

# A Reader's Guide To PTOLEMAIC EGYPT

Created by The Hellenistic Age Podcast

Heirs to both Alexander the Great and the Pharaonic tradition, the Ptolemies were the longest-ruling dynasty of both Egypt and the Successor Kingdoms. Here are a couple of books I've found to be useful for those wanting to learn more about some of the most famous (and infamous) figures of the Hellenistic Age:



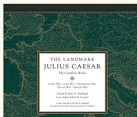
## Primary



**Diodorus Siculus - Library of History (Books 1, 18-20)**  
While sometimes only as good as his sources, Diodorus provides the most complete account of the early Hellenistic period. Books 18-20 covers the Wars of the Successors, in which Ptolemy I Soter plays a major role throughout. Book 1 also provides important tidbits on post-Hellenistic Egypt. Oxford World Classics recommended.



**Polybius - The Histories**  
Easily the greatest historian of the Hellenistic Age, Polybius' surviving books provide a rich account of the reign of Ptolemy IV, including the Fourth Syrian War fought between him and Antiochus III of the Seleucid Empire, but fragments continue to deal with the Ptolemaic kingdom throughout the early 2nd century. OWC provides Books 1-6. Loeb collects the rest of the fragments.



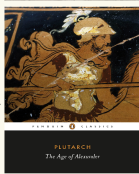
**Julius Caesar - The Civil and Alexandrian Wars**  
Writing in the third person, Caesar (or more likely a subordinate) provides an account of his involvement in the civil war between Ptolemy XIII and Cleopatra VII, before becoming trapped in Alexandria in a siege by its inhabitants. The Landmark Classics edition provides helpful maps, footnotes, and essays analyzing Caesar's works.



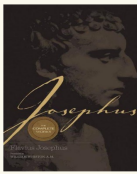
**Livy - The History of Rome (Books 31-45)**  
A Roman historian under Emperor Augustus, Livy's monumental work on the history of Rome spends ample time covering their arrival into the Greek East. Though sometimes overly patriotic, Livy builds upon where Ptolemy left off, and gives plenty of information about the reigns of Ptolemy V-VII. OWC recommended.



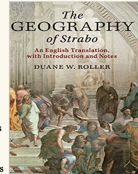
**Justin - Epitome of the Philippic Histories**  
An epitome of an earlier "universal" history, Justin covers the affairs of the Hellenistic world. Despite its often-dramatic style, it is invaluable as a complete (if heavily condensed) chronicle of the Ptolemaic dynasty. A cheaper one-volume copy is offered by Sophron Publishing, but a more academically rigorous edition is translated by J.C. Yardley.



**Plutarch - Lives of the Greeks and Romans**  
A moralist and biographer, Plutarch composed several colorful "Lives" of important Greeks and Romans. While no Ptolemaic ruler is given such a treatment, they (and especially Cleopatra) feature as important characters in the lives of Demetrius, Aratus, Cleomenes, Pompey, Caesar, and Antony.



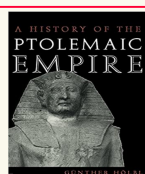
**Josephus - The Antiquities of the Jews**  
A prominent Jewish author of the Roman period, Flavius Josephus composed a history of Jerusalem and the Jews throughout antiquity. Since the Ptolemies controlled Judea from the late 4th-early 2nd centuries, we gain a unique non-Greek perspective on their rule and relationship with the Jewish peoples, but Josephus also fills in the details of the events in Egypt at the time. An affordable and complete collection of Josephus' works by Thomas Nelson Publishing is recommended.



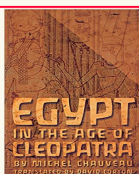
**Strabo - The Geography**  
Composed in the Augustan period, Strabo provides a descriptive account of the ancient world from Britain to Bactria, mixing geography with digressions on history and ethnography. While written a few decades after Cleopatra's death, Book 17 remains one of our most valuable eyewitness accounts of Greco-Roman Egypt, including a lengthy discussion on Alexandria. The complete one-volume edition published by Cambridge is quite good.

## Secondary

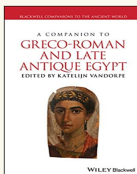
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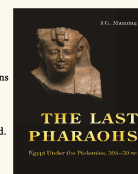
**A History of the Ptolemaic Empire - G. Hölbl**  
The best single-volume work covering the history of the Ptolemaic dynasty from Ptolemy I to Cleopatra VII. In addition to a narrative account, there are discussions on topics relating to the monarchy and religion.



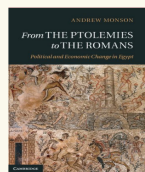
**Egypt in the Age of Cleopatra - M. Chauveau**  
A fantastic introduction to the world of Hellenistic Egypt. Very accessible, provides a clear and concise overview of the major aspects of Ptolemaic society without becoming overly bogged down in details.



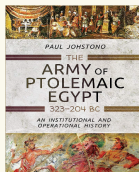
**A Companion to Greco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt - K. Vandorpe (editor)**  
I've always been a fan of the Blackwell Companions series, and this is one of their best. With contributions by several leading experts, this companion covers virtually every topic relating to Egypt during the Hellenistic period and beyond. If you haven't wanted an expanded version of Chauveau's work, this is the place to go.



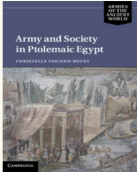
**The Last Pharaohs - J.G. Manning**  
Thanks to an intensive taxation program and fertility of the Nile River, the Ptolemies were the richest people in the 3rd century BC. Manning offers an analysis of the Ptolemaic monarchy, viewing them as the inheritors of the Macedonian and Egyptian traditions and looking to see how they sought to assert their authority by using the preexisting machinery of governance.



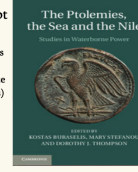
**From the Ptolemies to the Romans - A. Monson**  
An overview of the administrative and economic organization of Hellenistic Egypt. Very straightforward, full of interesting charts and figures relating to Egypt's demography, land ownership, and more.



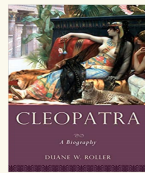
**The Army of Ptolemaic Egypt - P. Johnston**  
Though often considered lesser than their Seleucid or Antigonid rivals, the Ptolemies were no strangers to war, and maintained one of the ancient world's largest militaries. Johnston's work covers the Ptolemaic army at its height, giving an account of its operations and organization from the Wars of the Diadochi to the Battle of Raphia.



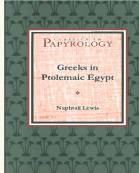
**Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt - C. Fischer-Bovet**  
Instead of tactics or strategy, Fischer-Bovet looks at the Ptolemaic army as an institution, using papyrological and literary evidence to investigate how the soldiers (of various ethnic backgrounds) were deeply involved in the economic, social, and cultural landscape of Egypt.



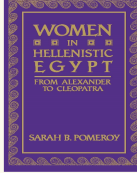
**The Ptolemies, the Sea and the Nile - K. Buraselis et al. (editors)**  
In addition to their holdings in Egypt, the Ptolemies were one of the great naval powers of the era. This series of essays focuses on multiple aspects of their nautical enterprises, such as the role of the navy in defense and the exploration of the Red Sea for the burgeoning trade with East Africa and India.



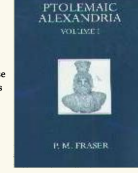
**"Women in Antiquity" (Series) - Oxford University Press**  
The prominence of the royal ladies of the Ptolemaic dynasty is quite unique when compared to their Seleucid and Antigonid counterparts. This series has seen the release of solid biographies of three of the most important Ptolemaic queens: Arsinoe II (E. Carney), Berenice II (D.L. Clayman), and Cleopatra VII (D.W. Roller).



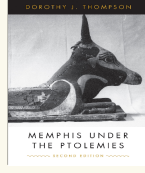
**Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt - N. Lewis**  
The abundance of papyrus fragments enables us to get an intimate look at those who lived and died under the rule of the Ptolemies. This introductory work focuses on a few case studies, such as the records of the chief engineer Kleon, who oversaw the terraforming of the Fayyum Oasis, or the letters of Ptolemaios, a reclusive devotee of the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis.



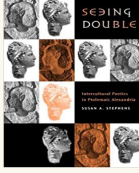
**Women in Hellenistic Egypt - S.B. Pomeroy**  
Thanks to the corpus of papyrus fragments and ostraca, the women of Hellenistic Egypt are better documented than just about anywhere else in the ancient world. Pomeroy looks at the lives and roles of the women of Greek Egypt, be they slaves or queens.



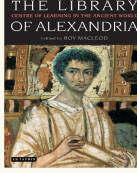
**Ptolemaic Alexandria - P.M. Fraser**  
Alexandria-by-Egypt, or simply Alexandria, was the capital of the Ptolemaic kingdom and among the largest and most beautiful cities in history. Fraser's immense study meticulously looks over every aspect of Alexandria, going from its foundation and organization to important landmarks like the Library and the Lighthouse of Pharos.



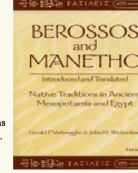
**Memphis Under the Ptolemies - D.J. Thompson**  
While the Greeks may have had Alexandria, the Egyptians had Memphis, which remained an extremely important cultural and religious center. Thompson provides a look at an "Egyptian" city during the period, but also insights on the often-cooperative relationship between the Ptolemies and the Memphite priesthood.



**Seeing Double: Intercultural Poetics in Ptolemaic Alexandria - S.S. Stephens**  
Thanks to the patronage of the Ptolemies, Alexandria played host to a prestigious body of artists. Stephens looks at the most important of these figures - namely the poets Callimachus, Theocritus, and Apollonius - to see how they were integral in communicating Ptolemaic imperial ideology and reorienting the framework of Egypt through court poetry.

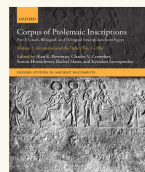


**The Library of Alexandria - R. MacLeod (editor)**  
A pet project of Ptolemy II, the Library of Alexandria was the greatest repository of knowledge in all of antiquity, and possessed a staff of dedicated scholars who composed their own original body of works. This volume has several authors tackling the various aspects of the library's history, myths, and contributions to the intellectual culture of the Mediterranean.

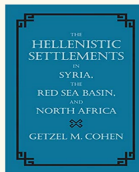


**Berossos and Manetho, Introduced and Translated - G.P. Verbrugge and J.M. Wickersham**  
Manetho, an Egyptian priest serving in the retinue of Ptolemy I and II, was the author of the Aegyptiaca, a history of Egypt written in Greek. This volume compiles the fragments of the Aegyptiaca and provides a scholarly introduction at Manetho's aims and the context of his work as an Egyptian author expressing pride for his culture to a Greek audience.

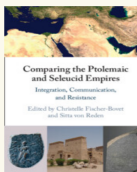
## Miscellaneous/Reference



**Corpus of Ptolemaic Inscriptions - A.K. Bowman et al. (editors)**  
In addition to papyrus fragments, we also have a large collection of inscriptions dating to the Ptolemaic period, most notably the Rosetta Stone of Ptolemy V. These volumes compile the inscriptions, preserving their bi- or trilingual forms (Greek, Hieroglyphic, and Demotic Egyptian).



**The Hellenistic Settlements (series) - G.M. Cohen**  
Alexandria may have been the crown jewel, but the Ptolemies founded many cities across Egypt and the surrounding areas of the Levant and East Africa. Cohen provides a virtual encyclopedia of all known Ptolemaic settlements, giving a list of sources and general summary of information on each.



**Comparing the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires - C. Fischer-Bovet and S. von Reden (editors)**  
Ruling over Syria and much of Alexander's Asian territories, the Seleucid Empire was the great rival of the Ptolemaic dynasty. This study seeks to compare and contrast the two great powers, showing how they responded when faced with similar problems in the course of establishing and maintaining their kingdoms.

