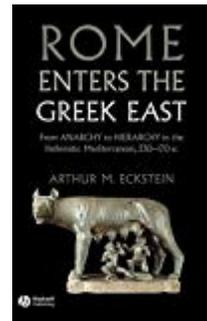




**Arthur M. Eckstein.** *Rome Enters the Greek East: From Anarchy to Hierarchy in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, 230-170 BC.* Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2008. xi + 439 pp. \$119.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4051-6072-8.



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**Published on** H-War (March, 2009)

**Commissioned by** Brian G.H. Ditcham

## Rome's Imperial Moment in the East?

Readers familiar with Arthur M. Eckstein's 2007 study, *Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War, and the Rise of Rome*, will already be aware of some of his interdisciplinary methodology. The present work likewise makes a forceful argument for the utility of modern international relations theory as a lens through which to study the nuances of the growth of Roman power. That is, Eckstein's methodology combines traditional classical scholarship with realist theories of international systems. As in the previous volume, Eckstein provides a useful corrective to the reigning understanding of Roman imperial expansion east of the Adriatic in the third and second centuries BC. He makes a good case for rehabilitating Maurice Holleaux's thesis that the Romans had few interests east of the Adriatic down to 201/200 BCE.[1] That is, it was not until envoys from the Greek states threatened by Philip V of Macedon and Antiochus III of the Seleucid Empire arrived at Rome with the news that the two monarchs had made a pact to destroy the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt that the Senate decided to intervene in great strength in eastern affairs.

Since Holleaux first put forth this notion in 1921, the importance of the Pact Between the Kings has subsequently been disputed or simply ignored by many modern scholars. Meanwhile, William V. Harris and his intellectual heirs have argued that Rome was an exceptionally aggressive imperialist state with dark and irrational roots, and that no special explanation is needed for the Roman intervention in the east.[2] In his 2007 study, Eckstein reacted against Harris's notion of Roman exceptionalism. He examined the classical and Hellenistic Greeks and found that many were deeply militarized cultures, but, even more striking, regardless of size or political type, nearly all were involved in endemic warfare. This led him to conclude that much of this penchant for belligerence must be due not to the attributes of the states in the ancient international system, but to the characteristics of the prevailing system as a whole. The eastern Mediterranean state system, with which the Romans came into increasing conflict not only seems to fit the modern realist model of an international anarchy but also was a particularly stark example of one. Rather than being un-

usually belligerent, the Romans were caught up in an international system that fundamentally required ferocity from all state actors simply as a matter of survival. Ruthlessness on the part of any particular state was not exceptional or necessarily evil. It was simply tragically typical.

Building on this foundation in the present volume, Eckstein seeks not only to bring the Pact Between the Kings back into prominence but also to highlight the tentative and hesitant nature of Rome's expansion in the east. The book breaks down into three main sections. The first covers the period 230-205 BCE and the first hesitant Roman moves across the Adriatic. The second sketches the events of 207-200 BCE and the crisis caused by the collapse of Ptolemaic power that eventually drew the Romans east. The final section covers 200-170 BCE, tracing the two rounds of hegemonic war needed to subdue Philip and Antiochus and their immediate aftermath. Roman hesitancy to become involved in the east is a constant theme. Eckstein argues that after the defeat of Antiochus Roman victory replaced the old tripolar system in the east with a new unipolar system embracing the entire Mediterranean. But unipolarity did not necessarily signify control, let alone empire.

Eckstein's examination of the situation created by the Roman victory in the First Illyrian War (229-228 BCE) in the first section is illustrative of his methodology. Modern reconstructions of Roman relations with the polities on the Illyrian coast range from informal control exercised on the basis of a patron-client relationship to some form of clearly subjugated protectorate.[3] Eckstein disputes this by carefully critiquing the ancient evidence and finding it far from conclusive. The handful of disparate, geographically noncontiguous polities brought under Roman protection did not constitute anything approaching the coherent protectorate we should expect to find if the Senate had more than minimal concerns in maritime Illyria.

In this, he follows Karl-Ernst Petzold and Erich Gruen but reinforces the point by noting two terms often used somewhat cavalierly by classical scholars but precisely defined by political scientists: "protectorate" and "sphere of influence." [4] Maritime Illyria was not a "bordered political space that had lost both its sovereignty as a whole and its internal administration into the control of an imperial power," nor was it "a definite region within which a single external power exerts a predominant influence which limits the independence of freedom of action of states within it ... against the influence of other comparable powers over the region" (pp. 51, 54). Classical his-

torians are often tempted to chastise others for using imprecise translations of ancient sources. Eckstein makes the salutary point that they should be equally precise in their use of the modern terminology of imperial control.

In this conception, authority and control must be asserted and asserted often in order to be authority and control. In Eckstein's view, the sporadic and limited interventions east of the Adriatic until 205 BCE were just that, limited and sporadic. Obviously, the existential threat of the Second Punic War (218-201 BCE) helped ensure that this was so. What's more, Eckstein argues that the eastern diplomatic environment did not lend itself to large-scale Roman intervention. In the First Macedonian War (214-205 BCE), prominent Greek states, such as Ptolemaic Egypt, Rhodes, and Athens, were involved in diplomatic maneuvers dramatically at variance with Rome's interests. They left Rome isolated by brokering a separate peace between Philip and Rome's main ally in Greece, the Aetolian League. Within five years, however, some of these same states were desperate for Roman intervention.

In his second section, Eckstein explains this diplomatic revolution as a result of a power transition crisis. Internal unrest and the ascension of a child to the Ptolemaic throne in 204 BCE ensured that Egypt could no longer act as a balance against Macedonian and Seleucid power. The attendant hegemonic war could have resulted in a new bipolar structure in the east dominated by Philip and Antiochus or even the eventual emergence of one or the other as a unipolar hegemon. Instead, Rome, a power that was heretofore peripheral to eastern affairs, defeated both, and what had been regional eastern and western international systems came together into one Mediterranean-wide system. That is, Polybius's emphasis on the development of the *symploke* (interconnectedness) of east and west is precisely on point.

Eckstein argues that the proximate cause for this intervention is to be sought, as reported by Polybius, in the pact between Philip and Antiochus. Thus, he devotes an entire chapter to countering the various modern criticisms of Polybius's account. Here Eckstein's skills as a classical scholar come to the fore. He discusses the Polybian narrative and manuscript tradition to establish that there is no a priori reason for dismissing it as implausible. More important, he then demonstrates that the practical operation of the pact can be discerned. Eckstein not only argues that Philip campaigned vigorously against Ptolemaic holdings in 201-200 BCE but also adduces new epigraphic evidence to demonstrate that the kings were

in active cooperation. Eckstein posits that it was the pact that accounts for a diplomatic revolution. The expansionist threat posed by the kings drove the Ptolemies, Rhodians, Athenians, and Pergamenes to turn to Rome. That is, focusing on Roman aggressiveness only gives a partial picture. In Eckstein's view, we will get a much clearer picture if we lift our eyes to the international system as a whole and the stresses placed on it by the interests and actions of all the actors, not just the Romans.

For Eckstein, the embassies of 201 BCE were no mere pretext for continuing Roman aggression. They were a necessary catalyst that galvanized the Senate into action because of the security threat posed by the Pact Between the Kings. He notes that the actions of the Roman government were not what we should expect of reflexive imperialism. Instead, they were the typical response of a powerful state concerned about its security in a threatening international environment. The senatorial resolution in 200 BCE for what amounted to preventive war against Philip was initially rejected by the people when put to a vote in the *comitia centuriata*. Instead of imperial aggression, Eckstein suggests that what moved the Senate and eventually the Roman people was fear of a "worst-case scenario," the unknown threat that would be posed by Philip and Antiochus after they had digested Egypt. It was this that brought them the "cognitive closure" that they had "no choice" but to wage a preventive war (p. 264). That is, that threat assessment may have been a critical element in Roman decision making.

In his final section, Eckstein argues that, even after embarking on the Second Macedonian War (200-196 BCE) and the Syrian Wars (192-188 BCE), the Romans were far from following a policy of formal imperialism. He discerns three factors as the foundation of the relationship between Greece and Rome after 188 BCE and the explanation for the ambiguous nature of Roman predominance. First, no single polity remained a serious challenge to Roman authority after 188 BCE. The power of all other serious, first-tier polities had been severely curtailed. Second, the hegemonic wars over Philip V and Antiochus III had not been won by the Romans alone. Rather, Rome was the central component of broad voluntary alliances of smaller and mid-sized Greek polities. Third, the Romans completely withdrew their forces west of the Adriatic and specifically did not attempt to establish formal *provinciae* in the east—what Eckstein refers to as a policy of "smash and leave" (p. 305). Rome's allies and erstwhile enemies were all free to pursue their own international agendas and private wars so long as they did not run directly counter to Roman interests.

Again, Eckstein argues for precise terminology. He insists that if the term "empire" is to be used meaningfully, it should be rather narrowly construed as the direct control over both the external and internal policies and politics of subordinated polities. "Empire is not mere inequality of power among states" (p. 373). All-in-all, Eckstein presents a compelling case that, despite achieving unipolar status as the sole remaining "superpower" in the Mediterranean international system, true Roman "empire" had to wait. Indeed, Polybius noted (1.1.5, 3.4.2-3, and 6.2.3) that Roman supremacy was only consummated over the course of a fifty-three-year period that ran until 168 BCE and the close of the Third Macedonian War. It took time for Rome's relationship with the Greek polities to evolve through a continuum of hierarchical arrangements into imperial control.

The conclusion of earlier scholars lacking Eckstein's grounding in modern political theory has often been that following the peace of 188 BCE there was nothing left for the Greeks to do but submit themselves to the Romans who were now the ultimate arbiters of international relations, the "cops of the world."<sup>[5]</sup> Eckstein argues that a situation of actual imperial rule had not yet come into being because no such rule was either practiced by the Romans or recognized by the Greeks. What is more problematic is tracing the precise nature of this progression from unipolar power to imperial rule. Long ago, Gruen made a convincing case that even after the complete "emasculatation" of Greece in 146 BCE, the Romans were still declining to exercise "overlordship."<sup>[6]</sup> Eckstein's study supports this view and would seem to indicate that in the east the Roman empire was the product of a long process. Military victory may have been a necessary condition of empire but was not sufficient without the frequent assertion of authority and control that would come later.

#### Notes

[1]. Maurice Holleaux, *Rome, la Grèce et les Monarchies Hellenistiques au III<sup>e</sup> Siècle avant J.-C. (273-205)* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1969).

[2]. William V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome 327-70 BC* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 46-53.

[3]. Ernst Badian, *Foreign Clientelae (264-70 BC)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 41-42, 53-54, 113; Jean-Louis Ferrary, *Philhellénisme et Impérialisme: Aspects Idéologiques de la Conquête Romaine du Monde Hellénistique* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1988), 24-33; N.

G. L. Hammond, "Illyris, Rome, and Macedon in 229-205 BC," *Journal of Roman Studies* 58 (1968): 7-9; and Peter Derow, "Pharos and Rome," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 88 (1991): 267-270.

[4]. Karl-Ernst Petzold, "Rom und Illyrien: Ein Beitrag zur römischen Aussenpolitik im 3. Jahrhundert," *Historia* 20 (1971): 206, 220-221; and Erich Gruen, *The Hel-*

*lenistic World and the Coming of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 78, 367-368.

[5]. Peter Derow, "From the Illyrian Wars to the Fall of Macedon," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 65-66.

[6]. Gruen, *Hellenistic World*, 528.

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**Citation:** Joseph Frechette. Review of Eckstein, Arthur M., *Rome Enters the Greek East: From Anarchy to Hierarchy in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, 230-170 BC*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. March, 2009.

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