1 Introduction

1.1 A social and military history of the Ptolemaic state

War as a Cultural and Social Force, the title of a recent edited volume on warfare in pre-modern states, encapsulates the approach of the present study, which explores the role of the army under the Ptolemies (323–30 BC), the Greek rulers who succeeded Alexander the Great in Egypt.[1] The editors of the volume in question, Bekker-Nielsen and Hannestad, defend the notion that "the military," a modern concept, must be considered along with civilian and religious issues. War has long been neglected by modern historical scholarship, as if it could produce only the "kings and battles" type of history.[2] While many essays in the Bekker-Nielsen–Hannestad volume are devoted to Mediterranean antiquity, however, none analyzes the case of Hellenistic Egypt, suggesting a certain disinterest on the part of historians toward one of the best-documented ancient armies. The omission may also point to a lack of comprehensive studies of the army in Egypt framing the relationship between its organization, composition and cost and state formation, and the connection between state formation and socio-economic and cultural developments within society.

The present work is aligned with what historians refer to as the "new military history" or, more explicitly, "war and society" history.[3] This trend emerged several decades ago in reaction to traditional military history, which focused for many years on strategy and battles, although it has now moved far beyond those aspects of warfare. The "war and society" approach has been criticized for "being interested in everything about armies except the way they fought, interested in everything about war except campaigns and battles."[4] In this book I try to avoid these problems by examining the relationship between the composition of the army and the effect of military institutions on society, on the one hand, and the nature of warfare and military reforms, on the other hand. My study offers a description of

[1] Bekker-Nielsen and Hannestad (2001). [2] Bekker-Nielsen and Hannestad (2001) 15.
[3] For a brief overview of the trends in military historical studies, see Citino (2007).
[4] Citino (2007) 1071.

military institutions and how they changed over time, the foremost goal of the series *Armies of the Ancient World*. It combines a reconstruction of the organization of the Ptolemaic army from technical terms found in the papyri, and a presentation of basic equipment and weapons, with a larger explanatory framework that aims to understand the impact of military institutions on society.

Put another way, this study attempts to go against the tendency to treat military and political history apart from socio-economic and cultural history. Such an approach has been suggested and applied by some ancient historians. Alston's recent study of the Roman army in Egypt, for example, focuses on the relationship between soldiers and society rather than on military institutions *per se*.[5] More closely related to the present volume, Austin has produced a fundamental article entitled "Hellenistic kings, war and the economy" and, more recently, an essay in the edited volume referred to above on "War and culture in the Seleucid empire," while Chaniotis has written *War in the Hellenistic World: a Social and Cultural History*.[6] But Chaniotis' work centers on the Greek city-states of Asia Minor and the Aegean, while Austin focuses on the Seleucids and examines culture in the narrow sense "Greek culture."

This book emerged from my reading of the work of historical sociologists on state formation, including Mann, Tilly and Turchin.[7] In *The Sources of Social Power*, Mann develops his *IEMP* model, in which the four main sources of social power – ideological, economic, military and political – explain the emergence and organization of states. Mann defines "military power" as "concentrated coercion" that "derives from the necessity of organized physical defense and its usefulness for aggression" and sees its role as promiscuous.[8] Drawing on his idea that complex relationship exists between institutions and their functions and changes over time, I aim to explore how military power required economic and ideological support and how military institutions played economic, social and ideological roles in Ptolemaic Egypt.[9]

My project was also greatly stimulated by Tilly's work on state formation in Early Modern Europe, in which he explores how continuous warfare led to the formation of states he defines as "coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial

[5] Alston (1995). [6] Austin (1986), (2001); Chaniotis (2005).
[7] Mann (1986); Tilly (1992); Turchin (2003).
[8] Mann (1986) 20, 25. [9] Mann (1986) 18–19, 521.

territories."[10] The Hellenistic period has often been characterized as an era of large-scale warfare in comparison with the previous period and the *pax romana* following the disappearance of the Hellenistic states. Until recently, however, little attention has been paid to the connection between warfare and state formation in antiquity or to the similarity of state-formation processes in the Hellenistic Eastern Mediterranean and Early Modern Europe. I suggest that intensive state formation similar to that which took place in Early Modern Europe happened several times in world history, although the scale or success of its outcome differed according to variables specific to each case. This parallel between antiquity and Early Modern Europe has been drawn elsewhere, notably by Callataÿ in his article on warfare and minting in the Hellenistic period, although his research focuses on the military budgets of the Greek city-states.[11] So too, state-formation theory is currently stimulating work on late antiquity and the Early Modern period, as a conference volume on statehood and state formation recently published in Germany illustrates.[12]

Finally, I draw on Turchin's *Historical Dynamics* and his refined interpretation of Goldstone's model in *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* to shed light on the role of the elite, in particular the military elite, in the making of the state and its degree of stability or instability.[13] Building on Turchin's model, which treats socio-economic and ethnic affinities as the two main vehicles for collective action, I attempt to show that the army brought similar socio-economic status and ideological cohesion to people from different ethnic backgrounds, and that this had a positive effect on local civilian communities. As I explain in more detail in the section that follows the review of scholarship on Ptolemaic Egypt, I use the theoretical approaches sketched above to question the idea of the Ptolemaic army as a

[10] Tilly (1992) 1; his study draws on previous work, mainly from the 1980s, that examines the impact of international competition on state formation in Early Modern Europe. Burke (1993) 146 summarizes this type of approach, notably the influential work of Parker (1988), thus: "The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were an age of 'military revolution' in which armies grew larger and larger. To pay these armies, rulers had to squeeze more out of their subjects in taxes. The armies in turn helped to enforce the collection of taxes, thus setting up what Samuel Finner has called an 'extraction-coercion cycle.' The rise of the centralized state was not so much the result of a plan or a theory (such as 'absolutism') as an unintended consequence of competition for power in the international arena." It goes without saying that the comparison between the Hellenistic states and Early Modern Europe must be adjusted in terms of scale, making the Hellenistic states comparatively less centralized and less able to coerce those who lived in their territory.

[11] Callataÿ (2000), esp. 340.

[12] Eich *et al.* (2011).

[13] Turchin (2003); Goldstone (1991). For the concept "praetorianism" used in my framework, see Andreski (1968).

mere tool of colonial domination and to refine the concepts of Hellenization and Egyptianization that emerge from study of it.

1.2 Previous views of Ptolemaic Egypt and the army

For many years the tendency among ancient historians was to look at Ptolemaic Egypt from an Hellenocentric point of view using categories inspired by the modern colonial experience: Greek rulers created a new, rational and efficient system to exploit their dominion – the royal economy – and generally favored Greeks, notably the Greek soldiers who were settled on private plots of land and are usually called cleruchs. Since the 1970s the picture of Ptolemaic Egypt has become more complex, with scholars increasingly emphasizing the role of the Egyptian elite and local elite within Ptolemaic institutions; the existence of a mixed, Hellenized local elite; the difficulties of enforcement; and the actual functioning of institutions (as seen in petitions and in the inaccuracy of some land surveys), all of which creates space for approaching Ptolemaic Egypt as a society marked by the interaction of and tension between groups. Egypt is often designated a "multicultural" or "multiethnic" society. But these terms have been interpreted in opposite ways, either as representing an ensemble of populations with the same rights in a sort of "mixture," implying that culturally distinctive populations mingled with one another, or as illustrating the "juxtaposition" of such populations.[14] In the mid 1980s Will proposed a colonial approach to analyzing Ptolemaic Egypt as an essentially segregationist state, a view shared by some other scholars.[15] Bagnall, by contrast, stressed the weaknesses of Will's model and concluded that "an approach through colonialism grasps only a fragment of power relationships in question."[16]

Without denying that Alexander's conquests gave an impulse to a type of colonization in the territories previously belonging to the Persian empire, ancient historians over the last decade have tended to emphasize continuity between the Hellenistic states and their predecessors rather than rupture.[17]

[14] For an overview of these concepts, see Bagnall (1982–3) 18–20. For the rejection by modern scholars of Egypt as a "mixed culture," see Heinen (1989) esp. 122–5, 132–3, and more recently the questioning of the existence of a mixed culture by Préaux (1978); Bingen (1984); Will (1985); Montevecchi (2001).

[15] Will (1985); e.g. Bingen (1978b), translated into English in Bingen (2007a) 215–28; Anagnostou-Canas (1989), (1994).

[16] Bagnall (1995) 101–6 and (1997) 228.

[17] For example, Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993); Manning (2003).

One example related to the organization of the army illustrates such continuity: before the Greeks used mercenaries and settled foreign soldiers in Egypt the Persians relied on very similar strategies, as did the Egyptian pharaohs of the Twenty-sixth dynasty and of the New Kingdom.

The nature and the role of the army are at the heart of debates about the army as a tool of domination and about multiculturalism. Lesquier concludes the first fundamental work on the Ptolemaic army by asserting the two opposed views that would prevail thereafter about the army's role in the Ptolemaic state: first, focusing on the military aspect of the army, he underscores how the Successors of Alexander and their descendants "remained Macedonians vis-à-vis subject races . . . [and] relied on their army, Macedonian in theory, Hellenic in practice, as the safest moral and material foundation of their domination."[18] But a few lines later, after mentioning the military reform of the late third century BC, he explains that the army "also offers, with the cleruchic system, a remarkable example of the fusion of Hellenic and indigenous civilizations that characterizes the Hellenistic period."

These two theses have been developed further since then, sometimes resulting in extreme interpretations. At one end of the spectrum, Launey, applying dubious racial theories, deplores the disappearance of the Greek "race" in Egypt because of "racial degeneracy" through intermarriage.[19] At the other end, Anagnostou-Canas, relying on the "colonial hypothesis" mentioned above, denounces the army as the tool of colonial domination *par excellence*:[20] it dispossessed natives of cultivable land, caused the spiritual dispossession of the colonized through their enrollment in the colonizers' army and was a site of forced contacts between colonizers and colonized that failed to result in large-scale acculturation. Strangely enough, these opposite approaches have sometimes led to the same conclusion. For example, both Anagnostou-Canas and Launey regard the gymnasium as a stronghold of "Greekness," although the former denounces its exclusive character, while the latter is relieved by the preservation of some Greek elements in Egypt.

Most work in recent decades, however, finds a middle way. Papyrologists have generally acknowledged the role of the army as a tool of domination, at least implicitly. The absence of military violence in the conquest of the country by Alexander and Ptolemy (as satrap and then king) – recognized even by Anagnostou-Canas – does not erase the military aspect of the occupation.

[18] Lesquier (1911) 288, translated by Fischer-Bovet.
[19] Launey (1949), e.g. 1089–90. [20] Anagnostou-Canas (1989), e.g. 236.

Scholars have devoted most of their attention to one feature of military occupation: the cleruchy, the system of distribution of land in exchange for military service to men who served only when needed, in contrast to professional troops continuously in active service. The most recent work on the Ptolemaic army, by Scheuble-Reiter, is a study of the cavalry cleruchs.[21] This is due mainly to the nature of the sources, which provide considerable information about cleruchic land, the civil life of soldiers and their financial situation, whereas information about the military functions of cleruchs and garrisoned soldiers is scarce. Part II of this book is in part a response to previous views of the cleruchic system regarding the place of residence of cleruchs, for example, and the so-called "progressive devaluation" of the cleruchic system, and it seeks to explain the development of the system in connection with the making of the Ptolemaic state.[22]

As for multiculturalism, over the last few decades scholars have reasserted the presence in the army of Egyptians – although as a minority – and other non-Greeks.[23] But introductory or general works on the Hellenistic world often neglect the role of Egyptians in the army.[24] Intermarriage of soldiers with Egyptian women also provided the army with recruits of a mixed cultural and linguistic background. Clarysse's work points out the frequency of double names among soldiers and officials and the new light that the combination of Greek and Demotic documents sheds on Ptolemaic society.[25] Similarly, Van 't Dack has underscored the army's multiculturalism, although he refuses to regard it as the reflection of the entire society, pending deeper multidisciplinary research.[26]

Finally, the hiring of a large number of Egyptians by Ptolemy IV to fight the Seleucid king at Raphia in 217 BC has generally been interpreted as the cause of the revolts that followed, on the basis of Polybius' take on the event (5.107). The first three Ptolemies are therefore usually considered powerful and militarily successful rulers, whereas their successors led the state into a spiral of decline until the Romans annexed Egypt in 30 BC. A new approach to the role of the army in the making of the Ptolemaic state should help to clarify this question.

[21] See the various articles by Sandra Scheuble cited in the bibliography. Scheuble-Reiter (2012) appeared too late to be taken into account here.

[22] For the place of residence, see esp. Bingen (1973), (1978c), (2007a). For the devaluation of the cleruchic system, see Van 't Dack (1977).

[23] For example Peremans' articles in *Ancient Society*; Winnicki's numerous articles; Clarysse (1985); the unpublished dissertation of Marrinan (1998); Lloyd (2002b) on the Egyptian elite.

[24] Launey (1949), for example, does not even mention them (see the preface to the new edition, p. XIV), although his work is still the standard study of the Hellenistic armies.

[25] E.g. Clarysse (1985), (1992).

[26] Van 't Dack (1992).

1.3 A new approach

The Greco-Macedonian cleruchs settled in the Fayyum in the third century BC did indeed serve as a tool of domination for the new foreign rulers in Egypt. But the communities of professional soldiers living in Upper Egypt in the second century can no longer be interpreted within this framework. So too, while interaction between ethnic groups was slow in the third-century Fayyum, it became common a century later, with some variation throughout Egypt. This shows that none of the approaches to the Ptolemaic army mentioned above – as a colonial tool, on one end of the spectrum, or as a place of interaction, on the other – can, if applied in an exclusive manner, explain the army's role in Egypt and its development over the course of three centuries. An extreme schematization would suggest that the army developed from a tool of domination to a locus of ethnic interaction.

The goal of this study is accordingly to go one step further, by providing a larger framework that describes the various functions of the army in order to make sense of its role in the making of the Ptolemaic state and its interaction with society. This approach reveals how internal factors (above all settlement and marriage patterns) and external factors (in particular the pressure of the Seleucids and the intervention of the Romans) drove the evolution of the army's role in Egyptian society. I argue that a century after Alexander's conquest the army came to function as an engine of socio-economic and cultural integration at the same time as it was growing less powerful in military terms.

The socio-economic roles of soldiers illuminate the mutual impact of the army on state structures and society. The impact of the army on state structures mostly concerns the means the state was forced to develop to pay soldiers and to keep them loyal; the impact on society is mainly related to the level of social differentiation between soldiers and the civilian population. The socio-economic status of soldiers depends on how the state pays and/or settles them, which can promote or prevent interaction between soldiers and civilians. Conversely, if the state's means to remunerate soldiers are diminished, and/or if the relationship between different population groups within the society changes, the state may recruit from a different pool of people and modify the organization of the army, which in turn affects the relationships between soldiers and between soldiers and civilians.

The evidence from Ptolemaic Egypt points to a time of crisis, transition and reform between *c.* 220 and *c.* 160 BC that reshaped the relationship between state, army and society. From a larger point of view, this period corresponds to increasing Roman involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean.

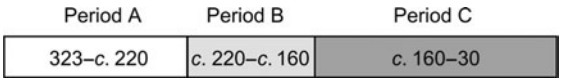

Figure 1.1 Periodization of Ptolemaic history

By 168 BC the Romans were able to ask the Seleucids, who had just invaded Egypt, to leave the country with their army.[27] At that point, the international function of the Ptolemaic army had almost disappeared. From an Egyptian perspective this period was a time of political instability and economic distress due in part to the overwhelming expense of supporting a series of wars against the Seleucids. In demographic terms, the situation was different from the previous period, since substantial Greco-Macedonian immigration had ended and marriages between Greeks and Egyptian women had become more and more frequent. Most Greeks in Egypt had been there for three, four or even five generations. Some had Egyptian ancestors and many lived in the countryside, where they had integrated into local social networks and become involved in community traditions. Matters may have been different, however, in the three Greek cities (poleis) of Egypt. Just as immigration had mainly brought Greek soldiers, the end of it led to an increase in the number of Egyptian soldiers in the army. In addition, new ways of remunerating soldiers, which correlate to a decrease in their bargaining power, created less social differentiation and led the army to enhance socio-economic and cultural integration among some population groups.

Previous scholarship has noted Egypt's lack of participation in Mediterranean politics and military action but has ignored the effect of the end of immigration and of the new relationship between soldiers and society. The present study argues that the new situation within state and society affected the army in two ways. Its functions became broader, but its military function became weaker on an international scale, at the same time that it was penetrated more and more by the indigenous Egyptian elite and by soldiers with a Greco-Egyptian background. The periodization in Figure 1.1 can be used as a heuristic tool to understand changes in Ptolemaic Egypt, with the intervening period of crisis between *c.* 220 and *c.* 160 BC.

This schema resembles the traditional periodization used by Hölbl in his *History of the Ptolemaic Empire* but aims to provide a chronological perspective for a new framework that draws on the sociological approaches

[27] On this episode, involving C. Popillius Laenas, see Polybius 29.27.1.

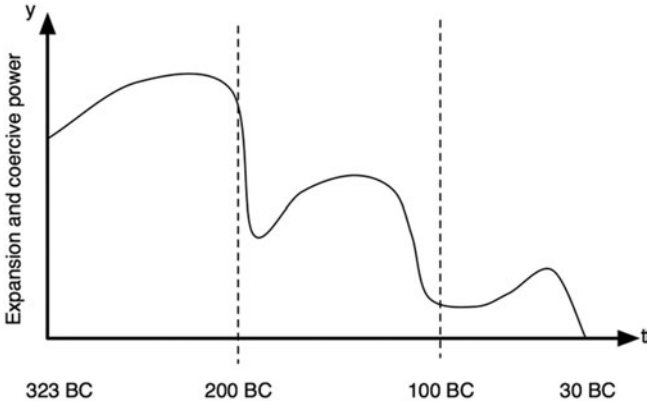

Figure 1.2 Rethinking Ptolemaic "decline"

sketched above and departs from traditional views.[28] The latter assert a quasi-teleological decline of the Ptolemies after Raphia, either because of a so-called Egyptianization of the dynasty or because a so-called Egyptian nationalist movement emerged. Consequently, the prevailing view describes Period A as a time of intense state building and expansion, and, from at least the 280s BC onward, as a century of balance between the Hellenistic states. Then, after the victory of Ptolemy IV at Raphia in 217 BC, there was a straightforward decline of the dynasty, in large part due to the recruitment of vast numbers of Egyptians. My study proposes a more complex approach to "decline" and a different explanation for it. If sketched in a curve that impressionistically represents the Ptolemaic state's expansion and the kings' degree of coercive power over time, a synthetic view would resemble Figure 1.2.

As has recently been pointed out, there was no true balance of power in Period A, but instead a continuous competition that drove the different actors to maximize their revenues.[29] The Ptolemies were in a difficult situation when the Seleucid king attacked in 217 BC. They had to increase their military expenditures and then face the postwar demobilization, which resulted in a chain reaction of revolts. The period of crisis was thus not caused by the so-called Egyptianization of the rulers or by a nationalist movement. Six decades later, the Ptolemies were again able to rule their state, albeit a state that had shrunk dramatically. During the period of crisis, the Ptolemies reshaped the state and the army but were forced to withdraw

[28] Hölbl (2001) 304–11.
[29] Austin (1986); Lévêque (1999); Heinen (2003); Eckstein (2006).

from the international battlefield. The period that followed did not consist of a long, straightforward decline, but of complicated power relations between the kings, the elite and local communities. Moreover, the final decades of the Ptolemaic dynasty were inextricably entangled with Roman politics.

From Period B onward, the evidence shows that the army was a unifying force between ethnic groups in certain strata of the population. Ptolemaic history cannot be reduced to a zero-sum game between Greeks and Egyptians, and integration went on in both directions between soldiers and local elites. Papyrologists use the concepts of Hellenization or Egyptianization, or of Hellenized/Hellenizing Egyptians and Egyptianized/Egyptianizing Greeks.[30] But these terms scarcely reflect the complexity of the new situation, in which there must have been great variation in the extent to which a Greek was familiar with Egyptian culture or an Egyptian adopted Greek culture. The traditional scheme also obscures the fact that many (although not all) Hellenized/Hellenizing Egyptians and Egyptianized/Egyptianizing Greeks were the product of mixed marriages. In this study I call Greco-Egyptians the offspring of intermarriage but otherwise refer mostly to Greek or Egyptian origin.[31] As in other fields that explore cultural interaction, we may need to begin evaluating the use of terms such as creolization and hybridization to describe what happened in certain strata of Egyptian society.[32] I say "certain strata" because the Greek population, which represented perhaps only 5 percent of the population of Egypt, was largely well-to-do at the Greek polis level, the Egyptian city level and the village level. Intermarriage and integration, happening for the most part through the army, could affect only a small portion of the Egyptian population.[33]

[30] These expressions are traditional in the field of papyrology, for example in Lewis (1986) 154.

[31] Chauveau (1997) 208 is among the few historians to apply the concept of Greco-Egyptianness to certain strata of Ptolemaic society. See also Bagnall (2000) and, on mixed families, e.g. Véïsse (2004) 99–102 and (2005), esp. 219–20.

[32] Dyson (2003) 105, for example, ends his work *The Roman Countryside* thus: "The face-off between imperialists and post-colonialists has sometimes led scholars to miss the process of blending and integration, of what Jane Webster has called 'creolization,' which created a new society that was one of the most impressive achievements of Rome." Webster (2001) 218 suggests a framework for understanding ethnic groups and culture changes "not [as] the gradual replacement of one way of life by another, but [as] the blending of both, in a clearly nonegalitarian social context."

[33] Contrary to the numerous articles by Peremans on the subject, I do not believe that intermarriage occurred most often among the lower strata, but rather at the local elite level. See Chapter 7.