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978-1-108-06567-2 - A History of Egypt: Volume 4: Under the Ptolemaic Dynasty

John Pentland Mahaffy

Excerpt

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## A HISTORY OF EGYPT UNDER THE PTOLEMAIC DYNASTY



FIG. 1.—*Obverse*.—Head of Alexander, with horns of Amon, diademed, with elephant's skin.



FIG. 2.—*Reverse*.—Pallas eagle on thunderbolt, ΑΑΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΤ, and mint marks.

### CHAPTER I

**GENERAL AUTHORITIES.**—*Ancient*—Arrian, ii. 13 *seq.*; Diodorus, xvii. 48 *seq.*; Curtius, iv. 7 *seq.*; Plutarch, *Alexander*, 26 *seq.*; Justin, xi. 11 *seq.*; Josephus, *B. J.* iv. 10. 5 *seq.*; pseudo-Callisthenes, lib. i. (ed. C. Müller). *Modern*—Grote, *Hist. of Greece*, chap. xciii; Thirlwall, *Hist. of Greece*, chaps. xlix. *sqq.*; Sharpe, *Hist. of Egypt* (German ed.), i. chap. iv. *seq.*; Droysen, *Gesch. des Hellenismus*, i.; Niese, *Gesch. der Griech. und Maked. Staaten*, etc., vol. i.; Holm, *Gesch. Griech.* vol. iii.; Mahaffy, *The Empire of the Ptolemies*, chaps. i. and ii.; Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie* (P.-W.R.), arts. "Alexander," "Alexandria," "Aigyplos," "Ammon"; Hogarth, *Philip and Alexander of Macedon*, pp. 187 *seq.*; G. Botti, *Fouilles à la Colonne Theodosienne* (Alexandria, 1897); Lumbroso, *L'Egitto dei Greci e dei Romani* (Rome, 1895).

THE condition of Egypt under the Persian dominion has been described in the previous volume. So far as we know, the Egyptian people suffered more from

sentimental than from material grievances under that rule. We do not hear that Alexander, when he set the land in order, remitted taxes, and yet his conquest was regarded by the natives as a great boon. The main difference seems to have been in his attitude to the Egyptian gods and their priests. Instead of ignoring this great element in Egyptian life, or insulting the feelings of religious Egypt, the new conqueror sacrificed to the local gods, and probably granted some charter or security for their property to the priests. His conquest was attended with no trouble. The Satrap of Egypt, Sabakes,<sup>1</sup> who came with his contingent to support Darius at the battle of Issus, had fallen in the fight, and another Persian grandee, Mazakes, had succeeded to the satrapy either by the new appointment of the king, or, what is more probable, as the lieutenant of Sabakes, left in charge of the country.

The first attack upon this new governor's authority had been made by Amyntas, son of Antiochus, a deserter from the Macedonian side,<sup>2</sup> who had joined Darius at Issus, and who fled, with some others of his kind, with a remnant of 8000 mercenaries by way of Cyprus to Egypt. What was the policy or the intention of this person, beyond mere raiding, we cannot tell. Curtius says he was gladly received by the natives, as being opposed to the Persians, his recent patrons, and that accordingly he attacked the Persian garrison at Memphis, but was beaten off by Mazakes, and presently overpowered and slain with his accomplices by the natives, who soon found that plunder was his object. The story is not clear. What position can he have assumed against the Persians and also against the Macedonians, unless he pretended that he was fighting for the natives—an excuse which could only last a few weeks? And surely such a person could never hope to set up for himself an independent

<sup>1</sup> This man, to judge from his name, was a grandee of Ethiopian extraction. Shabak occurs as a king's name in the XXVth dynasty.—PETRIE.

<sup>2</sup> *Prætor hic Alexandri fuerat, tunc transfuga.*—Curt. iii. 11, 18.

## VICTORIOUS MARCH THROUGH EGYPT

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monarchy. Yet this is the view of Q. Curtius, who alone among our authorities gives us any details.<sup>1</sup>

There was, no doubt, great uncertainty, and a great collapse was impending throughout all the Persian provinces. Had Alexander perchance died shortly after Issus, the whole Eastern world would have indeed been the prize of the boldest adventurers. But Curtius by himself is a poor authority. At all events, Mazakes, who was loyal and strong enough to repel and crush this wholly unauthorised raid upon his province, was not strong enough to offer any resistance to Alexander. The whole population was excited with the news of Issus, and ready to fall into the arms of the new deliverer. So Alexander, appearing at Pelusium (probably September 332 B.C.), entered Egypt without resistance, and ascended the river to Memphis. His march was a triumphal progress, for the inhabitants felt that he would free them not only from the hated Persian yoke,<sup>2</sup> but from the more pressing danger of other raids like that of Amyntas, and from the piracy which must have been rampant during the great crisis of the last year's campaign. Not only was Memphis surrendered by Mazakes, but with it 800 talents of treasure, a most welcome addition to the military chest of the victor, for the expenses of the campaign must have been great, and the profits (excepting the plunder of Tyre) not yet very large.

<sup>1</sup> *Quum in illo statu rerum id quemque, quod occupasset, habiturum arbitraretur, velut certo jure possessum, Ægyptum petere decrevit.* He exhorts his soldiers, shows the weakness and unpopularity of the Persians in Egypt, and how the natives would regard any new power as an ally against their hated masters. He gets admission to Pelusium under the pretence of being the new satrap of Darius, and then calls the natives to join him in crushing the Persian garrison. At first successful, and proceeding to the siege of Memphis, he takes to raiding the neighbourhood, and is defeated and slain in a sortie of the besieged Persians. —Curt. iv. 1, 27 *seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Oxyrynchus Papyri, I, xii. col. iv. : Ολυμπιαδι εκατοστη δωδεκατη . . . ταυτης κατα το πρωτον ετος Αλεξανδρος ο Φιλιππου Τυρον ειλεν' και Αιγυπτον παρελαβε εκουσιως αυτον προσδεξαμενων των ενχωριων δια το προς Περσας εχθρον.

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We are told by all our authorities that he forthwith offered sacrifices to the local gods, especially to Apis, and celebrated gymnastic and musical contests with the help of Hellenic artists, who were on the spot at the required moment. Some historians regard this coincidence as a proof that Alexander had foreseen his movements and their success, and had ordered these distinguished people to meet him at Memphis. I think it more likely that, like camp-followers, they watched campaigns, and found themselves in the vicinity of conquests, knowing that under no other circumstances would their profits be so great as when celebrating the glories of victorious armies. It was worth while sailing to Egypt, and having a little acting season at Naukratis, among their Greek friends, upon the chance of being summoned by the recklessly extravagant Macedonian youth to adorn his successes. The festival must have been chiefly intended for his soldiers, and for the various speculators, petitioners, and other adventurers who came from Greek lands. For it is not very likely that the natives would understand or appreciate Greek gymnastics, still less Greek music.

But from the outset, the policy which Alexander marked out for himself was to protect and promote Eastern nationalities, without abating aught from the primacy of the Greeks in culture. Hence his musical and gymnastic celebrations were a counterfoil to his sacrifices to Apis and to Ptah. The latter god is not indeed mentioned by our Greek authorities, but as his temple was the greatest feature of ancient Memphis, and his priests were the greatest corporation there, it was most probably in this metropolis of Greek religion that Alexander was formally crowned king of Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

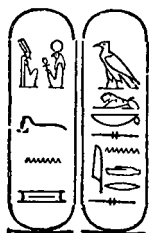


FIG. 3.—Cartouches of Alexander the Great.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For explanations of these and other cartouches cf. Mr. Griffith's Appendix to this volume.

<sup>2</sup> On this question M. Gaston Maspero has recently published a most instructive essay (*École des hautes études*, annuaire for 1897),

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## FESTIVITIES IN MEMPHIS

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It is to be noted that when Alexandria had become the recognised capital of Egypt, the earlier Ptolemies

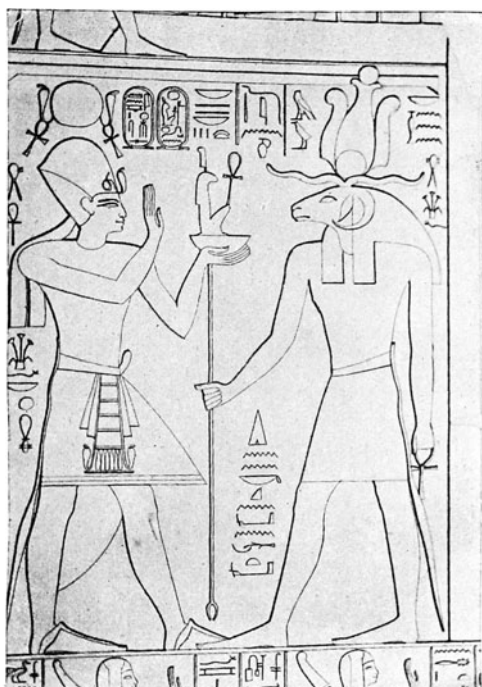


FIG. 4.—King Ramses II. worshipping the Ram-headed Amon.

did not trouble themselves with the sacred ceremony at Memphis. With Ptolemy V. the solemn national

which examines the nature of Alexander's deification. He has not, however, cited the only direct Greek authority for the ceremony, which he establishes upon *à priori* grounds. The pseudo-Callisthenes, who gives a very important, though much distorted, account of Alexander's visit to Egypt, says expressly (i. 34): *καὶ ἐλθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰς Μέμφιν τὴν πόλιν ἐνεθρονίασαν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν τοῦ Ἡφαίστου (sc. Ptah) θρονιστήριον ὡς Αἰγυπτίων βασιλέα*. This is not the only important fact preserved to us in the *Romance*, as will appear in the sequel.

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## ALEXANDER THE GREAT

enthronement was resumed, as the Rosetta stone tells us with the emphasis of reiteration.

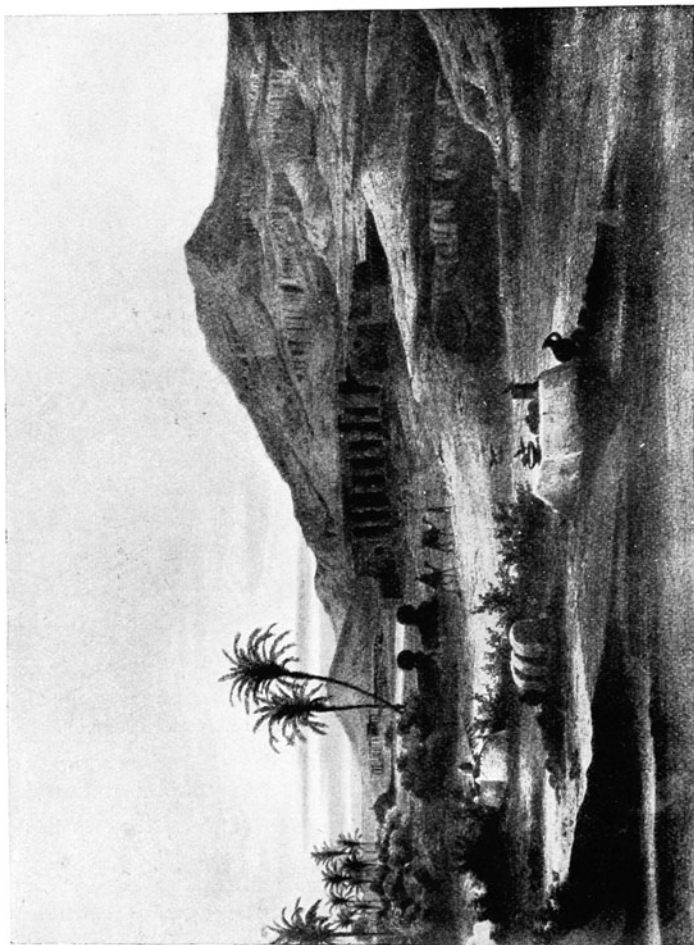


FIG. 5.—View of the Western Bank of the Nile over against Thebes.

There was also another great Egyptian god, served by a separate, and probably rival corporation of priests,

who was better known to the Greeks, and whom Alexander desired to honour. This was Amon,<sup>1</sup> whose shrine and city Thebes, in the upper country, had for centuries been the real metropolis of the whole land. Alexander must have thought it an important part of his policy to conciliate this great spiritual authority. But it does seem strange, at first sight, that he should not have ascended the river to Thebes, a very charming and instructive journey, showing him the greater part of his new possessions, at the goal of which he would see the wonders which attract travellers from all the world even to the present day. In the palmiest days of Memphis, its religious appointments were not equal to those of Thebes. Why then did Alexander select the long and difficult route to the oasis of Jupiter Ammon, to perform a ceremony which could have been more splendidly performed at Thebes?

There are several adequate reasons to explain this apparent waste of time in a very busy man, full of ambitious plans for the conquest of the East. In the first place, something may be due to the jealousy of the priests of Ptah at Memphis, whose old rivals were those of Amon at Thebes, and who might dread the effect which the splendour of Thebes would have upon Alexander, while the shrine of the god in the far oasis was in outward appearance and appointments insignificant. Secondly, while the splendours of Thebes were unknown to the Greeks, the reputation of the oracle in the desert was old and well established. From Pindar's day onward, mention of it crops up occasionally in Greek history, showing that it was well known and honoured in the Hellenic world.<sup>2</sup> Very probably it was through the comparative proximity of

<sup>1</sup> On the various forms of the name, Ammon, Hammon, Amoun, etc., cf. the art. "Ammon," in Pauly-Wissowa's *Realencyclopädie*. He is represented frequently as ram-headed, and so associated with that form in the legends of the pseudo-Callisthenes. The Greeks identified him with Zeus, and hence Thebes was called by them Diospolis.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the catalogue of consultations by Greeks in early days in P.-W.R., "Ammonion," p. 1858.



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Cyrene, and the trade of this city with the desert, that it became thus known in the Levant.

But there were other than religious interests working in the minds of the Greeks of Egypt. Alexander had come into the land by its eastern gate, and if he left again by the same route, he might never see the western Delta, and so never become personally acquainted with the only purely Greek city in the land, the old mart of Naukratis. This consideration escaped the notice of historians,<sup>1</sup> because they did not know the site of Naukratis, discovered by Mr. Petrie a very few years ago. As soon as Alexander spoke of founding a capital, the first alarm of the Greeks must have been that he should choose Memphis, or some site near it, at the head of the Delta. It was highly necessary to lure him away from too great an Egyptian centre. They may have hoped that he would select Naukratis itself, which he must have visited on his way to the Canopic mouth; but in any case they obtained this, that Alexandria was founded near it, and far from any great native city. The conqueror chose the strip of ground between Lake Mareotis and the sea, with the island Pharos over against it, so that this natural break-water might afford means of making a good anchorage for ships.

Our best authorities agree that he planned this new and momentous foundation on his way to the oasis<sup>2</sup> (which, by the way, he could more easily have reached across the desert), and perhaps immediately after he had been solicited by the Greeks of Naukratis to remember Hellenic interests in Egypt. I have already argued that there is no need for attributing special insight or prophetic genius to Alexander's selection of the site.<sup>3</sup> Any site along the coast, or near it, on

<sup>1</sup> Cf. now *Empire of the Ptolemies*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> To judge from the foundation feast afterwards kept on the 25th of Tybi, at Alexandria, the formal act appears to have taken place on or about January 20, 331 B.C. Cf. the authorities quoted by Holm, *Griech. Geschichte*, iii. 383, note 5.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Hogarth (*Philip and Alexander*, p. 189) contests this, and thinks the site behind Pharos the only suitable spot for a harbour



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## ALEXANDRIA

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one of the larger arms of the Nile, must have proved successful, if we give it the conditions supplied by the great conquests in the East, and then the wise and practical rule of the first Ptolemy and his successors. Wherever the mart was established for the meeting of the merchandise of the Mediterranean and the Nile, a vast concourse of people must inevitably take place.

We hear many accounts, more or less detailed, of the founding of this great city, but of these the most fabulous (that in the *Romance*) is apparently the most instructive, for the writer was personally intimate with the city, and records the traditions of the inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> But they all presuppose the city to be so well known that they omit details which to our comprehension of it are vital. The only earlier attempt to fix the plan by excavations was made for Napoleon III. by Mahmoud Bey (1866). Dr. Botti's map in this volume gives the results of his researches up to 1897. On one point we must lay peculiar stress, because most authors produce a false impression, that Alexandria was a city in which Jews and Greeks counted for everything, the natives for nothing. There is good evidence that the majority of the poorer classes was from the first Egyptian, and that to the end the city remained very different from

along the whole Delta coast. Of course if this were so, it would detract greatly from Alexander's credit, as his choice was controlled by necessity. But it is not so. Ancient ships did not require the deep water that ours do, and the precautions taken at the Sebennyitic and Pelusiatic mouths prove that landing at these points was easy even for ships of war. Even Nelson's ships could fight in the bay of Aboukir.

<sup>1</sup> I quote from the Didot edition of Arrian, etc., edited by C. Müller. The importance of pseudo-Callisthenes, especially according to our oldest text, and the Armenian translation, was first shown by G. Lumbroso, whose varied and curious learning has not marred his natural acuteness. Both in the case of this book and in that of the pseudo-Aristeas, he has shown that what the learned world up to his day had rejected as purely fabulous, contained valuable historical indications. Cf. his *L'Égitto*, etc., cap. xvi.; and also Zacher's *Pseudo-Callisthenes* (Halle, 1867), p. 96.

other Hellenistic foundations.<sup>1</sup> The native element, though at first thrust out from power and influence, gradually asserted itself, and the city that opposed Cæsar was probably far more Egyptian than that which opposed Antiochus Epiphanes. This is not an extraordinary or exceptional course of events. The city of Dublin, for example, has been settled with Danes and English for many centuries, during which the whole control and government of the city lay in these foreign hands. Yet, though they imposed their laws, their language, and to some extent their religion, upon the native population, the English never made it an English city. The masses of the poor, long subjected to harsh control, nevertheless so influenced the settlers, that to this day Dublin has remained and will continue an Irish city, with the national characteristics strongly and clearly marked. Such was the case with Alexandria.

It is therefore not out of place in this book, which deals with the people of Egypt and their condition under the Macedonian dynasty, to enter into some details regarding the origin of this great foreign mart in the north-west corner of the land. For this capital in its day became, like Paris in France, the normal controller of the fortunes of the whole country.

The first point which deserves special notice is the statement of Strabo (xvii. 1, 6), corroborated by the *Romance*, that the site, when Alexander found it, was not an open coast, only occupied by a fishing village. "The former kings of Egypt, content with home produce and not desirous of imports, and thus opposed to foreigners, especially to Greeks (for these were pillagers and covetous of foreign land, because of the scantiness of their own), established a military post at this spot, to keep off intruders, and gave to the soldiers as their habitation what was called Rakotis, which is now that part of Alexandria which lies above the dockyards, but was then a village. The country lying round

<sup>1</sup> The expression of Justin (xi. 11), *coloniæ Macedonum caput esse Ægypti jubet*, is, I believe, accurate. The Macedonians, so called, were always a small and privileged part of the population.