



EGYPT I. PERSIANS IN EGYPT IN THE ACHAEMENID PERIOD

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i. Persians in Egypt in the Achaemenid period

The last pharaoh of the Twenty-Sixth dynasty, Psamtik (Psammetichus) III, was defeated by Cambyses II (q.v.; 530-22 B.C.E.) in the battle of Pelusium in the eastern Nile delta in 525 B.C.E.; Egypt was then joined with Cyprus and Phoenicia in the sixth satrapy of the Achaemenid empire (Cook, p. 214; Bresciani, *Camb. Hist. Iran*, pp. 502-03; Briant, 1987; idem, 1992, p. 67). The “first Persian domination” over Egypt (or Twenty-Seventh dynasty) ended around 402 B.C.E. After an interval of independence, during which three indigenous dynasties reigned (the Twenty-Eighth, Twenty-Ninth, and Thirtieth; for the probable last ruler, Khababash, see Ritner; cf. Bresciani, 1990, pp. 637-41), Artaxerxes III (q.v.; 359-38 B.C.E.) reconquered the Nile valley for a brief period (342-32 B.C.E.), usually called the “second Persian domination.”

The first Persian domination. Cambyses led three unsuccessful military campaigns in Africa: against Carthage, the oases of the Libyan desert, and Nubia. He remained in Egypt until 522 B.C.E. and died on the way back to Persia. In contrast to the hostile tradition transmitted by Herodotus (3.64-66) and Diodorus Siculus (1.95), who described Cambyses’ conduct in Egypt as mad, ungodly, and cruel, contemporary Egyptian documents offer a different



perspective on this sovereign's "atrocities" (Posener, pp. 171 ff.; Klasens; Bresciani, *Camb. Hist. Iran*, pp. 504-05), even though violence and abuses perpetrated by the occupation troops can be taken for granted. Herodotus may have drawn on an indigenous tradition that reflected the Egyptian clergy's resentment of Cambyses' decree (known from a text in Demotic script on the back of papyrus no. 215 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris) curtailing royal grants made to Egyptian temples under Amasis (Bresciani, 1981).

In order to regain the support of the powerful priestly class, Darius I (522-486 B.C.E.) revoked Cambyses' decree. Diodorus (3.89 ff.) reported that Darius was the sixth and last lawmaker for Egypt; according to Demotic papyrus no. 215, in the third year of his reign he ordered his satrap in Egypt, known in Greek as Ariandes, to bring together wise men among the soldiers, priests, and scribes, in order to codify the legal system that had been in use until the year 44 of Amasis (ca. 526 B.C.E.). The laws were to be transcribed on papyrus in both Demotic and Aramaic, so that the satraps and their officials, mainly Persians and Babylonians, would have a legal guide in both the official language of the empire and the language of local administration (Bresciani, 1958, pp. 153-55). To facilitate commerce, Darius built a navigable waterway from the Nile to the Red Sea (from Bubastis [modern Zağāzīq] through the Wādī Ṭūmelāt and the lakes Boḥayrat al-Temsāḥ and Boḥayrat al-Morra); it was marked along the way by four great bilingual stelae, the so-called "canal stelae," inscribed in both hieroglyphics and cuneiform scripts (Posener, pp. 48-87).

In 1972 archeological excavations at Susa brought to light a stone statue of Darius I, standing and wearing a sumptuous Persian garment; it is inscribed in cuneiform (in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian) and in hieroglyphics (Stronach; Yoyotte; cf. Bresciani, 1990, pp. 534-36). This sculpture confirms the use of bilingualism as a political tool and Darius' recognition of the importance of Egypt and its culture.

Shortly before 486 B.C.E., the year of Darius' death, there were disorders in Egypt, perhaps a revolt of the type that had occurred under Ariandes; this hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the fact that Xerxes I (486-64 B.C.E) appointed his brother Achaemenes (q.v.) satrap of Egypt (Herodotus 7.7). Another, more serious and extensive revolt took place in about 460 B.C.E. under Artaxerxes I (q.v.; 464-24 B.C.E.). It was led by the Libyan Inarus, son of Psammetichus (Thucydides 1.104), who asked for help from Athens; a fleet of 200 ships sailed up the Nile as far as the ancient citadel of Memphis, two thirds of which was occupied by the invaders. Achaemenes was killed in the course



of the battle of Papremis in the western Delta. Herodotus, who traveled in Egypt a few years later, visited Papremis and studied the remains of the fallen, confirming his belief that the Egyptians, who usually went bareheaded in the sun, had stronger skulls, whereas the Persians, who covered their heads, had more fragile ones (3.12). Memphis was recaptured by Megabyzus, satrap of Syria, who had been sent to Egypt. The revolt ended with the capture and execution of Inarus in 454 B.C.E, and the rest of Artaxerxes' reign over the Egyptian province was uneventful; the satrap Aršāma (q.v.; Arsames), an Achaemenid prince, remained in office during the reign of Darius II (424-04 B.C.E.; Lemaire).

During the first Persian domination Egypt was governed from Memphis by a satrap (transcribed in Demotic as *ḥštrpn*) representing the Achaemenid emperor. His chancery was modeled closely on the one in Susa; many officials and scribes were employed there, and documents were issued in both Demotic and Aramaic (see Davies and Finkelstein, pp. 444-45; Bresciani, *Camb. Hist. Iran*; see [DOCUMENTS ii](#)). The pre-existing administrative and judicial division of the country into large districts was retained. In this and other areas the Persian government appears not to have introduced major changes; at least at first, it simply replaced indigenous officials with its own mainly Persian and Babylonian personnel. Each district was ruled by a governor (called *fratarak* in Egyptian Aramaic documents) assisted by many "scribes of the province"; each city or small center had a lower-ranking governor subordinate to the *fratarak*. The Persian governor of Coptos, Atiyawahy, and his brother Ariyawrata left several hieroglyphic inscriptions in the Wādī Ḥammāmāt quarries; those of the former (dated between 486 and 473 B.C.E.) include the title "sarīs of Persia" in transcription, while those of his brother (active between 461 and 449 B.C.E.) include the same title translated by two equivalent Egyptian expressions ("commander of Persia" and "superior of Persia"), thus demonstrating the progressive influence of the ruled over the rulers (Bresciani, 1958, p. 139 and n. 39; Briant, 1988, pp. 166-67).

The state treasury ("of the king") was at Memphis under the patronage of the god Ptah. Many treasurers and scribes were employed both there and in the districts; officials and mercenaries employed by the Persian government were paid from the provincial treasuries ("houses of the king"). In the indigenous economy the traditional weight standard continued to be used as the unit of value. In Egyptian Aramaic documents monetary value was calculated in *kerashin*, shekels, and *hallurin*, while minted silver coins, which Herodotus



claimed to have seen in circulation (4.166), rivaled Darius' gold darics in purity. Larger sums were calculated according to "the king's weight," the official standard. The satrap was also in charge of the central fiscal administration, while tax and tribute in the provinces were collected and transmitted to the center mainly by indigenous officials (Bresciani, 1989; Descat, p. 86).

The satrap also appointed officials to administer his personal holdings in Egypt. There is an important archive of business letters, written in Aramaic on leather between 411 and 408 B.C.E., about Aršama's extensive property in Upper Egypt and the western Delta, including the area of Papremis, which abounded in vineyards; these holdings and the income they brought were apparently entrusted to an Egyptian overseer (Driver).

Egyptian and Egyptian Aramaic documents provide knowledge of Persian military organization and deployment of Egyptian garrisons and military colonies in Achaemenid Egypt, both along the frontiers (Daphne, Marea, Elephantine) and at various points within the country. The foreign contingents, which reflected the multiethnic character of the Achaemenid empire, were supported by strong indigenous units. A "general" by the name of Amasis left two stelae in Memphis, on one of which he reported that he had inspired respect for the bull Apis "in the heart of the people and also of the foreigners from every country who were in Egypt." Beside soldiers there were also merchants of every ethnic origin in Achaemenid Egypt (for Aramaic documents on sea trade and customs in the year 475 B.C.E., see Porten and Yardeni, C3.7).

The great king's policy toward the Egyptian temple and priests was a crucial issue. In contrast to Cambyses, who incurred the hatred of the clergy, Darius I was tolerant and generous; a vast, beautifully preserved temple that he built for Amon of Hibis (Bresciani, 1958, pp. 177-88) still stands in Kārja (Kārga) oasis in Upper Egypt. A small stele from Fayyūm, now in the Ägyptologisches Museum, Berlin (no. 7493), was dedicated to Darius I, portrayed as the Egyptian falcon god Horus. From the statue (Museo del Vaticano, no. 158) of Udjhorresne (archiater of Amasis, Cambyses, and Darius I; Posener, no. 1; Bresciani, 1990, pp. 560-66) it is known that Darius ordered restoration work in the "house of life" in the temple of Neith at Sais.

The Egyptian environment influenced foreign religion and artistic style, as can be seen in the stelae and sarcophagi of Semites who settled in Egypt. A certain



number of objects produced by Persian artists in Egypt have been found, and many objects of purely Achaemenid workmanship were certainly in circulation, for example, gold bracelets and necklaces, which high Egyptian officials may well have received as gifts from the great king as rewards for fidelity and collaboration. There are such examples in the jewelry on statues wearing “Persian garments” and representing people like Udjahorresne and Ptahhotep, treasurer of Ptah in Memphis (see the basalt statue in The Brooklyn Museum, no 57.853**; Bresciani, 1958, pp. 178-82).

Among non-Egyptian monuments of Achaemenid Egypt is a limestone funerary relief of a high official (perhaps a satrap) from Mit Rahīna (Memphis; Berlin, Ägyptologisches Museum, no. 23721; Parlasca, p. 76, table 5/1).

The second Persian domination. It is not known who served as satrap after Artaxerxes III, but under Darius III (336-31 B.C.E.) there was Sabaces, who fought and died at Issus and was succeeded by Mazaces. Egyptians also fought at Issus, for example, the nobleman Somtutefnekhet of Hera-cleopolis, who described on the “Naples stele” (Naples Museum N. 1035) how he escaped during the battle against the Greeks and how Arsaphes, the god of his city, protected him and allowed him to return home.

In 332 B.C.E. Mazaces handed over the country to Alexander the Great (q.v.) without a fight. The Achaemenid empire had ended, and for a while Egypt was a satrapy in Alexander’s empire. Later the Ptolemys and the Romans successively ruled the Nile valley (see iii, below).

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