

X.—Romano-Egyptian Relations During the Third Century B.C.

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The exact nature of diplomatic relations between Rome and Egypt in the third century B.C. is not one of those questions on which authorities are agreed. That diplomatic courtesies were exchanged in 273 B.C. is, however, admitted, Eutropius recording the visit to Rome of an Alexandrine embassy which resulted in a treaty of *amicitia*, and Valerius Maximus the return visit of three Roman envoys in the same year.¹ Livy (*Per.* 14) states that at this time an alliance was concluded, and this, though perhaps a blunder by the historian or his editor, provides confirmation of the existence of an understanding of some sort.

C. F. Lehmann-Haupt believes that an alliance was actually concluded, and asserts that Ptolemy Philadelphus, fearing that if Pyrrhus overcame Antigonos in Greece, he would coalesce with Syria against Egypt, strove to build up a counter-alliance.² Maurice Holleaux, on the other hand, denies the existence of any formal understanding whatsoever,³ and treats with little respect those who have arrived at a different conclusion. With regard to the embassies of 273 B.C. he asks: "Did the shrewd and farsighted Ptolemy wish on general principles to assure himself of the friendship of this young but formidable power or had he some specific motive? We have no information which permits us to answer that question.

¹ "Anno urbis conditae quadringentesimo sexagesimo primo legati Alexandrini a Ptolemaeo missi, Romam venere, et a Romanis amicitiam quam petierant, obtinuerunt" (Eutropius 2.15). Val. Max. (4.3.9) alludes to the visit of Roman envoys to Alexandria in the same year.

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² "Ptolemaios gehoerte einer zwischen 275 und 273 begruendeten Koalition, oder sagen wir vorsichtiger Interessengruppe an, die durch Pyrrhos bedroht wurde" (C. F. Lehmann-Haupt, "Vom pyrrischen und ersten syrischen zum chremonideischen Kriege," in *Epitymbion* [Swoboda], Reichenberg 1927, p. 153). See also the same author's "Der erste syrische Krieg und die Weltlage um 275-272 v. Chr.," *Klio* 3 (1903) 496-547, especially 537-8.

³ "Rome, la Grèce, et les Monarchies Hellénistiques," *École Française d'Athènes et de Rome*, Paris 1921.

The arguments which modern historians have produced in support of the latter hypothesis are more or less chance guesses when they are not wild imaginings."⁴ Philadelphus was inspired by intelligent curiosity, and the Romans wished to stand well with the sovereign who controlled "the richest corn market in the world," but "it would be a gross blunder to suppose the existence of any close tie."⁵ Holleaux will admit the formation of neither a *societas* nor of an *amicitia*, mistrusting the ancient authorities, and adding the positive argument that during the first Macedonian war Egypt laboured to reconcile Philip V with the Aetolians, a policy which, he says, was manifestly contrary to the interests of her supposed allies, the Romans.⁶

Holleaux's extreme scepticism was challenged by Th. Walek,⁷ who believes that the negotiations of 273 B.C. had an important bearing on the commercial interests of Egypt.⁸ Supporting the theory that a treaty of *amicitia* existed between the two powers, he rightly points out that the Greek conception of interstate friendship was not violated by Egypt's attempt to reconcile Philip V with the Aetolians, and he might have added that in a war in which Rome had been forced to admit her inability to protect her South Italian dependencies, and bade them look to themselves,⁹ sovereign states, linked to her by ties of friendship only, did no violence to that friendship, by following the course dictated by their own safety, even if it did prove detrimental to Roman interests. Holleaux's reply to Walek¹⁰ deals only with the Illyrian phase of the controversy and does not here concern us.

The same problem has recently been discussed by Eugenio

⁴ M. Holleaux, *op. cit.* 61.

⁵ "... le plus riche marché de céréales qui fût au monde" . . . "l'erreur serait grande de croire qu'ils se soient alors étroitement rapprochés" (*ibid.* 81-2). Whatever the understanding arrived at "il n'en résulta nulle entente politique des deux gouvernements" (*ibid.* 77).

⁶ *Ibid.* 70, citing Polybius 11.4.1.

⁷ "La Politique Romaine en Grèce et dans l'Orient Hellénistique au IIIe Siècle," *Rev. Phil.* 49 (1925) 118-142.

⁸ Egypt's "intérêts commerciaux devaient certainement jouer un grand rôle" (Walek, *op. cit.* 137).

⁹ Appealed to for protection by the Petelini, a loyal state of Bruttium, in 216 B.C., the "patres" "fateri coacti nihil iam longinquis sociis in se praesidio esse, redire domum fideque ad ultimum expleta consulere sibimet ipsos in reliquum pro praesenti fortuna iusserunt" (Livy 23.20.6).

¹⁰ "La Politique Romaine en Grèce et dans l'Orient Hellénistique au IIIe Siècle," *Rev. Phil.* 50 (1926) 42-66.

Manni¹¹ whose position is roughly the same as Walek's. He doubts if Ptolemy in 273 B.C. sought to draw Rome into a coalition against Syria, Carthage, or Pyrrhus, but thinks that he may have sought to secure Egyptian trade routes to the West. Rome was in a good position to control piracy in the Tyrrhenian sea.¹² He doubts if Egypt's attempts to make peace in Greece in 209 B.C. could be interpreted as being unfriendly to Rome. A Punico-Macedonian victory, he observes, "would have strengthened Macedonia to the detriment of Egyptian interests in the Aegean."¹³

While Walek and Manni may have weakened Holleaux's case, nothing that they have produced makes his assertion that no entente resulted from the negotiations of 273 B.C. untenable. "We are in the realm of hypothesis, and cannot make positive judgments," says Manni.¹⁴ The three scholars confine themselves to assessing evidence which has long been available and the drawing of inferences sometimes contradictory but never capable of positive proof or refutation. If the question is to be clarified, new data must be provided; and fresh evidence has been furnished by the researches during the last quarter-century of Mattingly and other numismatists, British and continental, and by papyrological material.

The classic theory regarding the dating of early Roman coinage, unquestioned until little more than twenty years ago, was that the Roman copper coinage originated in the decade 340-330 B.C., that the silver currency came into being about the same time, being

¹¹ "L'Egitto Tolemaico nei suoi Rapporti Politici con Roma," *RFIC* 77 (1949) 79-106. I have not seen E. Manni, "Pirro e gli stati Greci nel 281-80," *Athenaeum* 27 (1949) 102 ff.

¹² Citing Rostovtzeff, "L'Économie Royale des Lagides." This work I have been unable to trace, and suspect a reference to the book of the same name published by Claire Préaux, Brussels 1939.

¹³ "... un ingrandimento della Macedonia a tutto scapito degli interessi lagidici nell'Égeo" (Manni, *op. cit.* 94). If Holleaux's argument needs further refutation it is provided by Livy 27.30.4: "Eo legati ab rege Aegypti, Ptolemaeo, Rhodiisque, et Atheniensibus et Chiis venerunt ad dirimendum inter Philippum atque Aetolos bellum. . . . Omnium autem non tanta pro Aetolis cura erat, ferocioribus quam pro ingeniis Graecorum gentis, quam ne Philippus regnumque eius, grave libertati futurum, rebus Graecis immisceretur." Livy, who implies the existence of a close Romano-Egyptian entente (31.2.3-4) at this time, is not conscious here of its infringement. Even supposing that a peace from which the Romans were excluded had been agreed upon, the Aetolians dared not, for their future safety, permit a Macedonian invasion of Italy, supposing that Philip would venture on such a step with his turbulent neighbours unsubdued.

¹⁴ "... si entra nel regno delle ipotesi e non possiamo più giudicare" (Manni, *op. cit.* 81-2).

first represented by seven successive groups of the so-called Romano-Campanian didrachms, then by the quadrigatus didrachm, and finally in 269 B.C. by the X-denarius.¹⁵

In a series of articles, the first of which appeared in 1924, Mattingly, with some assistance from collaborators, undertook the revision of this scheme of dating, and finally arrived at the conclusion that Rome produced her earliest silver didrachms in 269 B.C., while the standard silver coin of the republic, the X-denarius, did not appear until 187 B.C. He later produced considerable evidence in support of this new theory, which has stood up well in the face of criticism and, though not yet universally accepted, has far outgrown the stage of heterodoxy.¹⁶

Mattingly's researches have an important bearing on the question of how much significance is to be attributed to the Romano-Egyptian negotiations of 273 B.C. A group of the early Romano-Campanian didrachms (obverse, Diana; reverse, Victory; legend, ROMANO) bears on its reverse a series of single or double Greek letters. The coin cannot be earlier than 269 B.C.,¹⁷ says Mattingly, and is probably not much later. The Greek letters supply a clue. The Alexandrine decadrachms of Arsinoe Philadelphus, who died in 270 B.C., and was deified, bear a similar series of letters, A-Ω, AA-ΩΩ, A-B, fifty in all. Svonoros¹⁸ interpreted the letters as representing the successive years of issue, and suggested that the treaty of 273 B.C. included a clause providing for a joint Romano-Egyptian coinage. Arsinoe died three years later and the new coinage was employed to do her honour. Svonoros' theory as to the significance of the lettering is plausible, for, if correct, it means that the issue continued fifty years until about 220 B.C. when the accession of Ptolemy IV inaugurated a new financial policy.

So far Svonoros. Mattingly adds corroborative evidence. The "Chronicum Paschale," a late chronicle, records that the first issue of Roman silver was in 273 B.C. This is incorrect, but in that year

¹⁵ See K. Regling in A. Gercke und E. Norden, *Einleitung in die Altertumswissenschaft*, 2.1² (Berlin and Leipzig 1932) 23-27.

¹⁶ H. Mattingly, "The Romano-Campanian Coinage and the Pyrrhic War," *Num. Chron.* 5 (1924) 181-209; "The First Age of Roman Coinage," *JRS* 19 (1929) 19-37; (and E. S. G. Robinson) "The Date of the Roman Denarius and Other Landmarks in the Early History of Roman Coinage," *Proc. British Academy* 18 (1933) 211-268.

¹⁷ "The Diana-Victory Didrachms and the Decadrachms of Arsinoe," *Num. Chron.* 6 (1946) 63-67.

¹⁸ *Die Muenzen der Ptolemäer* (Athens 1908) 1.148 ff., 217 ff.; 4.83 ff., 143 ff.

C. Fabius and Q. Ogulnius, who as consuls in 269 did issue the first Roman silver, were ambassadors to Egypt so that we may suppose that the decision to coin was taken then. The appearance of identical lettering on the Egyptian and the Italian series, and the fact that they ran, as far as can be determined, for about the same period (only the Italian counterpart to the fiftieth and last coin in the Egyptian series is missing) make the existence of a financial understanding between Rome and Egypt probable, and invest the diplomatic exchanges of 273 B.C. with much deeper significance than Holleaux will consent to allow them.

It is interesting to note that three authorities, Mattingly, Heichelheim and Giesecke (the last most emphatically) have signified their disbelief in Rome's ability to produce a silver coinage in the early third century B.C., without the gift of precious metals from some foreign power. When Mattingly's scheme of re-dating was still in embryo he named Carthage as furnishing Rome with the bullion for the Romano-Campanian coinage, in order to strengthen her in the struggle with Pyrrhus.¹⁹ Giesecke is positive that the precious metals could only have been obtained from Tarentum,²⁰ while Heichelheim suggests that Egypt subsidised Rome in order to hinder the hegemony of Carthage in the West.²¹ Mattingly's later researches have invalidated his Carthaginian hypothesis, for he now places the first Roman silver in 269 B.C., some years after the defeat of Pyrrhus had relieved Carthage of any necessity for promoting the solvency of the Roman state. Giesecke, who is in general agreement with Mattingly on the date of the early Roman silver, forgets that it would be very odd if Tarentum could have furnished Rome with silver in any considerable quantity in 269 B.C., when she had so recently been playing the host to an impecunious condottiere like Pyrrhus. If Rome then could not have founded a silver coinage without South Italian or extra-Italian aid, the most likely supposition is that she received the aid from Ptolemy Philadelphus, and the cumulative evidence for important financial transactions between the two powers in 273 B.C. becomes strong indeed. The existence of parallel coinages is well substantiated. The part

¹⁹ "The Romano-Campanian Coinage etc." (1924).

²⁰ "Wo hatte Rom die Mittel her, eine so reiche Gold- und Silberprägung vorzunehmen? . . . Die Antwort kann darauf nur lauten 'Aus Tarent'" ("Die Entstehungszeit von Quadrigat, Denar, und Victoriat," *Deutsche Münzblätter*, Neue Folge, Band 11, 54-5 [1934-5] 181-91).

²¹ In unpublished *History of Rome*.

played by Fabius and Ogulnius in both the Egyptian embassy and the development of the coinage is fully attested, for both the old and the new theory ascribe to the year 269 an important role in the growth of the currency; and finally three competent authorities are agreed that the unaided resources of Rome were inadequate for the production of any considerable volume of silver currency early in the third century B.C.

Evidence of interconnection between the currencies of Rome and Egypt at a somewhat later date is furnished by three short articles by T. Reekmans, which it was the writer's privilege to read in manuscript.²² Mr. Reekmans shows that in about 217 B.C. disturbances occurred in Egypt owing to a scarcity of silver and the consequent decline in the relative value of copper. The government tried to alleviate the popular distress in 210 B.C. by changing to the copper standard and sacrificing what remained of its foreign trade to restore internal harmony. It is curious to note that 217 and 209 B.C. were years of financial crisis at Rome also. In the former year when inflation was producing disturbances in Egypt, Italy saw the As of 10 ounces reduced to one of 6 ounces by the "lex Flaminia minus solvendi."²³ Egypt went on to the copper standard in 210 B.C. The following year the Roman As dropped to three ounces and Romans were called upon to deliver what gold and silver they had to the public treasury.²⁴ There seems to be more than coincidence here.

Evidence that intercourse between Rome and Egypt went beyond the mere exchange of diplomatic courtesies at least towards the close of the third century B.C. is contained in two passages in Livy. In 200 B.C. Rome "sent to Ptolemy, king of Egypt, three envoys, C. Claudius Nero, M. Aemilius Lepidus and P. Sempronius Tuditanus to announce the defeat of Hannibal, to thank the king for his steadfast friendship which had remained unshaken at a time when Rome's closest allies had deserted her, and to request that if the Romans, to avenge the wrongs they had sustained, declared war on Philip V (of Macedon) Ptolemy would remain the loyal

²² "The Ptolemaic Copper Inflation, 220-173 B.C.," now in print; "Monetary History and the Dating of Ptolemaic Papyri," *Studia Hellenistica* 5 (1948) 15 ff.; "Economic and Social Repercussions of the Ptolemaic Copper Inflation," *Chron. Eg.* 46 (1949) 324 ff. See also T. Reekmans, "Die Beginperiode der Ptolemaeische Koperinflatie (c. 221-c. 169 B.C.)," *Phil. Diss., Louvain* (1950) 43 ff. and 79 ff.

²³ H. Mattingly, "First Age of Roman Coinage," *JRS* 35 (1945) 73.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Livy 26.36.

friend which he had been heretofore."²⁵ A little later ambassadors from Ptolemy arriving at Rome "announced that the Athenians had sought help from him against Philip, but that although Egypt and Athens were allies, the king would send no force to Greece for any military purpose without the consent of the Roman people. If the Romans chose to defend their allies, Ptolemy would forbear or, if they preferred to take no action, Ptolemy could easily furnish sufficient forces to protect Athens against Philip. The Senate instructed the ambassadors to thank the king, stated that the Roman people intended to protect their allies; if they needed any help they would inform Ptolemy, knowing that the resources of his kingdom could always be relied upon to supply the needs of the Republic."²⁶

The genesis of the second Macedonian war is a difficult episode which has possibly been deliberately confused by the legalistic Roman who would represent himself as bound to go to the assistance of Athens against Philip.²⁷ Still it is difficult to ignore these two passages. They are too circumstantial to have crept in through the carelessness of the annalists, and have not enough propaganda merit to justify the supposition that they were deliberately invented. The first passage, be it noted, contains no direct reference to Athens, which the Romans were desirous of making the "*casus belli*." Their genuineness therefore, though disputable, cannot be positively denied, and we have therefore some grounds for supposing that Egypt in conformity with a tacit or acknowledged understanding rendered valuable service to Rome during the Hannibalic war, and that there was an entente between the two states to maintain

²⁵ Livy 31.2.3-4: "Interim ad Ptolemaeum, Aegypti regem legati tres missi, C. Claudius Nero, M. Aemilius Lepidus, P. Sempronius Tuditanus, ut nuntiarent victum Hannibalem Poenosque et gratias agerent regi, quod in rebus dubiis, cum finitimi etiam socii Romanos desererent in fide mansisset, et peterent, ut, si coacti iniuriis bellum adversus Philippum suscepissent, pristinum animum erga populum Romanum conservaret."

²⁶ "Legati a rege Ptolemaeo venerunt, qui nuntiarent Athenienses adversus Philippum petisse ab rege auxilium; ceterum, etsi communes socii sint, tamen nisi ex auctoritate populi Romani neque classem neque exercitum defendendi aut oppugnandi cuiusquam causa regem in Graeciam missurum esse; vel quieturum eum in regno, si populo Romano socios defendere libeat, vel Romanos quiescere, si malint, passurum atque ipsum auxilia, quae facile adversus Philippum tueri Athenas possent missurum. Gratiae regi ab senatu actae responsumque tutari socios populo Romano in animo esse; si qua re ad id bellum opus sit, indicaturos regi regnique eius opes scire subsidia firma ac fidelia suae rei publicae esse" (*ibid.* 30.9.1-5).

²⁷ See Walbank's "Philip V. of Macedon" (Cambridge 1940) Chap. 5, for a detailed study of this difficult question.

the balance of power in Greece. The Egyptian embassy takes it for granted that one or the other was bound to secure Athens against Philip. We have, then, considerable ground for believing what Holleaux denies, the existence of an "entente politique" between Rome and Egypt for all but the first three decades of the third century B.C.

If such an entente existed it was Egypt which took the initiative in concluding it. What were her motives and what were the terms of the understanding? We may dismiss Lehmann-Haupt's theory of an anti-Pyrrhic or anti-Seleucid coalition. Rome's aims, purely defensive, were best served by securing Brundisium and Tarentum; she would only be concerned with a fraction of the interests of an East Mediterranean Grand Alliance.

But she could, with profit to herself, be made the instrument of Egypt for other purposes. Tarentum, which in 273 B.C. was still enjoying a quasi-independence under an Epirot garrison,²⁸ could not long remain in that condition, and with Egypt's extensive trading interests, it was to her advantage to ensure that Rome and not Carthage became lord of the South Italian metropolis. Furthermore it might be worth her while to incur some expense in winning the friendship of the dominant power in Italy and securing a friendly reception for her traders in Tyrrhenian and Adriatic ports. Under these circumstances, a loan or a subsidy to Rome would be a thoroughly sound investment, especially if linked with the stipulation that the Alexandrian trader in South Italy was to be given an advantage over the Carthaginian by the establishment of a joint coinage to facilitate exchange.

A strict alliance, general in its provisions, would have appealed neither to Egypt nor to Rome; for the spheres of interest of the two powers were very different. Yet these spheres overlapped at two points, Carthage and Greece proper. Both states had reason to fear the aggrandisement of Carthage, and both dreaded the establishment of a single dominant power in Greece—for Rome would not lightly forget the appalling danger she had incurred in a war with Epirus, "the merest appendage to the Macedonian kingdom,"²⁹ and they might well have concluded a restricted alliance such as the treaty which linked Great Britain with the Japanese Empire to the advantage of both powers until it was terminated in 1921 through

²⁸ E. Manni, *op. cit.* 84.

²⁹ "Minima accessio semper Epirus regno Macedoniae fuit" (Livy 31.7.9).

the insistence of the Canadian government which feared that through it the nations of the British Commonwealth might become embroiled with the United States. If the Egyptian embassy of 273 B.C. was merely a mission of courtesy such as those which Queen Elizabeth of England despatched to Ivan the Terrible of Russia and to the Great Mogul it is odd that it should have been sent just at the time when the balance of power in the Mediterranean was threatened by the persistent aggressiveness of Pyrrhus and by the possibility that Carthage might fall heir to the decaying powers of Magna Graecia.

Evidence of friendly intercourse between the two powers from the time of Pyrrhus to that of Hannibal is scanty, but not entirely non-existent. F. M. Heichelheim³⁰ finds a Roman, Dinnos, to have been a military settler in the Arsinoite Nome in 252-1 B.C., finds mention of a Tarentine in the Zenon correspondence in 247, and of Campanian settlers in Egypt in 226-5. In Crete, about 210 B.C., a Roman, "Lucius, son of Gaius," is mentioned as a high Ptolemaic official in Crete. Mention of Campanians raises the question of whether Egypt had acquired from Rome the right to hire mercenaries from the population which had earlier produced the Mamertines, whose occupation, with the extension of the "Pax Romana" into Sicily, was gone. Worthy of note is a passage in Eutropius which Walek alone of the authorities here consulted is disposed to take seriously.³¹ "At the close of the first Punic war, the Romans, having attained the height of glory, sent ambassadors to Ptolemy, king of Egypt, promising to help him against Antiochus, king of Syria, who had attacked him. Ptolemy declined the offer with thanks, as the war was already over." That Rome, at the close of an exhausting war, was anxious to assume military commitments in the East is most unlikely. Yet this tradition may well have a historical foundation, representing a continuing exchange of military intelligence, "staff talks," between the two conservative

³⁰ "Die auswaertige Bevoelkerung im Ptolemäerreich," *Klio*, Beiheft 18, Neue Folge, Heft 5 (1925) 80-2. Dr. Heichelheim on reading this pointed out that one *Μαμερτινός* actually appears in Late Ptolemaic Egypt when the name had become obsolete in Italy, and also that Callimachus of Cyrene alludes to an otherwise unknown story of a siege of Rome, perhaps derived from verbal tradition imparted to him by one of the ambassadors of 273 B.C. Cf. Pfeiffer, *Callimachus* 1 (Oxford 1949) 109 f.

³¹ "Finito igitur Punico bello, quod per viginti duos annos tractum est, Romani, iam clarissima gloria noti, legatos ad Ptolemaeum, Aegypti régem, miserunt, auxilia promittentes, quia rex Syriae, Antiochus, ei bellum intulerat. Ille gratias Romanis egit, auxilia non accepit, iam enim fuerat pugna transacta" (Eutropius 3.1).

powers in the Mediterranean whose interests were best served by maintenance of the status quo.

What assistance did Egypt give Rome during the war of Hannibal to justify the warm expression of gratitude which Livy quotes? One important instance can be cited. With regard to Rome and Carthage, says Manni, Ptolemy IV preserved a strict neutrality, "but this neutrality does not seem to have extended beyond the year 210, when the Alexandrine consented to aid the Romans in time of desperate want."³² Rome was notoriously short of cash at that time, and if Ptolemy who, as Reekmans has shown, was himself financially embarrassed, furnished Rome with corn on credit, he fully deserved the hearty thanks which he later received. The change of policy which Manni notes in 210 B.C. suggests that Ptolemy had for a time despaired of the survival of Rome, but returned to her aid with alacrity after the reduction of Syracuse and Capua had proved her power of survival. The recovery by Rome of the agricultural areas of Campania and Sicily would probably render assistance after that date unnecessary.

³² "Questa neutralità non pare essere andata oltre il 210. In quell'anno, infatti, il re alessandrino non disdegnò di aiutare i Romani colpiti da una gravissima carestia" (*op. cit.* 93-4, citing Polybius 11.11a). I could not confirm this reference, but Polyb. 11.44 tells of a Roman embassy in 210 B.C. begging for grain, the granting of which presumably occasioned the grateful language quoted in Livy 31.2.