The Egyptian Attitude to the Persians

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The question that I want to address in the present paper is this: what exactly does our evidence tell us about the attitude of the Egyptians to their Persian conquerors? Certainly there was armed opposition to them on a number of occasions, but were these rebellions simply opportunistic reactions to foreign occupation which would have arisen, irrespective of who the foreigners were, or was there something specific to the Persian way of doing things which gave rise to these events? I shall begin with the Second Persian Domination since it presents an altogether clearer picture than our evidence from the First.¹

The Second Persian Domination

One could characterize the Second Persian Domination of Egypt as a universally happy affair. Diodorus Siculus describes the reconquest of the country by Artaxerxes III in the following bleak terms:

Artaxerxes, after taking over the whole of Egypt and pulling down the walls of the most important cities, plundered the temples and thereby gathered together a huge quantity of silver and gold, and he also carried off the documentation from the ancient temples, which Bagoas subsequently returned to the priests of the Egyptians on payment of a huge ransom. When he had rewarded the Greeks who had accompanied him on the campaign with lavish gifts, each according to merit, he dismissed them to their native countries. Having installed Pherendates as satrap of Egypt, he returned with his forces to Babylon, taking with him many possessions and booty and having won great glory by his successes (16. 51. 2–3).

This is hardly a policy of conciliation! Some elements in this description were to be expected and would probably not have excited much ire on the part of the Egyptians. The appointment of a Persian satrap, bringing the country back into the Persian administrative system, would not, in itself, have appeared particularly offensive, and many, if not all, Egyptian administrators would quickly have come to terms with it. Admittedly, known cases of such collaboration amount to one instance only, i.e. Somtutefnakht, a member of an elite family of the city of Herakleopolis Magna in Middle Egypt, which was a major player in Late Period Egypt (Lichtheim 1980: 41–44), but he cannot have been unique. It is also well-nigh certain, though not explicitly stated anywhere, that Egyptian forces were present in the Persian army at the Battle of Issus (Arrian, Anabasis, 2.11.8; Curtius, 3.11.9), and, overall, the Persian approach to governing Egypt, insofar as it can be detected in the meagre evidence available, would have been to work with the local system, as far as possible, but impose at the top the satrapal structure whose major function was to dispatch to the Great King the maximum economic return from the province (Meadows 2005). It is probable that this economic

preoccupation is reflected by the fact that the Second Domination provides some of our earliest examples of coinage minted in Egypt in the form of issues bearing the name of Artaxerxes in demotic as well as the names of satraps in Aramaic (Daumas 1977; Meadows 2005: 200, 206).

The destruction of city walls is altogether less benign. This could hardly fail to impact negatively on the security of the cities affected and would also have been a severe blow to local pride for which the image of the greatness of the city was of cardinal importance. However, this act would have paled into insignificance compared with the offence created by the plundering of the country by the victorious army and, above all, by the ravaging of the temples not only for their wealth but also for their sacred writings which had no intrinsic value for the Persians. However, their removal could be guaranteed to cause the maximum of indignation in Egyptian circles and must have been calculated to be the sternest and most ruthless of warnings of what happened when Egyptians did not toe the Persian line. Indeed, these actions made a lasting impression on Egyptian historical consciousness, and references to the Persians’ removal of sacred objects and images occur in several Ptolemaic texts in which their recovery becomes a marker of a king who restores to Egypt not only the possessions of the gods but also Egypt’s national pride (Winnicki 1994; Austin 2006: 365).

Later Classical sources develop the anti-Artaxerxes tradition further. For Plutarch (De Iside 11 (355C)) he is the most ‘savage’ (ōmos) and most fearful of Egyptian kings who killed many Egyptians and, in the end, even butchered the Apis bull and feasted on the proceeds with his friends, gaining the nickname ‘Knife’. Later in the same text (31[363C]) Plutarch informs us that he was the most hated of the Persian kings and was identified with the donkey, which was in Egyptian eyes a Typhonic beast, i.e. it was connected with Seth, the god particularly associated with disorder and chaos. Aelian (Varia Historia 10.28) repeats the Apis bull tradition but reports a modified version of the donkey connection according to which Ochus went so far as to divinize the animal in order to cause the Egyptians as much distress as possible. It is evident that the comments on the Apis bull owe much to assimilation of the Artaxerxes tradition to the earlier claims of Cambyses’ maltreatment of this sacred animal (see below). Indeed, respect for this sacred animal quickly became the litmus test of the willingness of foreign rulers to make an accommodation with the Egyptians, and it is no coincidence that Curtius emphasizes (4.7.5) the importance of Alexander the Great’s respect for Egyptian traditions, and that Arrian (3.1.4) makes a point of mentioning that he sacrificed to the Apis bull. Whatever the truth of Artaxerxes’ attitude to Egyptian religion, the important point for us is the value of the tradition in revealing Egyptian attitudes to the founder of the last Persian dynasty.

Classical sources leave us in no doubt that the negative image of Artaxerxes’ activities in Egypt applies in general to the character of Persian rule at this time. Curtius tells us that it was characterized by harshness, lack of respect for the temples, greed, and arrogance (4.7.1), and this scenario is confirmed by the fact that Alexander the Great was able to take the country not only without a fight but with the complete acquiescence of the local population.

We must now turn to Egyptian documentation – such as it is – to determine what that has to say about the Persian occupation. The earliest available is the Satrap Stele dating from Regnal 7 year of Alexander II [IV of Macedon] (311 BC) which makes particularly interesting reading (Simpson 2003: 392–97). In the first place, its comments on Artaxerxes square very well with Classical material; for it is now generally accepted that the Persian ruler mentioned in this text is not Xerxes, as earlier literature claimed,
but none other than Artaxerxes III (Simpson 2003: 395, n.7). Its statements reflect unequivocal hostility:

Then did His Majesty (i.e. Ptolemy) say to those who were beside him: ‘This marshland, inform me (about it)!’ They said before His Majesty: ‘As for the northern marshland, which is called “The Land of Wadjet”, it previously belonged to the gods of Pe and Dep, before the enemy Artaxerxes (Hōryṣ) annulled it. He did not make offerings from it to the gods of Pe and Dep’ (ll. 8–9).

Horus, son of Isis, son of Osiris, ruler of rulers, the definitive Upper Egyptian King, the definitive Lower Egyptian King, the champion of his father, Lord of Pe, foremost of the gods who came into existence afterwards, who has no king subsequent to him, expelled the enemy Artaxerxes even from his palace together with his eldest son; so it is perceived in Sais of Neith on this day beside the God’s Mother (ll. 10–11).

Here Artaxerxes is called ‘the enemy’ (ḥfṯy), a word that is very heavily loaded in an Egyptian context since it would immediately suggest assimilation to Seth. That such a figure should ultimately be punished with expulsion by the gods was only to be expected, and this punishment is almost certainly to be identified with the short-lived rebellion of Khababash, which features prominently in this text. Artaxerxes’ aggressive refusal to respect Egyptian gods is very much in line with Diodorus’ comments.

The so-called Demotic Chronicle also has comments to make on the Second Domination. Our one manuscript of this fragmentary and obscure text was written in the early Ptolemaic Period and consists of a series of oracles/prophesies and interpretations which are closely linked to the history of Egypt from the end of the First Domination to the beginning of the Ptolemaic Period — and even beyond (Spiegelberg 1914; Johnson 1974; Devauchelle 1995; Felber 2002). Columns IV and V contain clear references to the Second Domination in which negative judgements are unequivocal. The period is associated with lamentation, and it is foretold that the Persians will cause misfortune to the Egyptians and deprive them of their houses. They are also compared to wild animals, and it is foretold that they will be driven out of Egypt by god, i.e. because of their iniquities. These comments are strikingly different from those on the First Domination. As in the case of the Second Domination the rulers of that period are described as nṯ nṯswt, ‘those of the foreign (or desert) lands’, a term which is intrinsically derogatory to Egyptians, but the text does not single out the Persians of that period as particularly heinous. They are simply Asians, and they are mentioned in this text pre-eminently as a dating point to which other events can be related. It is surely significant that the writer/s felt no compulsion to make the kind of negative comments on them that were made of their fourth-century successors.

To summarize: the attitude to the Persians of the Second Domination comes through in our sources as one of extreme hostility, but it is hostility motivated pre-eminently by particular types of behaviour. Faced with such behaviour on the part of the Persians, the Egyptians seem to have been very happy to accept the rule of Alexander who showed himself to be infinitely more accommodating to their susceptibilities. We must, however, be careful not to assume that this situation was simply a rerun of the First Domination. Troubles there certainly were during that period, but their motivation may well have had causes other than the behaviour of the Persians themselves.

The First Persian Domination

The obvious starting point is the hieroglyphic texts on the naophorous statue of Udjahorresnet which was set up on the temple of Neith at Sais, probably about 519
The Great King of All Foreign Lands, Cambyses, came to Egypt, the foreigners of all foreign lands being with him. In its entirety did he gain mastery of this land, they setting themselves down therein. He was the Great Ruler of Egypt, and the Great Chief of All Foreign Lands, His Majesty handing over to me the office of Chief Physician, having caused me to be beside him as a Companion and Controller of the Palace when I had made his royal titulary in his name of King of Upper and Lower Egypt Mesutire \(\text{sc. Offspring of Re}\) . . . I made supplication in the presence of the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Cambyses, concerning all the foreigners who had settled in the temple of Neith to drive them therefrom so as to cause the temple of Neith to be in all its beneficial powers, as in its primal condition, so that His Majesty commanded that all the foreigners \{who\} had settled in the temple of Neith be expelled, that all their houses be demolished and all their abominations which were in this temple . . . and His Majesty commanded that the temple of Neith be purified, and that all its people be restored to it . . . the priesthood of the temple. His Majesty commanded that offerings should be given to Neith, the Great One, the Mother of the God, and to the great gods who are in Sais as it was earlier. His Majesty commanded that all their festivals should be \{organized\}, and their feasts of manifestation, as was done earlier. This did His Majesty do because I had caused His Majesty to recognize the greatness of Sais. It is the city of all gods who shall remain on their thrones therein for ever . . . . The King of Upper and Lower Egypt Cambyses came to Sais. His Majesty betook himself to the temple of Neith and touched the ground before her very great Majesty even as every king had done. He made a great offering of all good things to Neith the Great One, the Mother of the God, and the great gods who are in Sais even as every excellent king had done. This His Majesty did because I had caused him to know the greatness of Her Majesty; for she is the mother of Re himself . . . . His Majesty completed all that is beneficial in the temple of Neith, establishing the libation for the Lord of Eternity in the temple of Neith even as every king did earlier. This did His Majesty do because I had caused him to recognize how everything beneficial had been fulfilled in this temple by every king because of the greatness of this temple; it is the place of all the gods who live eternally (ll. 11–30).

This text begins with a brief reference to the invasion using terminology that emphasizes that Cambyses is a foreign conqueror, but Udjahorresnet’s description of what subsequently happened is even more interesting in that it illustrates how effectively the social armour of elites can smooth their way even in the most difficult of circumstances. After holding high office under native Egyptian rulers Udjahorresnet is able to slide neatly into similar lofty positions and preserve important elements of his status under the new regime that guarantee close proximity to the king and eminence at court. He also informs us that he played a critical role in customizing Cambyses for his role as Pharaoh by drawing up for him an Egyptian royal titulary, which particularly emphasizes his legitimacy through the element ‘Offspring of Re’. His eminent position, giving immediate access to the king, then enabled him to purify the temple of Neith of foreign occupation, though it is not entirely clear whether this occupation was connected with the Persian conquest or not, and then the king is described at some length as being punctilious in observances within the temple in which activities Cambyses is brought explicitly into line with earlier kings. This account of Cambyses’ piety is rather lengthy and looks like a covert justification for Udjahorresnet’s close collaboration with Cambyses since it could be argued that any ruler who carried out to the letter the Pharaonic agenda automatically became a legitimate king who was entitled to receive the whole-hearted support of his subjects.
It has been pointed out *ad nauseam* that this view of Cambyses’ activities in Egypt is totally at variance with that presented by Herodotus and developed with ever increasing salacious detail by later Classical writers (Lloyd 1988, 1994; Cruz-Uribe 2003; Serrano Delgado 2004; Venticinque 2006). There is no need to rehearse the minutiae here. It is sufficient to reiterate that the obvious starting point for this negative tradition is priestly outrage in certain quarters at Cambyses’ documented interference with temple privilege, which led to a speedy demonization of a Persian ruler who was probably more concerned with putting his Egyptian house in order than with committing acts of gratuitous sacrilege. If this interpretation is correct, we can treat the pejorative tradition as evidence that at least in some priestly circles, i.e. those particularly affected by Cambyses’ measures, a negative view of at least one Persian king was developed, and we can assume that any such tradition would be picked up and developed with enthusiasm by Greeks prepared to listen.

Udjahorresnet was able to maintain this privileged position into the reign of Darius:

> The Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Darius, may he live for ever, commanded me to return to Egypt, while His Majesty was in Elam when he was Great Chief of All Foreign Lands and Great Ruler of Egypt, in order to restore the office of the House of Life (44) . . . after the ruin.

> As the Lord of the Two Lands had commanded, the foreigners brought me from land to land and caused me to reach Egypt. In accordance with that which His Majesty had commanded me did I act, having provided them with all their students who were the sons of men of quality, without there being children of people of low rank amongst them. Under the direction of every scholar did I place them . . . all their works. His Majesty commanded that there be given to them every good thing in order that they might do all their works. With all their beneficial things did I equip them, and with all their requirements as indicated in the writings as it had been before. The reason why His Majesty did this was because he knew the usefulness of this craft for causing the sick to live and in order to cause to endure the names of all the gods, their temples, their offerings, and the conduct of their festivals for ever (ll. 43–5).

The historical background to this passage is not made absolutely clear in the wording of the text, but the most reasonable interpretation is that Udjahorresnet continued to enjoy close proximity to the Great King and was present in Elam with Darius in his capacity as a physician. Doubtless at the instigation of Udjahorresnet Darius is presented as being directly concerned with the reestablishment of the House of Life at Sais. The reasons given for the interest of the king are concern for the medical profession and for the continuance of the divine cult, though whether this was genuinely the case or simply the line which the self-serving Egyptian wished to present we can never know, but it is perfectly feasible that hard-headed *Realpolitik* is the ultimate motivation, the great reorganizer of the Persian Empire prudently ensuring that the priesthood and devotees of a particularly important Late Period temple have reason to be grateful to him. However that may be, given such a positive attitude to his

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2 Caution is similarly required in reading too much into the appearance of Darius in the *Edfu Donation Text* (Meeks 1972; Manning 2003: Appendix 1). Manning, following Meeks, rightly insists: ‘The royal ritual of “donation” was performed at the beginning of a reign as a sign of renewal ... Subsequent pharaohs merely “reiterate” a donation of a previous king’ (76–77), i.e., in practice, Darius may not have given the temple anything which it did not already possess.
native cult centre, Udjahorresnet has no compunction in applying to Darius the standard terminology used of a legitimate Egyptian king.

This picture of successful collaboration is paralleled in other less well-known Egyptian texts. A particularly clear picture is provided by Khnumibre who left a series of inscriptions in the Wadi Hammamat quarries in the Eastern Desert that were much exploited in the early Persian Period (Posener 1936: 88–116). His official career started in the reign of Amasis, but he, like Udjahorresnet, whom he must have known, continued to flourish into the reign of Darius where he features particularly as Minister of Works, like his father before him, but he also bears military titles. The stela of Ahmose (Louvre 359 – Posener 1936: 41–46), which certainly dates to the Persian Period and possibly to the reign of Darius, presents us with the picture of a high-ranking Egyptian whose father had been a general and who manages to maintain his position under the new regime and even perhaps improve it. He describes himself as a Sole Companion, an age-old ranking title placing its holder close to the centre of administration, and he was also a general and later the Egyptian equivalent of a Field Marshal. His authority was clearly very wide-ranging, and he may well have exercised it over Persian officials. If we then shift our attention to late fifth-century Aramaic documentation from Egypt, we find Nakhthor (Nehtihur in the original) as second man in the satrapy with powers that take him even to Babylon and Susa (Driver 1954).

The hieroglyphic texts on the trilingual canal inscriptions of Darius I show the Egyptians at their most accommodating to a Persian king (Posener 1936: 48–87; Lloyd 2007: 99–107). The best preserved hieroglyphic text, though still badly damaged, is that from Tell el-Maskhuta (fig. 1) the beginning of which translates as follows:

Fig. 1
Tell el-Maskhuta Stele, hieroglyphic version
(Posener 1936: pl. IV).
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... born of Neith, mistress of Sais, image of Re, he whom he [sc. Re] placed on the throne to complete that which he had begun ... of all that which the sun’s disc encircled, when he was [still] in the womb and had not come forth on earth, because she [sc. Neith] knew that he was her son, bequeathing to him ... her hand carrying the bow before her to cast down his enemies every day as she did for her son Re, that (?) he might be powerful ... his enemies in all lands, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands, Darius, may he live for ever, the Great One, the King of Kings, the ... [son of Hystaspes, the Achaemenid, the Great One. He is her valiant son ... [l. 1–5].

The remainder of the text is too badly damaged for a consecutive translation to be possible, but the run of its narrative is clear, presenting us with the spectacle of Darius in his palace in Persia discussing the possibility of setting up a water link with Egypt to facilitate the transit of goods from Egypt to Persia and then carrying the project out.

The important point to grasp here is that Darius is being treated in every respect like a legitimate Egyptian Pharaoh. The physical structure of the monument, the format of the narrative and the images are virtually identical with those which we should expect to be applied in the case of a native Egyptian Pharaoh with the exception of the list of captive nations which is probably there under Achaemenid influence. Despite all this, we should beware of assuming that the text reflects a whole-hearted endorsement of Darius as an Egyptian king for the simple reason that the only formulation of kingship available in Egyptian ideology was that of the king as Pharaoh, irrespective of national origin.

It belongs in the same order of things that the cartouche of Darius should feature in the temple of Hibis in the Kharga Oasis (Cruz-Uribe 1988; Lloyd 2007: 107–10). It is often claimed that this phenomenon indicates that Darius built it, implying a direct concern for this structure, but such a view goes far beyond the evidence. In the first place, it is now known that the temple was begun during the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, and there is no indication whatsoever that any building work was carried out in the time of Darius. More serious still is the point that the presence of the cartouche of any king on a monument cannot be taken as evidence of the direct involvement of that ruler because all it need mean is that there was some activity, large or minuscule, in the building during the time of that ruler who may have known nothing whatsoever about it.

We may be tempted to regard other evidence as reflecting that this great ruler took a benign view towards his Egyptian subjects. There is a claim in Polyaeus, for what it is worth, that Darius offered a reward of 100 gold talents for the discovery of an Apis bull (7.1.17), a claim highlighting a concern for the most important of Egypt’s sacred animals which became a major criterion in defining whether a foreign ruler is good or a bad. If this tradition is correct, it need mean no more than that Darius recognized the political importance of such an act and considered it prudent to play the Egyptian game, and one would want to make the same point about the extant evidence of other positive actions in relation to Egyptian cults. Similarly, we can interpret his interest in the codification of Egyptian law less as a concern for the well being of the Egyptians than a recognition that a well-organized legal system would facilitate the running of the province. Indeed, whatever the intrinsic merits of reform, we may well wonder whether the Egyptian reaction was much more likely to have been one of irritation or even downright resentment at foreigners meddling with time-hallowed Egyptian ways of doing things.

However, whatever the motives behind all this, we must concede that some of these activities could have appeared to the Egyptians in a positive light and that it would, therefore, be natural for them to regard Darius as a benign figure, at least most of the
time. A shrine door in the British Museum (fig. 2) points in this direction. Here we have a representation of Darius as Pharaoh offering to a seated figure of Anubis with Isis behind him (Curtis and Tallis 2005: 173, 266). Such scenes are common at other periods of Egyptian history but are extremely rare for the Persian Period. However, the most remarkable text is a diminutive stone stela (Berlin 7493) from the Fayyum that shows an Egyptian named Pediusierpre worshipping a gigantic hawk which is described as 'the Good God, Lord of the Two Lands, Darius' (Burchardt 1911: 71–72 – see fig. 3). The point to emphasize here is that this is not a high-status or official monument but a badly executed piece with a hieroglyphic text that is full of errors. We are not, therefore,
dealing with an official document whose creators were simply going through the formal motions of saying what they ought to say. Here Darius is being treated by a relatively low-ranking Egyptian as a deity to which an appeal can be made for life. Since the owner of the stela is described as imāw, lit. ‘revered’, he may be conceived of as being dead and asking for blessings beyond the grave, and that possibility is increased by the fact that such monuments are much more likely to be funerary than anything else. However, what is indisputable is that it is extremely unusual for any king to feature in such a context rather than a relevant god of the pantheon. There is no escaping the fact that, in this case, Darius is being treated by a relatively humble worshipper as the equivalent of a god such as Osiris and, therefore, as a beneficent being. Whether he is to be regarded as a living king or as a deified deceased monarch is debatable, though the latter is more probable, but, either way, the monument is an extraordinary indication of a genuinely positive attitude by at least one Egyptian towards this Persian king.

All this evidence is enough to demonstrate that Egyptians were prepared to take a positive view of Darius on the basis of actions that could be regarded as helpful and constructive in the Egyptian context, whatever his underlying motives might have been. Nevertheless, there are indications that Darius bought into Egyptian ideology no more than he had to and that political expediency was the driving factor. We can point to two monuments that nurture these suspicions. The first is the Old Persian canal text that is recoverable in large measure from the Kabret stèle (Ménant 1887; Kent 1950: 146–47) and translates as follows:

Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King of Countries, king in this great earth, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian.

A great god is Ahuramazda who created yonder sky, who created this earth, who created man, who created happiness for men, who made Darius king, who gave Darius the king this great kingdom, possessed of good horses and of good men.
I am Darius, Great King, King of Kings, king of provinces of all kinds of people, king in the great earth, far and wide, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian.

Darius the King says, ‘I am a Persian; from Persia I seized Egypt; I gave order to dig this canal from a river named Nile which flows in Egypt, to the sea which goes from Persia. Afterwards this canal was dug thus as I had ordered, and ships went from Egypt through this canal to Persia thus as was my desire.’

This is not in any sense a translation of the hieroglyphic Egyptian text but its Achaemenid equivalent with full Achaemenid features. In an earlier study I described the tone as ‘one of national pride and imperial arrogance, an attitude typical of Achaemenid texts’ (2007: 106), and I have seen no reason since writing these words to alter my opinion. The Egyptian and Persian agendas are running in parallel, but that of the Persians is unequivocally Persian. There is a further point worth emphasising: in this text there is no indication that the ships in question would be used to channel the good things of Egypt to Persia whereas that point is explicitly made in the hieroglyphic text. It is not too fanciful to argue that this aspect of the project rankled with the Egyptians and that the exploitative ethos of Persian policy was a matter of resentment. Indeed, there are good grounds for suspecting that such economic pressure could have become more acute with time. It is known that Darius introduced a systematic taxation regime into the satrapal system which bore particularly heavily on Egypt (Briant 2002: 391; Meadows 2005: 183); indeed, in Herodotus’ account of this system (3.89–95) only the ninth satrapy (Babylonia and Assyria) paid more; and finally Diodorus Siculus (1, 46, 4) comments on the serious effect of Persian exactions on Egypt to meet building expenses in Persepolis, Susa, and Media, and, whilst we must make allowance for the possibility of exaggeration generated by Persian actions during the Second Domination, the reference to Persepolis is telling.

The Darius statue (fig. 4), found at Susa, is an even clearer example of the king’s orientation (Roaf 1974; Razmjou 2002; Curtis and Tallis 2005: 99). Although it was made of Egyptian stone in Egypt and displays a number of Egyptian iconographic features, including the Nile-god motif, there is no attempt to present the king in Egyptian format: his garment is entirely un-Egyptian and shows an unequivocally Achaemenid style, and
the same holds true of his footwear. On either side of the plinth are listed the subject peoples of the Empire in essentially the same way as on the canal stelae. This monument, therefore, becomes an emphatic statement, despite some concessions to the Egyptian context, that Egypt is part of the Persian Empire and that ultimately the Great King who rules Egypt is a Persian king and not a Pharaoh.

Overall, then, we can develop a plausible picture of Egyptian attitudes to the Persians during the First Persian Domination. Any foreigner in Egypt, ruler or otherwise, would be regarded with condescension, if not outright contempt, simply because their culture was not Egyptian, and Persians did not show themselves particularly adaptable in this respect. This did not prevent the establishment of a *modus vivendi*. The attitudes of many high-ranking Egyptians of the official elite were very much what we should expect. As in comparable situations in more modern times, many of them were more interested in maintaining the status and power that they and their families had enjoyed for generations than they were in engaging in patriotic or nationalistic demonstrations.

Since the Persians were initially happy to accept this situation, Egyptians with the right kind of flexibility were able to maintain and even enhance their privileges, despite the facts that even Darius was only prepared to go so far in recognizing Egyptian susceptibilities and that, with the passage of time, the Persians were even less inclined to play the game by Egyptian rules. Some priestly groups were not as willing to come to such an accommodation because they had suffered from the rigours of Persian administration, and they became the source of hostile propaganda which particularly affected the tradition on Cambyses’ reign in Egypt and possibly even graduated to the status of fomenters of rebellion.

Another source of resentment that is likely to have had a wide impact was the pressure of Persian demands on the wealth of Egypt that was channelled out of the country for specifically Persian developments. This may well be the explanation for the fact there was no significant temple building in Egypt during the First Persian Domination and why quarrying activity in the Wadi Hammamat falls away. We must add to these seeds of discontent another factor that we can only suspect.

Before the Persian Period and during the fourth century there is clear evidence of the presence in Egypt of ambitious families whose members were perfectly capable of aspiring to the kingly office and would have liked nothing better than to replace the Great King on the throne of Egypt; it is permissible to suspect that the fifth-century rebel leaders Inarus and Amyrtaeus (Ray 1988: 476–77) both fell into this category, i.e. we must allow for the ambitions of local dynasts in creating unrest and exploiting it. We should also bear in mind that the resentment of such stalwarts may well have received a further boost by the allocation of estates in Egypt to high-ranking Persians — that land had to come from somewhere! Finally, all these destabilizing factors would have been greatly exacerbated by the problem of strategic overextension which would inevitably have afflicted any power from Iraq or further east which attempted to keep a grip on Egypt, as the Assyrians and Babylonians had found to their cost, and that problem would have been further aggravated by the assistance readily available from enemies of Persia in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea.

We need not, therefore, postulate anything like the behaviour or attitudes characteristic of the Second Domination in creating the periodic Egyptian unrest during the sixth and fifth centuries. Indeed, the very fact that the First Domination lasted so long is itself an indication that Persian rule for much of the time was at least acceptable to the native Egyptian population.
Conclusions

There is a real danger of falling into the trap of interpreting the Egyptians’ attitudes to the Persians during the First Domination in the light of their undoubted bitter hostility during the Second. The later attitude sprang initially from their brutal treatment at the hands of Artaxerxes III who was undoubtedly determined to teach them a lesson that they would never forget, and things did not improve during the next two reigns. Attitudes during the sixth and fifth centuries were more variegated and the interplay of factors more complex. To the rank-and-file Egyptian, the occupation was probably more often than not something that they had to put up with on the same basis as the activities of any governing body. To the elites, however, attitudes were more often than not determined on the principle of personal advantage: if you could benefit, you collaborated; if you did not, you became a potential, and even actual, source of unrest. For everyone economic problems were probably a major irritant at times, and it is no coincidence that one of the first actions of the rebel Inarus was to take action against tax-collectors. Whilst it is universally recognized that Achaemenid administration was highly pragmatic in recognizing and adapting to local conditions in the provinces and satellites of the empire, there has been an increased awareness in recent years that governance within provinces was far from operating on the laissez-faire principle, much championed in earlier literature. It clearly functioned as a system which was very tightly controlled at all levels [Kuhrt 1995: vol. 2, 696–701], and the extraordinary bureaucratic gyrations surrounding the repair of a boat described in an Aramaic papyrus of 411 BC from Elephantine were probably typical [Kuhrt 2007: 2, 672]. This degree of rigour may well have weighed very heavily on subject peoples at times, especially since it was foreigners who were applying it.

The attitude of Persian kings may also have caused a measure of offence. Certainly the Egyptians treat them as Pharaohs, but they were absentee landlords, and even Darius seems to have adopted an essentially aloof attitude in this area, a situation which only got worse as time went on, as is spectacularly demonstrated by the rarity of dedications in Egyptian temples or even temple building after Darius’ reign. However, the stance of Persian rulers on this matter falls far short of the savage arrogance of Artaxerxes III and may well not have been a major ingredient in creating a dangerously hostile situation.

Bibliography


3 Darius II does appear in the Edfu Donation Text, but see above, n. 2.
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