

Ptolemy I Soter: A Man of His Own Creation.

Scholars, more often than not, retroject the fame and importance of Ptolemy son of Lagos into the years of the reign of Alexander the Great; the same scholars, moreover, tend to describe Ptolemy as one of Alexander's closest friends (e.g., Ellis 1994; Hölbl 2001). This is hardly surprising, since that was exactly what Ptolemy himself did when he composed his now-lost *History of Alexander*.

Ptolemy's bias as a historian is well known (Errington 1969; Howe forthcoming), and yet few have questioned whether the image of Ptolemy as a "boyhood friend" and leading officer of Alexander is tainted by hindsight and deliberate self-promotion. He is, among scholars, probably the most admired of Alexander's successors: sagacious and restrained even in his own ambition (or so the vision goes), Ptolemy recused himself from the hybris of attempting to rule the entire empire of Alexander, unlike his enemies, the Antigonids; attentive to the needs of his own realm, he fashioned a net of foreign holdings such as Cyrenaica and Cyprus, an imperialism that was purely defensive in nature (see, e.g., Will 1979).

Furthermore, Ptolemy's status as a "boyhood friend" has seldom been questioned, even though he was born eleven years before the king. Auguste Bouché-Leclercq even suggested that he was a Page at Philip's court and a *syntrophos* of the crown prince (Bouché-Leclercq 1903, followed by both recent biographers (Ellis 1994 and Caroli 2007); see (*contra*) Heckel 1985). The allegedly intense friendship between Alexander and Ptolemy was accentuated in the rumours that they were actually half-brothers and in the popular tradition of Alexander's great fear for Ptolemy's life when the latter was (perhaps) wounded at Harmatelia (Diodoros 17.103; Curtius 9.8.22.27).

Unlike the other marshals of the great conqueror, however, Ptolemy was in fact a late bloomer and a man of average talents (emerging only during the Indian campaign; Heckel 2016). Behind the well-protected barriers of the desert and the Nile, which gave Egypt a unique position in Alexander's empire, Ptolemy could scheme against the more powerful Successors and act with relative impunity within his "satrapy." In the end, it became clear that his pen was mightier than his sword.