

Ptolemy the Reckless: the Son of Lagos' Actions in the Early Years Following Alexander the Great's Death

While there is debate over whether Ptolemy wished from the beginning to partition Alexander's empire (Ellis 1994: ix; Anson 2014: 193) or become himself the ruler of the empire in its entirety, he is most often noted for his caution (Gruen 1985: 253-71; Billows 1990: 156-60, 351-2; Hauben 2014: 260-1; Meeus 2014; Seibert 1969: 34-35; Strootman 2014: 314-15). This paper will conclude that Ptolemy was not simply in favor of partition, but also of the ultimate dissolution of the empire and its attendant Argead monarchy, and that in achieving these particular goals he was anything but cautious. In Babylon Ptolemy proposed solutions to the succession crisis that would have ended the Argead dynasty of kings and created collective leadership. Moreover, as satrap he began early to act independently of the central government. His seizure of Alexander's body (Erskine 2002), even if he were attempting to fulfil the Conqueror's wish to be buried in Siwah, was both a violation of the orders of the regent Perdikkas and an act of overt violence against the troops of the central government.

It will be shown that Ptolemy wished to provoke the regent to action and the result of this provocation was one cause of the First Diadoch War. Later Ptolemy did show a reluctance to pursue risky undertakings – his disinclination to attack Demetrios at Gaza, his absence from Ipsos – but caution is hardly an apt description of Ptolemy's actions prior to the First Diadoch War. There is moreover no contradiction in his behavior, if it is understood that the Egyptian satrap and later king's desire from the time of the death of Alexander the Great had been to dismember the empire and secure his possession of what he must have considered its jewel, Egypt. Once having achieved this goal, all subsequent policies were predicated on maintaining

his hold on Egypt. Provoking the First Diadoch War was Ptolemy's effort to strike at Perdikkas on Egyptian turf before the regent could grow more powerful.