

095: Ptolemaic Egypt – The Two Lands Restored

Throughout the history of the Ptolemaic kingdom, one is hard-pressed to find a ruler who inherited such a dire set of circumstances upon taking the throne as Ptolemy V. With his father's premature death in 204 and the murder of his mother shortly afterwards, the six-year-old boy was orphaned and left to the mercy of ambitious court officials looking to use him as a puppet for their own whims. Though the Alexandrian mob violently intervened to secure his survival, his approved representatives faced quite the odds: a violent rebellion led by the native pharaoh named Haronnophoris seized much of Upper Egypt since 206, with attacks reaching ever-further north with each passing year; meanwhile two of the fiercest warrior kings of the era, Philip V of Macedon and Antiochus III of the Seleucid Empire, agreed to carve apart Ptolemy's inheritance. The situation was indeed dire, yet the dynasty would survive and continue to rule for another 150 years, though at a fraction of their former power. Let us look to see how the Ptolemaic kingdom was able to recover from two decades of turmoil and see how they adapted from this time of crisis.

As we can recall, the Fifth Syrian War formally began following the invasion of Coele Syria by Antiochus III in mid-202, though he had been attacking Ptolemaic territories in Asia Minor in years prior. The Alexandrian government mobilized its strained resources to combat the incoming Seleucid king and handed responsibility over to the mercenary general Scopas of Aetolia, who was able to recapture a fair amount of land, including Jerusalem. Hope for another victory like at Raphia was misplaced, as the Ptolemaic army suffered a devastating defeat at the Battle of Panium in the summer of 200. Most of the 50,000 men brought to the field were killed or captured, and the pike phalanx virtually annihilated, which was staffed by large numbers of Greco-Macedonian cleurchs.¹ There was little that the royal court could do as a full-scale conquest by the Seleucid king seemed inevitable. Yet Antiochus chose instead to head back to Asia Minor in 197 and continue his campaign against the last Ptolemaic strongholds in the region. Perhaps his decision was due in-part to the intervention of the Roman Republic, who sent ambassadors in 200 who either were looking to arrange for peace talks between the two dynasties or delivered an order to Antiochus to keep his hands off Egypt.² They probably were most interested in gauging the Seleucid king's willingness to provide military assistance to Philip V, who was eventually defeated by the Republic in 197 and forced to relinquish his claims over territories in Asia. While Rome expressed an interest in taking the role of arbitrator, the two dynasties had been negotiating for an end to the war without their knowledge.

The Alexandrian court witnessed a series of powerful court officials come and go since the beginning of young Ptolemy's reign: Sosibius the Elder, Agathocles, Tleopolemus, and lastly Aristomenes, who oversaw most of the war effort. This chaotic politicking certainly did no favors for the defense of Coele Syria, and much of the criticism was placed upon Aristomenes' shoulders. By 196 he was falling out of favor, exacerbated by the arrival of Polycrates of Argos – the governor of Cyprus and one of the architects of the victory at Raphia – who came to the capital bearing great sums of money to be gifted to Ptolemy. This propelled him to the king's inner circle, who was now 13 years old and approaching the age where he could be formally coronated. Polycrates coordinated the *anakleteria*, Ptolemy's coming of

¹ Johstono, P. (2018): 182-183

² Polybius, 16.27.5; Justin, 31.1.2; Appian, *The Macedonian Wars*, 4

age ceremony, and this was matched by a coronation in the city of Memphis on November 27th of 197 – more on that later. The realm could now boast once again of being commanded by a proper king, though his advisors would be strongly relied upon to get him past his teenage years, placing Polycrates' in just the right position.³

As the sole surviving member of the dynasty, it was essential that Ptolemy quickly find himself a bride and produce more heirs. Coincidentally there was an eager father looking to secure a husband for his daughter: that father being Antiochus III. A marriage alliance with the Seleucid house was unorthodox, but not without precedent. Granted, the last time the two families were united through marriage, that being Antiochus II Theos and Berenice Phernophoros, the murder of the Ptolemaic princess and her child by the rival Seleucid line led to the outbreak of the Third Syrian War. But this was a different situation, now a Seleucid bride was in the Alexandrian court, her father still very much active on the world stage as a force to be reckoned with. Could she realistically be trusted? The author of the Book of Daniel claims that Antiochus III intended to use Cleopatra to undermine the Egyptian kingdom:

“He [Antiochus] shall set his mind to come with the strength of his whole kingdom, and he shall bring terms of peace and perform them. In order to destroy the kingdom [of Egypt], he shall give [Ptolemy] a woman in marriage; but it shall not succeed or be to his advantage.”⁴

In 195, Antiochus announced the impending union between Ptolemy V and his daughter Cleopatra, signifying the end of the Fifth Syrian War. A wedding was held at Raphia in late 194, no doubt intended to give the Seleucid king a degree of satisfaction after being defeated there nearly 23 years earlier, and Cleopatra was received into the House of Ptolemy.⁵ As the author of Daniel states, the situation did not exactly work in Antiochus' favor as he might have intended. Cleopatra would end up proving to be a dutiful wife for her new husband and a skilled ruler of Egypt, though reportedly she expressed a sympathetic attitude towards her family in Syria. It is no coincidence that it was this Cleopatra who introduced the name to the dynasty, which would be used by several Ptolemaic royal ladies thereafter. While she would receive many of the titular honors of her husband, her foreign extraction would earn her the moniker *Syra* (“the Syrian”).⁶

While we have covered the early years of Ptolemy V's reign down to the conclusion of the Fifth Syrian War, we have not paid much attention to the goings-on in Upper Egypt. The Great Revolt, which began in the final years of his father's reign in 206, had split the kingdom and left the government struggling to contain it to the Thebaid. The native Egyptian rebel Haronnophoris was declared pharaoh in 205 by the Theban priests of Amun, politically and cosmologically challenging the Ptolemies for mastery over Egypt.⁷ Haronnophoris' army overran the major cities of Thebes and Ptolemais-in-the-Thebaid, and by 201 he captured Abydos approximately 170 kilometers to the northwest, evidenced by an inscription by one of his supporters.⁸ The attacks occurred far and wide varying in degree, as described by a priestly decree from the Temple of Philae:

“The rebel against the gods, [Haronnophoris], he who had made war in Egypt, gathering insolent people

³ Polybius, 18.53.3-9

⁴ Daniel 11:17, NRSV Translation

⁵ Livy, 35.13.4; Porphyrius, 47; Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.4.1

⁶ Appian, *The Syrian Wars*, 5; Figure 1

⁷ Cairo 38258

⁸ P. Recueil 11; It states that it is in year 5 of his reign, so presumably in 201/200.

from all districts on account of their crimes, they did terrible things to the governors of the nomes, they desecrated (?) the temples, they damaged (?) the divine statues, they molested (?) the priests and suppressed (?) the offerings on the altars and in the shrines. They sacked (?) the towns and their population, women and children included, committing all kinds of crimes in the time of anarchy. They stole the taxes of the nomes, they damaged the irrigation works.”⁹

Though they tried to diminish the rebellion by referring to it as “the disturbance”, the Ptolemaic government had done little in combating Haronnophoris’ advance, probably a consequence of the turbulent court politics following the death of Ptolemy IV.¹⁰ A letter written by an unknown Greek soldier expressed the frustration of contending with the insurgent attacks by the rebels and the failure of the local officials to deal with them:

“on the new moon the Egyptians ambushed the guards and pursued them back to the fort. Because the guards had been warned [that an attack might occur]... the [Egyptians] left off the fort and instead attacked the houses just opposite it. They brought a siege device up to the house of Nechthenibis, which lies along the road. But when a part of the palisade threatened to crash upon them, they made their retreat. But know this: the Egyptians are not now guarding the village as we told them, because Kallias is not communicating [orders to them], nor is he submitting reports to us...”¹¹

However, it seems that the government had reached a modicum of stability, and by 200, Ptolemaic forces started their push into Upper Egypt. The Philae Decree suggests that many of these soldiers were mercenaries hired from abroad to shore up manpower, and Ptolemais-in-the-Thebaid was recaptured thanks to this strengthened army.¹² Soon Abydos was placed under siege – the Ptolemaic soldier Philokles of Troizen carved a message on the nearby temple of Seti I in August of 199, offering honors to Serapis and confirming his role in the attack upon the city.¹³ Abydos fell right afterwards, but it seems that the rebel forces had gathered near Koptos, presumably intending to stop the royal army in its tracks. It is believed that a large battle took place here: a funerary epigram for a Macedonian commander named Ptolemaios and his son describes their role in a great battle, “striking down innumerable foes” before being slain themselves during the fight.¹⁴

Haronnophoris was very likely present at this engagement or in Abydos, but there is a noticeable change in protocol. All rebel documents dating from late 199 onwards are no longer dated to the reign of Haronnophoris, but to that of Chaonnophris.¹⁵ It has been often interpreted that Haronnophoris was killed at this point, and the crowning of a second pharaoh bearing the name “May-Onnophoris-Live” was an attempt to show their dedication to the rebel cause. However, I believe that they are the same man: rather than dating documents with a new regnal year (i.e. “Year 0”), Chaonnophris simply continued to use the regnal years of his predecessor, a practice that was unheard of in Egyptian history. His name may

⁹ TM 48339 (https://www.attalus.org/docs/other/inscr_260.html)

¹⁰ The term used is ταραχή

¹¹ BGU 6.1215, translation from Johstono, P. (2016): 201

¹² TM 48339: “His Majesty caused that great quantities of silver and gold came to the land to bring troops to Egypt, money from the taxes of the nomes, in order to protect the temples of Egypt against the impious men who violated them”

¹³ OGIS 758; Along with Serapis, Philokles also pays honors to “Sesostris”, a semi mythological Egyptian pharaoh who was an amalgamation of several real-life rulers, though he misidentifies the very real Seti I with this pseudo-king.

¹⁴ SEG 35.1604; Johstono, P. (2016): 199-200; Compare this to Polybius’ claims at 14.12.4

¹⁵ P. Dem. Berl. Kaufv. 3146

give us a clue, for if people believed that he was killed in the battle, he would have to reaffirm that he escaped and would continue the fight.¹⁶ For the sake of convenience, I will keep using Haronnophris from this point onwards.¹⁷

With nothing opposing them, the royal army marched south towards Thebes, the stronghold of the rebellion and Haronnophris' capital. Between December 199 and January 198, the city was attacked and fell to the Greeks. This was certainly a great victory and the offensive seems to have worked: Ptolemy's authority extended far into the Thebaid once again, and royal garrisons continued to occupy the farthest reaches of the Elephantine near the borders of Nubia.¹⁸ It meant that the rebellion was sandwiched between the incoming army from the north, and prevented from escaping too far south by the garrisons. Haronnophris remained undeterred. Rather than heading deeper into Upper Egypt, it seems that the rebel army escaped Thebes – likely through the desert – and made an appearance in the Delta. Haronnophris captured the settlement of Lycopolis-Shekam sometime during 198.¹⁹ Perhaps due to being cut off from resupplies from Alexandria, the Ptolemaic garrison abandoned Thebes during 197 to reorganize, but Lycopolis was placed under siege.

Though their re-possession of Thebes was brief, the Ptolemaic offensive managed to make a serious dent against the rebellion. Despite the defeat suffered at Panium and the loss of Coele Syria, a celebration was in order. On November 27th 197, the thirteen-year-old Ptolemy V travelled to the city of Memphis to take part in the *anakleteria*, his coming-of-age ceremony. Here he met with the Memphite priesthood to be coronated in the Egyptian manner: the high priest Harmachis adorned Ptolemy's brow with the *Pschent*, the traditional double-crown symbolizing the unity of Upper and Lower Egypt, and granted him the epithet of Epiphanes Eucharistos ("God Manifest and Beneficent"). Several of the rebel leaders captured in the fighting during years prior were brought to the city as well, and were punished for their transgressions with a public execution.²⁰ The ceremony itself was important for the newly crowned Ptolemy V Epiphanes, not only to project the image of a stable kingdom to his counterparts across the Mediterranean, but to also confirm his role as the legitimate pharaoh of Egypt.

Memphis had remained an important city since Alexander's day, but this was the first time in the dynasty's history that a Ptolemaic ruler observed the rites of a traditional Egyptian coronation. Harmachis and his fellow priests remained loyal to the Ptolemaic cause throughout the rebellion's duration, and wielded tremendous influence over the wider communities of Egypt.²¹ For this faithfulness, several concessions needed to be given to ensure they remained so: temples were renovated thanks to the king's generous donations, gifts were bestowed upon the sacred Apis and Mnevis bulls, and perhaps most important were the remission of debts and taxes on temple lands. To celebrate the events of the ceremony and terms with the king, the Memphite priests ordered that a series of decrees be set up across the land on March 27th 196. It was to be relayed across three

¹⁶ Pestman, P.W. (1995): 128-131; For an argument linking Haronnophris and Chaonophris, see Veisse, A.E. (2022); For the religious significance ("Messianic") of the naming convention for these rebel pharaohs, see Clarysse, W. (2004): 10-11

¹⁷ The name Haronnophris is also far easier to pronounce, which is quite convenient.

¹⁸ Evidence for the Ptolemaic garrison at Elephantine during the rebellion: P. Tor. Choach. 1, P. Dem. Berl. 13593

¹⁹ OGIS 90; Pap. Gr. 274; Polybius, 22.17.1

²⁰ OGIS 90

²¹ Thompson, D.J. (2012): 110-112

languages: the traditional Hieroglyphic, the common Demotic Egyptian, and lastly Greek, an excerpt of which reads as follows:

...the chief priests, the prophets, those who enter the holy of holies for the robing of the gods, the pterophoroi, the sacred scribes and all the other priests who assembled before the king from the temples throughout the land to Memphis for the festival of the reception of royalty to the ever-living Ptolemy, beloved of Ptah, God Manifest and Beneficent, which he received from his father, having come together in the temple at Memphis on this day, declared: since King Ptolemy the ever-living, beloved of Ptah, God Manifest and Beneficent, born of King Ptolemy and Queen Arsinoe, Father-Loving Gods, has conferred many benefits on the temples and / those who dwell in them and on all the subjects in his kingdom, being a god born of a god and goddess – just as Horus son of Isis and Osiris, who avenged his father Osiris – and being benevolently disposed towards the gods, has dedicated to the temples revenues in money and corn, and has sustained many expenses to bring Egypt to a state of prosperity and to establish the temples, and has given away freely from his own means, and of the revenues and dues he receives from Egypt some he has completely remitted and others he has reduced, so that the people and all others might enjoy prosperity during his reign.²²

Along with listing Ptolemy's achievements, such as managing the Nile River and his generosity towards the temples, they also emphasized the connection between Ptolemy and the god Ptah, rather than Amun (the protector of Haronnophoris) and celebrated the king's victories over the rebels.²³ This was invaluable for the restoration of Ptolemaic authority over Egypt, and the relationship between the two parties would become closer in subsequent generations.

One copy of the Memphite Decree was carved into a large granodiorite stela, perhaps measuring 5-6 feet tall, where it stood for many hundreds of years, before being lost to the sands of time.²⁴ The surviving portion of the stela was re-discovered in July 1799 during the height of Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt, dug up by Captain Pierre François-Xavier Bouchard during the repairs of an old Ottoman fortress near the town of Rashid ("Rosetta" in French). As an engineering officer with a background in archaeology and classics, Bouchard immediately understood its significance as he translated the Greek portion and prepared it to be shipped back to France following war's end. 167 scholars and scientists (the "savants") accompanied Napoleon to Egypt and performed an enormous amount of work studying (and sometimes plundering) Egyptian antiquities, kicking off a chain reaction that led to the "Egyptomania" that gripped Western Europe thereafter. The Rosetta Stone would be the key to this, but not for some two decades afterwards as it along with most of the excavated antiquities were seized by the British in the Treaty of Alexandria after helping the Ottomans drive the French out of Egypt, and the stone was placed in the British Museum in 1802 as a gift from King George III, which has since been the subject of intensive controversy about its rightful ownership thereafter.

In the context of Ptolemaic epigraphy, the Rosetta Stone is not especially unique for its trilingual nature – a number of examples have been found carrying inscriptions in multiple languages, such as the Canopus

²² OGIS 90; Translation by Austin, M. (2006): 492-495

²³ Cairo 38258

²⁴ The subsequent story and history of the Rosetta Stone's decipherment is extensively captured in Buchwald, J. and Josefowicz, D.G. (2020); Figure 2

Decree of 238 and the Raphia Decree of 217.²⁵ There are even different copies of the Memphis decree that survive, such as the limestone stela of Nubayrah in the Canopus. However, the Rosetta Stone held the distinction of being the first reliable set of inscriptions where scholars could be reasonably certain they were identical translations, as per the final lines of the Greek text:

“This decree shall be inscribed on stelae] of hard stone, in sacred, native and Greek letters, and placed in every [temple] of the first, second [and third rank, next to the statue].”²⁶

This was not entirely true, as the Demotic and Hieroglyphic texts aren't perfectly one-to-one, but often paraphrase the original Greek text. However, it was about as good as one could ask for the time. Prior to the nineteenth century, hieroglyphs – one of the most iconic elements of Ancient Egypt – were indecipherable. Nobody quite knew if the images were meant to be logographic (conveying words) or phonetic (conveying sounds) or ideographic (conveying concepts and abstract ideas). Neither could they determine if the script was written from left to right (akin to modern English and the Romance languages), right to left (such as Hebrew and Arabic), or top to bottom (seen in Chinese and Japanese scripts). The art of writing in Hieroglyphic ended sometime during the fifth century AD, with our last surviving inscription dating to 394 A.D., and Demotic disappeared not long afterwards. One ninth century Arab alchemist named Abu Bakr Ahmad Ibn Wahshiyah successfully decoded a handful of these hieroglyphs, but his feat was unknown in Europe. Following the discovery of the stone, a handful of scholars attempted to decipher its secrets. The renowned British polymath Thomas Young was the first to make any substantial progress – through his analysis, he determined the sounds of Ptolemy's name, which appears frequently in the inscription, and did quite well with translating the demotic portion, but failed to understand the grammar.²⁷

Jean-François Champollion, a young French polyglot and philologist who acquired an interest in Egyptian studies during his university years, had started to tackle the Rosetta Stone around the same time as Young.²⁸ The two briefly collaborated, but the spirit of discovery quickly turned to an intense rivalry and saw each pursue their own independent study. Young had made remarkable progress, but Champollion would be the one to ultimately crack the code. Champollion realized that to learn the sounds of Ancient Egyptian, one needs to look at its closest relative: Coptic. Coptic is a family of dialects spoken by the peoples of Egypt from the period of Late Antiquity to roughly the nineteenth century when it had been largely replaced by Arabic. Only a handful of speakers survive in the present day, but like Latin in the Roman Catholic tradition, it has been a permanent fixture of the Coptic Christian liturgy in Egypt. Champollion learned the language years earlier and was one of the few European scholars to correctly identify the connection between Coptic and the Egyptian of antiquity.²⁹

Coptic was an invaluable resource to draw upon, not only for preserving many of the words and sounds of its ancestral language, but also its alphabet. Like other Afro-Semitic languages, the phonetic sounds of Egyptian were only present for consonants, not vowels. Difficulties can arise to the untrained eye when

²⁵ OGIS 56; The Raphia Decree is best preserved in Demotic, but a bit of the Greek survives as well, while the Canopus Decree has Greek/Demotic/Hieroglyphic.

²⁶ OGIS 90; Translation by Austin, M. (2006): 492-495

²⁷ Figure 3

²⁸ Figure 4

²⁹ Some scholars believed it to be a pre-Islamic sister language, rather than a direct descendant.

presented with a sequence that could change dramatically based on what vowels you substituted, never mind for that of a long-dead language. Demotic, the “common” script of Egyptian, followed much of the same conventions as Hieroglyphic and was no more decipherable. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman period, a system of writing developed whereby the Greek alphabet was adapted and modified to use for the Egyptian language to become what is known as the Coptic script. Most importantly, it introduced signs for vowels into the written language for the first time. One of the few pieces of evidence for the Great Revolt coincidentally provides evidence of this linguistic transformation. A graffito carved into the mortuary temple of Seti I in Abydos around 199/198 is written in Egyptian by a supporter of Haronnophris, but rather than the Demotic script they use the Greek alphabet.³⁰ This is the earliest known example of this phenomenon, well before any sort of codification.

By working backward from his knowledge of Demotic, Champollion was able to hypothesize the sounds and correlate them with the individual hieroglyphs found in the royal cartouches of Ptolemy and Cleopatra within the text of the stone. Believed to be named after the bullets used by French soldiers at the time, cartouches contained the name and title of Egyptian rulers, which had been assumed but never confirmed. The acquisition of a large obelisk from the temple of Isis and Philae, now residing in Dorset England, was the newest example of a bilingual inscription which contained the cartouches of Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II and III, providing an essential counterexample to check and verify his work. He also quickly deduced that hieroglyphs were not only phonetic, but they also were logographic, giving context to the absence of vowels. In September 1822, Champollion presented his findings to his peers, thus providing the key to unlocking the Egyptian language and effectively founding the modern field of Egyptology.

While the Memphite priests praised the king’s victories, the rebellion would continue to rage in the Thebaid for the next decade. The record from 197-191 is extremely spotty. Lycopolis itself appears to have been recaptured sometime during 197/196. Several of Haronnophris’ officials tried to surrender themselves requesting amnesty, but Ptolemy responded to the attempts at supplication by having the men stripped naked, paraded in the streets of Alexandria on a cart, then tortured to death for all to witness.³¹ Yet the surrounding countryside saw intense fighting in the years following, and Haronnophris continued to rule from Thebes down until 191.³² Since the Fifth Syrian War had been over for quite a few years, the Ptolemaic army was allowed to rebuild and launched a new expedition into the Thebaid in autumn of 191 led by the general Ptolemaios, and Thebes was ripped away from the rebels and placed permanently under royal authority by November of that year.³³

Haronnophris likely fled south from Thebes into the Meroitic Kingdom in Nubia, ruled over by King Arqamani (Ergamenes to the Greeks). Ptolemy’s forces were consolidating their control over the Thebaid after their victory, and a new general named Komanos gathered supplies and troops to oversee one last

³⁰ *P. Recueil 11*; Figure 5

³¹ Polybius, 22.17.3-5; Lycopolis’ fate is very confusing: as per OGIS 90, Lycopolis was put under siege in 197, whereas Polybius (22.17) implies that the capture took place in 186 (when Ptolemy was 24/25 years old). It seems unlikely that a ten-year siege took place, but outside of the city changing hands multiple times, it is likely that the Lycopolite nome was a frontier zone.

³² *P. dem. Ehev. 29* is a contract dated to August/September 191 and dates it to the reign of Chaonophris.

³³ *Chr. Wilck. 162*; BGU 3992 indicates an auction of Theban land held by the Alexandrian government in November 191, otherwise impossible unless they captured the city well before that point.

effort to destroy the rebels once and for all.³⁴ Starting from March 186, Komanos' army marched into the furthest reaches of Upper Egypt, and on August 27th they met the massed forces of Haronnophoris just south of Syene in the Aswan. The rebel pharaoh strengthened his army with Nubian allies, perhaps hoping to break back into the Thebaid with a renewed vigor, but it was not meant to be. This final battle saw the destruction of the rebel army, Haronnophoris' capture, and the death of his own son.³⁵ News of the victory was carried to Alexandria less than ten days afterwards, to the joy of the court. Haronnophoris was placed in chains at Ptolemy and Cleopatra's feet, and they announced that the impious rebel was to be executed for his crimes. Bands of surviving rebels remained scattered, and would be confronted in at least one more skirmish in 185/184. However, Haronnophoris' dream of an Egypt freed from Ptolemaic control was now over.³⁶

After nearly twenty years, the Great Revolt that had raged across Egypt was brought to an end. Since it was largely confined to the Thebaid and is poorly documented in our sources, some might be inclined to dismiss its impact given the long-term survival of the dynasty and when compared to events like Antiochus' invasion of Coele Syria. Yet it cannot be downplayed. Such chaos had radically destabilized the Ptolemaic kingdom at a time where it had been already weakened by the mismanagement of its rulers, and Haronnophoris explicitly challenged Ptolemy as the sole pharaoh of Egypt. The loss of tax revenues and grain from some of its most agriculturally productive regions for two decades was a heavy blow to the kingdom's finances, and the amount of manpower used to combat the rebels probably contributed to the overwhelming defeat by the Seleucids.³⁷

Violence, perpetrated by the rebels and royal armies alike, ravaged many regions of Egypt. Many plots of land were abandoned during the chaos. Documents from the Lycopolite nome speak of the land running dry and most of the population being killed, probably caught between the fighting as raids were conducted against each other.³⁸ A surviving letter records the purchase of the young Egyptian man Thasion by another Egyptian woman named Thaubastis in January 197. In spite of their shared background, Thaubastis lived in a Greek military community, while Thasion had been enslaved explicitly because of his involvement in the rebellion, whether he was a soldier fighting in Haronnophoris' army or was somehow related to one.³⁹ Widespread enslavement of dissidents and their families had been officially approved in November 198 through a royal decree, no doubt intended to drive fear in the hearts of the other rebels and make an example to everyone else, along with giving the Ptolemaic soldiers an incentive to fight.⁴⁰ Thasion is described as being heavily scarred, a hint of brutal treatment at the hands of his captors.

The rebellion was a consequence of the economic burdens placed upon the Egyptian subjects by the Alexandrian tax regime and likely a sense of general inequality compared to the Greeks. If Ptolemy was going to continue to keep them in line, he was going to have to make concessions. We saw such a policy

³⁴ SB 6.9367 contains several receipts for grain shipments to the forces stationed at Syene in the Aswan in March 186. Komanos is confusingly called "Eumenos" in the inscriptions as well.

³⁵ *P. Mil.* 2.22; TM 48339; Johstono, P. (2016): 207-208

³⁶ Evidence for the battle: Cairo RT 2/3/25/7 (https://www.attalus.org/docs/other/inscr_262.html)

³⁷ Fischer-Bovet, C. (2014): 92-93; Johstono, P. (2016): 211

³⁸ Pap. Gr. 274/ SB XXIV 15972, quoted in Pestman, P.W. (1995): 121 and Clarysse, W. (2004): 4-5

³⁹ SB 20.14659; Clarysse, W. (2004): 12

⁴⁰ As per the document SB 20.14659: "*in accordance with the decree issued in year 8, on the 2nd of Phaophi, concerning those who own Egyptian slaves as a result of the revolt in the land...*"

with the priests of Memphis, but on October 9th 186, the king proclaimed a general decree of amnesty: all fugitives were to return home and be forgiven for their crimes, barring murder or the robbing of temples. A general remission of debts for the royal farmers was also part of this formula, offering a clean slate and encouraging them to return to the neglected plots of land. The government also took steps to try and limit the amount of abuses from tax collectors or being gang-pressed into serving on ships.⁴¹ Certain social privileges were granted as well: Egyptians had served in the armed forces since the reign of Ptolemy I, but they occupied less well-paid and less-prestigious positions than their Greek counterparts. Throughout the second century BC, we see the increased enrollment of Egyptians as cleruchs and cavalrymen, and the army became a useful tool to integrate Greek and Egyptian communities.⁴² This was in part a pragmatic decision made necessary by the destruction of the Ptolemaic army at Panium: the pike phalanx was annihilated in the battle, and given that it was staffed by Greco-Macedonian troops, this would have certainly affected the demographics of the cleruchic system.⁴³

While amnesty and concessions were given, punishments were meted out in equal measure. Within a year of the Revolt's end, there are over ten separate recorded examples of public auctions of temple land in Upper Egypt. Prior to this point, much of the land in the Thebaid was owned by the temples and rented out to farmers, who in turn continued to pay rent to the priests, as had been done for centuries. Now the Ptolemaic government would receive those rent payments directly, diminishing the power of the very same temples who had betrayed their cause in favor of Haronnophoris.⁴⁴ This coincides with an increased administrative oversight in Upper Egypt, starting with general Komanos who became the epistrategos of the Thebaid. The widespread settlement of veterans and garrisons in Egyptian communities would act as a deterrent for any outbreaks of violence, or at least would respond more effectively.⁴⁵ This was not a perfect fix, as attested to in papyrus fragments recording the frustrations between the military and the civilian communities, but there would be no other rebellions on the scale of the Great Revolt for the rest of the dynasty's history.

With the Great Revolt over, let us cover the events going on in Alexandria down to the end of the decade. The defeat of the Egyptian rebels also coincided with some good news: in 186, Cleopatra gave birth to a healthy baby boy, the future Ptolemy VI. The King and queen sailed with their newborn son up the Nile from Memphis to the Aswan during the following year, the first such appearance of the royal family in Upper Egypt since at least 206, and a public announcement of restored order after decades of chaos. In 184/183 she produced another son also named Ptolemy, along with a daughter named Cleopatra a year later. For her role in ensuring the survival of the dynasty, the Lady of the Two Lands earned the same titles as her husband and was honored as his sister-wife, though the name Syra continued to be the preferred moniker used throughout antiquity.⁴⁶

We know very little about the character of Ptolemy V and his skill as a ruler, outside of the machinations

⁴¹ P. Köln 7; de Frutos García, A. and Tovar, S.T. (2017); The First Philae Decree (TM 48335) mentions a prohibition on gang-pressing Egyptians into rowing crews.

⁴² Fischer-Bovet, C. (2014): 252-255, 366-367

⁴³ Johstono, P. (2018): 182-183

⁴⁴ Clarysse, W. (2004): 12-13

⁴⁵ Höbl, G. (2001): 157; Clarysse, W. (2004): 13; For example, Pathyris, which would later become the home of the cavalry commander Dryton starting in 152 BC.

⁴⁶ TM 48335; Llewellyn-Jones, L. (2024): 89-91

of the court that supported or manipulated him during his youth. It is said that his one-time guardian Aristomenes was poisoned on his orders, and the king became quite irresponsible without his guiding hand, remembered more for his ability as a hunter than that of a king.⁴⁷ We do know that he envisioned a great military expedition, intent on reclaiming Coele Syria from the Seleucids. His father-in-law Antiochus died in Elam and was succeeded by Cleopatra's brother Seleucus IV in 187. As what happened the previous five times, a change in regime usually meant some sort of conflict over Syria, and though Ptolemy was but a small child during Antiochus' invasion, its loss would have been a source of shame for the king. He may have started planning it as soon as the Great Revolt was ended: a court eunuch and childhood friend of Ptolemy named Aristonicus was sent to Greece to hire mercenaries in 185. While he was there, treaties with the Achaean League were renewed probably at the same time, and Epiphanes offered the Achaeans ten outfitted ships as a gift in 180 – Polybius was supposed to head to Egypt to claim this offer as part of a delegation, but was prevented from doing so by outside events.⁴⁸ Relations were also kept up in Lycia, as attested to an inscription set up by the Lycians in Alexandria honoring the royal family, so his attempts to extend his reach abroad is quite in keeping with his predecessors.⁴⁹

Haronnophoris and his rebellion may have been crushed, but it appears that the Alexandrian court was very hesitant regarding the king's ambitions. Peace had just been restored in the Thebaid, rebuilding an army would take time. The power of the Seleucids may have been hit hard by the defeat of Magnesia and the Treat of Apamea, yet they were still the most powerful force in Asia. Even if they had the numbers, the costs would have been quite high, especially as they were just trying to recover financially. According to Diodorus Siculus, a courtier inquired about Ptolemy's mission to pursue a Syrian campaign and how he was to acquire the cash to do so, the king simply pointed to the other members of his court and called them his "walking money-bags".⁵⁰ This sort of veiled threat was not the kind of response that would soothe their concerns. In September 180, Ptolemy V Epiphanes died unexpectedly at the age of 30, according to one account poisoned by members of his own cabinet out of fear of having their wealth seized for another Syrian war.⁵¹

The period between the death of Ptolemy IV in 204 until the end of the Great Revolt in 186 was a time of intense chaos for the Ptolemaic dynasty. Egypt, Cyrenaica, Cyprus, and a few naval bases in the Aegean were all that remained in Ptolemaic hands, the rest having been taken away by Antiochus and Philip during the period of strife. Though the monarchy had been able to endure a near total collapse and continued to rule for another 150 years, what had once been the wealthiest kingdom of the third century BC was reduced to the status of a second-class power. It completely disrupted the dynamics of the Hellenistic world, which had been marked by a near-equal balance of the three main Successor dynasties each vying for dominance. This opened the door for the aggressive expansion of Antiochus and Philip, but the shift led to the intervention of the Roman Republic, which was now the supreme master of the Mediterranean. The relationship between Rome and Egypt would continue to develop over the next several decades, with often complicated results.

⁴⁷ Diodorus Siculus, 28.14; Polybius, 22.3.8; Figure 6

⁴⁸ Polybius 22.17.6, 22.3.5-9, 24.6; These mercenaries were likely intended to finish off the stragglers of the revolt, but the build-up of the military was an ongoing process.

⁴⁹ OGIS 99

⁵⁰ Diodorus Siculus, 29.29; Porphyrius, 48

⁵¹ Porphyrius, 48; Pompeius Trogus, *Prologues*, 34; Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.235

Disregarding the premature demise of Epiphanes, the realm was more stable than it had been for two decades. Cleopatra ended up taking charge following her husband's passing, and would rule Egypt before her sons would come of age. However, it would be up to her to ensure that the dynasty continued onwards into the mid-second century, and to keep hold of the golden kingdom that no longer shimmered as it did in the time of their forefathers.

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095 Figures



Figure 1 - A relief of Cleopatra I Syra from El Kab. Wikimedia Commons

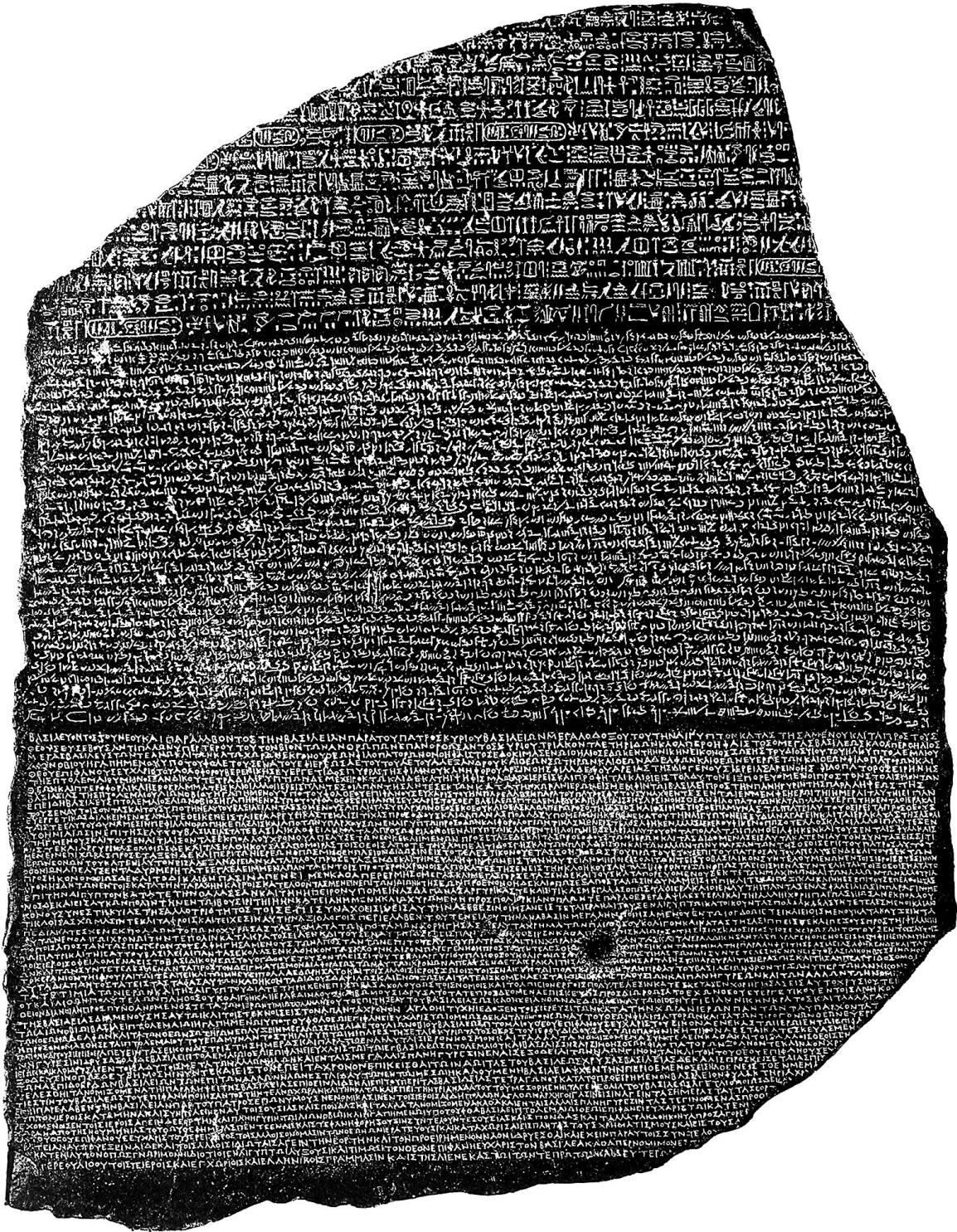


Figure 2 - The Rosetta Stone, Wikimedia Commons



Figure 3 - Thomas Young (1773-1829), Wikimedia Commons



Figure 4 - Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832), Wikimedia Commons

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ΜΗΙΕΣΙΝΟΜΟΥΣΙΡΕΜΗΙΕ
ΜΟΥΝΛΑΛΟΝΤΗΡΓΙΝΟΤΩ
ΥΑΙΡΚ ΤΜΗΤ ΤΟΝΕΥΜΑΥΘΥ
ΟΥΚΟΡΕ ΤΑΙΝΟΜΠΟΝΑΜΜΗΡΟΝ
ΡΥΜΕ

Figure 5 - Graffito 74 from Abydos, an Egyptian inscription written using Greek letters by a supporter of Haronnophoris during the Great Revolt. This provides the earliest known example that would eventually develop into Coptic. Wikimedia Commons



Figure 6 - A silver tetradrachm of Ptolemy V Epiphanes, ANS 1948.19.2423

Ptolemaic Dynasty Family Tree

Key:

Bold = Monarch

---- = Marriage

— = Descendant

