

THE 'CRISIS OF THE PYRAMID-BUILDERS' IN HERODOTUS BOOK 2 AND DIODORUS BOOK 1, AND THE EPOCHS OF EGYPTIAN HISTORY

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Ancient Egypt, as everyone knows, is by no means a classical civil community; moreover, from its early time (probably, after the mid third millennium B.C.) Egyptian society lacked free rural communities, which might be called analogous to classical civil communities in other Near Eastern lands.¹ However, the Greek city-states were in a resonating contact with Egypt throughout their existence; and the tradition of describing Egypt launched already in the Greek archaic period continued well into the hellenistic and Roman periods, when civil communities were no longer true independent states. This tradition served as a cornerstone to the study of Egypt in modern times – a cornerstone notoriously neglected by many contemporary Egyptologists. The present paper deals with an episode which was perceived in its classical reflection as a severe crisis in the history of ancient Egypt. The specific problem to be touched upon is the misplacement of this episode in the sequence of historical events, which at the first glance seems a gross mistake of the classical writers. The aim of this paper is to come to a better knowledge of who was responsible for this mistake, and if it is a mistake in the proper sense of the word; hopefully, a conclusion on this will illustrate how far Greek understanding went in perceiving the past of this alien people with its specific turning points.

The best-known description of the pyramid-building is found in Herodotus Book Two (Hdt. 2.124–34);² however, it is inadvisable to treat that apart from a much less known account by Diodorus Siculus in Book One of his *Library of History* (Diod. Sic. 1.63.2–64).³ There seem to be no reasons to doubt that Diodorus' Book One was largely built on the work on Egypt compiled in the late fourth century by Hecataeus of Abdera at the court of Ptolemy (possibly, still when he was a satrap of Egypt).⁴ Herodotus should not be treated apart from Hecataeus reproduced

- 1 Yu. Ya. Perepyolkin, 'Menovye otnosheniya v staroegipetskom obshchestve (The Exchange in the Egyptian Society of the Old Kingdom)', in *Sovetskoe vostokovedenie (Soviet Oriental Studies) vi* (Moscow/Leningrad: Academic Press, 1949), 302; I. Ladynin, Rev.: P. Andrassy, *Untersuchungen zum ägyptischen Staat des Alten Reiches und seinen Institutionen*, *BO* lxxi.1–2 2014, 138.
- 2 See general commentary: A. B. Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II, Commentary 99–182 (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 43)* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 62–86.
- 3 See general commentary: A. Burton, *Diodorus Siculus: Book I. (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 29)* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 187–92.
- 4 E. Schwartz, 'Hekataeos von Teos', *RM* xl 1885, 223–62; E. Schwartz, 'Diodoros (38)', in *RE* v (1905), 669–72; F. Jacoby, 'Hekataios aus Abdera', in *RE* vii (1912), 2750–69; O. Murray,

by Diodorus, as their accounts are the only ones inside the classical tradition available to us that trace the Egyptian history in all its length. Shortly after Hecataeus there appeared the famous work by Manetho of Sebennytos;⁵ and some of its stories allude to Herodotus. However, Manetho's scheme of Egyptian history is different from those of classical authors (and, needless to say, more adequate to the reality). As for Herodotus and Hecataeus, it has already been observed that the latter not seldom narrated the same stories as the former; however, he rather addressed their different and somewhat expanded versions, probably, taken independently from Egyptian tradition.⁶ The same applies to the outline of the Egyptian history given by these authors: Hecataeus/Diodorus' scheme is richer than that of Herodotus, it gives a longer sequence of kings and a subdivision of periods nearly lacking with Herodotus; but both authors highlight mostly the same figures arranged in the same order. One might say that Herodotus and Hecataeus give two different versions – one shorter and rougher, another more detailed and skilled – of basically the same scheme, which, speaking fairly, could have only an Egyptian origin⁷; thus there is every reason to consider the stories narrated by both these authors in comparison.

Herodotus' story of the pyramid-builders is known for a series of errors it contains. The description of the building process itself (Hdt. 2.125) is perhaps accurate; however, the second pyramid-builder, Chephren (id. 127.1: acc. Χεφρήνα

'Hecataeus of Abdera and Pharaonic Kingship', *JEA* lvi 1970, 144–50; S. Burstein, 'Hecataeus of Abdera's History of Egypt', in J. H. Johnson (ed.), *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond (Studies in the Ancient Oriental Civilisations 51)* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1992), 45–9; J. Dillery, 'Hecataeus of Abdera: Hyperboreans, Egypt and Interpretatio Graeca', *Historia* xlvii 1998, 255–75 at 256 n. 4; S. A. Stephens, *Seeing Double: Intercultural Poetics in Ptolemaic Alexandria (Hellenistic Culture and Society 37)* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: U. of California P., 2003), 32, n. 35; R. B. Gozzoli, *The Writing of History in Ancient Egypt during the First Millennium B.C. (ca. 1070–180 B.C.): Trends and Perspectives (Golden House Publications Egyptology 5)* (London: Golden House, 2006), 193–4. An alternative view, Burton (n. 3 above); fair criticism of it, reviews by A. B. Lloyd, *JEA* lx 1974, 287–9; O. Murray, *JHS* xcvi 1975, 214–5.

5 J. Dillery, 'Manetho', in T. Whitmarsh & S. Thomson (edd.), *The Romance between Greece and the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2013), 38–59.

6 See below about their transmission of the names of the pyramid-builders; about Moiris, the maker of Lake Moiris, for whom Herodotus states this commitment (Hdt. 2.101.2) and Hecataeus/Diodorus explains (rightly) that it was intended to prevent the deficiency of water (Diod. Sic. 1.52.1); cf. on the story about Darius and the statues of Sesostris/Sesoosis in these two versions: Burton (n. 3, above), 26–9; A. Ivantchik, 'Eine griechische Pseudo-Historie. Der Pharao Sesostris und der skytho-ägyptische Krieg', *Historia* xlviii 1999, 406–7.

7 The arguments for this is the abundance of allusions to Egyptian phenomena and their adequate descriptions in both narratives (see, *passim*, the comments of A. B. Lloyd and A. Burton), as well as the structuring of their information into sequences of reigns that actually corresponded to the epochs known to the Egyptians themselves (see on Herodotus Gozzoli [n. 4, above], 172–3). The only possible alternative to Herodotus' and Hecataeus' borrowing from Egyptians is the assumption that they invented their information, perhaps, only pinning it to some authentic pieces of narrative. If this was the case, one should go further and propose that Herodotus' 'invention' of Egyptian history was somehow canonised for Hecataeus, who amplified it inventing a number of new stories but left untouched the setting found in Herodotus; but the improbability of such a course seems self-evident.

<*Χεφρήν < *H^cy.f-R^c* 'He appears, Re',⁸ Khafre), is called the brother of Cheops (id. 124.1, etc.: acc. Χέοπα <*Χέοψ < *Hwy.f-w(i)-Hnmw* 'He protects me, Chnum',⁹ Khufu, according to the first part of this name), though in the historical Egyptian Dynasty IV Khafre was certainly Khufu's son (this error might have occurred because either Herodotus or his Egyptian informers knew that Khafre's predecessor, the historical king Djedefre, really was his brother but confused him with a much better-known Khufu).¹⁰ There might be another inconsistency, as Herodotus says that Mycerinus (Hdt. 2.129.1: acc. Μυκερίνον <*Μυκερίνος < *Mn-k3w-R^c*, 'Firm are the Doubles of Re',¹¹ Menkaure) was Chephren's son and followed him directly, though some Egyptian sources indicate between them one more king, Baufre,¹² but there is not much clarity on that point as to the Egyptian sources themselves.¹³ Hecataeus of Abdera seems to have known the history of Dynasty IV better: according to Diodorus, there were also three pyramid-builders: Chemmis (1.63.2: Χέμμυς, with the name-form corresponding to the second component of the historical Cheops' full name), his brother Cephren (1.64.1: Κεφρήν), who alternatively was thought to be his son and to be called Chabryes (a transcription which fits much better the original Egyptian form; *ibid.*: acc. Χαβρύην <*Χαβρύης), and Mycerinus (1.64.6: Μυκερίνος), who was called alternatively Mencherinus (acc. Μεγγερίνον <*Μεγγερίνος; *ibid.*). Thus Hecataeus was aware both of Herodotus' version of this dynastic sequence and of another one which was in a better relation to the Egyptian realities and certainly derived from Egyptian informers.

However, the most blatant error attested for both these authors is the position of the pyramid-builders within the entire sequence of Egyptian history: their time was placed after the reigns which correspond in all probability to the historical New Kingdom, and before the reigns which should correspond to the Libyan period of the early first millennium. According to Herodotus, Cheops was the successor of Rhampsinitus (Hdt. 2.121: acc. Ῥαμψίνιτον < Ῥαμψίνιτος), and it was specially remarked that until the time of that king 'Egypt ... was altogether well governed and prospered greatly', in contrast to what started under Cheops (2.124.1). Herodotus' story of Rhampsinitus (2.121–3)¹⁴ is marked with every feature of a folklore tale, and its meaning is quite clear: it tells of a cunning king, whose morals were not unimpeachable but who nevertheless managed to run his country well. There is a reason to bear in mind the ambivalence of this image and the contrast between the reigns of Rhampsinitus and Cheops. In the scheme of Hecataeus Chemmis is the eighth successor of Remphis (Diod. Sic. 1.62.2: Ῥέμφις)¹⁵, who is

8 J. von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen (Münchner ägyptologische Studien 49)* (Mainz: Zabern, 21999), 54–5.

9 Beckerath (n. 8, above), 52–3.

10 Lloyd (n. 2, above), 74.

11 Beckerath (n. 8, above), 54–5.

12 Lloyd (n. 2, above), 76–7.

13 J. von Beckerath, 'Baef-Re', in W. Helck, E. Otto & W. Westendorf (edd.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972–92), i. 600.

14 Lloyd (n. 2, above), 52–60.

15 Burton (n. 3, above), 185–6.

a clear equivalent of Rhampsinitus (perhaps this name is an extension of the root of the name 'Remphis' with a frequent Late Egyptian royal epithet *z3-Nt*, 'son of Neith'¹⁶). The negative features of this image are articulated by Hecataeus/Diodorus much more neatly than by Herodotus: Remphis is in the first place a niggard, who amassed a 'treasure larger than any king before him' but was reluctant to spend money on offerings to gods and benefactions to his subjects. Symptomatically, closing the temples and the cessation of offerings was ascribed to Cheops by Herodotus (Hdt. 2.124.1; cf. note 1 above) and said to have continued under Chephren (2.127.1, 129.1); but this is not stated of these two kings by Hecataeus/Diodorus, and so this feature seems to be fully transferred in their tradition on Remphis. The successors of Remphis between him and Chemmis were all 'confirmed sluggards and devoted only to indulgence and luxury', except for the king called Nileus (gen. Νειλέως < Νειλέυς), who constructed many canals (2.63.1). Thus, Hecataeus/Diodorus tells about a sort of 'negative trend' in Egyptian history which started with Remphis and continued into the reigns of the pyramid-builders (both Herodotus and Diodorus define this period as the time of extreme hardship: Hdt. 2.128; Diod. Sic. 1.64.4–6).

However, who is Rhampsinitus, or Remphis? It is evident that the stem of the name resembles the Egyptian name 'Ramesses'. For those preferring to define a precise prototype of this figure the choice lies between Ramesses II¹⁷ and Ramesses III.¹⁸ In due course, A. B. Lloyd proposed that Rhampsinitus is a 'composite creation embodying the Ramesses Pharaohs of the New Kingdom, though the mesmeric figure of Ramesses II may have made a particularly important contribution'.¹⁹ This judgement is true as a matter of principle; nevertheless it skips certain details, especially coming from the comparison of Herodotus' and Hecataeus' traditions. Even with Herodotus there is a detail associated with Ramesses II but detached from the image of Rhampsinitus: the erection of two colossi before the Memphite temple of Hephaestus ascribed to Sesostris (Hdt. 2.110); and the story connected with them is reproduced in Hecataeus' narration of Sesosis (Diod. Sic. 1.58.4).²⁰ As for

16 Lloyd (n. 2, above), 52.

17 K. Sethe, *Sesostris (Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens 2.1)* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1900), 6 (partly because the figure of the king-warrior Sesostris/Sesosis that precedes the figure of Rhampsinitus/Remphis should replicate Senwosrets of Dynasty XII and not Ramesses II).

18 Most earlier Egyptologists believed that Sesostris/Sesosis is equivalent to Ramesses II (cf. critically: Sethe [n. 17, above], 4); thus it was logical to assume that Rhampsinitus/Remphis must be the only later remarkable bearer of the name "Ramesses", i. e. Ramesses III (cf. Burton [n. 3, above], 185 n. 5).

19 A. B. Lloyd, 'Herodotus' Account of Pharaonic History', *Historia* xxxvi 1988, 22–53 at 43; cf. Lloyd (n. 2, above), 52.

20 This is a story of Darius' intention to put his statue near the statues of Sesostris/Sesosis, which was prevented by a priest (or, according to Hecataeus/Diodorus, by an assembly of priests) as Darius had not yet become equal to the Egyptian warrior-king in his deeds. The erection of colossi to the west of the temple of Hephaestus by Rhampsinitus (Hdt. 2.121.1) was thought to indicate his equivalence to Ramesses II (Burton [n. 3, above], 185). However, Herodotus certainly cannot mean in this case the same monuments, as in the story of Sesostris and Darius: the emphasis laid by both Herodotus and Hecataeus on the plan of Darius makes it improbable that the monuments involved in it would be confused with some other. For the colossi of Sesostris/

Hecataeus, there is a well-discernible replica of Ramesses II in his figure of Osymandias (Ὀσυμανδύασι; Diod. Sic. 1.47–48): his name corresponds to the so-called 'solar' name of Ramesses II *Wsr-m3ʿt-Rʿ Stp.n-Rʿ* ('Mighty is the truth of Re, Chosen by Re'),²¹ and his alleged tomb is certainly the Ramesseum, the funerary temple of Ramesses II, with scenes showing his wars with the Hittites.²² Notably, the scenes in the tomb of Osymandias depicted 'the war which the king waged against those Bactrians who had revolted' (Diod. Sic. 1.48.1); and in later time the topos of contacts with Bactria reflected Ramesses II's interplay with the Hittites and was connected with the king remembered as Ramesses.²³ Thus the appearance of Osymandias in the narration of Hecataeus/Diodorus makes it clear that if the figure of Remphis was influenced by the memory of Ramesses II, it was somehow totally purified of any military character, which was completely transferred to Osymandias. Actually, the figure of Herodotus' Rhampsinitus is also peaceful; and this, incidentally, makes problematic the direct equation of this character not only with Ramesses II, but also with Ramesses III, whose important activity was the repulsion of the Sea Peoples²⁴. Thus, Rhampsinitus, or Remphis, appears at the position marked in real history by the bearers of the name 'Ramesses', therefore corresponding to the second half of the New Kingdom; but the message of this figure is somehow different from what might be expected.

An important characteristic of Rhampsinitus, or Remphis, is his chronological relation to the Trojan War. Both Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus placed him after Proteus, who is said to be contemporary with it (Hdt. 2.112–20; Diod. Sic. 1.62.1); besides, Hecataeus placed among the seven kings between Remphis and Chemmis the king Nileus (Gen. Νειλέως), 'from whom the river came to be called the Nile, though formerly called Aegyptus' (1.63.1). A fragment ascribed to

Sesoosis there is some degree of certainty that they are the colossi of Ramesses II at Mit Rahineh (Lloyd [n. 2, above], 36–37); for the colossi of Rhampsinitus there is no substantiated identification.

21 Beckerath (n. 8, above), 154–5; Burton (n. 3, above), 148.

22 Burton (n. 3, above), 148–52)

23 Cf. the *Bentresh Stela*, ascribing to Ramesses II contacts with the country of Bakhtan, i.e. probably Bactria (K.A. Kitchen, *Ramesseid Inscriptions: Historical and Biographical*, ii (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 284–7; K. Ryholt, 'Imitatio Alexandri in Egyptian Literary Tradition', in T. Whitmarsh & S. Thomson (edd.), *The Romance between Greece and the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2013), 66–8), and a statement by Tacitus ascribing to the king Rhamses the possession of the Bactrians, among other lands and peoples (Tac. *Ann.* 2.60; B. Kelly, 'Tacitus, Germanicus and the Kings of Egypt', *CQ*² 1x 2010, 221–37; Ryholt (*op. cit.*), 63–4.

24 There is a reason to believe that the wars against the Sea Peoples were reflected in Manetho's story about the king Amenophis and his son Sethos-Ramesses and their struggle with Egyptian lepers allied with Hyksos (Manetho, fr. 54 Waddell): I.A. Ladynin & A.A. Nemirovsky, 'K evoluzii vospriatia amarnskih zarey i Horemheba v ideologicheskoy i istoricheskoy traditsii drevnego Egipta' (On the Evolution of the Attitude Towards the Amarna Kings and Horemheb in the Ideological and Historical Tradition of Ancient Egypt) in A.A. Nemirovsky & O.I. Pavlova (edd.), *Drevniy Vostok: Obshchnost' i svoeobrazie kulturnyh traditsiy (Ancient Orient: Unity and Diversity of Cultural Traditions)* (Moscow: Institute for Oriental Research, 2001), 92–9.

Eratosthenes and reinterpreting the sequence of Egyptian ('Theban') kings (*FGrH* 610 F 1)²⁵ lists as the thirty-eighth among them 'Thuoro, or the Nile' (Θουροῦ ἥτοι Νεῖλος) preceded by 'Siphthas' (Σιφθᾶς). At the same time Manetho put 'Thuoris' at the very end of Dynasty XIX (Manetho, frs. 55–6 Waddell: Θούορις, *Thuoris*), and he must be equivalent to the historical queen Tawosret, who was really preceded by the king Saptah.²⁶ Manetho says that in the reign of Thuoris Troy was captured; so the equivalence of the king 'Nile' with Thuoris again brings the reign of Remphis quite close to the Trojan War. Historically this event must have been connected with a vast migration, which affected Egypt with the advent of the so-called Sea Peoples;²⁷ and the kings Sethnakhte and Ramesses III, who fought its 'second wave', are conflated in the Manethonian tradition in a single figure of 'Sethos (and) Ramesses' (Manetho, fr. 54 Waddell = Joseph. *Ap.* 1.245: Σέθων τὸν καὶ Ῥαμεσσήν) or simply 'Rampses' (1.251: Ῥάμψης) or 'Ramesses' (Manetho, fr. 55.4 Waddell: Ῥαμεσσής), placed in the king-list one generation before Thuoris (see note 24). This is quite similar to the position of Remphis before Nileus in Hecataeus' sequence of kings; and this similarity should, if anything, reinforce the idea that Rhampsinitus/Remphis is equivalent to Ramesses III. Anyway, the proximity to the Trojan War defines perfectly well the position of this figure not just in relative but also in absolute chronology: the border of the thirteenth and twelfth centuries.²⁸

The aftermath of the pyramid-builders is defined more neatly by Hecataeus/Diodorus: in this tradition their successor is Bocchoris (Βόκχορις; Diod. Sic. 1.65.1), who is characterised as both arrogant and wise and, in another fragment, as the fourth greatest legislator of Egypt (1.79, 94.5).²⁹ This tradition says that his reign was followed by the attack of Ethiopians under the king Sabaco (Σαβάκων; the historical king Shabaka of Napata, founder of Dynasty XXV) only 'much later' (1.65.2: πολλοῖς δ' ὕστερον χρόνοις); however, Manetho states that Bocchoris was burned by Sabaco (frs. 66–7 Waddell), and the authentic data prove, at least, the immediate proximity of their reigns. According to Herodotus, the Ethiopian advance closely followed the time of the pyramid-builders: Mycerinus was succeeded by Asychis (acc. Ἄσυχιν; Hdt. 2.136), and his successor Anysis (acc. Ἄνυσιν) faced the attack on Egypt by Sabaco (acc. Σαβακῶν; 2.137). There is no controversy on the identity of Bocchoris: he is believed to correspond to the historical king of this name (*B3k-n-rn.f*) who reigned before the Nubian conquest of

25 A. Möller, 'Epoch-making Eratosthenes', *GRBS* xlv 2005, 245–60 at 258–9.

26 K. A. Kitchen, 'Tausret', in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (n. 13, above), vi. 244–5.

27 *C.A.H.*² iii. 2 (1975), 363–71.

28 Nearly the same figure is indicated in the calculation of Dicaearchus of Messana as quoted by Apollonius of Rhodes: 'From Sesonchosis to the kingship of Nilus was 2,500 years, <from the kingship of Nilus to the destruction of Ilium was 7 years>, from the capture of Ilium to the first Olympiad was 436 years, altogether 2,943 years (schol. *Ap. Rhod.* 4.276 = Dicaearchus, fr. 59 Fortenbaugh: γίνεται δὲ ἀπὸ Σεσογγώσεως ἐπὶ τὴν Νεῖλου βασιλείαν ἔτη βφ', <ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς Νεῖλου βασιλείας ἐπὶ τὴν Ἰλίου ἄλωσιν ζ>, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς Ἰλίου ἄλώσεως ἐπὶ τὴν α' Ὀλυμπιάδα υλζ', ὁμοῦ βλμγ'). If the year of the first Olympiad is 776/5, the kingship of Nilus must be c. 1219–1212.

29 A. Moret, *De Bocchori rege* (Paris: Leroux, 1903); Burton (n. 3, above), 194, 231–2.