

«EGYPTIANS AND GREEKS» : NOTES ON HISTORIOGRAPHY

By

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The relationship between the natives and the Greek settlers has been one of the most controversial issues in the study of the social history of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. The interrelationship between the two «races»⁽¹⁾ had shown promise in the Delta well before Alexander's advent.⁽²⁾ But during the early Ptolemaic period the situation grew rather complicated. Now the rulers, though Macedonians by origin, were clearly influenced by the Greek culture. Under their sovereignty the doors of Egypt were opened wide welcoming more Greek settlers. The new immigrants were probably more numerous now than at any time during the Saite era. Moreover, their role in the country's life reached a peak. The new régime depended heavily on them particularly in the army. It is true that the Saite kings employed Greeks in their army and allowed Greek counsellors to influence their internal policy—for instance, a work attributed to Aristotle gives a vivid example

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- (1) I use the word «races» here with every due reservation. Neither the Egyptians of the Saite era nor the foreign settlers of the same period were biologically of a specific distinctive race. The term «Greeks» is admittedly misleading both for the Saite and Ptolemaic periods, since a great part of the so-called «Greek» settlers can never have been ethnically pure Greeks. Indeed some of them were not fully hellenized or even superficially so. But since the term has already been established in modern littérature, and the alternative one, «foreigners», is no more convenient for the limited scope of the present paper, I shall use it.
- (2) See e.g. Dittenberger, *SiG*, I, No. 1, Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas*, pp. 113 — 4.

of how an Athenian general, Chabrias, persuaded king Tachos to adopt certain economic measures which affected virtually all the inhabitants, not even sparing the priests⁽³⁾. It is true also that they sympathized with the Greeks and their culture to the extent that at least two of them, Psammetichus I and Amasis, deserved the epithet *philellén*(4). But none of these kings had gone far off in this field as the early Ptolemies did. In essence the policy of the latter was a kind of continuation and furthering of the former's. But the early Ptolemies built an empire which included not only

(3) Ps. — Aristotle, *Oeconomica*, II. 25.

(4) Diodorus, I.67. 8 — 9 (Psammetichus); Herodotus, II. 178 (Amasis). Apart from the privileges which Amasis bestowed upon the Greek settlers, both soldiers and civilians, he himself is reported (Herodotus II.181), to have married a Greek lady. He also (ibid., 182) «dedicated offerings in Hellas. He gave to Cyrene a gilt image of Athena and a painted picture of himself, to Athena of Lindus two stone images and a marvellous linen breast-plate, and to Hera in Samos two wooden statues of himself, which stood yet in my time behind the doors in the great shrine». Moreover, he is said (ibid., 180) to have contributed to the rebuilding of the Delphian temple by a donation of a thousand talents of alum. Herodotus also records (ibid., 159) that king Necho dedicated the armour in which he fought in his Syrian campaign (608 BC) to Apollo at Branchidae, near Miletus (see Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas*, p. 113). In 361 BC king Tachos had some gold coin minted, the model for which was derived from the Athenian tetradrachm. The obverse type shows the head of Athena, who we know had already been assimilated to the goddess Neith of Sais. The reverse shows the native Egyptian papyrus, along with the king's name in Greek, TAOS. (Kraay, *Archaic and Classical Greek Coins*, p. 76 and pl. 12. 217). His successor, Nechtanebus II, also had gold coin minted. The obverse type, a galloping horse, is wholly Greek; though the reverse consists of two Egyptian hieroglyphs, which together signify *nefer nub* «fine gold» (Kraay, ibid., p. 295 and pl. 62.1064).

Cyrenaica, Cyprus, and Coele Syria, but also, for longer or shorter periods, the coastal area of Asia Minor from Cilicia to the Dardanells, Thrace, and the Cyclades. In other words, their subjects were not only Egyptians, but also the inhabitants of these regions. The incessant wars of the Successors and the following period of the political balance of power and rivalry among the Hellenistic monarchies, made the domination over the Aegean a cardinal aim of the first Ptolemies. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in their court large numbers of prominent figures from their possessions outside Egypt, and from the Greek motherland where the competition among the leading three kingdoms of the Successors was high. The Ptolemaic empire also entailed an unprecedented intensification of coming and going between Egypt and the Aegean world. As the home of the ruling Dynasty and the richest part of the Ptolemaic empire, Egypt was to become a centre for migrations. The most important difference between the Saite kings and the Ptolemies, however, is that the first only encouraged the Greek language (5), while retaining Egyptian as the official language of the administration; under the latter the Greek language, which had become increasingly dominant in the eastern Mediterranean and had won international recognition, was to replace Egyptian, thus opening the doors wide for Greek cultural influences in the country.

In the light of the new developments under the early Ptolemies, modern scholars agree almost unanimously on two principal standpoints: that the Greeks enjoyed a distinguished status in Egypt, and that although members of the two communities intermingled producing a class of «hybrids», others preserved their blood «uncontaminated». But they do not seem to agree on how and on what basis and for how long the Greeks were a distinguished class. Nor do they agree on the extent and the consequences of intermarriage and the mutual influence between the two peoples.

(5) Herodotus, II. 154; Diodorus, I. 67. 8—9, cf. Mosley «Greeks, Barbarians, Language and Contact» (*Ancient Society*, II, 1971), p. 3.

In the present paper I shall be limiting my attention to the discussion of certain preconceptions which seem to influence some modern scholars in their study of the Greek-native relationship in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, and which are bound to produce a subjective social history.

Some scholars maintain that the two peoples remained largely separate from and hostile to each other throughout the Ptolemaic and Roman eras. Rostovtzeff is a good example. «For the Egyptians — their mode of life, their religion, and their attitudes — the Greeks had no understanding and no sympathy. To a Greek an Egyptian was a barbarian in the modern sense of the word, a man who had no share in civilized life. As late as the third century AD an Egyptian Greek writing to his «brethren» says: «You may take me, brethren, for a barbarian or an inhuman Egyptian»⁽⁶⁾.

The problem in this view lies in the document (P. Oxy. 1681) which Rostovtzeff cites as vindication. For there is absolutely nothing in it that can provide justification for his assumption that its author was a Greek. He calls himself «Ammonios», an Egyptian name derived from the name of the God Ammon signifying «He of Ammon»⁽⁷⁾. The addressees bear the Roman name of Julius and the Greek (also Roman) Hilarus. A person to whom Ammonios sends his greetings has the Hellenized Egyptian name of Isidora (or probably Isidorus). Apart from these names the letter is by and large no more than greetings and apology. The word «brethren», however, may be suggestive. It was used about that time as a conventional epithet among the Christians regardless

(6) Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, pp. 275, 278. This contradicts another statement by the same scholar, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, p. 1099, that «during the second and first centuries B.C., . . . natives were . . . to be found in large numbers in the group of «Greeks» and Greeks in the group of «natives».

(7) Vergote, *Les Noms Propres du P. Bruxelles Inv. E. 7616*, p. 6.

of their nationalities and social backgrounds⁽⁸⁾. It is not improbable, though this is only a surmise, that Ammonius was newly converted to Christianity and that his addressees were Christians. So, if one is to follow the interpretation of Rostovtzeff (and the editors of the document) that the word «Egyptian» is used by Ammonius in a pejorative sense, then the latent feelings could well have derived from religious antipathy rather than racial prejudice. However, it is not entirely strange to suppose that an Egyptian might sometimes become critical of his own people or a section of them, or might even defame them, intentionally or only in jest, for one reason or another. In a well-known document from 257 BC, the elders of a large group of peasants from the Heliopolite nome — who collectively undertook to cultivate 1000 arouras from the estate of Apollonius in the Fayum — complain of a

ἡ γραμματεὺς Αἰγύπτιος τῶν πονηρῶν

who, they say, does not allow Philadelphia to be settled and drives away those who try to come there⁽⁹⁾. If one is to make a dramatic case of this

(8) «Brethren» is a very common word of Eusebius (c. 260 — 340 AD) denoting «Christians». See his Ecclesiastical History, e.g., VII. xi. 17:

πολλὴν ἡμῖν ἤγεν ἀδελφῶν τῶν
ἀπ' Αἰγύπτου τὴν ἐπιρριξίαν,

ibid., xxii. 12 (see also 11):

Ἐρμάμμωνι δὲ πάλιν καὶ τοῖς κατ'
Αἰγύπτου ἀδελφοῖς δι' ἐπιστολῆς κτλ.

Hermammmon was an active Egyptian Christian during the reigns of Decius and Valerian and Gallienus; see ibid., VII, i, x. 2.

(9) P. Lond. 1954, 6 — 7.

document, then all these peasants would be taken for Greeks and not Egyptians !

Yet, the excerpt from the letter, correctly quoted above by Rostovtzeff, can also be literally translated as follows. «Perhaps you consider me, brethren, a barbarian or an inhuman Egyptian⁽¹⁰⁾. Evidently, the word «barbarian» here does not, unlike Restovtzeff's explanation, qualify the word «Egyptian». Moreover, the context and the spirit of the letter should suggest «rude» rather than «barbarian in the modern sense of the word», as the suitable interpretation. The word «Egyptian» is qualified only by «inhuman». It seems to me that «Egyptian» here actually reveals the identity of Ammonius, that he himself is Egyptian, but he suspects that his brethren might consider him «inhuman». Yet the context of the letter clearly indicates that Ammonius did not in fact do anything evil to his brethren. Probably all that happened is that he left abruptly without telling them and for some time he did not let them hear from him. He reminds them of his proven sentiments and explains that «many things urged me to visit my family». Moreover, he plans to see them shortly and tell them his news. It would be too academic, therefore, to take the word «inhuman» literally. It is quite possible that Ammonius used it simply in the sense of «unfriendly» or «unmanly». There is nothing dramatic in the letter to suggest dramatic interpretations⁽¹¹⁾.

Even if Ammonius had a good Greek name and the names of his father and forefathers proved to be likewise, and even if he plainly stated that he was a Greek, how can we confidently argue that he, in the third century AD, reflects the experience of more than nine long centuries of Greek settlement in Egypt ? How can

(10) P.Oxy. 1681 = Select Papyri, 152 (3rd. cent. AD), 4 — 7 :

ἴσως με νομίζετε, ἀδελφοί, βάρβαρόν
τινα ἢ Αἰγυπτίον ἀνάνθρωπον εἶναι.

(11) Cf. Bickermann, «A Propos des astoi dans l'Égypte Gréco-Romaine» (Revue de Philologie de Littérature et d'Histoire Anciennes, 1927), p. 368.

we be sure whether he was a temporary resident (a foreigner) or a first-generation immigrant or a descendant of a pure Greek line in Egypt dating back to the third or even the seventh century BC ?

The document, however, is not the only source that Rostovtzeff cites. In his note on the above-quoted passage, he claims that «there has been very little change since the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus». Then he quotes the following words from Theocritus:

ἀλλάλοις ὄμαλοί, κακὰ παίγνια, πάντες ἔρινοι

adding that they were used by Praxinoa to characterize the native Egyptians.⁽¹²⁾.

Praxinoa is one of two Syracusan women featured in a poem of Theocritus describing the life in Alexandria at the festival of Adonis in the time of Philadelphus. There is no doubt that in such an early period, when new Greek immigrants came in flocks to settle in Egypt, there had to be some sort of misunderstanding between the new-comers and the local inhabitants. Commenting on this particular passage, Gow remarks that although «in Praxinoa's allusion to the depravity of the natives we may if we choose, find a trace of the tension which necessarily underlay the relations between the dominant Greeks and Macedonians and the unprivileged Egyptians, she does not go much beyond what other Greeks had said of Egyptians before or what any Greek might say of any barbarian⁽¹³⁾.

(12) Rostovtzeff, SEHRW, p. 667 note 39.

(13) Gow, «The Adoniazusae of Theocritus» (Journal of Hellenic Studies, 1938), p. 191.

Gow's exegesis is not impossible, «if we choose». Nevertheless there is a significant problem in the text under discussion. For a key-word, *erinoi*, is by no means reliable. It is one of several modern conjectural emendations of an empty word, *erioi*, which appears in the medieval manuscripts of the text⁽¹⁴⁾. Edmonds⁽¹⁵⁾ adopts another emendation, *ereioi*. To this Liddel and Scott's «Greek-English Lexicon» gives no equivalent saying that it is a dubious reading of Theocritus. The short edition of the same lexicon states that it is «a term of insult to Egyptians». Apparently the term failed to occur in any other place of the known Greek literature. Thus the definition of the insult became anybody's guess. Edmonds chose the word «queer», as the proper meaning⁽¹⁶⁾. Gow rendered it «a cursed lot»⁽¹⁷⁾, while Dover preferred the emendation *araioi* translating it to «accursed»⁽¹⁸⁾.

All these scholars are undoubtedly well aware of a sound textual word, *aergoi*, which appears in a copy of the text in P. Antinoë Theocritus⁽¹⁹⁾, and there seems to be no reason for not accepting it. In fact it explains the contents of the whole passage in which it occurs. For during the time of Soter I, Alexandria was still a city under formation. And it is not unlikely that the place attracted idle people who found there a good opportunity to earn their living through crime and mischief. Theocritus gives Philadelphus the credit of bringing this phenomenon to an end, so that the

(14) Dover, *Theocritus, Select Poems*, p. 47.

(15) Edmonds, *The Greek Bucolic Poets, Theocritus*, XV. 50 and note.

(16) *Ibid.*

(17) Gow, *The Greek Bucolic Poets*, p. 59.

(18) Dover, *ThSP*, line 50; see also his «vocabulary list».

(19) Johnson and Hunt, *Two Theocritus Papyri, Idyll XV*. 50.

inhabitants in his time enjoyed peace and safety. Thus when Praxinoa and her lady-friend found themselves in a street of Alexandria packed with the great multitudes of revellers, there was no cause for them to perceive any danger. It was an occasion to pay compliments to Philadelphus, that since his father died⁽²⁰⁾.

Οὐδεὶς κακοεργὸς δαλείται τὸν ἴοντα
παρέρπων Αἰγυπτιστί. οἷα πρὶν ἐξ ἀπάτας
κεκροτηγένοι ἄνδρες ἔπαισδον, ἀλλάλοις
ὄραλοι, κακὰ παίχνια, πάντες ἀεργοί.

The «Egyptian fashion» here may lead, though not necessarily⁽²¹⁾, to the assumption that the criminals were Egyptians. Even so, the imputation is directed solely to the villains in the Alexandria of Soter I, not to the average Egyptians.

This is attested by another idyll of Theocritus, where the poet flatters Philadelphus that his subjects «occupy their business without let or hindrance»⁽²²⁾. Egypt in his eye was a fruitful land that «possessed so many cities of men learned in labour... and in

(20) Theocritus, XV. 44 — 50 (text quoted: 47 — 50).

(21) Alciphron, in a letter (IV. 19.4) supposedly written by Glycera to Menander, says that Ptolemy son of Lagus

δι' ὑπονοιῶν Αἰγυπτίοις θέλων
Ἀττικισμοῖς σε διατωθάξειν.

The son of Lagus was not a native Egyptian nor was he an Athenian citizen either.

(22) Theocritus, XVII. 97:

λαοὶ δ' ἔργα περιστέλλονται ἔκηλοι.

them the lord and master of all is proud Ptolemy⁽²³⁾. In short, Theocritus does not appear to shore up Rostovtzeff's view. And in any case he was only a visitor in Egypt; he did not settle there permanently.

In the same note, partly quoted above, Rostovtzeff finally says that «not even Philo was very enthusiastic about the Egyptians. Apart from his contempt for the Egyptian religion and the low opinion in general of the materialistic ideals of the Egyptians, he attacks in many places their passionate, unstable, rebellious and unreasonable character».

This, evidently, is irrelevant and even more confusing. For the simple fact is that the largest part of Philo's writings about the Egyptians is concerned with the experience of the Jews in Pharaonic Egypt according to the Old Testament; and has nothing whatsoever to do with the attitudes of the Greek settlers in Egypt towards the natives. Ironically he was one of the prominent leaders of the Jewish community in their strife against what modern scholars take for granted as Greeks in Alexandria during Caligula's reign. He wrote two essays, «Flaccus» and «The Embassy to Gaius», explaining the events of the strife, both in Alexandria and in the Emperor's court, from the Jewish point of view. He himself headed the Jewish embassy to the Emperor⁽²⁴⁾ in an attempt to counter the allegations of the anti-Jews in Alexandria.

(23) Ibid., 81 — 5:

ὅσ τε̄α τόσσα βροτῶν ἔχει ἔργα
δαέντων ... τῶν πάντων Πτολεμαῖος
ἀγῆνωρ ἐμβασιλεύει.

Cf. 77 — 80.

(24) Philo, Embassy, e.g. 181 — 184.

In reality Philo is an excellent witness not of the antipathy between the Greek settlers and the natives, but to their integration. In his «Embassy» he never uses the term «Greeks» to denote the anti-Jewish population in the city⁽²⁵⁾. In «Flaccus» the term does not even occur at all. Philo employs only the terms «Alexandrians» and «Egyptians» interchangeably to designate the same group of people.

Commenting upon two passages of the «Embassy» (139 and 163), Smallwood claims that Philo «inaccurately and no doubt with intent to insult and not out of ignorance, attributes Egyptian animal-worship to the Alexandrians, who were Greeks, not Egyptians, and who moreover despised the depressed Egyptian peasantry⁽²⁶⁾».

Philo is free from such accusations. It is common knowledge that «Greeks» in the Delta of the Saite period had already adopted certain animal-worships⁽²⁷⁾. And it is clear beyond any doubt that animal cults were flourishing in Alexandria during the Ptolemaic and Roman eras and, moreover, were introduced to Greeks outside Egypt, to Romans and even emperors.⁽²⁸⁾ Suffice it here to

(25) Without textual authority, Smallwood (Philonis Alexandrini Legatio ad Gaium) took the liberty of inserting the word «Greeks» into her translation of at least two passages : 124 and 133.

(26) Smallwood, *ibid.*, p. 225 note 139. Smallwood does not seem to know that the Egyptians were not just a group of peasants.

(27) See e.g. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274 C; Vermaseren, *Apis*, I, No. 132 and pl. LXXVII; U.P.Z.I.

(28) See e.g. Grœnier, *Anubis Alexandrin et Romain*, *Passim*; Griffiths, *Apuleius of Madauros, The Isis-Book*. See also the references cited on p. 17 note 42.

point out that one of the influential Alexandrian leaders, who antagonized the Jews so much that Josephus attacked him bitterly in one of his works, was called «Apion». Apion, as Vergote explains, signifies «He of Apis»⁽²⁹⁾. Is it conceivable that a man bearing such a name could possibly have come from a background that cherished a genuine contempt of animal cults ? Apion was not a «depressed Egyptian peasant» !

In another passage of the «Embassy», Philo says that Caligula was unusually pleased by the news of his deification among the Alexandrians, and that he was under «the influence of some of his household who were continually laughing and joking with him». Then he adds, in the next passage, that «most of these were Egyptian... the leader of this whole Egyptian dance-band was one Helicon... who wormed his way into the imperial household⁽³⁰⁾.

If these two passages are divested of the harsh words, which naturally reflect the author's bitterness, the substance becomes very simple, and that is: some Egyptians in the Imperial court had a hold on Caligula and were able to enlist him against the Jews in Alexandria.⁽³¹⁾ But Smallwood was moved to comment that «strictly speaking this should mean the depressed native classes of Egypt, and not include the Alexandrian Greeks, although possibly Philo uses the term here contemptuously to denote people who were in fact Greeks⁽³²⁾.

This, evidently, creates a curious paradox. For it is difficult to understand how they were «depressed» natives and in the same time were members of the Emperor's court. Moreover, it is misleading to attempt to censor the basic information which the

(29) Vergote, *Les Noms Propres*, p. 6.

(30) Philo, *Embassy*, 165 — 166 (trans. Smallwood, PhALG). Passage 166 is full of insults to Egyptians (omitted from the quotation).

(31) See Malaise, *Les Conditions de Pénétration et de Diffusion des Cultes Egyptiens en Italie*, p. 398 and note 2.

(32) Smallwood, PhALG, p. 246 note 166.

passages convey by a cliché, claiming that Philo used the term «Egyptians» as an «insult» to Greeks. When he says «most of these were Egyptians»⁽³³⁾, he is simply reporting⁽¹⁴⁾. The insults come afterwards.

Smallwood is not the first scholar to reach such amazing interpretations. Box, in his edition of «Flaccus», testifies that «Willrich's view (Judaica, pp. 128 — 30) that Philo calls the anti-Semitic inhabitants of Alexandria Egyptians to insult them, seems undeniable»⁽³⁵⁾. In another place, he claims that «Philo confuses the Egyptian population with the Greek» His best example of this alleged confusion is Philo's statement (On Flaccus, 92 — 3) on the disarmament of the Egyptians by the Romans. He accuses Philo of confusion between disarming the «Egyptians throughout the country» and the «houses» which ought to be searched, assuming that the first denotes natives, and the second Alexandria and, consequently, Greeks⁽³⁶⁾. «Houses», needless to say, were not an exclusively Alexandrian or Greek domestic device. Moreover, from the beginning Alexandria was not inhabited solely by Greeks, nor was it the only place in Egypt that accommodated Greek settlers either. In fact Philo was no exception in using the term «Egyptians» to describe all the inhabitants of Egypt, including Alexandria. The term was universally employed, to the

(33) Philo, Embassy, 166:

(34) It is a well-known fact that the time of Caligula marked the end of a period of persecution against the Egyptian cults in Rome. Caligula is also believed to have dedicated a temple to Isis in the Campus Martius. The emperor was by his upbringing inclined to establish his rule on oriental style. It was Alexandria which publicly gave birth to and fostered the idea of his godship, and no doubt the «Egyptians» in his court furthered his hopes in this direction. See Malaise, CPDCEI, pp. 395 — 401; see also Philo, Embassy, 338.

(35) Box, Philonis Alexandrini in Flaccum, p. 79 note 17.

(36) Ibid., p. 110 note 93.

same effect, by historians and writers from the Roman era.⁽³⁷⁾. Were they also «insulting» the Greeks of Egypt by calling them «Egyptians», and «confusing» them with the natives ? !

Philo himself, however, settles this question when, in a meaningful statement, he says that Flaccus knew «that both the city and all Egypt have two classes of inhabitants, us and these⁽³⁸⁾; in other words, Jews and Egyptians⁽³⁹⁾.

Swiderek remarks that «charmé par la littérature et la culture classique les savants ne voyaient le monde antique que par les yeux des Grecs et des Romains appartenant surtout aux classes élevées.⁽⁴⁰⁾. This seems to be true. For when a distinguished

(37) e.g. Strabo, XII.3.34; XVI. 2.33; XVII. I. 11; Chrysostom, XXXII.36; Pausanias, I.ix. 1 — 2, II. ix. 3, IV. xxxii. 1, V.xxi. 12, 18; Appian, The Civil Wars, I. 4, 6, II. 90; Dio, XXXIX. 12 — 13, 58, XLII. 34 — 44, XLVIII. 27.2, LI.6.1; Plutarch, Pompey, LXXII.2; Philostratus, The Life of Apollonius, V. 24, 25, 28, Cf. Caesar, The Civil Wars, III. 110, 112.

(38) Philo, Flaccus, 43 (trans. Box, PhAF):

ὅτι καὶ ἡ πόλις οἰκήτορας ἔχει διττούς,
ἡμᾶς τε καὶ τούτους, καὶ πᾶσα Αἴγυπτος.

Cf. *ibid.*, 96.

(39) I am unable to understand the significance of Box's irrelevant remark (PhAF, p. 94 note 43) on this passage. that «Philo ignores the native Egyptian element in the population which was coeval with the foundation of the city». Philo shows no such intention. For if he does, then the passage would imply that he ignores them in all Egypt, which is certainly ridiculous. Box's own translation of the passage, which is correct, contradicts his interpretation.

(40) Swiderek, «La Société Indigène en Egypte au IIIe Siècle avant notre Ere d'après les Archives de Zenon» (The Journal of Juristic Papyrology, 1953 — 4), p. 231.

scholar like Bell, for example, writes that the «Egyptian religion . . . consisted largely of primitive and barbarous myths», and that «the spiritual significance assigned to the myth of Isis and Osiris by a writer like Plutarch is mainly the work of the Greek mind working on Egyptian material⁽⁴¹⁾, he, for a moment, sets aside the objectiveness of the historian. Yet in reality, as Bell himself undoubtedly, knows very well, these «barbarous» myths of the Egyptian religion were extremely effective in satisfying the spiritual needs of multitudes not only of Egyptians, but also of Greeks and Romans and many others all around the Mediterranean until the final triumph of Christianity⁽⁴²⁾. Even as late as the mid-fourth century AD, «the function of the Anubiaci, who paraded with the mask of this god (sc. Anubis), was often undertaken in Rome by the nobles»⁽⁴³⁾. Anubis was a dog-faced deity believed to be the son of Isis and the messenger of gods. By contrast, the Isis of Plutarch, «the work of the Greek mind», of «spiritual significance», was in fact no more than a philosophical view which meant little or nothing to the actual followers of the Egyptian goddess in antiquity.⁽⁴⁴⁾ And we have no right, as students of history, to push our personal views into the religious doctrines of the ancients, or else we would find ourselves testing each by the standard of our own religion.⁽⁴⁵⁾ It is always easy to avail oneself of selected

(41) Bell, *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, p. 2.

(42) For the spread of the Egyptian cults into the Mediterranean, see e.g. Dunand, *Le Culte d'Isis dans le Bassin Oriental de la Méditerranée*, three vols.; Malaise, CPDCEI, *passim*.

(43) Alfoldi, *A Festival of Isis in Rome under the Christian Emperors of the IVth Century*, p. 44; see also plates I — III, XIX.

(44) See Dunand, *CIBOM*, I, pp. 105 — 8.

(45) In his review of Bell's CCGRE, Youtie, *Scriptiunculae*, I, p. 553, remarks that «it was Bell's right, in a popular lecture, to award the palm to Christianity as «the truer and finer religion», but we are very far here from his usual unbiased empiricism».

passages from writers like Juvenal and Lucian and paint a repugnant picture of the Egyptian cults, but how far this would be from the reality of religious life in antiquity !

The double-sided obsession of the superiority and ingenuity of the «Greek mind» in Egypt on one hand, and the quiescent and conservative native mind on the other, can well be illustrated by a statement of Bevan.⁽⁴⁶⁾

To remedy . . . the shifting relation between the Egyptian year and the natural year, Greek science at Alexandria was quite advanced enough to know that what was wanted was an extra day intercalated every fourth year. An attempt was made under Ptolemy III to carry this into effect. We know of it, because the decree of the Egyptian priesthood establishing the new system for their sacred year has been preserved for us. It is improbable that the Egyptian priesthood by themselves would ever have thought of instituting this rational change. We may, I think, believe that it came from a Greek brain at Alexandria and was supported by the royal will.

Yet, Diodorus and Strabo plainly give the credit of this achievement to the Theban priests.⁽⁴⁷⁾

(46) Bevan, *A History of Egypt under the Ptolemaic Dynasty*, p. 207, cf. note 1 of the same page.

(47) Diodorus, I.50.2: «They (the Theban priests) do not reckon the days by the moon, but by the sun, making their month of thirty days, and they add five and a quarter days to the twelve months and in this way fill out the cycle of the year». Strabo, XVII. 1.46: «It is due to these (Theban priests) that people reckon the days, not by the moon, but by the sun, adding to the twelve months of thirty days each five days each year; and, for the filling out of the whole year, since a fraction of the day runs over and above, they form a period of time from enough whole days, or whole years, to make the fractions that run over and above, when added together, amount to a day».

Fraser gives a striking example of another kind of obsession. He quotes a passage from Polybius (XV. 33.9) describing the massacre of Agathocles and his family in Alexandria: «All of them being delivered together into the hands of the mob, some began to bite them, some to stab them and others to gouge out their eyes. They tore each body as it fell limb from limb until they had mutilated them all. For the inhabitants of Egypt are capable of terrible violence when their anger is aroused». Although Polybius uses here the general term

οἱ κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἄνθρωποι

Fraser insists that «it cannot be doubted that he means the native Egyptians», assuming that «they took advantage of the opportunity offered to them to express their general hatred of Greek rule». In order to justify this interpretation, he recalls two more incidents claiming, inaccurately, that they were parallels to this, one of which took place in c. 59 BC, and the other in the early fifth century AD.⁽⁴⁸⁾. «These gruesome facts», he adds, «remind

(48) The first of these incidents was allegedly witnessed by Diodorus (I.83.8—9). It is about a Roman delegate who killed a cat by accident in Alexandria. Since the cat was sacred, a crowd of angry people chased him to his house. And «neither the officials sent by the king to beg the man off nor the fear of Rome which all the people felt were enough to save the man from punishment». Diodorus does not specify the nature of this timoria, nor does he claim that the angry crowd was purely native. Probably the man was only molested, for there is no recorded reaction on the part of the Romans to this incident. The second incident took place, also in Alexandria, in 415 AD. The victim this time was Hypatia, an intellectual lady and enthusiastic preacher of pagan doctrines. A band of «Christian fanatics, led by a certain Peter, dragged her to a church and, tearing off her garments, hewed her in pieces and burned the fragments of her body» (Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, I, pp. 217 — 19). It would be a grave mistake to

one that the great medical papyrus of the eighteenth dynasty of the Pharaohs records remedies against human bites». In this way Fraser seems to imply that «biting human-beings», among other atrocities, was a characteristic trait of the Egyptians. Therefore he takes what he calls an «almost anthropophagous mob» in Alexandria of the end of the third century BC as exclusively native. He appears to maintain a genuine belief that the participation of Greeks in such savageries is inconceivable⁽⁴⁹⁾.

== claim that the members of this tiny fanatic Christian band were descendants of a pure native Egyptian stock, or that their criminal act was characteristically Egyptian or Christian. The crime was a great shock to the public opinion at the time. It is to be recalled in this connection that no one nowadays can possibly hold abnormal crimes, which usually make headlines, as a mirror of the character of the whole nation in which they occur. It should also be noticed that the three episodes, gathered by Fraser, are not compatible. Time and circumstances are entirely different from one case to another.

(49) Fraser, Ptolemaic Alexandria, I, p. 82. Fraser, *ibid.*, p. 84 and *passim*, attributes all the disasters of the «mob-rule» and signs of «cultural-decline» in Alexandria of the late Ptolemaic period, to «the adulteration of Greek by Egyptian blood». He tirelessly keeps repeating this view till the very last page (812) of his otherwise masterly work. «Still the background of the savage brutality of the city mob remained unaltered, and one cannot read the accounts of the dreadful savagery of the pagan element against Christians . . . , and the Christian element against pagans . . . , without recognizing how fraught with lasting and dire consequences was that period after the battle of Raphia when the Egyptian population first asserted itself in the city». In his astonishing racial interpretation of the history of Alexandria, Fraser overlooks the obvious fact that the Egyptian population was there all over the Nile valley, and that «the adulteration of Greek by Egyptian blood» took its course also in the chora, but without the «lasting and dire consequences» !

Referring to the same passage of Polybius, Bevan does not attempt to spare the Greeks. But he has no doubt that they were infected by the Egyptians. «It is with regard to these scenes», he writes, «that Polybius remarks that the inhabitants of Egypt (the remark applies evidently not only to the natives, but to the Greeks, who in this case mainly, if not exclusively, concerned, and who must be supposed to have taken on, by their residence, some quality of the environment) have an abnormal tendency to commit atrocities, when their angry passions are roused»⁽⁵⁰⁾.

This kind of logic⁽⁵¹⁾ is confronted by the study of the Egyptian character in the Pharaonic period. Gardiner, for example, observes that the Egyptians «were kind, charitable, and courteous in their behaviour, and there are no evidences of barbarous savagery and cruelties»⁽⁵²⁾. He also observes that even the Egyptian language does not contain many words of crime.⁽⁵³⁾ This does not mean that they were an impeccable stock of people. Of course they had many faults like anyone else, but savagery does not seem to have been one of them. It is to be noticed that even the graphic treatise known as «The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage», which refers to a period of an absolute anarchy and violent civil strife in Pharaonic Egypt, does not record atrocities parallel to that described by Polybius. However, it is a truism that any angry mob, ancient or modern, civilized or uncivilized, is capable of committing dreadful

(50) Bevan, HEPD, p. 255; cf. pp. 57, 239 and note 2.

(51) Discussing the revolt of the Boukoloï in the second century AD, Milne, «Egyptian Nationalism under Greek and Roman Rule» (Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 1923) p. 231, argues that the bulk of the rebels were natives, simply because «the course of struggle was marked by incidents which in their fanatical savagery were more Egyptian than Greek» (!)

(52) Gardiner, «Notes on the Ethics of the Egyptians» (Ancient Egypt, 1914), p. 58.

(53) Ibid., p. 55.

atrocities, especially if the angry masses are agitated by wily intriguers from the top leaders of the State, as was the case in the episode recorded by Polybius.⁽⁵⁴⁾.

The above discursive review is not without purpose. It is meant to illustrate two specific phenomena, related to each other, which often vitiate some of the modern literature about the native and the Greek settlers in Egypt. Evidently some analyses which maintain that the Greeks remained by and large hostile to the natives all through the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, are virtually groundless and mainly the result of excessive reading into the sources and unguarded generalizations. The second phenomenon, which might well have led to the first, is even more serious. Apparently because of personal fondness of the Greeks in general and their culture, some scholars tend to preconceive that the Greek settlers must have been superior to the natives culturally and socially and, above all, racially, Mommsen's view — that Egypt, when it became Roman, was «ein Land zwiefacher Nationalität; . . . stand neben und über dem Einheimischen der Griechen, jener der Knecht, dieser der

(54) See the sequence of events (Polybius, XV. 25 — 32) which led to the massacre. It is evident that the carnage was the culmination of a mounting hatred among practically all the inhabitants of the city, against Agathocles and his party, artfully nourished and exploited by high-level conspirators in the army and the government. The people were led to believe that Agathocles was planning to usurp the throne from their legitimate king, Epiphanes, who was still only a child, and that it was the king's wish to see him and his party destroyed. The mob's behaviour was, in the last analysis, a strong expression of loyalty and allegiance to the house of Ptolemy.

Herr»⁽⁵⁵⁾ — still surviving despite so many years of advanced and far better equipped studies.

Presumably some scholars, in their study of the Greek-native question in Egypt, are also influenced by the experience of modern European settlement in Africa in particular, and the nature of modern European colonization in general. A statement of one of the more forthright scholars, Bevan, implies this possibility.⁽⁵⁶⁾

No modern country in which a European race bears rule over a more numerous native race is quite like Ptolemaic Egypt. South Africa so far resembles it, that the European race there too has settled in the country as its permanent home, a minority amongst a native population, but the situation is different in so far as the natives of South Africa are primitive people, not, like the Egyptians, representatives of an ancient civilization of which the European immigrants stood in a certain awe. In that respect, India seems more analogous to Ptolemaic Egypt, but India again is unlike in the other respect — that the Europeans have not settled in the country as their permanent home. . . And there were two important regards in which the relations between European and native in Ptolemaic Egypt differed from the relation between European and native today. In the first place. . . . many Greeks and Macedonians married natives. From this continual mixture of blood, the racial difference in Ptolemaic Egypt grew less and less with succeeding generations. . . The other great difference between the relation of Greek to Egyptian in Ptolemaic Egypt and relation of «white man» to «native»

(55) Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte*, Band 7, p. 253.

(56) Bevan, *HEPD*, pp. 86 — 9.

today is in the sphere of religion. . . There was nothing in the Greek's religion to make him regard the Egyptian religion as heathenish or as idolatrous or as a religion essentially inferior to his own. . . Greek and Egyptian ideas were jumbled up together in a strange amalgam, very much as Theosophy today dresses up bits of Hinduism for Europeans by amalgamating them with ideas borrowed from Christianity or from modern science. And if we want to realize how the Ptolemaic Greeks could both feel their superiority, as Greeks, to the native Egyptians, and at the same time do homage to the Egyptian religion, we might try to imagine what the difference could be today in India, if the English, professed Theosophy, made offerings on occasion to Hindu deities.

Despite Bevan's reservations, it is obvious that his argument is based on modern observations and the superiority of the «European race» to the «natives» in modern times. But as far as the Greeks themselves were concerned, there was no such idea of a «European race». In their eye the whole world was either «Greek» or «Barbarian». Even the Romans who ruled over the world, including Greece, were also barbarians.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The Macedonians who so much dominated the Greeks since the time of Philip II and Alexander the Great and the subsequent establishment of the Hellenistic monarchies of the Successors, were no more Greeks

(57) In the late first century BC, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (The Roman Antiquities, VII. 70 — 2) troubled himself to prove that the Romans were not,

ὥσπερ ἔνιοι νομίζουσι, βάρβαρα καὶ ἀνέστια.

Even to adopt a Roman name was considered by Greeks as an act of barbarismos (Philostratus, Life of Apollonius, IV.v).

than the Romans and the Egyptians and many other nations.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Yet it was not always strictly the «race» of the Greeks that mattered most, but rather their «culture». In the early fourth century BC Isocrates observed that the cultural influence of Athens had «brought about that the name «Hellenes» suggests no longer a race but an intelligence, and that the title «Hellenes» is applied rather to those who share our culture than to those who share a common blood.⁽⁵⁹⁾

Nevertheless, their august and most exalted poet, Homer, was variously said to be from many different cities, amongst which was the Egyptian Thebes.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Herodotus claims that the accepted Greek version of the genealogy of the Dorian kings proves that they were originally Egyptians. For, he believes, although by the time of Perseus son of Danae they had come to be reckoned as Greeks, farther back than that, «if (Perseus') ancestors in each generation, from Danae daughter of Acrisius upward, be reckoned, then the leaders of the Dorians will be shown to be true-born

(58) E.g. Philostratus, *ibid.*, I.xxxiv.:

Ἐπειδὴ ἐν Ὀλύμπῳ ἀγωνιέται ἡ Μακεδονία,
ἢ Αἰγύπτῳ, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἐν Ἑλλήσι.

(59) Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, 50:

τὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὄνομα πεποίηκε μηκέτι τοῦ
γενέους ἀλλὰ τῆς διανοίας δοκεῖν εἶναι, καὶ μᾶλλον
Ἑλληνας καλεῖσθαι τοὺς τῆς παιδείας τῆς
ἡμετέρας ἢ τοὺς τῆς κοινῆς φύσεως μετέχοντας.

(60) Lucian, *In Praise of Demosthenes*, 6.

Egyptians».(⁶¹) In the second century AD, Pausanias wrote that

ἦσαν δὲ οἱ Ναπλιεῖς ἔμοι δοκεῖν Αἰγύπτιοι
τὰ παλαιότερα,

who came with Danaus to the Argolid, and two generations later were settled in Nauplia by Nauplius the son of Amymone».(⁶²) Similar arguments are obviously utterly unthinkable in the two modern examples cited by Bevan. Incidentally, neither Herodotus nor Pausanias was «insulting» Greeks by tracing their ancestry back to Egyptian origin, and the assumption that Homer was originally a native of the Egyptian Thebes was not a «slur» upon the reputation of the poet !

Still more reservations should be added to Bevan's. Ptolemaic Egypt was not a Greek colony, nor was it a Greek satellite either; and it would be a grave mistake to import modern colonial experiences into Ptolemaic Egypt and use them as an exemplar in any attempt to understand the social and political history of the country.(⁶³) Egypt was a fully independent kingdom virtually from

(61) Herodotus, VI. 53:

ἀπὸ δὲ Δανάης τῆς Ἀκρισίου καταλέγοντι τοὺς
ἄνω αἰεὶ πατέρας αὐτῶν φαινοῖατο ἂν ἔόντες
οἱ τῶν Δωριέων ἡγεμόνες Αἰγύπτιοι ἰθαγενεές.

ibid., 54 — 5.

(62) Pausanias, IV.xxxv. 2.

(63) Unduly impressed by some recent publications treating the Prosopographia Ptolemaica, Will, «Bulletin Historique» (Revue Historique, 1979) pp. 456 — 7, has written that «les études des rapports entre ethnies en Egypte suggèrent

the first day Ptolemy son of Lagus assumed the reins of power. The Greek immigrants knew in advance that they were not going to reside in a Greek colony, but in the «kingdom» of Egypt. Imagining what could have been the response of Menander if Ptolemy son of Lagus had invited him to go and live in his kingdom, Alciphron believed, not without reason, that the Athenian comedian would have turned the invitation down. «Where indeed in Egypt», he ponders, «shall I see an Assembly of the people or a question put to the vote ? And where a democratic populace exercising such freedom ? ... is it so great a thing to consort with Ptolemy and with satraps... whose friendship is not constant nor their enmity is free from risk ?»⁽⁶⁴⁾ (Incidentally, it should be borne in mind, in this connection, that not all the Greek immigrants were a hand-

== fortement que les Lagides et leur entourage hellénique agirent comme les enquêtes de sociologie coloniale ont montré qu'agirent les administrations coloniales modernes en Afrique et en Asie: en procédant à une sorte de dépolitisation du milieu indigène, destinée à assurer la suprématie absolue de la minorité allogène dominante. Mais la sociologie coloniale nous a encore fourni des enseignements sur d'autres points: en montrant que, lorsque le colonisateur est obligé de recourir (aux échelons inférieurs) à du personnel indigène, il tend à le recruter dans des milieux auxquels la tradition locale ne conférait pas d'autorité: il serait intéressant de savoir (mais sans doute n'est-ce qu'un vœu pieux) si les Lagides procédèrent de même. Et, d'autre part, la sociologie moderne nous donne de précieuses analyses des réactions indigènes à la colonisation (mobiles profonds d'opposition, formes de résistance, etc.) (!).

(64) Alciphron, Letters, IV. 18.10 — 13.

some bunch of Solons and Platos and Pericles, and, moreover, not all the settlers were Greeks). Ptolemy the son of Lagus, after he had arrived in Egypt, never saw his home in Macedonia again. Egypt became his country, while Macedonia became his rival, and he would not hesitate to fight his home of origin in order to secure the independence and supremacy of his own kingdom. His Dynasty's rule in Egypt cannot be compared in any way with the examples of modern colonial experiences cited by Bevan. If it is it would be rather among the many royal families who established their monarchies in countries which had not been their home of origin, in Europe and elsewhere (in Egypt we have the recent example of Mohammed Ali's Dynasty which had ruled the country for one and a half centuries until only thirty years ago; Mohammed Ali was an Albanian and not a native of Egypt) — but even here we must guard from deceptive resemblances. As for the «Greek» settlers themselves, how could they be likened to the «English in India» when most of them had come in fact from regions already occupied by either the Ptolemaic or Seleucid or Macedonian or (from the early second century BC) Roman troops ? Many of them were even settled in Egypt after capture in war. They came from a wide variety of regions that had never been able to merge into «one country», or «one nation» under one and the same administration. On the contrary, they had almost constantly been at variance, waging wars against each other, and even in the face of a common threat such as that of Persia, they had never succeeded in forming a single truly united front. And what connection is there anyway between the «English» and the «Greeks» of antiquity ?

The Greek immigrants who came to live in Egypt in the early Ptolemaic period were not «pioneers». Thousands and thousands of Greeks before these had already established themselves in the Delta (and Memphis) in the Saite period. The relation between them and the natives there had been auspicious. It may be useful

to recall here the passage from Plato's *Timaeus* which indicates that the inhabitants of Sais in the Delta professed to be not only

μάλα φιλαθύναιοι but also

τινά τρόπον οἰκεῖοι to the

Athenians.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Although the passage is concerned primarily with the inhabitants of Sais, it can be justifiably assumed that other sections of the Delta population had cherished similar favourable attitudes towards the Greeks and their culture. This does not mean that Delta people had been completely converted from Egyptian to Greek culture. This cannot be expected in any society anyway; and in Egypt in particular the background of the millenia was not that easy to obliterate. But it is evident from the available sources⁽⁶⁶⁾ that the two peoples had intermingled and reached coalescence in Lower Egypt centuries before the Ptolemaic period. When Ptolemy son of Lagus took over, there must have been enough common ground between the new immigrants and some sections of the local population there to speed up their integration.

The above critical notes can be easily multiplied. My quoted, and disputed, statements from some scholars are only few

(65) Plato, *Timaeus*, 21 E.

(66) See e.g. Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, I, no. 1, 1—2; U.P.Z. I; Vermaseren, *Apis*, I, no. 132 and pl. LXXVII. cf. Herodotus, II. 42; 50; Lefebvre, *Le Tombeau de Petosiris*, I, pp. 31—5, 90—108; III, pls. XIX, XXII. See also Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas*, pp. 113—4.

quotable and logically arguable examples among many. But this must not be understood as an attempt to underrate the previous efforts in this subject.

The objection has been limited to certain preconceived ideas and obsessions which are bound to deflect the study of the Greek-native question in Egypt from its objective course.