.

This small hint can show the full geographical understanding of the scholar and how small could the world be considered around Mediterranean Sea.

Text in Ancient Greek: “(...) τὴν εἰς δεξιὰ τοῖς πλέουσι τὸν Πόντον ἡγεμονίαν παραλαμβάνει (...)”
Müller, Karl, and Theodor Müller, 1883. p.6

because of the Philometor's manipulations to come to power and fall periodically.⁴¹ Euergetes II spend time in Cyrene where he was called back to Alexandria to be announced king after the death of his brother. He and his sister Cleopatra II had two children that were also named Ptolemies (VIII-IX), the one Soter II and the other Alexander. The first have been in power under his mother's orders, characterized as "docile" by the author, and after a terrible slaughter that happened by his mother's order, he had to seek refuge to Cyprus. Then his brother continued ruling again under his mother advices. The son of Ptolemy VII Soter II who's name in Ptolemy X Dionysios Junior is the tenth ruler of the dynasty, ruling for 22 years and he is the brother of Cleopatra "the last ruler of the Lagi lineage"⁴². At the same time more members are alive like Cleopatra Bereniki and Cleopatra Tryphaina but they never ruled. (see Ptolemaic family tree in Image 1, p. 39)

This idea of a world full of wars, treaties and royal families struggling to survive is where the Ptolemies were belonging in the scholar's minds, untill the 3rd century CE. Several kings of the dynasty had to do military interventions around the Mediterranean Sea in order to avoid bringing the war closer to their kingdom, with the most famous intervention the break of the Macedonian's Kingdom naval embargo and the creation of a suppling route while the independent state of Rhodes was under siege for years.⁴³ An important note, that we will return to it in the next chapter, is that Porphyry's description of the Ptolemaic history was circulating in Syriac language too, enriching the Syriac tradition in preserving ancient Greek texts and transmitting them in to Arabic, but this topic will be further analyzed in the Arabic mass translation movement that expressed during the rise of the Islamic caliphates.

The next historian that was generous with his mention to Ptolemies lived across the coast of Tyre, on the island of Cyprus. A chronicler of the early Byzantine period, Epiphanius (403 CE), a Bishop in Salamis, Cyprus, and his work "Treatise on Weights and Measures", he offers us new information about the cultural attribution of the Ptolemies to

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 720-121

⁴² Original text: "ύστατη τῆς Λαγιδῶν γενεᾶς"

Ibidem, p. 723

⁴³ The siege of Rhodes is one of the most spectacular events of the late Hellenistic Period. The most impressive fact from these battles are that the war engineers of Demetrius Poliorketes (the Besieger) impressed with their unperishable iron-made war-towers and their other miraculous, for the period, war constructions. Demetrius assault however failed because of the successful naval intervention of Ptolemy I the Soter that broke the embargo. Source: Wheatley, P. 'Demetrius I Poliorketes'. In *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, 2012. (Accessed 10 June 2020)

Egypt. This title has not been given by him but is a later addition. The original work has been written in Byzantine Greek but only some fragments are saved, luckily though, his work was translated in Syriac and has been fully preserved and translated into English by J.E. Dean.⁴⁴ This can be a proof of the intellectual interaction that was occurring between the different Christian societies. Epiphanius' story agrees with Porphyry's story, concerning dates and names, but it adds some new elements that slowly reshape the events in a narrative. Epiphanius narrates the story, similar to the later Arabic writers, the way he heard it, allowing his beliefs often to interfere his words, which is a typical characteristic of the Byzantine chroniclers.

He inserts a new motif to the story of the Ptolemies, the story of the translations of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. According to him, Ptolemy II recruited 72 translators⁴⁵, six from every 12 tribes of Israel, in order to translate texts from Hebrew to Greek. He also quotes someone that is named Aristeas⁴⁶ who referred to every single name of those seventy-two men that Epiphanius included in his work too. Epiphanius showed even greater interest in Ptolemy II, listing his famous accomplishments one by one. Firstly, the Great Library of Alexandria, which was located, according to Epiphanius, where wastes of Alexandria were laying at his times. Demetrius from Phaleron was appointed by the Pharaoh-King as director, responsible to gather books from all around the world. The trustworthiness of Epiphanius starts being questioned when he starts presenting even dialogues between Ptolemy II and Demetrius, in which the King asks him about the books and Demetrius responds:

“There are already fifty-four thousand eight hundred books, more or less; but we have heard that there is a great multitude in the world, among the Cushites, the Indians, the Persians, the Elamites, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, and the Chaldeans, and among the Romans, the Phoenicians, the Syrians, and the Romans in Greece (...) But there are also

⁴⁴ Dean, James Elmer, 1935.

⁴⁵ The number 72 has very high religious importance both in Judaism and Christianity. For example, 72 were the languages that occurred after the biblical “Babel” event. But there are even deeper meanings that can someone find in biblical numbers and their “intertextuality” as K. Nielsen argues.

Source: Nielsen, Kirsten. 2000.

⁴⁶ Aristeas is a very questionable figure that, deriving from the older Josephus “Jewish Antiquities”, is Jew civil servant during the Ptolemy II Philadelphus. According to him, Aristeas was the key character of communication between Ptolemy II and Eleazar, the high priest in the Solomon temple. For more details on Josephus and the objections of his works see footnote 50, page 15)

with those in Jerusalem and Judah the divine Scriptures of the prophets, which tell about God and the creation of the world and every other doctrine of general value”⁴⁷

This is an obvious attempt to connect the Ptolemy II with the Abrahamic religions, that was a famous medieval way to find a way of connection between the ancient history and the later Abrahamic religious traditions in Christianity or Islam.⁴⁸ He insists that Ptolemy II had very good relations with the tribes of Israel, exchanging letters, specifically, with Hebrew scholars, expressing his zeal on reading the texts but he couldn't read because he didn't know Hebrew so he needed to translate them into Greek. This idea of a strong Greek-Jewish interaction is partially true, or in other words, a misinterpretation of questionable events that were written long before Epiphanius, but he reshaped them in order to serve his cause. There have been extended argumentations about the understanding of the Judeans by the ancient Greek sources that give various explanations.

Johann Cook in his work “Ptolemy II Philadelphus and His World”⁴⁹ approached every variation of the stories of Ptolemy II and tried to trace them from both sides, the Greek scripts and the accounts in Hebrew. A key text in the story of the translations is the *letter or book of Aristeas*⁵⁰ who was Jewish member of the Ptolemaic administrative system and whose text presents the story of Epiphanius. This letter has been transmitted by the Jewish scholar Josephus (died after 100 CE) and his work on Jewish antiquities.⁵¹ The text cannot be considered trustworthy and it seems that it has a mixture of genres that follow partially the classical Greek historiographical way of writing.⁵² A well-known modern interpretation of the letter of Aristeas is by Honigman⁵³, proposes that the perspective of the narrative could work in order to serve the Judeans interests and their interpretation of the events. The bible though has been indeed translated into Greek, during the reign of the Ptolemies and was very influenced from the ancient Greek scholarship and texts.⁵⁴ And a second fact is that the Jewish community during the Ptolemaic period enjoyed freedom of religion practice and higher ranks. This stability declined after the rise of the Judean kingdom of Hasmoneans and the Jewish people of Egypt were tempted to move there, as Paul McKechnie argues. The Hebrew texts kept their own perspective and they built the

⁴⁷ Dean, James Elmer, 1935. p. 25

⁴⁸ The history of al-Ṭabarī is a good example, having as starting point the creation of the human kind by god.

⁴⁹ Paul McKechnie Philippe Guillaume, 2008.

⁵⁰ Swete, Henry Barclay, and Thackeray, Henry St. John, 2010.

⁵¹ Schalit, Abraham. "Josephus Flavius." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, (Accessed June 7, 2020).

⁵² Swete, Henry Barclay, and Thackeray, Henry St. John, 2010.p.195

⁵³ Honigman, S. *Aristeas, Letter of*. In *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, 2012. (Accessed June 7, 2020).

⁵⁴ Paul McKechnie Philippe Guillaume, 2008. p.207

myth even further, reaching the level of praising the Ptolemies and setting them on the same level of their prophet Moses.⁵⁵ Last but not least, there are even anti-Jewish texts of Hecataeus⁵⁶, or to be more exact have been attributed to him, during the period of Ptolemy I Soter that have been investigated in detail by Bezalel Bar-Kochva in “The Image of the Jews in Greek Literature: The Hellenistic Period”.⁵⁷

This Jewish-Christian motif literally becomes part of the Ptolemaic narrative through different Byzantine authors. Another attempt to present the Ptolemy II as a precursor of Christianity continue by the famous Byzantine Greek historian Iohannes Malalas (d. 578 CE) and his 18 books long work “Malalae Chronographia” which is an attempt to describe the history of the human kind from the creation of the universe by god to the period he was living, a usual chronicle type that dominates historiography for centuries. The problems with Malalas’ report about the Ptolemies start from the very first king, Ptolemy I. According to him, Ptolemy son of Lagus “the astronomer” was king and ruler of all Egypt and Libya. This is the first reference we can find that connects the astronomy with the Ptolemaic dynasty, but not clearly stated any relation with Claudius Ptolemy yet. Indeed, Ptolemy I could be an intelligent person with many interests, besides his own calendar that passed to Arrian and then has been lost, he was a man of high intelligence and culture⁵⁸. The possibility that a false translation started from Malalas text is something that we have to keep in mind. Both options are possible if we consider the nearly 500 years that separate Malalas with Claudius Ptolemy, meaning that even for Malalas, Claudius Ptolemy was already in the remote past.

The conflict between good and bad that Christianity focuses often can be seen in a short event that Malalas wanted to describe, being part of the previous narrative that derives from the Hebrew texts. According to him, the Judean people asked from Antiochus IV Epephanes- King of the Seleucid Empire at the time of Ptolemy VI Philometor- to be the mediator between them and the King of Egypt, in order to ask him not to ask them for more wheat supplies. Indeed, Antiochus did send him letters but Ptolemy did not respond and a war started with the Judeans taking the part of the Ptolemy believing that Antiochus was dead. Antiochus won the battle, one of the multiple “Syrian wars” between the Successors, and slaughtered even the high priest of the Solomon Temple, which he made it

⁵⁵ Ibidem p. 233

⁵⁶ Scanlon, T.F, 2015.

⁵⁷ Bar-Kochva, Bezalel, 2010.

⁵⁸ Ellis, Walter, 1994. p. 15-19

a sanctuary dedicated to Zeus and Athena, bringing pork meat in its spaces and forcing the Judeans turn to the Hellenistic traditions. The story is written in a Judeo-centric model, trying to describe more what was the Judean people's position in the conflicts and their consequences, than to describe the events, for example the war campaigns. Malalas way of writing is almost similar to spoken language of the period, targeting the wide accessibility to the people. His narrative would be used as a mean of entertainment for his wealthy readers, this is why he switches from mythology to reality very fast creating a plot that will keep the interest of his audience stable. This mixture of real and unreal events, combined with uncited sources made the modern scholars highly doubt the information he provides.⁵⁹

Half a century later, the Greek chroniclers would insist on the same story with some small differentiations. The monk Johannes Zonaras (d. 1159 CE) and his work "Epitome of History" is a valuable historiographical work mostly for the contemporary to him events, however he expressed interest in working on ancient history too. Zonaras work is highly influenced by his Christian beliefs and his personal status of an orthodox monk, retired in a remote island⁶⁰. His way of narration is similar to John Malalas and Epiphanius, typical chronographical way with small details that work as beautifications or gap-fillings of the story.

In Zonaras history, the clash between Judeans and the Ptolemies starts earlier. Ptolemy I son of Lagus was planning to invade the tribes of Israel, and specifically on Saturday in order to surprise them. It is fascinating how Zonaras openly shows his irony to his name because of the title he was carrying "Soter" (savior).⁶¹ Indeed, according to Zonaras, Ptolemy I took the Judeans by surprise and enslaved them, sending them back to Egypt. The abandoned holy lands were given to the Samaritans and other tribes. This story seems to be very similar to what the Roman Emperor Tiberius did to the Judeans, sending them out of their lands.⁶²In this similar to bible story, the role of Moses is played by the Ptolemy II Philadelphus. He is presented as an admirer of the Hebrew texts and culture of the

⁵⁹ Description of "Edition of John Malalas's *Chronographia* from 1831", Luwian Studies. (Accessed 14 June 2020)

⁶⁰ *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Joannes Zonaras". (Accessed June 14, 2020.)

⁶¹ This shorth translation have be made by using the edition of the Greek text of 1841 and confirm my translation using Oxford's Greek-English Lexicon.

Original text: "(...) ὁ Λάγου ὁ τῆς Αἰγύπτου βασιλεύων, ὃς καὶ σωτὴρ ἐχρημάτιζε, τῇ δε Συρία τάναντια τῇ ἐπικλήσει αὐτοῦ γέγονε, καὶ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα με δόλῳ κατέσχευε."

Translation: "(...) the son of Lagus who was ruling over Egypt, the one who supposed to be a savior, opposed to Syria and the Holy lands with wile behavior conquered"

Source: Zonaras, 1841. p. 306-316

⁶² Merrill, Elmer Truesdell, 1919. p. 365-72

Judean people and he translates everything into Greek, similarly to the Epiphanius story. The story becomes even more religious influenced by saying that he was convinced by the holy scripts of the Jewish people and he wanted to help them achieve their goal to return to their homeland that god promised them, using the word *Ethnos* (nation). His final decision was not only to set them free to return to their lands, but he paid them an amount of 120 drachmas each one of the ten thousand people. The relation between Ptolemy II and the people of Judea continued for long time, exchanging letters, gifts and visits with the Eleazar, Archpriest of the Judeans.⁶³

Another motif that survives is the dialogue between Ptolemy II and his chief Librarian of Alexandria, Demetrius, where we learn that the library at that time had approximately 20 thousand books, significantly less than the forty-eight thousand eight hundred of Epiphanius story. In Zonaras' work the philological importance of Ptolemy II and his Librarian was so great that they were literally the first Greek high ranks who admitted the existence of the Jewish god and they worshiped him by sending gifts to the Solomon temple to Jerusalem. At this point the narrative seems to turn in a more Judeo-centric perspective once again, analyzing the consequences of the Ptolemaic politics on the Judean people, copying the Josephus narrative about the Hasmonaeans. A story that will be finished in the next chapter by the Arab authors.⁶⁴

The information has been presented till this point, provide enough context in order to understand the Byzantine narrative circulating within the borders of the empire. It is clear that the Greek speaking scholars based their works on Hebrew works, and not on ancient Greek, the same happened in the following centuries with the Muslim scholars, however many of the Arabic authors had access to Syriac works too that were closer to the ancient narrative because of the works in Syriac written by Porphyry.

⁶³ Zonaras, 1841. p. 308-309.

⁶⁴ Ibidem

3. Ptolemaic Narratives in Arabic: A New Tradition Arises

In the previous chapter, Porphyry and Epiphanius works were a proof of the Greek-Syriac interaction that was unfolded in the broader area of Middle East already from the 3rd century and more systematic translations took place later in the 6th century by the Syriac Christians.⁶⁵ Two centuries later, the Arab speaking intellectual community of the Middle East and Mesopotamia began to rise rapidly leading soon to a vast variety of historiographical works that would circulate for centuries and they would contribute to historiography with their own genres. According to Encyclopedia of Islam, Syria had already a long tradition in studying Greek sciences before the Umayyads established their capital in Damascus.⁶⁶ The work of Claudius Ptolemaeus had already reach the area and had been translated into Syriac⁶⁷, something that will raise further questions in the confusion of his name with the homonyms kings of antiquity.

The famous for his unique works on the transmission of the Greek knowledge to the Arabic works, Dimitris Gutas, explains that the Abbasid capital Baghdad started producing works in Arabic in order to enforce its domination to the Persian scholars who tended to downgrade the Arab intellectual prestige⁶⁸. The first translated works appeared during the reign of the caliph Hārūn al- Rashīd (d. 763 CE), and between those texts was Ptolemy's book al-Magest. Even the name of the translator has been known, Al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf ibn Maṭar and his translation was finished in 827 CE⁶⁹ while al-Khwārizmī's works were in process. The same period, another translator, Abu Yahya Ibn al-Batriq translated C. Ptolemaeus *Tetrabiblos*. It is very interesting though that D. Gutas does not refer to any translation of any Greek historiographical work in Arabic yet, meaning that the Syriac language and the Jundīshāpūr would have dominate this knowledge even after the Arabic translations started. The Arab translations were mainly focused on medical, astronomical, philosophical and other science nature works at that point.

⁶⁵ Jundīshāpūr is an Iranian city founded but the Sassanid king Shapur. The name is Syriac, and it is located in a rather multilingual region. The city became known for its intellectuality, the medical studies, the translation from various languages into Syriac and several mentions have been made by the Muslim scholars al-Ṭabarī and al-Qiftī.

Fiori, Emiliano. 'Jundīshāpūr'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE. Accessed June 7, 2020).

⁶⁶ D'Ancona, Cristina. 'Greek into Arabic'. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE. (Accessed June 15, 2020).

⁶⁷ Ibidem

⁶⁸ Gutas, D., 1998. p.157-158

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p.153

The oldest work in Arabic that mentions the Ptolemaic dynasty is written by al-Khwārizmī (d. 850 CE) and carries the title “Keys to the Sciences” (Mafātīḥ al-‘Ulūm), and it is not clearly focused on the transmission the way historiographical works do. Al-Khwārizmī’s work is considered one of the famous encyclopedias written in arabic⁷⁰ and its content has been divided in two sections by the author. The first section was about indigenous knowledge and the second about foreign knowledge. Al-Khwārizmī, considering his work, seems to have deep knowledge of the ancient Greek sciences. His reference to the Ptolemies is included in a section of his scripts where kings were listed from various kingdoms and empires of the past. His lemma, named “Kings of the Rūm”⁷¹, starts saying that after Alexander the Great were 10 people, all of them named Baṭlimūs, which means according to him the “martial” (ḥarbī)⁷², but they all have different famous titles and continues by listing them. The first important detail that has to be taken in consideration is the translation of the kings’ titles. Some Muslim scholars have the names fully translated in Arabic, some keep the names transcribed in Arabic letters and some other both options. The translations most probably were not made by them, but this is another topic which needs further investigation.

The names have been translated most of the times correctly, and sometimes a new title is created for the king that characterizes his virtues. The translated names of Al-Khwārizmī’s list is a useful tool because they passed to numerous Arabic historiographical works of the next centuries. The Ptolemy I was called “al-arīb bin adīb” or “al-adīb bin adīb”.⁷³ The possible translations of these words according to Lane’s dictionary could be “al-arīb” the expert or skillfull⁷⁴, “al-adīb” as a well-educated and with great manners.⁷⁵ These titles have to be questioned. As mentioned in the introduction, the name of Ptolemy’s I father was Lagus or Lagos, that means “hare” in Greek. The word for hare in Arabic is “arnab”, a word that considering the absence of dots in many Arabs scripts using the Middle Arabic⁷⁶, could be easily misread as the translations were in process, changing the letter “nūn” with the letter “yā” in the word “al-arīb”. This is not the only case in

⁷⁰ Sabra, A.I. ‘Al-Khwārizmī’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 7, 2020).

⁷¹ There are three main ways that the Greeks are called in the arabic texts of this thesis. Most famous way is Yūnāniūn or Yūnānyn, , the second is Ar-Rūm and the last Ighrīqīūn.

⁷² Indeed, the root “Ptol” is equal to “Pol”, which is the root of the word “polemos”, that means war.

Source: A Greek-English Lexicon, 1978. p.1548

⁷³ Khwārizmī, 1846.

⁷⁴ Lane, Edward William. *Arabic-English Lexicon*. Book I p. 45

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 35

⁷⁶ Beeston, and Beeston, 1983. p. 11-15

which the name Lagus has been translated⁷⁷. This mistake confused Al-Khwārizmī who attributed the Greek word transcribed in Arabic as “bin Lagūs” to Ptolemy II. However, this small detail does not affect his reference much, it can be an example of how chaotic could the translated works be for a scholar of the period. The script that Al-Khwārizmī could have in his disposal probably presented the transliterated version of the word Lagus and the two possible translations in Arabic the way the translator understood it.

His short reference provides us even more valuable information. The Arabic titles that follow the kings continue with Ptolemy II “bin Lagūs Muḥibb al-Ab” (Philopator), Ptolemy III “al-Ṣān’a” (“The builder”, word used for “Euergetes” that originally means the benefactor), Ptolemy IV “Ṣaḥib al-‘ilm bi-al-nujūm wa Muḥibb al-Umm” (“The scholar of knowledge and stars and Philometor”), Ptolemy V “al-Ṣān’a al-thānī” (Euergetes II), Ptolemy VI “Mukhaliṣ” (word that probably refers to “Soter”, because of the nature of freedom and purity that the word has⁷⁸), Ptolemy VII “al’Askandarī” (the Alexandrian), Ptolemy VIII al-Khaīr (“The good”), Ptolemy IX “al-ḥadidī” or “al-ḥarirī” (“the made of Iron”), Ptolemy X “al-Khabīth” (“The Malignant or Vicious”⁷⁹, close to the meaning of “Physcon”-malignant- in Greek) and last queen “Qliūfaṭrā bint Muḥḥibbuhu”, “Cleopatra daughter of the beloved”, according to the editors of the edition.⁸⁰

The importance of this content is not the right order of the kings-list or the titles and the false attribution, but the consideration that Ptolemies, and only they, were the rightful heirs of Alexander the Great. Al-Khwārizmī, aimed with this work to create a source book, and not a historiographical work. Writing under the lemma “Kings of the Greeks” only about the Ptolemies as the only heirs, starts a tradition in which the rest of the “Diadochoi” are ignored from similar lemmas.⁸¹ The reason of excluding the rest of the Successors from their works will be attempted to be answered through the works of the following periods.

Towards the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century two important historiographical works were composed and they are truly worth to remember. The two historians, Al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 897 CE) and al-Ṭabarī (923 CE), Al-Ya‘qūbī’s work, named *Tā’rīkh ibn Wāḍiḥ* (“Chronicle of Ibn Wāḍiḥ”) The *Tā’rīkh ibn Wāḍiḥ* is an attempt to

⁷⁷ The argumentation can be supported by the much later works of Ibn al-Ibrī and Abu al-Fidā that mention Ptolemy I as “bin Arnab”.

⁷⁸ Lane, Edward William, p.787.

⁷⁹ Lane, Edward William, p. 694

⁸⁰ Khwārizmī, 1946. p. 112-113

⁸¹ Works were only Ptolemies are heirs

narrate the history of the human kind and the different civilizations and religions on earth starting from the protoplasts, in its first section, and the second refers to the history from the rise of Islam to the years of the author and up to 872.⁸² This really vast variety of topics and events that is nearly impossible to be accomplished without missing any event, figure or other narrative, automatically increases the importance of a short narrative like the Egyptian-Greek kings, comparing the narratives of more famous king of the ancient times. The historians decide that this story has to be included and has to play the role of a connection between the decline of the Greeks and the Rise of the Romans.

The new hint that al-Ya‘qūbī gives is the citation of the Claudius Ptolemy’s Royal Star List also known as “Canon”⁸³ which contains 10 of the Ptolemies, and the years they have reigned. But al-Ya‘qūbī did not list them all but six, for unknown reasons. In his reference we find for the first time title “Dhū al-Qarnaīn” (the one who has 2 horns) that according to the later analysis by the Leiden editor of the modern translated edition⁸⁴ is a title of Alexander the Great that was inherited to Ptolemy I Soter or it was attributed to him by mistake. Significant alterations in Ptolemy II narrative are obvious too, not being connected to the Judean people this time. The new facts that were added to the Ptolemy II Philadelphus were that during his reign talismans were made. This story could derive from the Syriac or Hebrew works, but there are not enough earlier works that can be investigated in order to shed light to it.⁸⁵ A notable absence from his list, and strange at the same time because he had access to the Claudius Ptolemy list, is queen Cleopatra, a figure that in most of the future texts had dedicated extensive lemmas to her. It could be his choice not to include all the Kings of C. Ptolemy list or just a practical matter, having a bad version of the list or not in good condition, but these are just assumptions.

Some years after al-Ya‘qūbī, al-Ṭabarī would have a more romantic perspective to present in his work “History of Prophets and Kings (“Ta’rīkh al-Rusūl wa al-Mulūk”). Al-Ṭabarī’s passion for history led him to nearly a science fiction story that could easily intrigue the mind of any reader or audience of his work. Alexander the Great became Ruler of the world, ruling even Tibet and China, “reaching the North Pole and the area southern the sun in reach of the Well of immortality.” After these adventures he marched back to

⁸² Zaman, Muhammad Qasim. ‘Al-Ya‘qūbī’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 7, 2020).

⁸³ Ya‘qūbī (2018). p. 428-432

⁸⁴ Ibid. 429

⁸⁵ The word “talisman” in uses like this can mean even temple that is made to protect from enemies. Source: Wiet, G. ‘Barbā’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 15, 2020.)

Iraq where “Alexander appointed the diadochs (mulūk al-ṭawāif), and he died on the road at Shahrazūr (a city in Media)- he was thirty-six, some say. He was carried to his mother at Alexandria”.⁸⁶ In only three lines, al-Ṭabarī accomplished to create a new history with new data that probably would cause so much surprise that would be easier remembered. But the perspective of the story of the Ptolemies that is presented by al-Ṭabarī proposed something new. As he mentions, after the death of Alexander, the realm was offered to his son who refused and then the Greeks “made” Ptolemy the son of Lagus their king, while the rest of the successors are mentioned in the next chapter that refers to the Persians after the death of Alexander.

A work that, according to Encyclopedia of Islam, influenced widely famous later works like Ibn al-Athīr’s (d. 1233 CE) and Ibn Khaldūn’s (1406 CE)⁸⁷ can indeed start its own tradition of a story that is already going on for centuries. It is very interesting how every scholar faces the Ptolemaic story with his own unique way. Al-Ṭabarī’s passion to present a very complete history which narrative flows without obstacles, like missing events, reshaped the Ptolemaic narrative in order to attribute to Alexander’s story a more proper end. The glory of the Greeks did not stop, it just continued by another king named Ptolemy son of Lagus. The rest of the successor’s kingdoms paradoxically can be found in the next account “*The Account of the Persian Kings After the Death of Alexander*”⁸⁸. According to him, they were rulers of the area after Alexander the Great, but not his direct heirs. This is a regional distinction that is slowly being shaped in the texts, where the Ptolemaic Egypt is considered as “more Greek” than Seleucian or Bactrian kingdoms.

The answer to this enigma comes in the very extended analysis on al-Ṭabarī’s history from a discourse perspective, by U. Maternsson⁸⁹, where she explains that al-Ṭabarī himself stated that the knowledge he provides it is not his, but he is the transmitter, excluding himself from any possible disapprovals of his work. This can be seen even in his historiographical work, where he often provides two information, and lets the reader decide. A good example is the age Alexander the Great when he died where he states: “As for Persians, they assert that Alexander’s reign lasted fourteen years. The Christians assert that it lasted thirteen years and some months (...)”⁹⁰ From the simple list with the Ptolemaic

⁸⁶ Ṭabarī, 1987. p. 87-95

⁸⁷ Bosworth, C.E. ‘Al-Ṭabarī’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 7, 2020).

⁸⁸ Ṭabarī, 1987. p. 96

⁸⁹ Materson, U. (2005): 287-331.

⁹⁰ Ṭabarī, 1987. p. 94

names of Al-Khwārizmī's work, to al-Ṭabarī's literature-influenced historiography, the story becomes even more interesting through the eyes of its narrator. But as the years were passing, historians were providing us with works that were targeting far higher than a simple transmission.

4. Al-Mas'ūdī: the Ptolemaic Narrative in Classical Arabic Historiography

Al-Mas'ūdī, in full Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī, born in Baghdad, Iraq—died September 956 CE in Al-Fuṣṭāṭ, Egypt (part of the modern Cairo) historian and traveler. He was the first Arab to combine history and scientific geography in a large-scale work, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jawāhir* (“*The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*”), a world history written in Arabic. Al-Mas'ūdī dedicated whole chapters in form of *Dhikr*⁹¹ (“Memory”) to the Greek Kings of antiquity. The major difference between al-Mas'ūdī's account about the Ptolemies and the Muslim historians up to this period is the extensiveness of his reference and the presence of numerous motifs that we have already seen in the previous chapters, deriving from ancient or medieval sources.

The historiographical work of al-Mas'ūdī received multiple different critiques from the later Muslim scholars, others considered it as a work and a person of non-importance and others quoted him again often for his writings. In the first category of the skeptical, is the great biographer Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995 or 998) who, according to Encyclopedia of Islam, in his work *Kitāb al-Fihrist (The Book Catalogue)* doubted his methodology and undervalued his name by calling him *Maghribī*.⁹² A logical explanation to Ibn al-Nadīm's judgment can be given even from an inaccuracy that is transmitted through al-Mas'ūdī's reference to the Ptolemies, the incorporation of Claudius Ptolemy as a part of the Royal family. Ibn al-Nadīm proves in his catalogue that he knew exactly who Claudius Ptolemy was and when he was living, writing “Baṭlimūs: The author of the Book of Almagest in the days of Adrianus and Antonius (...)”⁹³ and continues by explaining the structure C. Ptolemy's Almagest and how it transmitted into Arabic language by multiple translators that he cites namely. An interesting clue that Ibn al-Nadīm gives us is that there were numerous translations of Ptolemies works that were circulating at the same time, scholars that made corrections and others that made commentaries on it.⁹⁴ A new hypothesis arises after Ibn al-Nadīm's report, a contemporary to al-Mas'ūdī's work. Did the historiographers like the idea of a Claudius Ptolemy as a king in order to justify his intelligence and innovation and glorify him even more? The response to this is not clear, but there will be an attempt to have a spherical perspective of this motif of

⁹¹ Gardet, L. ‘*Dhikr*’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 15, 2020).

⁹² Pellat, Ch. ‘Al-Mas'ūdī’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 15, 2020).

⁹³ Declaration: The translations that are verbatim quoted have been made by me from Arabic into English, using Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon*. The original arabic text of this section can be found in the pages of the footnote below. This declaration is valid for every other quotation that refers to an arabic text. If it was already translated, it will be stated in a footnote.

⁹⁴ Ibn Al-Nadīm, 1994. p.374-375

“Claudius Ptolemy-King” later on this chapter and in chapter 5, taking into account the Latin perspective.

This small inaccuracy though must not discredit Al-Mas‘ūdī’s work. His reference is still very relevant, considering that he had at his disposal more than one hundred fifty ancient Greek sources and Arabic translations and that he was quoted by various scholars in the following centuries.⁹⁵ His account about the Ptolemies, in comparison with the previous Arabic works, is a true revolution in the Arabic historiographical genre. Up to this period, no other account tried to incorporate different sources about the Ptolemies in a single lemma. The result is a beautiful historiographical mosaic does not necessary sticks to the flawless narrative. The name of the account is “Memory of the Greek Kings after Alexander”⁹⁶ (*Dhikr Mulūk al-Yūnānīn ba’d al-Iskandar*) where al-Mas‘ūdī considers Ptolemy I clearly the true successor of Alexander the Great and he was “wise scholar, politician and ruler” (*wa-kān ḥakīman ‘ālamān sā’san mudabarān*)⁹⁷ who reigned for forty years “or according to others twenty years”. This is the first motif that can be found in his narrative. These compliments to Ptolemy I can be traced back to the work of al-Ya‘qūbī, “He was wise and learned, and his reign lasted twenty years”, he wrote.⁹⁸ From the same work al-Mas‘ūdī read about the talismans that according to the narrative of al-Ya‘qūbī were made during Ptolemy II Philadelphus.

A small sub-chapter in this lemma, and a new motif inserted to the Ptolemaic story in general, being named as “al-la’ab bi-al-bazāa wa al-shawāhīn” (The game of hawks and peregrine falcons) lies within this account and offers more relevant information for this investigation. This reference to a game (al-la’ab) with 2 types of birds that are the hawks (al-bazāa) and the Peregrine falcons (al-shawāhīn)⁹⁹ that were used, according to al-Mas‘ūdī, as a game of different kings around the known world. This detail raises the question if al-Mas‘ūdī had found any of the coins of the Ptolemaic dynasty (Image 3&4, p. 40) or saw any sign of these birds on the temples that left behind (Image 5, p. 41) during his journeys to Egypt. Quoting some unnamed wise Greeks, he proceeds to a short analysis of the birds that were important for the royals, mentioning “(...)The Greeks say that the preys have races, created by God and types: four genres, thirteen shapes, and the four races are: hawks, peregrine falcons,

⁹⁵ Pellat, Ch. ‘Al-Mas‘ūdī’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 15, 2020).

⁹⁶ Al-Mas‘ūdī, 2005. p.227-231

⁹⁷ Ibidem, p.227

⁹⁸ Ya‘qūbī, 2018. p. 431

⁹⁹ Lane, 1984. p. 1775

falcon (al-saqir), and eagle (‘uqāb) (...)”¹⁰⁰. This short parenthesis is exactly what characterizes al-Mas‘ūdī, his passion for more cultural understanding than simply a transmission of events. *Chase Robinson*¹⁰¹ wrote that historian and litterateur are the best words that can describe him.

Returning back to the kings, a long passage was dedicated to Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who is called by al-Mas‘ūdī as “Hīflūs”, a word that is unique and presented in his work for the first time. Although it looks like a Greek transliteration, it is hard to be understood. The ending “-ūs” in Arabic transliterations of Greek words is the ending “-os” in Greek, an ending that belongs to a male adjective like “Lathyros”, the title of Ptolemy IX. This word exists also in Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrī (d.1094 CE) book where it refers to Ptolemy II too¹⁰², and in the commentary of the Andalusian scholar Ibn ‘Abdūn (d. 1134 CE)¹⁰³ who attributes it to Ptolemy III Euergetes. As the lemma continues, al-Mas‘ūdī makes obvious that he read the motif that was first presented by Josephus. In short, he repeated the narrative of the cruelty of Ptolemy II, slaughtering the Judeans and looting their temple in Jerusalem, setting in this way the third motif.

The fourth proof that al-Mas‘ūdī’s story was a composition of narratives deriving from different sources is his list of the dynasty members. The reign of every king are differing slightly from the lists of Porphyry or Epiphanius, but his mistake, as already mentioned, was the attribution of the title astronomer and the book “al-majisti” to Ptolemy V Epiphanes. This specific position in which Al-Mas‘ūdī sets Claudius Ptolemy leads to an even longer continuous circle of false transmission. For the scholars Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrī (d.1094 CE)¹⁰⁴ and Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233 CE)¹⁰⁵, Ptolemy V was the famous astronomer too. In cases like this one, historiography could reshape the history not in purpose, but because of a wrong translation or a misunderstanding in older texts. In his conclusion though, Al-Mas‘ūdī expresses a bit of concern for all the information he provided, saying that what has been agreed by his sources is:

“that the number of the Kings of the Greeks is fourteen, the Last of them Queen Cleopatra and all the number of years of their kings and the duration of their days and duration of the

¹⁰⁰ Al-Mas‘ūdī, 2005. p. 227-228

¹⁰¹ Robinson, Chase F. 2003. p. 6

¹⁰² Bakrī, 2003. p. 229

¹⁰³ Ibn ‘Abdūn, 1846. p.49

¹⁰⁴ Bakrī, 2003. p. 230

¹⁰⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, 2010.

authority of them was three hundred one years, and it was all the property owned by the Greeks, after Alexander the great son of Philip, called Ptolemy (...)And we have already mentioned some of the ranks and names of the Kings of the world, and we shall soon bequeath upon our remembrance, if God wills. ”¹⁰⁶

With such a beautiful expression Al-Mas‘ūdī expresses his satisfaction but doing his duty as historian to transfer his findings to the next generations, and it has been very much appreciated.

Al-Mas‘ūdī’s reminds the intentions of the previous historians Al-Ya‘qūbī and al-Ṭabarī to write a universal history, and Ptolemies were rightfully part of their works. But at the same period, 10th to 12th century, scholars from different lands than Baghdad and the Abbasid Caliphate dedicated even some lines in the memory of the Greek rulers of Egypt. An overview of the new traits that the Ptolemaic narrative gains will help to understand the stage of the narrative at this point of the Islamic history. As *Chase Robinson*¹⁰⁷ Al-Mas‘ūdī establishes a new era for the Islamic historiography, the “Classical Period”, while the previous was the “Formative Period”. The difference between those two categories is that the historians of the first period had limited Arabic works in their disposal and most of them were prestigious people that were targeting higher values through their works, as unprecedented, while during the second generation scholars, libraries like Alexandria’s had already hundreds of books in Arabic that were already considered as “standard stories”¹⁰⁸. The scholarship becomes closer to the today’s research meaning, working on already existed works.

This period has been also famous for the thriving intellectual community of Spain. The Iberian Peninsula became a fertile soil for a fruitful interaction between Muslims, Orthodox and Catholic scholars. The Arabic texts started being translated back to Greek and Latin and Arabs came even closer to the Europe’s Christian intellectuality. Someone would imagine that the Muslim Scholars of Spain would follow their own school of translations, having read *D. Gutas* work and the relations between Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII and Umayyad Caliph ‘Abdarrahman. In a characteristic event, that Gutas describes, The Byzantine Emperor as a present to the Umayyad Caliph a copy of Pedanius Dioscorides (40-90 CE), a famous physician and pharmacologist, in Greek, decorated with multiple sketches and drawn images. At that time no one could speak Greek in Cordoba, the capital of the Caliphate. After further

¹⁰⁶ Al-Mas‘ūdī, 2005. p. 231

¹⁰⁷ Robinson, 2003.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem p. 7

communication, the Byzantine emperor sent a monk named Nicolas, who had a good knowledge of Arabic and was able to translate many other Greek works in Arabic. This event triggered a whole new movement, that on the one hand made many Arab officials attend Greek classes and on the other hand scholars started comparing the freshly translated works from Greek to Arabic with the older Arabic, that were based on Syriac translations.¹⁰⁹

Concerning the case Ptolemaic Dynasty and the different narratives that were circulating for years now, there are two types of narratives that someone can find during this period. They are scholars that were more conservative in their words, basing their works on older Arabic and re-produce the mistakes as were written before. An example of this category is Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrī (d.1094 CE), an Andalusian scholar whose reference to the Ptolemies is a simplified version of Al-Mas‘ūdī’s version, following the exact order of the narrative and using distinct Mas‘ūdīan terms, as mentioned before. The second category are the scholars that started facing critical the older references, clarifying for example that Claudius Ptolemy was not a member of the royal dynasty. It is not surprising that this misunderstanding was solved from the Muslim scholars of Egypt, where both the protagonists, Ptolemies and Claudius Ptolemy, spent their lives. For the first time the historian of the 11th century al-Mubashshir bin Fātik in his historiographical work “Mukhtār al-ḥikam wa maḥāsin al-kalim” (“Choice wise sayings and fine statements”) he clearly states:

“Ptolemy was an educated man, introducing the masterful engineering and star constellations. He classified many books: One of them is a book known as “al-māghāstī”, meaning “the perfection”, and the Arabs were calling it: “Almagestī.” Its birth and origins were in Alexandria at the time of King Adrianus, and others. (...) Ptolemy was not one of the Ptolemaic kings¹¹⁰, as some people thought. But it was a name as the man is called Khosroe or Caesar. He was of moderate height, white in color, full-fledged, gentle in foot; On his left cheek is a red mole, thick black beard, crunched folds, small mouth, well-spoken, sweet-spoken, very angry, folded, much hiking and riding, less edible, fasting, smell good, clean clothes. He died having seventy-eight years.”¹¹¹

With these beautiful words al-Mubashshir bin Fātik makes clear in a single reference that concerns the description of Claudius Ptolemy that he had no connection with the Ptolemaic

¹⁰⁹ D. Gutas, 1998, p. 171

¹¹⁰The original sentence in Arabic: „*Wa-lam yakunu baṭlīmūs malikan min al-muluk al-baṭālisa*“, Al-Mubashshir Ibn Fātik, 1958. p.201-202

¹¹¹ Original text from: Al-Mubashshir Ibn Fātik, 1958.

Dynasty as previous scholars believed. But the image of the Claudius Ptolemy as King followed its own path, being detached from the rest of his pseudo-family. This tradition started from the passion with the Arabic texts, Latin translators of Spain. A leading figure of this translation movement was Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187 CE) who was an admirer of Claudius Ptolemy and translated his famous books in Latin.¹¹² Because of the close connection of Claudius Ptolemy with the astronomy, the Ptolemaic names confusion transferred to the scientific works, from the historiographical that could be found before. In very interesting case study, Charles Burnett, explains briefly that although Gerard of Cremona read the passage of al-Mubashshir bin Fātik, there were other Latin translators that did not¹¹³. The results were that some of them were just attaching the Latin title “*rex*” (king) to Claudius Ptolemy and other expressing their doubts about who from the kings was. It turns that the influence and the magnificence of the works of Claudius Ptolemy could be justified in the eyes of Latins, similarly to the Arabs before them, only by accepting his royal background.

Taking about the Egyptian scholar Mubashshir bin Fātik and his accurate comment that clarifies a misunderstanding of centuries, the point of interest turns to the Egyptian arabic scholars. The Egyptian Muslim intellectual community attempted to solve some of the misinterpretations that we have already seen and to add a new perspective. The perspective of the locals who are in touch with the historical land of the Nile.

¹¹² Burnett, Charles. ‘Gerard of Cremona’. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE. (Accessed June 15, 2020).

¹¹³ Burnett, 1998. p. 340-343.

5. The lands where all started: Mamluks, Egypt & the Ptolemies

This chapter will attempt to explain on the one hand the narratives of the Ptolemaic dynasty the way they survived until this point of the historiographical Muslim scholarship, mainly in Syria and Egypt, and on the other hand to investigate if the local Egyptian authors understood the connection between the rulers of the late Hellenic era and the architectural achievements that were standing at their time, or not, all around Egypt.

From the North-East coast of the Mediterranean Sea, to the East shore of the Iberian Peninsula, the Ptolemies left their trace in history, and accomplished to stay alive in the human memory because of the passion of historians that defied any cultural or language barriers. This endless thirst for knowledge from the Muslims scholars part continued during the Mamluk period, starting from 1250 CE and ends with the rise of the Ottoman empire in 1517 CE. This historical period produced an extensive of number works that the modern humanities dedicate a whole branch to the Mamluk Studies. The chronicles and histories produced in Mamluk Syria and Egypt are considered a separate category from the previous periods with their own characteristics, as Hirschler wrote, it has been “a veritable explosion that history writing experienced in Syria and Egypt from the thirteenth century onwards”¹¹⁴.

Once again, the broader Syrian region becomes a fertile ground for its local intellectuals to engage with the history of their lands. Ibn al-‘Adīm (d. 1262CE), an Aleppan historian, found another reason to include in his history the last kings of Egypt. His work “*Ta’rīkh Ḥalab*” (The history of Aleppo) has significant importance because of its future use in works of numerous later historians like Ibn Khalikān (d. 681/1282), ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād (d. 684/1285) and many more¹¹⁵. Ibn al-‘Adīm expresses perfectly the new tendency that arises between Syria and Egypt. The local historians aim to describe the history of their lands, and this is how Ibn al-‘Adīm sees the Ptolemies, as rulers that influenced Syria, and more specifically Aleppo, that’s why they deserve to be part of his book. The list of the kings that he provides has been carefully made, giving to the reader both the Greek names in Arabic transliteration and the Arabic translation. A second detail that was not part of the Arabic narratives previously is a renewed motif, the conflict between the Judeans-Hasmonaean Dynasty and the Ptolemies. In the section dedicated to

¹¹⁴ Wollina, Torsten. "Devotional Annotations: Preserving the Family's Memory in Arabic Manuscripts." *Religions* 10, no. 6 (2019): Religions, Jun 2019, Vol.10(6).

¹¹⁵ Eddé, Anne-Marie. ‘Ibn Al-‘Adīm’. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. (Accessed June 2, 2020).

the Greek past of Aleppo he mentions all the names and the years that each king reigned alongside with the Judean rulers and the Seleucian, without losing the opportunity to point to the reader who is responsible for the infrastructures made in Aleppo, for example watering canals and castles.¹¹⁶

A contemporary scholar to Ibn al-‘Adīm, being called with the nickname Ibn al-‘Ibrī because of his Jewish descend , provided us with the most extensive reference to the Ptolemies in all Islamic Historiography. His fluency in Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac and his dream of a Syriac revivalism movement¹¹⁷ made him capable of diving deep into old sources that many Arabic speakers could not, working only on contemporary translations. His motivation in writing about a Greeks can be explained from the first words of his reference:

“As for the Greeks, they were a great nation among the nations. Among them was Alexander son of Philip the Macedonian, who gathered the kings of the earth, who obeyed his authority. And after him there were among the Greek kings of the Ptolemies that lasted their kingdoms and humiliated their enemies”¹¹⁸.

Some lines after he refers to the Romans who came in power after them. In Ibn al-‘Ibrī’s mind the Ptolemies deserve a position in the world’s history-what was considered as world at that time- in a more universalistic way and not being limited to the Mediterranean coasts. The way his lemma is presented looks very encyclopaedical and informative. Every King’s name is accompanied by a short or longer passage with every information he had in his disposal, and many of the female members of the family are mentioned too.¹¹⁹ The years that every king reigned, the accurately written names and the events attributed to every Ptolemy-with some influences of the later events that were attached on the narrative-, make Ibn al-‘Ibrī rightfully the Porphyry of the 13th century, over a whole millennium later.

A narrative that concerns the Ptolemies, the way that has been seen in the previous chapters, continued circulating even till the late Mamluk era, by famous historians like Abu ‘l-Fidā (d. 1331 CE)¹²⁰, al-Nuwayrī (d. 1333 CE)¹²¹, Aybak al-Dawādārī (d. 1335

¹¹⁶Ibn al- ‘Adīm, 2003. p.10-11

¹¹⁷ Segal, J.B. ‘Ibn Al-‘Ibrī’. In Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. (Accessed June 2, 2020).

¹¹⁸ Ibn al-‘Ibrī, 1890.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem

¹²⁰ In his work: “al-Āṭār al-bāqiyya ‘an al-qurūn al-kāliya”

CE)¹²², Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-‘Umarī (d. 1349 CE)¹²³, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406 CE)¹²⁴, al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418 CE) and al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442 CE), the names of their works are provided in footnotes below. Looking at the names of these scholars someone can find a common characteristic, and this is their common Egyptian identity, with an exception the Tunisian Ibn Khaldūn who only visited Egypt in his journeys. All the narratives have been included in this Thesis show that in the common Muslim historic memory the Ptolemies were Greek Kings that ruled over Egypt and periodically in Syria and Palestine. But Ptolemies actually were more than a memory in reality. Besides of the mythical light house and great library of Alexandria, that were destroyed before the authors of our interest started composing their works, Egypt was -and is- full of unique Ptolemaic architectural achievements. The questions that rises is, were the Muslim scholars of the Mamluk Era able to understand that not all the ancient temples belonged to the Pharaonic inheritance?

It would be a mistake to consider that all Ptolemies had the tendency to adopt Pharaonic profiles in every aspect of life or if they used it for political purposes related to the local population. But historiography with literature motifs and very limited sources would not be the ideal source for a sociological investigation of the Ptolemaic period. The temples on the other hand, that belonged to a period which attracted the interest of the Muslim scholars, should attract equally their interest. The most well-preserved temples that survive even today are, *Edfu*, a temple dedicated to ancient god Horus built by Ptolemy VII, *Dendera*, temple belonged to the goddess Hathor and was built by Ptolemy XII Auletes, *Kom Ombo*, built by Ptolemy VI Philometor in order Horus and Sobek to be worshiped and last the temples of *Esna* and *Philae*. What is important to keep in mind is that these temples were built over older ones, but following the distinct Ptolemaic architectural construction¹²⁵ and that the last three temples were finished by the Roman emperor Tiberius, meaning that were already in very good condition many years after the Ptolemies.

In a very interesting book, Okasha El-Daly, argues that the Medieval Egyptian scholars showed that the ancient monuments of Egypt intrigued their passion for understanding and discovering, focusing mainly on the Arabic understanding of the Pharaonic Era. According

¹²¹ In his work: “Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab”

¹²² In his work: “Kanz al-durar wa-jāmi‘ al-jurar “

¹²³ In his work: “*Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*”

¹²⁴ In his work: “*al-Muqaddima*”

¹²⁵ Hölbl, G., 2000. p. 160-172

to the author, the millennium that is considered unfruitful for the advancement of modern Egyptology, was not useless at all. There are Arabic scripts that presented in El-Daly's book that prove the attempts of describing and analyzing hieroglyphics by the medieval scholars, but there are any connections to the Ptolemies. The only member of the Ptolemaic dynasty that through the literature seems to be part of the pharaonic memory in the Egyptian's scholars' minds, and not in the Hellenistic where she belonged, is Cleopatra. In an extended analysis El-Daly explains how the name of queen Cleopatra VII Philopator, last queen of the Ptolemies, was connected with philosophy, magnificent constructions and even cultural unity because of her unique skill in using Egyptian, the only member of the Ptolemaic family that used the local language.¹²⁶ However the research turns into a failure when someone attempts to find in the medieval Arabic texts any connection between Ptolemies as Pharaohs and their constructions.

This distinction between Ptolemies as "Kings" and not as "Pharaohs" has been clearly made by a very famous non-Egyptian theologian polymath of the Mamluk period, Ibn Taymiyya (1255 CE) in his work "Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ", where he states "They (the Greeks) used to call their kings Ptolemies, as the Egyptians called theirs Pharaoh, the Ethiopians Negus, and the Persians Khosrow."¹²⁷

These few lines, even though they are written in a work of theologian interest, expressing clearly the idea of the Ptolemies in the Arabic works. I would personally argue that the meaning of what Ibn Taymiyya argues can be understood in two ways. First and more obvious, is that every non-Islamic culture had their own way to call their rulers. The second way can be, looking at the original text too¹²⁸, that the Ptolemies could be kings for the Greeks ("Basileus") and Pharaohs for the Egyptians, but this is a simple assumption. On the one hand it can be an arbitrary expression of Ibn Taymiyya while he used many times in the works the word "Pharaoh" because of his references to the bible, on the other hand it is odd to put side by side title that have so big chronological difference like the Pharaohs and the Hellenistic kings.

¹²⁶ Daly, Okasha El. 2005. p. 129-130

¹²⁷ Translation by: Ibn Taymīyah, Michel, Thomas 1984.

¹²⁸ Original text in arabic:

"صَاحِبِ أَرِسْطُو - بَنَحُو ثَلَاثِمِائَةَ سَنَةٍ. وَيُقَالُ: إِنَّهُ أَجْرُ مُلُوكِهِمْ كَانَ (بَطْلَيْمُوسَ) وَكَانُوا يُسَمُّونَ الْمَلِكَ مِنْ مُلُوكِهِمْ (بَطْلَيْمُوسَ) كَمَا يُسَمُّونَ الْقَيْطَ مَلِكَهَا (فِرْعَوْنَ) وَالْحَبَشَةَ مَلِكَهَا (النَّجَاشِيَّ) وَالْفَرَسَ (كِسْرَى) وَنَحْوَ ذَلِكَ. وَحِينَئِذٍ فَعَدُولُكُمْ عَنْ طَرِيقَةِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالْمُرْسَلِينَ."

Source: Taymiyya 1999.

In order to understand what local Egyptian Muslim scholars were thinking while facing the Ptolemaic remaining we have to take a closer look at works that referred to them. The term that was used in order to express the meaning of “pagan temples” was “barbā”, a word of Coptic origin firstly used by the famous traveler Ibn-Jubayr and the historian Yāqūt, according to ‘Encyclopedia of Islam’.¹²⁹ The first work that we have to take into account is “*Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā fī ṣinā‘at al-inshā’*” (“The Dawn of the Blind”) written by the jurist al-Qalqashandi (d. 1418). This work was not meant to be an actual historiographic work but a secretarial manual in order to cover the bureaucratic needs of Mamluk Egypt.¹³⁰ In the original Arabic text al-Qalqashandi cites under the title “As for the great buildings that remain on the lane of time” seven temples, between them two that belong to the Ptolemaic period, the temple of Dendera and Esna. Unfortunately, he did not provide us with historical background that he probably didn’t have enough clues to connect, while there is a short list- reference on the Ptolemies in the same work. It was enough for him to give an external description of those temples, characterize the first one as a building that its architecture favors the sunlight to pass through the building and the second that is of small size.¹³¹

A more extended work on the Ptolemies and their temples has been written some years later by the well-known historian of the Mamluk Era, al-Maqrīzī, “*Al-Mawā‘iz wa-al-Itibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār*” , or just “*al-Khiṭaṭ*” is a historiographical and topographical work that focuses on the area of Egypt. In an extensive chapter that aims to describe the “miraculous” (al-‘ajā’ib) pagan religious that Egypt of his period inherited he spends some line to describe some of the temples of this Thesis’ interest. Similarly, al-Qalqashandi, al-Maqrīzī focuses on the description of the temples more, with the difference that he makes some comments in between the descriptions that show his further interest in those buildings. Referring to a non-Ptolemaic temple of *Akmim* he writes “(...) and from them (the miracles): the temple of Akhmim is a wonder of wonders, having on it pictures and marvels and depictions of the kings who ruled over Egypt. (...)”¹³² and this phrase can explain well the way that the Muslim scholars wanted to see the archaeological sites that were laying all around them. As an inheritance of the once ruled glorious - pagans- kings.

¹²⁹ Wiet, G. ‘Barbā’. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. (Accessed June 15, 2020.)

¹³⁰ Bosworth, C.E. ‘Al-*Ḳalqashandī*’. (Accessed May 10, 2020).

¹³¹ Ḥamzah 1963.

¹³² Al-Maqrīzī, 1998. p.36

6. Conclusion

As it seems the respond to the question posed in the introduction is more complicated than someone could imagine in the beginning. We can definitely establish that the Arabs remembered, or to be more exact, chose to remember the Ptolemaic family but not always as part of their local remembrance. From the first translations of Baghdad and for many years after, the Ptolemies were faced a story that belongs to a more general pre-Islamic past, being a dynasty of foreign king that ruled over Egypt. Some scholars with more strict scientific profile found the Ptolemaic lists interesting to be included in their works but not something more than that. Others found the Ptolemies as the only narrative suitable in order to help to a smooth transition from the fall of a mythical king to the rise of Rome, and this is a safe conclusion too make. It is true that for most of the works that presented before, the Ptolemies were under a title that included the terms “Greek Kings”, sharing their reference with the precedent Alexander the Great and later with the Byzantine Emperors.

In the meantime, Claudius Ptolemy was transferring some of his fame and accomplishment to the ancient Kings, being among them and intriguing more and more the imagination of the scholars and their readers. As the scholarship of historiography was becoming stricter in its practices, the Muslim scholars started facing more critical the older sources and make comparisons in order to correct possible mistakes. But the power of the famous narratives was not so easily forgotten. Even after the first corrections and depending on the scholars’ perspective, the Ptolemies could be vicious rulers, companionate and intellectual kings or benefactors. If we realize though the centuries that these works have between them, we would characterize them rather stable. This model of copying and transmitting kept the Ptolemaic tree stable, even with the specific mistakes that an older scholar presented, showing us the sources of each scholar and how different he understood what he read from the previous author that he had in his disposal.

An important piece of this “historiographical puzzle” as I stated in the introduction, is the connection between the Ptolemies and the Land of Egypt, not in general but with the pharaonic-Ptolemaic inheritance. Alexandria’s buildings for example, as Ibn Hawqal said, was distinct for its Greek past because of the marble, and this material was more often being related to the ancient Greeks. On the other hands, in references like al-Maqrīzī’s, there is an obvious distance in his mind concerning the old temples and the analytical

reference to the Greek kings of Egypt. A possible explanation could be that his source on the Ptolemies was a Latin monk named Horosius from Suebiae, that he cites in the beginning of his account¹³³. Taking the Ptolemies outside the Egyptian context, writing about them more in a “known-world” scale can work as a factor of alienation between the story and the lands that it took place. But it would be unfair to judge the authors only for this fact. Even with very few sources that the first scholars had, they did not let the Ptolemaic Dynasty be lost in history. Even the new traditions that they were shaped through this process is a valuable example of their understanding and admiration to the Ptolemies, that in many cases -Ibn al-Ibrī- exceeded the Byzantines Greek’s admiration who chose to remember them for their behavior towards the Judean people and the bible.

At this point, there are some issues that need to be addressed. This thesis had to set a good basis in order the reader to understand how the transmission took place and what were the available sources. Unfortunately, there were not previous works that could provide the necessary information about the Ptolemies, within literature texts, in order to dedicate more space to the secondary literature and the personal influences of each scholar separately. It was more important for me to introduce the story that a scholar wanted to narrate in his work and analyze his own words, than to skip every story and focus on the factors that influenced his works and only this. The words can hide many stories themselves, for example the word “Lagus” that we saw it being translating and entirely changing name of a king, or the word “Hīflūs” in the third chapter that needs raises questions about its origin. These primary sources could only show us the intentions of the scholars in remembering the Dynasty. A personal concern is that all the editions of the primary sources are quite contemporary, making me doubt if these small and beautiful details derive from the old works directly or by the modern editors. This is a topic that we always have to keep in mind. Besides of these issues, there is plenty of work to be done on this subject.

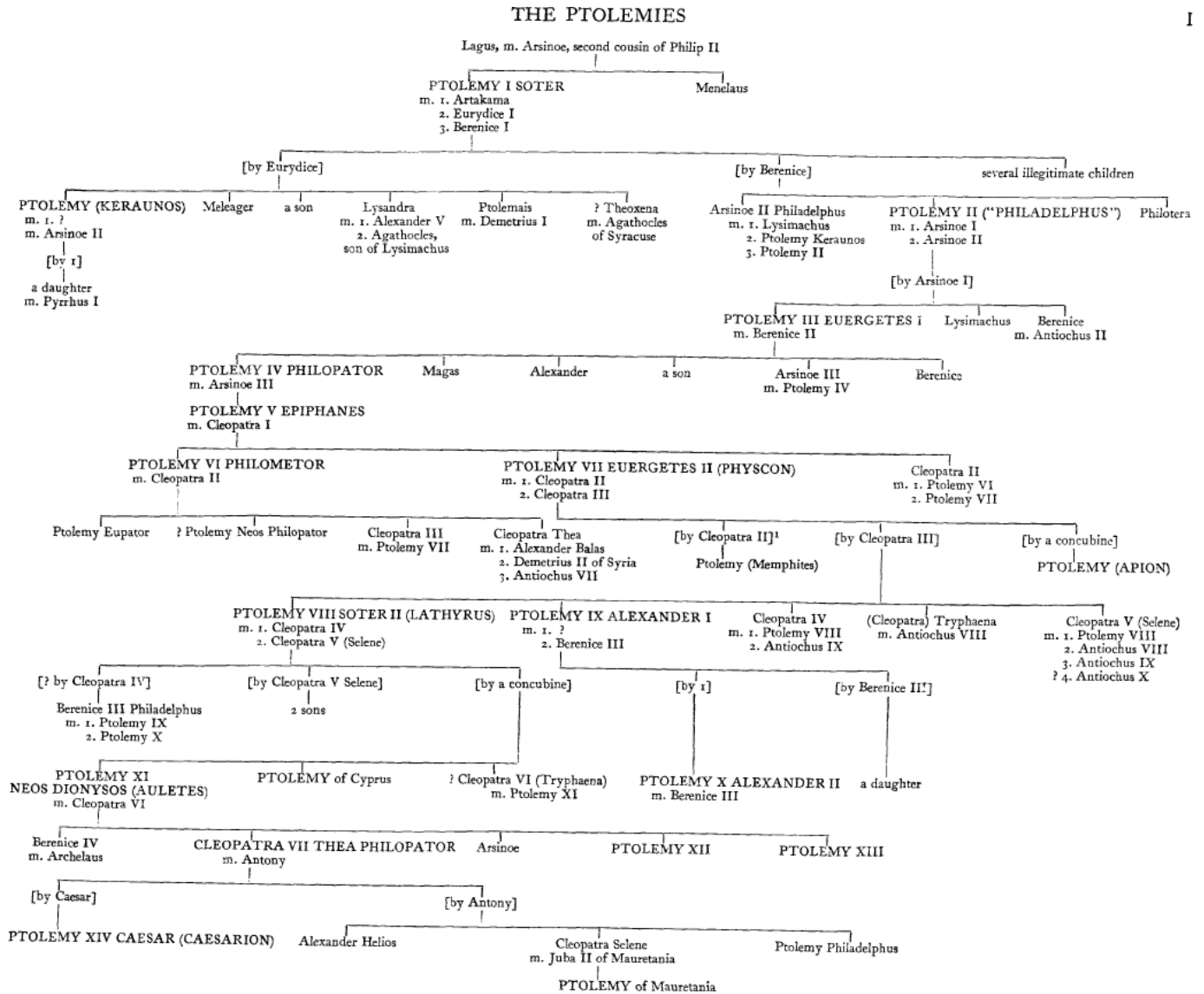
The first step that can lead this research further and deeper into the topic is the sources that could not be investigated in this Thesis. During this research I was often face different routes that could lead the research to different types of scholarships and understandings. There are texts in which secondary literature was referring to, in Syriac, Coptic and Hebrew that I am sure they would have their own story to tell. Another perspective that would be very interest would be to combine the references to the Ptolemies with the rest of

¹³³ Al-Maqrīzī, 1998. p.133

the Successors of Alexander the Great. We have seen already that the Ptolemies were the rightful heirs of the Macedonian king but what were they considering about Seleucids, the Bactrians and the Antigonids? The Persian Identity is often attached to the Seleucids making the topic really exciting. These intercultural and intellectual transmissions will never run out of wonderful reasons for us to explore them.

7. Appendices

I



¹ Some believe they had another son; see E. R. Bevan, *A history of Egypt under the Ptolemaic dynasty*, p. 309, n. 3.

Image 1 Ptolemaic Family tree according to Cambridge ancient history

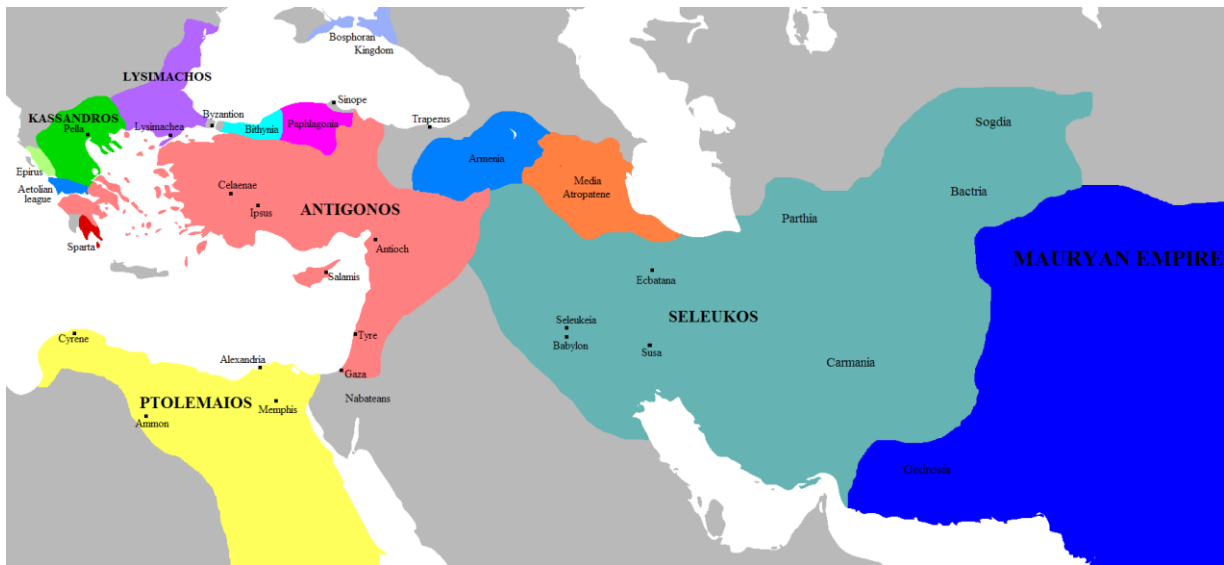


Image 2 Map of the Successor Kingdoms after the death of Alexander the Great.



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Image 4. Ptolemy I, tetradrachmon, c. 300-282 BCE: Head of Ptolemy/Eagle on Thunderbolt



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Image 3. Cleopatra VII, bronze 80 drachma(?), c. 40-30 BCE: Bust of Cleopatra/Eagle on thunderbolt



Image 5. Detail from the coronation ritual of the Living Holy Falcon in Edfu

8. List of Illustrations

Image 1: Ptolemaic Family tree according to Cambridge ancient history

Source: The Cambridge Ancient History. Vol.7. p. 488-489

Image 2: Map of the Successor Kingdoms after the death of Alexander the Great.

Source: Javierfv1212. "Map of the Successor Kingdoms, c. 303 BCE." Ancient History Encyclopedia. Last modified April 26, 2012. <https://www.ancient.eu/image/581/>. (Accessed 15 June 2020)

Image 3&4:

3. Cleopatra VII, bronze 80 drachma(?), c. 40-30 BCE: Bust of Cleopatra/Eagle on thunderbolt

4. Ptolemy I, tetradrachmon, c. 300-282 BCE: Head of Ptolemy/Eagle on Thunderbolt.

Christopher Howgego. *Ancient History from Coins*. 1995. p. 166 the descriptions and p. 179 the images

Image 5: Detail from the coronation ritual of the Living Holy Falcon in Edfu

Source: Leiden University Site,

Link: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2017/02/temple-culture-in-ptolemaic-egypt-alive-and-kicking> (Accessed 15 June 2020)

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10. Transliteration System

IJMES TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM FOR ARABIC, PERSIAN, AND TURKISH

CONSONANTS

A = Arabic, P = Persian, OT = Ottoman Turkish, MT = Modern Turkish

	A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT
ء	ʾ	ʾ	ʾ	—	ز	z	z	z	z	ك	k	k or g	k or ñ	k or n
ب	b	b	b	b or p	ژ	—	zh	j	j				or y	or y
پ	—	p	p	p	س	s	s	s	s				or ğ	or ğ
ت	t	t	t	t	ش	sh	sh	ş	ş	گ	—	g	g	g
ث	th	ṯ	ṯ	s	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ş	s	ل	l	l	l	l
ج	j	j	c	c	ض	ḍ	ẓ	ẓ	z	م	m	m	m	m
چ	—	ch	ç	ç	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	t	ن	n	n	n	n
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	h	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	z	ه	h	h	h ¹	h ¹
خ	kh	kh	h	h	ع	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ	—	و	w	v or u	v	v
د	d	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	g or ğ	g or ğ	ي	y	y	y	y
ذ	dh	ẓ	ẓ	z	ف	f	f	f	f	ة	a ²			
ر	r	r	r	r	ق	q	q	q	k	ال	a ³			

¹ When h is not final. ² In construct state: at. ³ For the article, al- and -l-.

VOWELS

	ARABIC AND PERSIAN	OTTOMAN AND MODERN TURKISH
<i>Long</i>	ا or آ ā	ā } words of Arabic and Persian origin only
	و ū	
	ي ī	
<i>Doubled</i>	آي iy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)
	أو uw (final form ū)	uvv
<i>Diphthongs</i>	أو au or aw	ev
	أي ai or ay	ey
<i>Short</i>	ا a	a or e
	و u	u or ü / o or ö
	ي i	i or i

For Ottoman Turkish, authors may either transliterate or use the modern Turkish orthography.