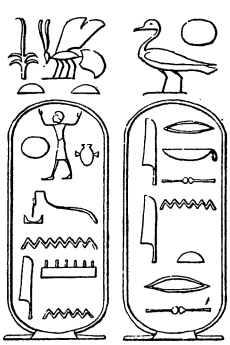
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION. ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND EGYPT

§ 1. THERE is something unsatisfactory in beginning a history with the mature state of a nation. As in biography so in history, we desire to go back to the cradle, and see the growth of social and of political life from their first rude commencements. There is, moreover, not a little difficulty in finding a later moment which will afford a real starting-point. Each condition of a nation is the result of what went before, and the human mind feels compelled to seek the causes for this, as for every other effect. In undertaking, however, to begin a special history of Egypt with the accession of the first Ptolemy, these objections lose most of their force. For, in the first place, several competent scholars have written the history of Egypt from its dawn till the conquest of Alexander, so that all the earlier stages can be studied in good books. These eminent men must



ALEXANDER THE GREAT.

also have felt some distinct break in the life of the nation, as their work appeared to them concluded when Egypt passed under Macedonian sway. In this impression they have but reproduced the unanimous feeling of Hellenistic writers, who imply or assert that with Alexander a new volume of the world's history had opened, and that the events even of the recent past belonged to a different age, and might be neglected as the decrepitude of a byegone civilisation. Polybius, for example, in his careful and philosophic history of the Greek world of his own century, though he inquires diligently into causes and appreciates traditions, finds no occasion, so far as we know him, to cite Xenophon or Thucydides more than once, Herodotus more than twice. In his mind the break with the past made by Alexander was complete. We are therefore fortified by a general consensus of opinion, when we assume for Egypt what was true of the rest of the nations about the Levant, and treat the Ptolemaic rule as a distinct epoch in the history of the valley of the Nile.

§ 2. That this epoch has hitherto been neglected is not strange. In spite of the great splendour and importance of the Ptolemies in the Hellenistic world, no systematic account of them had survived even in Pausanias' day.[1] We know them through pompous hieroglyphics, which were not intended to instruct us, through panegyrics which were perhaps intended to mislead us, through episodes in the universal histories of Polybius and Diodorus. Recently we have added to these literary authorities a good many stray inscriptions, and a mass of papyrus fragments, which give us multitudinous isolated facts, seldom of public interest,

[1] i. 6 *ὡς μὴ μένειν ἔτι τὴν φήμην αὐτῶν, καὶ οἱ συγγενόμενοι τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἐπὶ συγγραφῇ τῶν ἔργων καὶ πρότερον ἔτι ἠμελήθησαν.*

but no connected history. The only writer who has attempted to treat this period in connexion with the preceding and succeeding epochs, was Sharpe,[1] in whose book the Ptolemies have obtained the lion's share. But how antiquated it seems to us now, and how many of his statements are contradicted by recent discoveries! A like fate will inevitably attend his successors. Even now no history of the Ptolemies can claim or desire to be final. Ptolemaic inscriptions, Ptolemaic papyri, are finding their way into our museums every year. Whenever demotic Egyptian comes to be understood, so that its matter becomes accessible to ordinary scholars, a flood of new light may be thrown upon the subject. Yet if the vast body of isolated facts be not gathered periodically, and set in order, it will be impossible to fit further discoveries into their places, and we shall find ourselves in presence of a confused mass of evidence which few will attempt to comprehend. Even now the task of knowing the extant Ptolemaic papyri is arduous enough; were it not for exceptional privileges enjoyed in deciphering and explaining them, the undertaking would have been beyond my ambition. Those who know this vast and partly-explored field best, will be the readiest to make allowance for my shortcomings.

§ 3. None of Alexander's achievements was more facile, and yet none more striking, than his Egyptian campaign.[2]

[1] *History of Egypt* by Samuel Sharpe, 5th edition, in 2 vols., 1870. Unfortunately this edition takes no notice of the German translation (2nd ed., Leipzig, 1862), which is corrected and enriched with excellent notes by A. von Gutschmid. These latter I have constantly used.

[2] Arrian ii. 13 *sq.* and Diodorus xvii. 48 are our chief authorities; also Plutarch *Alex.* 26, Justin, and Curtius. It is so easy to find the respective passages in any index to these texts, that I shall often omit the 'chapter and verse.'

His advent must have been awaited with all the agitations of fear and hope by the natives of all classes, for the Persian sway had been cruel and bloody, and if it did not lay extravagant burdens upon the poor, it certainly gave the higher classes an abundance of sentimental grievances, for it had violated the national feelings, and especially the national religion, with wanton brutality. The treatment of the revolted province by Ochus was not less violent and ruthless than had been the original conquest by Cambyses, which Herodotus tells us with graphic simplicity. No conquerors seem to have been more uncongenial to the Egyptians than the Persians. But all invaders of Egypt, even the Ptolemies, were confronted by a like hopelessness of gaining the sympathies of their subjects. If it was comparatively easy to make them slaves, they were perpetually revolting slaves. This was due not to the impatience of the average native, but rather to the hold which the national religion had gained upon his life. This religion was administered by an ambitious, organised, haughty priesthood, whose records and traditions told them of the vast wealth and power they had once possessed—a condition of things long past away, and never likely to return, even under a native dynasty, but still filling the imaginations of the priests, and urging them to set their people against every foreign ruler. The only chance of success for an invader lay in conciliating this vast and stubborn corporation. Every chief who headed a revolt against the Persians had made this the centre of his policy; the support of the priests must be gained by restoring them to their old supremacy—a supremacy which they doubtless exaggerated in their uncriticised records of the past.

§ 4. There was another class of the population not less discontented—the military caste, which had long since

been thrust into the background by the employment of foreign, chiefly Greek, mercenaries. Even kings of national proclivities found these Greeks or Carians so much more efficient, that they could not be persuaded to dispense with them and depend upon native troops. The military caste, which denied that these foreigners were necessary,[1] and professed all readiness to fight the king's battles, or mount guard at his palace, was moody and jealous, and the neglect of its grievances must have given great additional force to the rebellions, usually supported by this section of the population. As for the labouring classes, we may assume that then, as now, they desired little more than freedom from forced labour, and security against the exactions of the tax-farmer. There is little mention, in this later Egyptian history, of any nobility territorial or otherwise, such as had flourished under the Middle Empire,[2] though there were still over the administration officials of great importance from their knowledge of the people and their language. But most local magnates or feudal chiefs only asserted themselves during those weaknesses of the central power, which give special opportunities to ambitious and wealthy provincials for making their dignities hereditary. Such a body of nobles does not meet us in any of the records of this period. Yet the insurgent chiefs who rose against the Persians and against the fifth Ptolemy were apparently men of high birth, descended from royal ancestors; no ordinary Fellah would ever think of leading an army.

[1] They could point to the high character of the Egyptian contingents which fought with Croesus against Cyrus (Xenophon *Cyrop.* vii. 1, 45) and with Xerxes against the Greeks (Herod. viii. 17, ix. 32), as historical evidence of their efficiency, when properly fitted out and treated with confidence. In Ptolemaic times they are called οἱ Μάχιμοι.

[2] Cf. Erman's *Aegypten* pp. 135 *sq.*

§ 5. We can only assert these generalities concerning the condition of the oppressed people, who were watching with breathless interest Alexander's attack upon the Persian Empire. All better information is wanting. The satrap of Egypt, Sabakes, had been summoned with most of the garrison to join his master Darius, and had fallen at the battle of Issus.[1] Though his division probably consisted of Greek and Asiatic mercenaries, it is hardly possible that some Egyptians did not accompany them, who must have brought back a startling report of the conqueror and his army. Even if they had not done so, the distinguished people mentioned by Arrian, the deserter Amyntas, Mentor's son Thymondas, and others, who fled straight from Issus to Egypt, as to a land of safety, made matters plain enough.[2] Then came the siege of Tyre, in which Alexander's obstinacy, and his versatility of resource, had overcome apparent impossibilities, and during these many months, so long as the Tyrian fleet was able to keep the sea-way open, traders must have brought news of the gradual change from confidence to alarm, from alarm to despair, in the great naval mistress of the Syrian Levant. And after the fall of Tyre, and the consequent passage of the naval supremacy into Alexander's hands, came in rapid succession the news of his clemency at Jerusalem, his severity at Gaza,[3] and his advent at the Eastern gate of Egypt.

I have elsewhere[4] explained the probable reasons for

[1] Arrian ii. 11, 8.

[2] Amyntas (Diod. xvii. 48, Arrian ii. 13, 2), who had a force of 4000 (Arrian says 8000) men, took possession of Pelusium, and tried honestly to hold the country for Darius, but he and his soldiers were all slain by the natives near Memphis as being lawless marauders.

[3] Arrian ii. 18-26; Diod. xvii. 48.

[4] *Greek Life and Thought* etc. p. 470.

his tender treatment of the Jews, whose trading connexions over the world, combined with the regular journeys of the 'Dispersion' to Jerusalem, made them invaluable friends to him, as guides to his intelligence department. From them too did he learn the passes into Egypt between marshes and deserts, and they must have announced to the Egyptians his liberality towards their religion, and his graciousness towards those who submitted promptly and unreservedly to his commands.[1] So, when the remaining Persian garrison and fleet had made hardly a show of resistance, the Macedonian entered into peaceable possession of the kingdom of the Pharaohs.

§ 6. The various mercenary forces, whether in the pay of the Persians, or marauding in the country under pretence of defending it for the Great King, had now no alternative but to submit to Alexander, and swell the ranks of his army. The priests hailed with satisfaction the victorious enemy of their recent oppressors. Thus we may assume that his march along the eastern outlet of the Nile, from Pelusium to Heliopolis and Memphis, was a triumphal procession.[2] No sooner had he arrived at Memphis than he displayed the same conciliatory policy to the priests which he had adopted at Jerusalem. He

[1] Isaiah xix. and Jer. xliv. tell us of settlements of Jews in the Eastern Delta, and imply frequent intercourse between Egypt and Judaea ever since Assyria (or Babylon) had been contending with Egypt for the possession of Syria and Palestine. The narrative of Josephus (*Antiqq.* xi. 8, 4) is very suspicious, and has been generally rejected. I have sought to disengage the element of truth concealed in it. Cf. the citations in Pauly-Wissowa's *Encyclop.* i. pp. 1422-23 (art. ALEXANDROS). Alexander, in reciting his dream to the high-priest says: διασκεπτομένῳ μοι πῶς ἂν κρατήσαιμι τῆς Ἀσίας αὐτὸς (*sc.* the figure of the high-priest) ἔφη ἡγήσεσθαί μοι τῆς στρατιᾶς, which means, I think, that the Jews would show him all the roads, and tell him the distances.

[2] Arrian iii. 1.

sacrificed to Apis and the other gods, and assured the priests of his favour and support.[1] If the Jewish authorities were to help him in his campaigns through Asia with their knowledge of distances, their correspondents in remote cities, their exceptional geographical knowledge, the Egyptian priests were to serve him in another way; they were to secure to him without disturbance the supplies of provisions and money which in that favoured country seemed unlimited, even in troublous times and under the grossest misgovernment. Some six millions—the Ptolemies raised the figure to seven and a half—of hard-working fellahs were trained by hereditary oppression to work for their masters, and pay taxes out of all proportion to the size of the country. This safe and certain source of revenue was at the moment of great importance to the new king, who had not yet seized the great hoards of treasure at Susa and Persepolis. His own treasury was at the lowest ebb, though his conquests may have already obtained for him considerable pecuniary credit.[2]

§ 7. But we are only concerned with Alexander so far as we can explain through his acts more clearly the policy of his successor in the sovranty of Egypt. We hear that he appointed two Egyptians, Peteesis and Doloaspis, *nomarchs* of the provinces, of which he created for this purpose but two, probably Upper and Lower Egypt. Doloaspis, who presently obtained the whole management, has a name which hardly seems to be Egyptian, Peteēsis, on the other hand, was the name of several native officials of importance in later generations. There were several

[1] With these ceremonies he combined a gymnic and musical contest among artists brought from Greece. Arrian *loc. cit.*

[2] The Egyptian priests also supplied him with a sentimental dignity which will come before the reader presently.

Greeks and Macedonian grandees also appointed for military purposes, and to look after the treasury.[1] Of these one only, Cleomenes, maintained his importance for some years. He was indeed the chief adviser of the king at the founding of Alexandria, if pseudo-Callisthenes,[2] here apparently well-informed, is to be trusted; but in the sequel, and when no longer under Alexander's eye, he earned a reputation for dishonesty and injustice. But, of course, all these appointments were merely provisional, pending a reconstruction of the Persian Empire.[3]

§ 8. Two acts only of the king were plainly intended as declarations of a deliberate policy. He had no time to visit Upper Egypt, but took care to send a detachment of troops under Apollonides as far as Elephantine,[4] to exhibit his authority. He himself, having made his peace with

[1] B. Niese *Hellenismus* i. p. 87 gives a good summary of the details. I can make nothing of Suidas' note on *βασίλειοι παῖδες ἑξακισχίλιοι· οἵτινες κατὰ πρόσταξιν* Ἀλεξ. *τοῦ* Μακ. *τὰ πολέμια ἐξήσκουν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ*, and suspect the last word should be *Αἰγαῖς* (viz. Aegae), the old seat of the Macedonian kings. Diod. (xvii. 48) says that he received reinforcements from Greece before he left Egypt (331 B.C. spring). Possibly this may be the fact concealed in the note.

[2] i. 30. I quote from the *βίος* Ἀλεξ. edited by C. Müller with Arrian, in the Didot series.

[3] Arrian iii. 5 gives a list of these officers, and notices the subdivision of charges, implying an apprehension on the part of Alexander, lest a single ruler of Egypt might cause him serious difficulties in case of revolt. This fear, he adds, the Romans seem to have learned from Alexander, since they exclude senators from governing it. He also notices that Cleomenes, the general collector of the taxes, was made governor not of Libya, but of Arabia, which lay far away from that person's native town Naukratis.

[4] There is evidence that this was now a penal settlement, probably to utilise the labour of the prisoners in the granite quarries, for Alexander sent there certain Chian political prisoners from Memphis (Arrian iii. 2, 7). I shall produce some evidence in the sequel that it was not yet a town or *πόλις*, though Arrian calls it so.

the priests of Memphis, and consulted with them—though of course any such consultation was carefully kept a secret—set out by the western branch of the Nile, on his circuitous route to the temple of Jupiter Amon in the oasis now called that of Siwâh. During his circuit the priests were, of course, duly informed of his approach by a detachment sent across the desert from Memphis.[1] They, therefore, were quite prepared for him, and instructed how to receive him.

Meanwhile his sail down the Canopic arm must have led him close by the old Greek city of Naukratis, founded upon a lesser arm, the Herakleotic, more to the west than even the Canopic. And as this Herakleotic arm or canal opened into the Canopic—for we know that the waterway from the sea to Naukratis was to ascend the latter arm—it is most likely that Alexander, who had done everything hitherto to favour the Egyptians, received some petitions or representations from the ancient Greek settlement, and visited it on his way to the sea. Nor is it likely that they should not have claimed wider privileges through the agency of Cleomenes, now a great state-officer, selected from Naukratis, to control the finances of the country; and who is said by Justin (xiii. 4) *to have been one of the architects of Alexandria*, along with Deinocrates: moreover Alexander was bound to show them that he did not mean his new province to be anti-Hellenic.[2] Hitherto the Naukratites had been under all manner of jealous restrictions, which, though relaxed in recent times, might be

[1] *Per praemissos subornat antistites quid sibi responderi velit*, Justin xi. 11.

[2] We now know, from the recent discoveries of Mr. Petrie, that the city was allowed to coin, at least copper, during Alexander's reign; this the legends NAT and AAE render certain. Cf. B. Head in *Numismatic Chronicle* vi. 3rd series, p. 11.