

est sense of the word, a sea trade, notwithstanding the animation of the navigation on the Nile, and the communication between the banks of the river, and the artificially constructed roads along the shores of the Red Sea. According to the grand views of Alexander, the newly-founded Egyptian city of Alexandria and the ancient Babylon were to have constituted the respective eastern and western capitals of the Macedonian empire; Babylon never, at any subsequent period, realized these hopes, and the prosperity of Seleucia, which was built by Seleucus Nicator on the Lower Tigris, and had been connected by canals with the Euphrates,* contributed to its entire downfall.

Three great rulers, the three first Ptolemies, whose reigns occupied a whole century, gave occasion, by their love of science, their brilliant institutions for the promotion of mental culture, and their unremitting endeavors for the extension of maritime trade, to an increase of knowledge regarding distant nations and external nature hitherto unattained by any people. This treasure of genuine, scientific cultivation passed from the Greek settlers in Egypt to the Romans. Under Ptolemæus Philadelphus, scarcely half a century after the death of Alexander, and even before the first Punic war had shaken the aristocratic republic of the Carthaginians, Alexandria was the greatest commercial port in the world, forming the nearest and most commodious route from the basin of the Mediterranean to the southeastern parts of Africa, Arabia, and India. The Ptolemies availed themselves with unprecedented success of the advantages held out to them by a route which nature had marked, as it were, for a means of universal intercourse with the rest of the world by the direction of the Arabian Gulf,† and whose importance can not even now be duly appreciated until the savage violence of Eastern nations, and the injurious jealousies of Western powers, shall simultaneously diminish. Even after it had become a Roman province, Egypt continued to be the seat of immense wealth, for the increased luxury of Rome, under the Cæsars, reached to the territory of the Nile, and turned to the universal commerce of Alexandria for the chief means of its satisfaction.

The important extension of the sphere of knowledge regarding external nature and different countries under the Ptolemies was mainly owing to the caravan trade in the interior

* Plin., vi., 26 (?).

† See Droysen, *Gesch. des Hellenistischen Staatensystems*, s. 749.