

EGYPT, THE PTOLEMIES, AND THE GREEK WORLD*

The Ptolemies were not the first foreigners to rule Egypt. Two characteristics, however, set them apart from previous foreign rulers: first, they were Mediterranean in background and orientation, not Asian or African; and secondly, they settled down as resident monarchs: kings of Egypt in the eyes of other foreigners, rather than a dynasty based in another country and ruling through governors. These two traits were of decisive importance both internally and externally. It is my task to describe in what ways they came into contact with the world outside Egypt and what impact they had on that world. By 'the world outside Egypt' I will mean the Mediterranean and in particular the Greeks, for relations with most of inland Asia were slight and obscure during this period -- thanks to Seleucid dominance of much of the continent -- and Egyptian connections to the south are a separate subject, one moreover about which I do not consider myself competent to speak.

My assignment, as you will see, is not an easy one. We can, to be sure, look at the evidence for a variety of connections between the Ptolemies and their kingdom, on the one hand, and the Greek world, on the other; in some cases we can trace lines of influence. When it comes to assessing the overall effects of Ptolemaic Egypt on the Greeks, however, and the basic attitudes of the Greeks toward the Ptolemies, things become far more difficult. We get such assessments principally from literary authors and from public inscriptions on stone. The writers, however, were mostly on the Ptolemaic payroll and had -- at least for public consumption -- a naturally rosy view of their patrons; while the inscriptions come in general from those with whom the Ptolemies were allied at the moment or who were ruled by the Ptolemies; their public utterances are full of thanks or praise, of course, but what did they really think? This is a very difficult question.

But to start, let us take some points of which we can be more certain. The most obvious point of contact is the Ptolemaic empire. The Ptolemies, throughout their history -- except for part of the reign of the last Cleopatra -- ruled not only Egypt but also other areas, many of them very important to their dynastic ambitions. You will recall that in the division of the empire of Alexander the Great in 323 Ptolemy received Egypt as his satrapy, while various other commanders took other parts of the vast empire. We can distinguish very early between those who concentrated on entrenching themselves in their own satrapies and those whose immediate concern was an

attempt to reconstitute centralized power (on the model of Alexander) and to get it for themselves. In this tug-of-war, Ptolemy was one of the separatists, like Lysimachus of Thrace, and in the end they prevailed over Perdiccas, Eumenes, Antigonus and lesser competitors. This separatist strategy, however, should not lead us to think that Ptolemy's ambitions were limited to Egypt: they were not.

For one thing, he could see at once that Egypt by itself had important deficiencies both from the point of view of defense and from that of natural resources. Prudence dictated controlling the approaches to Egypt from all directions: Palestine and parts of Syria on the northeast, the Cyrenaica on the west, the nearest major island, Cyprus, on the sea approaches. For natural resources, Egypt was rich above all in wheat, but even that could fail in a year when the Nile failed to rise; and Egypt needed copper and timber urgently if it was to be a major military power. The grain potential of Syria and Cyrenaica, and the forests and mines of Cyprus, were obvious targets. One need not ascribe any economic sophistication to Ptolemy I to realize that he knew perfectly well what materials he needed in order to be powerful.

And so these possessions were acquired as opportunities arose: Cyrene first -- a possession of the Ptolemaic dynasty for two and a quarter centuries; Cyprus, then, held from 310 until the reign of Cleopatra VII, barring only twelve years when Demetrius Poliorcetes took it away; and Phoenicia and Coele-Syria, acquired piecemeal and held throughout the third century.

This defensive strategy -- as I think these acquisitions may legitimately be called -- was not the end of it. Ptolemy I sought to play an active role in the international wars of the successors, beyond this core zone of Egyptian security. His earliest moves were very tentative, but in his lifetime he got control over the Cycladic islands and a number of shore points in Greek lands; and Ptolemy II Philadelphos early in his reign added substantially to these holdings, acquiring considerable parts of the coast of western and southern Asia Minor. Over the next few decades there were various fluctuations, but until the end of the third century, the Ptolemies remained a major power in Asia Minor and the Aegean. When we talk about the Ptolemies' political role in Greece, then, it is of this period we speak; after the dismemberment of the empire in 197, the Ptolemies never again held more than a few bases in the Aegean.¹

¹ For the empire, see my *Administration of the Ptolemaic Possessions outside Egypt*, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 4 (Leiden 1976).

Beyond the areas they actually controlled, the Ptolemies (especially the first three) played a major role in Greek politics in those areas which they did not, either by direct military intervention or by generous subsidies to those they supported. One such incident, barely known until recently, was the revolt of Athens from Antigonid control in 286, when Ptolemy I sent grain, military assistance, and diplomatic help. Our defective literary sources do not tell us about this, and until the discovery of an Athenian decree for Kallias of Sphettos, a Ptolemaic commander, and its publication two years ago, the extent of Ptolemaic involvement was quite unknown, only hinted at by two previously-known inscriptions.² Again, in the Greek attempt to remove Macedonian control from Athens and central Greece in the Chremonidean War, we now know, thanks to inscriptions and excavations, that Ptolemy II took an active role, with a fleet and troops campaigning in Attica on the Greek side.³

At some point in the wars of the early 250's, most likely, Ptolemaic naval power -- and hence control of the Aegean -- suffered a major setback, and the rest of Philadelphos' reign is comparatively quiet in that theater. With Ptolemy III, military activity is concentrated in Syria and in Asia Minor; in Greece, his intervention takes the form of cash subsidies paid to the Achaean League and later to Cleomenes of Sparta -- but then pulled out from under the latter in a reversal of policy which is said to have come from secret negotiations with Macedonia.

Even in the second century, when Ptolemaic power revived somewhat under Ptolemy VI, one of his major aims was to insert Ptolemaic power into Aegean politics once more -- an attitude which was no doubt in part responsible for the preference for his younger brother displayed by the Romans, who were now the dominant power. Ptolemy VI nonetheless intervened as an arbitrator of disputes in Greece and built back up a small network of naval bases.

A final judgment on all this activity would require divine omniscience. For the moment, a few observations will suffice. Inscriptions connected with Ptolemaic intervention in Greek affairs consistently sound themes of liberation, restoration of ancestral constitutions, democracy and the like. These slogans are directed against the Antigonids, in the main; they are not unique in Greek history either to this period or to the Ptolemies, and one is tempted

2 See T. Leslie Shear, Jr., *Kallias of Sphettos and the Revolt of Athens in 286 B.C.*, *Hesperia* Suppl. 17 (Princeton 1978).

3 See J.R. McCredie, *Fortified Military Camps in Attica*, *Hesperia* Suppl. 11 (Princeton 1966).

to think of them purely as propagandistic banalities. This would be to miss at least one essential point: in Greece, the Ptolemies were generally dealing with areas which they did not aspire to control directly, areas where their aims were limited to the diminution of Antigonid power. It is true that the governments supported by Antigonus Gonatas and his successors in Greece were largely oligarchic, and that it was the democracy that was restored at Athens, for example, by Ptolemaic help. These are not idle claims. But they are possible because Athens and these other cities were not in an area, the control of which was critical to Ptolemy. Not many of the areas under direct Ptolemaic control were so famous or so apt for propagandistic use as Athens, and considerable parts of the Cyrenaica and almost all of Syria were inhabited not by Greeks but by natives (Libyans, Jews, Phoenicians, Syrians) whose concerns are not reflected in our Greek documentation, with one exception: the Ptolemaic role in Palestine which is compared to the Seleucid rule in Maccabbees.

This example is a good place to enter the question of what Ptolemaic rule was like for those who were in the areas directly ruled by the dynasty, for Palestine was a long-time possession. We face a peculiar problem, however, in that Jewish tradition reviled Antiochus IV and his dynasty in unreserved terms; by contrast, the preceding Ptolemaic rule appeared beneficial and was treated in a much more favorable way. One might suppose that Antiochus IV was merely the victim of currents of change in his time; but overall I have nonetheless the distinct impression that the Ptolemies were more skillful and sensitive than the Seleucids in dealings with local concentrations of power in this region. The close relations with the Tobiads of the Ammanitis in Transjordan, revealed in Josephus and in the Zenon papyri, bear witness to the mutually beneficial treatment they received.

In Cyprus and Cyrene, what we can discern of Ptolemaic policy reflects support for Hellenization of these lands, only partly Hellenized at this time, and for moderately conservative, oligarchic governments. In no case, however, were the new rulers dealing with cities with democratic traditions analogous to those of Athens. In Cyprus, particularly, the native form of government had been civic monarchy, to which Ptolemy I put an end early on; if we see Greek civic institutions develop slowly in the Hellenistic period, we must remember that they were created practically from scratch, imported into a somewhat alien environment.

As to the Greek cities of Asia and the Aegean, it is harder to judge. Greeks did not like any kind of outside rule infringing on

their independence. The Ptolemies allowed cities to keep their own institutions of self-government, but clearly no independent foreign policy was possible, and royal officials kept a close watch on what civic governments did, especially with money. This surveillance may have been beneficial in some cases, but we can hardly suppose that it was welcome. No king, no royal functionaries, would have been.

Political relations brought with them economic consequences. The most obvious one is taxation, or more generally, economic exploitation of the conquered lands. Such phrases have a bad ring to modern ears, but we lack any real evidence about the effects on Cyprus or the south coast of Asia Minor from Ptolemaic logging operations, or from their control of mines on Cyprus, or from their taking wheat from Syria. Deliberate economic development, with an eye to a higher level of economic activity and employment, is an alien concept to ancient abstract thinking, but that does not mean that it did not happen. We are in no position to say if the stimulation provided to local economies by stepped-up extractive industry was significant. Nor do we have any real basis for estimating the burdensomeness of the tax load on Ptolemaic dependencies. We do not find any complaints about it, as we do here and there about Lysimachus (whether justifiably or not), and my own sense is that taxes were not a tremendous problem. The economic impact of the Ptolemies on the Greeks lies elsewhere, in three areas.

The most important to the majority of Greeks -- subjects and non-subjects alike -- was the Ptolemaic exportation of wheat from the huge surpluses piled up by Egypt in normal years. Greece itself is not very productive in cereals, and when population began to outstrip local growing capacities in the classical period, it did so thanks to the development of a grain trade which brought supplies from more distant regions. Much of the political history of Greece in classical times is centered around problems in the grain supply, and most of the sources could be unreliable, or the routes to them easily cut, as Athens discovered to its cost more than once. We do not really know what portion of the Greek world was seriously dependent on imported grain, but the widespread references in inscriptions to civic measures taken to ensure an adequate food supply suggest that most cities of any size, and many smaller ones too, could not feed their population with local produce.⁴

The availability of Egyptian wheat to the Greeks before the time of Alexander had been sporadic, a hostage at times to Persian-Greek

⁴ See A.R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (London 1968) 89-115 and documents on 175-94.

hostilities or estrangement. With a Hellenic ruler in charge, all this changed. The Ptolemies exported grain vigorously, although the operations outside Egypt were left entirely in the hands of private merchants, so far as we can see. There was no altruism involved: Egypt produces no significant amount of silver, and the Ptolemies desperately needed silver for coinage to pay soldiers and bureaucrats, as well as for a host of other imports. Silver, in short, was essential for a kingdom which would attract Greek manpower and be a major force in Mediterranean politics and diplomacy. Egypt's only major source of silver was exchange for its principal product. Greek needs for grain and Ptolemaic need for silver met in this very active trade. It should be noted that papyrus, the principal writing material of the ancient world, was an Egyptian monopoly and hence a major item of trade as well.

Another less obvious economic role of Ptolemaic Egypt was as a land of opportunity for immigrants. I am thinking here not so much of soldiers as of administrators and entrepreneurs. The Ptolemies did have a substantial army of Macedonians and Greeks, which they settled on parcels of land in Egypt, hoping to create a national army out of a pool of Hellenic settlers who could be mobilized in time of war, and their descendants. Philip II had done much the same thing in moving Macedonians from the highlands to conquered or reclaimed territory in the lowlands, thus building a large hoplite class for the first time in Macedonian history. But most of the Ptolemaic settlers, I believe, can be shown to come from the army that Ptolemy I took with him from Babylon in 323 or recruited very soon thereafter: they come, in other words, from Alexander's army and the troops in use in the early wars of succession. We have no evidence that the opportunity to become a landed settler was still open (to any significant number, at least) in the third century. The Ptolemies did employ mercenaries in substantial numbers, however, and many young men must have found a career, in Egypt or in the foreign possessions, in Ptolemaic military service.

Much more interesting, however, were the opportunities available in Egypt in activities of a more directly economic character. It is only in the last two decades that scholars have begun to appreciate properly the nature of this activity, for which we have a fair amount of papyrological evidence. For example, the Ptolemies used a system of tax collection which provided opportunities for capitalists: private entrepreneurs, usually in consortia, bid for the contract for a particular tax or monopoly; when they won it, they did not collect the tax or run the monopoly themselves, but rather guaranteed to the crown the collection of the amount bid. They supervised the collec-

tion by royal officials, helping to keep the latter honest -- or at least rapacious -- rather than lax. The contractors got a portion of any surplus above the guarantee but had to make up any loss. Despite the elaborate regulations promulgated to govern these transactions, which give at times the impression that it was a no-win game for the contractors, the reverse must have been true: the regulations were needed because the business was so profitable and the contractors so prone to try to get away with even more than they were entitled to. If it were otherwise, there would have been no bidders and no such system.

Again, many military settlers, especially those with the larger allotments, preferred to live in town, leasing out their property and living on the rents, rather than residing in the country or village in the midst of Egyptians. This situation provided a wide-open field for property agents, intermediaries who would lease an estate and then sublease it in parcels to Egyptian tenants, taking a cut in the middle.

There were many more typical enterprises too: importing and exporting are the most obvious, but a large Greek population in Egypt must have created at every level of the economy numerous opportunities for those who would supply their needs and wants, the things they would have to have in order to feel at home in their new land. It must have been a shiftless and stupid Greek indeed who could not make money in the heady environment of third-century Egypt.

If this was the cornucopia of possibilities offered by the Ptolemies to the Greeks, what was the effect on the Greek world? One observable effect was an increase in international commerce and travel, which are indeed one of the most characteristic features of the Hellenistic period. In the Zenon papyri we find many of Zenon's friends constantly coming and going on one sort of business or another. But many must have moved permanently to Egypt; their loss may well have had a negative effect on Greece and the Aegean, which are generally thought to have had considerable losses of population in the Hellenistic age -- not entirely from emigration, to be sure. The emigrants may well have included the most enterprising elements of the population. But at this point we get into the realm of pure speculation.

One further role played by the Ptolemies in the economy of the Mediterranean world was that of a charitable foundation. We find numerous instances of gifts, often on a lavish scale, to Greek cities. The most famous was certainly the gift to Rhodes by Ptolemy III after the city's major earthquake in 227/6 B.C. Polybius

tells us it amounted to 300 talents of silver (perhaps the equivalent today of \$75,000,000 in purchasing power), 1,000,000 bushels of wheat, and large quantities of bronze, timber, sailcloth, other naval supplies, and the loan of skilled workmen for the task of rebuilding. There are other gifts recorded, too, especially of grain to Athens. Often there was a political point to be made, but in many cases it is more plausible to see in this giving a manifestation of Greek philotimia, that instinct for competing for prestige, public honor, and recognition which bulked so large in the life of Mediterranean antiquity.

The Ptolemies were, after all, a relatively new dynasty even in the time of Ptolemy III, and in the time of his grandfather, Ptolemy I, one Macedonian general must have looked like all the rest, so far as most Greeks were concerned. Prestige, a reputation for being great kings rather than petty despots: this, after the necessities of power, was what the Ptolemies needed most from the Greeks. Military power, diplomatic skill, decent administration, food, and gifts all contributed to the proper image. But the Ptolemies went a step beyond this to cast themselves as patrons of the arts and learning, and to make of their capital, Alexandria, a cultural center to surpass all others, even Athens.

It was by no means inevitable that Ptolemy I should take this course. The Seleucids certainly did not. It is true that the Seleucids were forced to direct more of their attention to inland areas of Asia and less to the Aegean than the Ptolemies, but they did have extensive holdings in the Mediterranean littoral and a capital city, Antioch, which became one of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities of the ancient world, nearly a rival to Alexandria. Nor did the Antigonids really make a serious attempt to assume the role of patrons of civilization. Of the other Hellenistic monarchies, in fact, only the Attalids -- that late-born and rather imitative dynasty -- built a large library and tried to gain a reputation for culture: all this in direct imitation of the Ptolemies.

The immediate effects of all this activity must have seemed a bit ambiguous to the Greeks. When Ptolemy III borrowed the official Athenian copies of the great tragedians against a large deposit, then kept them and forfeited the deposit, are we to suppose that the Athenians applauded his love of drama?⁵ Or when a Ptolemy lured a famous poet, scientist, or scholar to Alexandria, was his taste praised? It probably seemed that uncultured newcomers were trying to buy culture. But in a broader sense, it worked. Alexandria

5 P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford 1972) I, 325; II, 480.

became, except for philosophy, the intellectual capital of the Hellenistic world. The learned and creative existed in comfort in the Museum on royal salaries, and used the unmatched facilities put at their disposal, whether those be the great library or the ability to get, by royal command, corpses for dissection.

These, then, are the roles in which the Greek world encountered the Ptolemies: conquerors, allies, rulers, sources of food, employment, and gifts, patrons of learning. To them one might add, as god, for there were plenty of Greeks who acknowledged the Ptolemies as gods. The proper interpretation of this phenomenon has long been a matter of controversy. The modern mind, whether religious or not, tends automatically not only to reject Ptolemaic claims to divinity -- a reasonable position -- but to believe that the ancients must similarly have rejected them, which is not a proper view. For a pagan, the demonstrations of power, both beneficent and the opposite, of which these rulers were capable, sufficed to lift them to a level higher than that of men. This is not to say that political considerations did not play a part (there are few dedications to a Ptolemy as god where they did not rule -- but there *are* some), but simply to insist that we not dismiss ancient religious beliefs as insincere merely because we do not hold them and cannot imagine ourselves doing so.

We turn now from this sketch of the roles the Ptolemies played in dealing with the Greek world to the impact on the Greeks of what they were and what they did. In some respects, the effects were completely evanescent. In political affairs, the Ptolemies may be said to have helped keep a balance of power in the Aegean for much of their first century, and by their fleet to have repressed piracy to the benefit of international trade and communications. But it is hard to discern any long-range effects of Ptolemaic rule except in Cyprus, where the remodelling of the cities into the image of the standard Hellenistic moderately-democratic city brought these cities more into the mainstream of political and social institutions of the Greek world -- at a certain cost in individual, local character.

With the economy, the case is similar: in the matter of food supply, not even Egypt proved a fully reliable source over the long run, and Greek cities still faced recurrent shortages. After a time, Egypt's economic opportunities waned and the land of promise faded from view. The Ptolemies, caught in a perennial shortage of cash, no longer employed so many mercenaries or gave such lavish gifts. A few monuments here and there testified to what had once been.

But there are respects in which this is not the full story.

There are broader, long-range influences whose effects are harder to discern. Ptolemaic Egypt was the first state of antiquity in which there were large numbers of resident Greeks who did not have any close ties to a polis, even if they did for some generations retain their home city name as an identifying mark. Ties to the home city weakened in time, and certainly the Greeks of Roman Egypt show no signs, in general, of links to specific Greek cities. We are accustomed, and rightly, to think of the Greeks as being part of a city milieu, and this is true as much in the Hellenistic period as in the classical. The polis did not lose its vitality as a social and cultural organism, the stage on which citizens acted out their lives. But in Ptolemaic Egypt we find a second way of life, coexisting with the city. Given the constant traffic between Egypt and the Aegean, it is impossible to believe that this city-less way of life did not become known to Greeks elsewhere and provide at least an alternative mental model.

We can go further. The absence of the city left only the king as a focus of larger loyalties, especially as the generations passed and the population mostly had never known any other life. Egypt thus offered to the Hellenistic world both an image of what a king was and should be, and a pattern of life under such a king. Where the other Hellenistic monarchs ruled over Greeks, it was either by virtue of controlling their cities -- as the Ptolemies also did, certainly -- or in very small numbers. We know too little of the attitudes of the bulk of the population to assess the effect of this royal rule on the way in which the Greek east accepted the rule of the Roman emperor, but I suggest that the Ptolemies played a considerable role in paving the way for the emperors.

There is another area in which the Ptolemaic way of governing Greeks -- this time those outside Egypt -- left a heritage to the Roman empire. The Ptolemaic kings tended in governing the Aegean parts of their empire to rule with a minimum of direct interference. Cities were left to run their own affairs, subject to check by royal officials, and in general a delegation of rule, rather than direct control, was the normal procedure. Relations even with controlled cities tended to fall into the pattern of diplomacy, not of bureaucracy. The Romans followed much the same pattern, both Republican magistrates in the second and first centuries and the emperors of the principate. It is impossible to document Ptolemaic influence here, but Roman magistrates under the Republic were certainly influenced in behavior by the pattern of the kings, and the Ptolemies must certainly be counted among these. We can see the similarities, but we cannot trace in detail a cause and effect relationship. The

choice of this type of administration was to have profound effects on the social character of the Roman empire, a state in which the upper classes of the cities came to play an ever-greater role in carrying out state functions.

In more general terms, there can be no doubt that the image of kingship which developed in the Hellenistic world had a profound influence on the character of the Roman empire. It has become a commonplace of recent historical writing to emphasize the continuity between the behavior of republican Roman magistrates and that of emperors, and there is much truth in this. But equally, the emperor was molded by the expectations of him held by his subjects, principally the upper classes both at Rome and in the provinces, and there can be no question that the model held in mind by upper-class Greeks was that of the Hellenistic king. Now no one king or even one dynasty is itself responsible for the pattern of kingship inherited by the Roman emperor: but the Ptolemies had longer and closer connections with Greeks than any dynasty except perhaps the Antigonids (whom many Greeks viewed very unfavorably because they were so close to them), and Alexandria as an intellectual capital certainly played a central role in the development of royal ideology.

Up to this point, we must have the impression that what the Ptolemies did to and for the Greek world had relatively little, except in an accidental way, to do with their being based in Egypt. The ideology and reality of kingship which I have described have everything to do with Macedonian practices -- for the Ptolemies were Macedonians, not Greeks -- and some debt to Greek philosophical thought, but very little to Egyptian traditions. The Ptolemies were able to compartmentalize their roles, so to speak, maintaining a Hellenic persona for the foreign part of the population, filling traditional Egyptian expectations for the natives. One could of course speak of the wheat as an Egyptian contribution, but that is more an accident of nature than a characteristic of civilization. Egypt afforded the economic opportunities; but they were created by the application of Greek conceptions of management and entrepreneurship to the Egyptian situation, not by long-standing Egyptian economic traditions. And the culture represented by Alexandria was most emphatically a Greek one.

There is another side, however, not always easy to discern, and its character not too clear, but present nonetheless. To begin, there is Alexandria itself, as image, exemplar, and influence. Alexandria was a Greek city, in some ways; but it was a very curious place for being a Greek city, despite all the cultural institutions. For one thing, it had relatively little self-government, less even

than other royal capitals of the period, especially after the abolition of its civic council. For another, it was too large by Greek standards. We do not know how many adult male Greek citizens there were, but the number was almost certainly larger than the normal Greek city, even the bigger ones; and this Greek citizen body was not the dominant part, numerically speaking, of the total population. Now most good-sized Greek cities had some resident foreigners; but in Alexandria they far outnumbered the Greeks and, it appears, gained in proportion throughout the Hellenistic period. There was a very large Jewish community, about which we know quite a lot, which remained active and influential well into the Poman period and which is credited with producing the Septuagint (or at least the Pentateuch), and from which comes the prolific author Philo.

There were other groups, too; the largest was no doubt native Egyptians. There had been a settlement at Rakotis before Alexandria was founded, and large numbers of Egyptians eventually settled in the city. The Greeks were well aware of this, and complained about it. The historian Polybius blames on this factor the decline of Alexandria and, indeed, of the Ptolemaic dynasty. His picture has persuaded some moderns, most notably Peter Fraser, whose great *Ptolemaic Alexandria*⁶ is dedicated to the thesis that the Egyptian element was responsible for the decline of the city in practically all respects.

If the situation is seen from the perspective of the classical Greek city, even of the normal Hellenistic polis, this view is no doubt largely true, even if overdrawn. But that is, after all, not the only possible point of view. What Alexandria was, above all, is the first great cosmopolitan city of the Mediterranean. It was not the only one of its type, but it was the great example; Antioch became another such, and Rome itself, much to the disgust of members of the better classes. One thinks of Juvenal's complaint about a flood of Syrians entering the city; Fraser in effect plays a modern Juvenal to Alexandria. Now it is not only Egyptian influence that is responsible for this character in Alexandria. The cosmopolitan city had existed in much smaller form along the Levantine coast for centuries, if not indeed millennia, and Phoenicians and Syrians (Ptolemaic subjects for a century, too) contributed a good deal to what Alexandria became. But if one tries to think of the nearest example of a large-scale city of mixed population, I think the answer is obvious: Memphis.

6 Cf. preceding note.

Our documentation for Memphis is nowhere like so good as we could wish. The population was and long had been mixed, with Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians, Carians, and various ethnic mixtures living together: not without strains, as indications of some antisemitism in the later Ptolemaic period show, but successfully nonetheless. Because the papyrological evidence for Memphis is not so abundant as that for the Fayum, papyrologists have tended until recently not to pay much attention to Memphis. Now a volume of studies in the Belgian series *Studia Hellenistica* has begun the task of relating Greek and Egyptian documentation.⁷ Among the firstfruits of this endeavor have been indications of closer than expected ties between Memphis and the Fayum -- the area of Egypt most densely settled by Greeks -- and between Memphis and Alexandria. It is this last connection which I think was crucial, far more important than we know. In this sense, the Egyptian contribution to the cosmopolitan capital was considerable, and Alexandria itself was of course enormously influential. Its image continues to fascinate people even today.

The image of Egypt in general held a remarkable appeal for the Hellenistic Greeks, and Ptolemaic Egypt was the intermediary by which this image was developed and spread. The phenomenon is a complex one. On its simplest level, it involved a greatly increased number of Greeks visiting Egypt, for commercial reasons, as representatives to festivals or bringing invitations to Greek festivals, as diplomats, and so forth. A papyrus of the third century gives orders for one such visit: "Apollonios to Zenon, greeting. As soon as you read this letter, send off to Ptolemais the chariots and the other carriage-animals and the baggage-mules for the ambassadors from Pairisades and the theoroi from Argos whom the King has sent to see the sights of the Arsinoite nome."⁸ A hundred and forty years later, another papyrus gives similar instructions for the visit of a Roman senator to the Fayum, including a view of the labyrinth.⁹ We may be sure that these ancient tourists understood not much more than the average modern visitor to Egypt of the civilization behind the marvels he was to behold.

These marvels included both natural and manmade sights, crocodiles as well as pyramids and labyrinth. The representation of these

7 *Studies in Ptolemaic Memphis*, by D.J. Crawford, J. Quaegebeur and W. Clarysse, *Stud. Hell.* 24 (Louvain 1980).

8 *P. Lond.* VII 1973.

9 *P. Tebt.* I 33 (112 B.C.).

sights in Nilotic scenes became very popular in Hellenistic art and continues as a stock motif into the Roman period. Anyone familiar with them knows how far they fail to resemble the reality; but they represent an image, one full of wonders: which was indeed already Herodotus' view of Egypt, and certainly that of many other Greeks.

What I am suggesting is that sights and motifs identified as Egyptian became a source of entertainment and amusement for the Greek world, through the intermediary of the Ptolemies and those who visited their kingdom. That hardly any real understanding of Egypt accompanied this fun is evident. This exploitative attitude, however, has deeper and darker aspects. A private letter of the second century gives us a clue: a wife writes to her husband, "Discovering that you are learning Egyptian writing, I am happy for you and for myself, because now when you come to the city you will teach the slave-boys in the establishment of Phaloues, the douche-doctor, and you will have a means of support for old age."¹⁰ Roger Rémondon has shown that the situation involves a Greek who learned Egyptian in order to teach the rudiments of the native language to Greek-speaking slave boys who were learning the trade of a doctor specializing in enemas.¹¹ Their teacher in their trade was Phaloues, who kept a school to which the slaves' masters could send them, and where the language of instruction would be Egyptian. Phaloues himself bears an Egyptian name, and the medical specialty in question was specifically Egyptian.

The motives for having the slaves learn Egyptian are mercenary: they will be able to acquire a skill which will make them valuable to their masters; much more valuable, in fact, as slaves trained as enema-doctors would be items of luxury, perhaps even, as Rémondon suggests, destined for the market in Rome. At the same time, it is far from clear that the use of these slaves as enema-doctors represented any cultural gain from Egyptian medicine, as the specialty itself is a primitive thing, revered by the Greeks because it is Egyptian and therefore mysterious and distinguished, rather than because Hellenistic science found value in it. It is a toy, in effect. I forbear to offer modern parallels to exotic practices like this becoming fashionable.

This scene is on the same intellectual level as the sightseeing and the artistic representations; but the depressing character of it all comes out more clearly because more is pretended and the economic

10 *UPZ* II 148.

11 Cf. *Cd'E* 39 (1964) 126-46.

motives are so obvious. And, when all is said and done, much the same conclusions must be reached about that most difficult and controversial of subjects, which I have purposely saved to the end, the spread of the Egyptian cults in the Hellenistic world and the influence of Egypt on Hellenistic and Roman religion.

Let us begin with Sarapis, the most prominent of all. We know that at Sakkara there was, as part of the necropolis, a sanctuary where the Egyptians buried mummified Apis bulls, which, as living repositories of the sacred power of Osiris, were called by the combined name, Wsir-Hapi, Oserapis in Greek transcription. And we find, spreading through the Greek world, a cult of Sarapis, clearly a Hellenic interpretation of this Egyptian cult. Now the cult of Sarapis, we must insist, was a voluntary and spontaneous development. As Claire Préaux put it, the "Greeks did not await a machiavellian political wish of Ptolemy I or II in order to discover and venerate Sarapis, as modern historians have thought."¹²

What is new about the cult of Sarapis in the Hellenistic world is its diffusion and its anthropomorphism. No longer is Sarapis a bull god; he is represented as a bearded male. To be sure, some of the characteristics of Sarapis derive from the Osirian background, including the hope of salvation. But equally, Sarapis is identified with, or assimilated to, other gods: Greek ones, like Zeus or Asclepius, like whom he was seen as a god of healing, producer of miracles, actor in dreams. In effect what has happened is that the Osirian heritage embodying the afterlife, salvation, and fertility was taken over by Hellenistic men and used in response to their own deeply-felt needs. The assimilation to other gods is not remarkable; in paganism hardly any characteristic or power is monopolized by only one god. Above all, the cult of Sarapis is another instance of Hellenistic appropriation of an image of Egyptian elements and transformation of them into something essentially Greek rather than Egyptian. I am far from suggesting that the blatantly pernicious character of the use of enema-doctors is present here too, but the process to which the Egyptian heritage is subjected is essentially the same.

The situation with the other cults was much the same: Isis, Osiris, Harpocrates, Anubis. There is not time to go into detail about them, and they are -- particularly the worship of Isis in the Roman world -- matters of immense complexity. But in general one will find again and again the same phenomenon: an essentially Greek

¹² Cl. Préaux, *Le Monde hellénistique*, *Nouvelle Clio* 6 et 6 bis (Paris 1978) II, 650.

or Roman cult, overlaid with forms borrowed from Egypt and thus possessing more mystery than the same form in native dress would have.

It was not only the Egyptian material that the Greeks treated this way. Michael Speidel has recently shown that Mithraism is a phenomenon of the same sort.¹³ This rival to Christianity -- the most dangerous of them, Speidel thinks -- was clothed in Iranian mythology and vocabulary; but the god himself is a transfer from the Greek hero Orion, his astrological equivalent, and the cult itself can be seen as essentially Greek and, in its transformation by the Roman army, Roman, rather than as Iranian.

The mention of Mithras, finally, brings us to astrology and thence to magic. The evidence is overwhelming that Ptolemaic Egypt is largely responsible for the development of these phenomena in the forms in which we see them in the Roman period. In Hellenistic times the evidence is fairly scanty, and astrology, though recognizable already in the third century B.C., was not yet a major force. But Cumont showed years ago that it was in Egypt that the main development took place. Once again, formulas, vocabulary, and mythology are mostly borrowed, from eclectic oriental sources, be they Egyptian, Babylonian, or Jewish. But the root ideas, the underlying cosmology, has to be seen as Hellenistic, grounded in the philosophies of that era, and not borrowed along with its trappings. It is no more oriental in essential character than the numerous buildings in pseudo-Egyptian style in North America or the other obvious traces of Egyptian imagery in our own society, such as the Freemasonry of Mozart's *Magic Flute*.

We have come a long way from the politics of the Aegean in the third century, and yet there are some common strands in all of this. We see, in the first place, that the relationship of Ptolemaic Egypt and the Ptolemaic dynasty with the Greek world had a Greek character: Greek politics, diplomacy, and warfare; Greek patterns of feeding the population; Greek methods of entrepreneurship; Greek traditions of charitable gifts; Greek culture implanted in a foreign land and expanded to an unimaginable degree by the application of vast royal resources. The Ptolemies' hopes for acceptance in the Hellenic world rested on being seen as enlightened and benevolent Hellenic monarchs.

Secondly, we find that the relationship of the Greeks, both those living in Egypt and those outside, to Egypt, its people and its civilization, was profoundly superficial. This was true in

¹³ *Mithras-Orion*, EPRO 81 (Leiden 1980).

political, social and economic relationships inside Egypt; coexistence rather than fusion was the dominant fact of intercultural behavior. The same thing is true in each aspect of the experience of Egypt undergone by the Greek world outside it: history, landscape, medicine, and religion, all are appropriated in a form which is only just barely recognizable as Egyptian. This superficiality has been the source of great trouble for modern scholars trying to interpret a supposed blending of the two civilizations, for nothing ever seems to be a true mix as they must expect.

Thirdly, inherent in this superficiality is a fundamentally exploitative attitude on the part of the Greeks. Egypt was from the first a prize of war to the Ptolemies, something acquired in the division of spoils from Alexander's march of conquest. It is true that the Ptolemies settled down to be monarchs in Egypt, not from a distance, and that in economic terms this saved them and Egypt from the more coldly shortsighted calculation which I believe was characteristic of Roman rule in later centuries. It is true also that some of the later kings -- I think of Ptolemy VIII, the second Euergetes, in particular -- seem to have had other ideas, less pro-Hellenic and exploitative. For these he was roundly despised by the Greeks and is uniformly vilified in the surviving sources. Overall, the dominant attitude was the exploitative one. This seems neutral in some respects: after all, it would be improper to blame the Greeks for worshipping a god of their own under the name of Sarapis, for we cannot expect them to adopt the underlying religiosity of a cult founded on a different experience of the world. In other respects, the exploitativeness is more disheartening. The Greeks had little true respect for Egyptian civilization as a living entity; they preferred to think of it as something fossilized which they could adapt to their own purposes without thinking of the people whose civilization it was, except as political, social and cultural inferiors and as a source of income. The Greek lack of esteem for the Egyptian present -- the failure of the reality of Egypt to have any serious impact on the Greek world, in other words -- is, I am persuaded, intimately connected to the eventual decline of traditional Egyptian culture under the Roman emperors.

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