

Egypt in Greco-Roman History and Fiction

In the current political and intellectual context it is not necessary to explain that the portrait created by one people, such as the Greeks or Romans, of another, such as Egypt, is likely to be a "construction" more than a "representation."* In his 1971 survey of the subject, C. Froidefond characterized Greek views of Egypt as a "mirage," an imaginative vision that had as much to do with who the Greeks were as it had with who the Egyptians were.¹ Edward Said's 1978 landmark work on orientalism traced how that Egyptian mirage developed and endured over the years in response to Europe's own evolving identity, and his book made a strong case for what has become a key idea in cultural studies: Power follows knowledge, and the seemingly objective and scientific study of other cultures is often an accessory to the crimes committed by empires in the name of civilization.² The enormous--and often nasty--controversy that swirled around the publication of Martin Bernal's Black Athena, with its accusation of racism in the conduct of European historiography, particularly in the treatment of the relationship between Europe and Egypt, has dealt a devastating blow to the pose of

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¹C. Froidefond, Le mirage égyptien dans la littérature grecque d'Homère à Aristote (Aix en Provenances: Ophrys, 1971).

²Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Culture and Imperialism (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1993).

objectivity in the conduct of scholarship.³ Despite this controversy, or perhaps because of it, the peculiar position of Egypt in the imaginations of the Greeks and Romans and its role in the classical world continue to be a subject of the greatest interest. I wish to contribute to this discussion by looking at the role Egypt plays in the so-called Greek romances, prose narratives of love and adventure that were composed during the Roman empire. I will begin by selectively sketching ideas about Egypt in Greek and Roman letters as a context for my remarks.⁴

³M. Bernal, Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987-1991); Mary R. Lefkowitz and G. M. Rogers eds. Black Athena Revisited (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); J. Berlinerblau, Heresy in the University: the Black Athena Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999); David Moore, ed., Black Athena Writes Back (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). See also the introduction to the Arabic translation of Black Athena by...

⁴This sketch relies mainly on the following recent discussions: P. Vasunia, The Gift of the Nile (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); M. J. Versluys, Aegyptiaca Romana (Leiden: Brill, 2000); S. Stephens, Seeing Double (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), each with comprehensive bibliographies, because they dovetail especially well with my interests in the novels. Other excellent short accounts include F. Hartog, "The Greeks as Egyptologists," in Thomas Harrison, ed. Greeks and Barbarians (New York: Routledge, 2002), 211-228; S. Burstein, "Images of Egypt in Greek Historiography," in A. Lopriero, Ancient Egyptian Literature (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 591-604; K. A. D. Smelik and E. A. Hemelrijk, "'Who Knows What Monsters Demented Egypt Worships?' Opinions on Egyptian Animal Worship in Antiquity as Part of the Ancient Conception of Egypt," ANR II 17.4 (1984), 1852-2000;

Greek Views of Egypt

References to Egypt occur in practically every classical author, but it would not be correct to say that Egypt was "central" to the Greco-Roman world. Indeed, marginality is paradoxically central to classical views of Egypt.⁵ The most important classical source on Egypt is Herodotus' account in a long digression from his discussion of the Persian Wars, a digression that takes up the entire second book of the Histories. Herodotus' many factual errors have long been recognized, such as his incorrect dating of the pyramid builders by a thousand years, but these are the least of his faults. A. B. Lloyd, who has written the most thorough commentary on Herodotus' Egyptian account, concludes that Herodotus "presents a view of Egypt's past which shows no genuine understanding of Egyptian history. Everything has been uncompromisingly customized for Greek consumption and cast unequivocally into a Greek mould."⁶ Indeed, as Francois Hartog has argued, Egypt was one of many "barbarian" countries whose customs were often defined by the Greek historian as an inversion of Greek

C. W. Müller, "Fremderfahrung und Eigenfahrung," Philologus 114 (1997), 200-14;

M. Futre Pinheiro, "A Atracção pelo Egipto na Literatura Grega," Humanitas 47 (1995), 441-468. I am unable to consult the works on the subject in Arabic, such as...

⁵S. Burstein, "Hecataeus, Herodotus and the Birth of Greek Egyptology," in Graeco-Africana: Studies in the History of Greek Relations with Egypt and Nubia (New Rochelle: A.D. Caratzas, 1994), 3-17.

⁶A. B. Lloyd, Herodotus, Book II (Leiden: Brill, 1975-1988); the quote is from A. B. Lloyd, "Herodotus' Account of Pharoanic Egypt," Historia 37 (1988), 52. For a more dialectical view of the interactions between Greek and Egyptian intellectual traditions, see I. A. Moyer, "Herodotus and an Egyptian Mirage: The Genealogies of the Theban Priests," JHS 122 (2002), 70-90.

customs: "The Egyptians seem to have reversed the ordinary practices of mankind."⁷ However, since barbarians in Herodotus tend to be not only inversions of Greece but also set in contrasting relation to one another, shifting and inconsistent alignments sometimes emerge. For example, Hartog takes the Scythians as an example of the "mirror" of Herodotus, in which they are negative reflections of everything Greek. Nevertheless, these same Scythians become increasingly "Greek-like" when they are contrasted to the Amazons, in order to convey the otherness of the Amazons to his Greek audience.⁸ Herodotus' report of various religious outrages committed by the Persian King Cambyses in his trip to Egypt, most likely fictitious,⁹ produces a surprising affinity between Egypt and Greece, since both are the pious victims of impious Persians. Herodotus, in fact, displays a deep ambivalence towards Egypt, a place that is simultaneously fascinating and repulsive. To Herodotus, Egypt is a land of enormous antiquity, much older than Greek civilization, a land of ancient wisdom, the source of Greek religion, particularly the names of the gods, and most of all a land full of wonders: natural ones, such as the Nile river, and even more impressive man-made ones, such as the pyramids. However, as Phiroze Vasunia notes, Herodotus could conceive of no way these colossal monuments could have been executed without slave labor, which contributed to another key cliché about Egypt, its love affair with despotism. From a political standpoint, Egypt could not for Herodotus be a school for democratic Greece.¹⁰ At the same time, the great antiquity of Egypt is wedded to an emphasis on its immutability, so that Greece's progressiveness is frequently contrasted

⁷Herodotus, Histories, 2. 35. See Hartog, The Mirror of Herodotus, tr. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁸Hartog, Mirror, p. 224.

⁹Smelik and Hemelrijk, "Who Knows What Monsters," 1864-69.

¹⁰Vasunia, Gift, 75-109.

with the static character of Egyptian civilization. Just as Egypt is neither Europe nor Asia, but a place through which each passes on the way to the other, Egypt is also strangely out of the temporal stream in which the events of Europe and Asia lie.¹¹

Two Greek tragedies centralize Greek-Egyptian comparisons, the Suppliant Women of Aeschylus and the Helen of Euripides.¹² The first involves the story of the descendants of Io, the Argive woman impregnated by Zeus. She traveled to Egypt in the form of a cow and there gave birth to Epaphus, whose descendants ruled Egypt and then founded numerous important cities in Greece. This kind of story, whose rationale seems to be the desire to make a claim of relative priority, will reappear in different guises, as will varying claims about the relative antiquity of Egypt and Europe. Aeschylus' play recounts the flight of the 50 daughters of Danaus (the Danaids) from their 50 first cousins, the sons of Aegyptus, and their supplication of the king of Argos for protection. The sons of Aegyptus are represented in the play by a number of negative stereotypes: their blackness is emphasized and associated with death; they are savage and lustful, and, along with the Danaids, have no appreciation of the democratic institutions of Greece, expressing surprise, for example, that the king must consult a deliberative body of Greek citizens instead of simply acting on his own advice. The Argives, on the other hand, are represented as the protectors of women against these oversexed Egyptians.

The Helen of Euripides recounts an alternative version of Helen's whereabouts during the Trojan War, namely that she spent the 10 years of the war in Egypt. Herodotus cites an account he received from the Egyptian priests at Memphis, who claimed that Helen had been kept by the good king Proteus, the type of the generous

¹¹Vasunia Gift, 110-35.

¹²Vasunia, Gift, 33-74. See Tariq Radwan, "The Image of Egypt in Greek Tragedy," diss. Athens University (not consulted).

host, until the rightful husband could come for her (Histories 2.113-115). In the Odyssey, Proteus is a mythical monster whom Menelaus encounters in Egypt on his way home from Troy. He is the Old Man of the Sea, whose wisdom is accessible only to those who can hold him fast while he changes his form (Od. 4.351-570). In Euripides' version when Menelaus is shipwrecked in Egypt on his way home, he discovers that the real Helen has been there all along, while Greeks and Trojans had been fighting over a phantom double. In this telling, however, Proteus' son, Theoclymenus, is king; but he turns out to be another lustful Egyptian trying to have Helen for himself. Not the generous host, but the xenophobic murderer who customarily kills strangers who land on his shore, Theoclymenus is similar to the sons of Aegyptus in Aeschylus' play, from whose rapacious grip the good Greek men must wrest their women. Such stories clearly reflect more about the anxieties of Greek men than they do about real Egyptians.

The figure of Proteus is one of many importations into the Egyptian king lists of Greek figures. Another king manufactured by the Greeks is Busiris, whose name is likely a corruption of the name of the god Osiris.¹³ This Busiris was the negative image of the good host Proteus; he was reputed to kill foreigners and eat them, an instance of the notorious xenophobia of the Egyptians. Without mentioning Busiris by name, Herodotus notes the tale as an example of the silly stories Greeks make up about Egyptians (Hist. 2.45). Nevertheless, Egyptian xenophobia, frequently connected with cannibalism, persists as a stereotype of Egyptians to the very end of antiquity.¹⁴ In the fourth century Isocrates makes a mock defense of Busiris, which praises him as a

¹³See M. C. Miller, "The Myth of Bousiris: Ethnicity and Art" in B. Cohen, ed., Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 413-42.

¹⁴J. J. Winkler, "Lollianos and the Desperadoes," JHS 100 (1980), 177-80.

master administrator of the affairs of Egypt, and a model of good government for Greece:

"As for the arrangement by which they preserve their kingship and the rest of their state, they do so well that the philosophers who attempt to discuss such things and are most highly regarded choose to praise the Egyptian state, and the Spartans manage their city best when they imitate some part of the Egyptians' practice."¹⁵

The parodic context of this quote makes it unlikely that this uncharacteristic expression of admiration by the usually Athenocentric Isocrates is heartfelt. It is more likely, as Vasunia argues, that this represents an engagement with the ideas of Plato on good government. In the course of the fourth century, a more positive evaluation of monarchy in the philosophical tradition is reflected not only in greater praise for Sparta, but also for Egypt for displaying the stability associated with strong central rule.

Plato's own relationship to Egypt is complex and ambivalent, but certain key themes can be highlighted. In the narrative of the story of Atlantis in the Timaeus and Critias, Plato reverses the relative chronology of Egypt and Athens; but the Athenians must learn this true history from the Egyptians, because only they have the technical resources to preserve the memory of the distant past. However, superior Egyptian documentary skills do not themselves participate in Plato's own greater philosophical project, as is evident from the critique of Egyptian writing in the famous story of the Phaedrus.¹⁶ Thus when Solon the lawgiver is told by the Egyptians in the Timaeus that the original Athens had a government that was identical to the ideal one described in Plato's Republic, this is Plato's way of using the "cultural capital" of Egypt to his own purposes. If Plato's own antidemocratic sentiments make the authoritarian government of Egypt an apparent ally in his ideas about kingship, it should be

¹⁵Isocrates, Busiris 17. See Vasunia, Gift, 183-215.

¹⁶Phaedrus 274c-275b, discussed by Vasunia, Gift, 146-60.

emphasized that neither his ideas about Egyptian government, nor those of Isocrates, reveal a genuine understanding or sympathy for contemporary Egypt, which for most of the classical period was ruled by the Persians. Although traditions about Greek intellectuals and lawgivers making trips to Egypt, where they were schooled in Egyptian wisdom, grew to include Plato himself, it is striking the degree to which Egypt was an idea for the Greeks, manufactured for their own purposes, rather than a contemporary reality which they confronted on its own terms.

Greeks and Egyptians in the Hellenistic Era

With the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great in 332 BC, the relationship between Greeks and Egyptians intensified and changed. After the death of Alexander the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt who succeeded him seemed to be intent on maintaining class and ethnic distinctions, but they also made significant gestures to present themselves as restorers of Egyptian institutions dismantled by the Persians and as continuers of Pharaonic traditions. In the three centuries of Ptolemaic rule the center of gravity of Greek intellectual life shifted toward Alexandria, with its famous library and generous patronage by the rulers of Egypt. Greek interest in Egypt was fueled by greater contact and greater familiarity with Egyptian sources. A number of new historical works were composed at this time in Greek, such as the Aigyptiaca of Hecataeus of Abdera and the Aigyptiaca of Manetho, both now lost except for excerpts and epitomes. The latter author was an Egyptian writing in Greek, who critiqued other Greek writers and presented accounts of events such as the colonization of Greece that were more favorable to Egypt. He also insisted on the antiquity and priority of Egypt in

respect to a number of important cultural phenomena.¹⁷ Hecataeus of Abdera centralized the story of Io and her descendants in his account, likewise reasserting the chronological priority of Egypt and emphasizing the cultural contributions that Egypt had made to world history. He was also the first to interpret Egyptian myths as the distorted records of mortal kings who were deified after their death, which is part of a more general tendency to insist on the underlying rationality of Egyptian culture.¹⁸ This is an important development because it contributed to the sense that Egyptian tradition was a body of wisdom that needed to be interpreted allegorically, a course that would lead eventually to the hermetic corpus of literature in late antiquity.

Recent scholars have seen in the context of this intensified contact and mutual interest between Greeks and Egyptians of the Hellenistic era the development of a new aesthetic, which Susan Stephens calls "Seeing Double."¹⁹ In this view Hellenistic Greek literature tends to straddle Greek and Egyptian audiences and cultural assumptions in certain ways that provide for a dual reading of them. The overwhelmingly Greek tradition of allusion and material found in this literature is sometimes adapted in ways that make provision for an Egyptian way of looking at things. One example Stephens gives is from the so-called Alexander Romance, a text that in the form that has come

¹⁷Burstein, "Images of Egypt," 600-1. See D. Mendels, "The Polemical Character of Manetho's Aegyptiaca," in H. Verdin et al., eds. Purposes of History (Leuven, 1990), 91-110.

¹⁸Burstein, "Images of Egypt," 598-9.

¹⁹S. Stephens, Seeing Double: Intercultural Poetics in Ptolemaic Alexandria (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Cf. D. Selden, "Alibis," Classical Antiquity 17.2 (October, 1998), 290-412; J. D. Reed, "Arsinoe's Adonis and the Poetics of Ptolemaic Imperialism," Transactions of the American Philological Association 130 (2000), 319-51.

down to us is a compilation from the third century of the common era, but whose first chapter most scholars agree must go back to the beginnings of the Ptolemaic dynasty. This part of the narrative recounts how Nectanebo II, the last indigenous pharaoh of Egypt, travels to the Macedonian court where he ensconces himself as a magician and astrologer. By magic and ruses, he manages to sleep with Olympia, Philip's queen, convincing her that she will become impregnated by the god Ammon and give birth to a son. In time Olympia becomes pregnant with Alexander who as a man seeks out the truth about his paternity at the oracle of Ammon in Siwa. There he is confirmed to be the son of Ammon, who instructs him to found the city of Alexandria. In Memphis, however, Alexander sees a statue of Nectanebo II with an inscription predicting the fugitive king's return as a youth. Alexander recognizes himself as the fulfillment of the prophecy and explains his lineage publicly. From a Greek perspective, the fashioning of Alexander's invasion of Egypt as a "return" recalls the myths of the descendants of Io who "return" to Greece from Egypt.²⁰ But at the same time there seem to be too many fathers in this scenario--is Alexander the son of Ammon or Nectanebo? However, as Stephens points out, the scenario is one that is perfectly comprehensible from an Egyptian perspective, where the pharaoh is always the son of a mortal father, but at the same time a manifestation of the god on earth, the living Horus. Rather than a piece of Egyptian propaganda, as it is often thought to be, Stephens sees the story as a Greek invention to insert Alexander into the political and religious traditions of Egypt, "a narrative that Egyptians and Greeks could recognize as possessing features not only of their own culture but of both cultures."²¹

²⁰Io, who journeyed to Egypt in the form of a cow, was identified quickly with Hathor/Isis, who was often depicted as a cow.

²¹Stephens, Seeing Double, 72.

Another interesting example is Stephen's reading of the 17th Idyll of Theocritus, which is an encomium of Ptolemy II. She again identifies a number of intriguing combinations of Greek and Egyptian themes, deployed here to clarify issues of kingship in the early Ptolemaic context. Two points are noteworthy here. First, is the emphasis on the feminine side of the family, which is not a Greek trait. The special attention given to the loving marriage of the parents of Ptolemy II derives from Egyptian ideas of kingship, wherein such unions produce true and legitimate sons (Id. 17 38-40). In the poem, Aphrodite is fashioned as the goddess who oversees such ideal unions, which is most likely a reflection of her identity with Isis, who is, unlike the Greek version of Aphrodite, the ideal wife. It is well-known that one of the innovations of the Greek romance is to represent true love as a mutual desire between two people of equal status, a "sexual symmetry" that eventuates in marriage and permanent happiness.²² Although it perhaps goes too far to suggest that the origin of this idea is to be sought in Egyptian ideas about love and marriage, the least that can be said is that the interpenetration of Greek and Egyptian culture may have contributed to making the idea more acceptable to Greeks. The other noteworthy Greek theme in the poem that is enriched by Egyptian ideas has to do with revivifying unguents. Aphrodite revivifies Berenike, the wife of Ptolemy I, in ways that combine Greek themes of the miraculous preservation of corpses by the gods with Egyptian ideas of embalming as a prelude to reanimation and the arousal of erotic desire. Mummification was one of the exotic traditions which made Egyptians seem to the Greeks bizarre and excessively preoccupied with death--for Greeks bodies were for burying or burning. Herodotus' account of the practice in a virtuoso passage includes the statement that the Egyptians had to take special steps in order to make sure that young and beautiful corpses were not subjected to necrophilia (Histories 2.86-9). The way that Stephens reads Theocritus'

²²D. Konstan, Sexual Symmetry (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994).

poem suggests a greater understanding among his Greek audience of the true character of Egyptian practices with regard to the dead. Although there are plenty of counter-examples which attest to hostility between Egyptians and Greeks, these gestures of accommodation between Greeks and Egyptians lay the groundwork for an Egyptian-Greek symbiosis in the context of Roman domination of the Mediterranean.²³

Views of Egyptians in the Roman Period

The Ptolemaic era ends with the death of Cleopatra VII and the annexation of Egypt into the Roman empire as a province in 30 BCE.²⁴ Although Romans sometimes

²³See O. F. Riad, "Théocrite entre le Sicilie et l'Egypte," in Carratelli, G. P. et al., eds, Roma e l'Egitto nell'antichità classica (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1992), 305-15.

²⁴Besides the comprehensive study of Versluys on Roman Egypt cited in note 4 above, see the two collections of essays from the International Congresses on Italy and Egypt: Carratelli, G. P. et al., eds, Roma e l'Egitto nell'antichità classica (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1992); and N. Bonacasa, et al., eds., L'Egitto in Italia: dall'antichità al Medioevo (Roma: Consiglio nazionale delle ricerche, 1998). A sense of the wide range of evidence that is adduced to illuminating the complex relationship between Rome and Egypt can be gleaned from the following selection of contributions:

In Roma e l'Egitto: F. Abou-Bakr, "The Egyptian Testament and Roman Law," 19-25; Al-Hussein Abou el-Atta, "Heracles of Alexandria," 27-39; Abdoullatif A. Aly, "Cleopatra and Caesar at Alexandria and Rome," 47-61; F. H. El-Kadi, "The 'Cives Romani' in Egypt," 123-39 (in Arabic); H. El-Sheikh, "Roman Expeditions to the Upper Nile," 157-60; M. A. Ibrahim, "The Western Desert of Egypt in the Classical Writings of the Roman Era," 209-17; M. H. Ibrahim, "Education of Latin in Roman

expressed curiosity about Egypt in the Republican era, there is a dramatic change as Egypt becomes a province. Rome's rule in Egypt was one of its most unsuccessful ventures, and there was persistent mutual hostility and mistrust between Romans and Egyptians. The Egyptians "experienced a qualitative change in repressive policy beginning with the principate of Augustus which imposed rigid restrictions on upward social mobility."²⁵ Literary sources from the Augustan period on tend to repeat a number of negative clichés and topoi: the treacherous murder of Pompey by Ptolemy XIII, the pernicious attack on the state by the dangerous and seductive Cleopatra, the bizarre worship of animals, Egyptians as cowardly Orientals and barbarians, etc. In his victory ode to Augustus on the defeat of Cleopatra, Horace concludes with a famous coda which seems to make the Egyptian queen sympathetic, but the middle stanzas of

Egypt," 219-226; M. Manfredi, "The Influence of Egypt on Rome in the Literary Field," 253-58.

In L'Egitto in Italia: A. Abou-Aly, "Rufus of Ephesus and Egypt," 15-22; E. Mohamed Ahmed, "La medicina egizia nella cultura e nell'arte romana," 127-134; L. A. W. Yehya, "Clement of Alexandria versus Rome," 167-74; O. Fayez Riad, "Le théâtre hellénistique à Rome," 255-62; M. G. Mokhtar, "Rome in Sinai," 303-6; N. Tayea Hussein, "The Relation between Egypt and Rome through the ancient Roman Lamps in the Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria," 521-24; H. Abou el Atta, "The Doctrine of Curability in Roman Alexandria," 537-46; Y. el Gheriani, "The Cults of Alexandria," 603-10; S. R. Redwan, "L'arrivo del culto di Iside ed Osiride a Roma," 645-52.

²⁵M. Reinhold, "Roman Attitudes Toward Egyptians," Ancient World 3 (1980), 100. A more positive view of Roman rule is given by S. A. Bari, "Economic Interests of Augustan Rome in Egypt," in G. P. Carratelli et al., eds, Roma e l'Egitto nell'antichità classica, 69-76.

the poem are a catalogue of negative stereotypes of Egyptians (Odes 1, 37).²⁶ Other Augustan poets, such as Vergil and Ovid, also reference Egypt in purely negative terms, but the most outrageous attack is found in Juvenal's 15th satire, which is a withering example of Juvenalian indignatio prompted by a supposed instance of Egyptian cannibalism.²⁷ In these sources emphasis is often placed on the seditiousness of the Egyptians, which no doubt reflects a major context in which Romans ever thought about Egypt, for whom the province was simply a land "to be exploited methodically and efficiently."²⁸

Some Greek authors of the Roman period followed suit, especially those who had achieved success in the Roman administration, such as Cassius Dio, who was a Roman senator, consul and governor in the second century of the common era; Reinhold considers him second only to Juvenal in his contempt for Egyptians. But the Greek tradition tends to be more positive toward Egypt in general. Strabo's account of Egypt in the 17th book of his Geography was written in the Augustan period and from a distinctly Roman perspective. Strabo himself visited Egypt, but after it had become part of the Roman Empire, and he sees Egypt with the eyes of an official, "noting the setting up of good Roman order."²⁹ The other surviving Greek description of Egypt from this period is Book 1 of Diodorus Siculus' Library of History. Diodorus, a

²⁶See Ahmed Etman, "Cleopatra and Egypt in the Augustan Poetry," in G. P. Carratelli et al., eds, Roma e l'Egitto nell'antichità classica, 161-75.

²⁷Negative statements by other Roman authors include Propertius, Elegies 3.11; Vergil, Aen. 8.696-700; Ovid, Metamorphoses 15.826-31; Lucan, Civil War 8.542-4.

²⁸Reinhold, "Roman Attitudes," 100. See M. Giusto, "Connotazioni dell'Egitto negli autori latini," in G. P. Carratelli et al., eds, Roma e l'Egitto nell'antichità classica, 261-4.

²⁹Hartog, "The Greeks," 224.

compiler and epitomator, is our main source for Hecataeus of Abdera and other Hellenistic historians, although he himself visited Egypt some time between 60-56 BCE. Unlike Strabo, Diodorus is interested in the cultural and religious dimensions of Egypt. Chaeremon of Alexandria, a tutor of the emperor Nero, wrote two books on Egypt, now lost, which extended the allegorizing tendencies of Hellenistic authors in order to show that Egyptian myths were in essential agreement with the main theses of Greek philosophy. His work helped to legitimate the search for the secret wisdom of the Egyptians that was carried out in works like Plutarch's On Isis and Osiris, Iamblichus' On the Mysteries of Egypt, and the hermetic corpus.³⁰ In late antiquity, as Hartog notes, it was mostly the religious dimension of Egypt's profile that dominated discussion of that land.³¹

Before turning to the Greek novels, some mention should be made of the only Latin work that seems to provide a serious and positive evaluation of Egyptian religion, the 11th book of Apuleius' Golden Ass, from the second century of the common era. The novel seems to be an adaptation of a Greek original that told a humorous story about a man turned into an ass, and his subsequent adventures before reassuming his human shape. The original is now lost, but an epitome survives among the works of Lucian. Apuleius has apparently added to this story a final book describing the character's redemption and initiation into the rites of Isis and Osiris. This final book is so different from the rest of the novel in tone and topic that religious scholars like J. Gwyn Griffiths have assumed that it is a serious representation of a true experience tacked on to an immoral tale. It is taken by these scholars to be an accurate

³⁰Burstein, "Images," 601-4; Hartog, "The Greeks," 226-28. See especially fragment 10 on the lives of the Egyptian priests in P. W. van der Horst, ed. Chaeremon (Leiden: Brill, 1987).

³¹Hartog, "The Greeks," 226.

source for details about Isaic religion.³² However, not everyone agrees that the ending is so serious or that the rest of the novel is so immoral. Ingenious attempts to provide a comprehensive view of the novel that would knit together its two disparate parts have so far failed to win consensus. Daniel Selden, however, has argued that the genre of the novel is typified by the figure of speech known as syllepsis, which is characterized by a yoking of two incompatible orders, an insistence on "both" rather than "either/or."³³ This is precisely the characteristic that Selden and Stephens have subsequently identified as animating Hellenistic poetry, there associated with the encounter by Greek poets of Alexandria with the both/and logic of Egyptian mentality.³⁴

At this point, I would like to quote part of the conclusion of Versluys' thorough discussion of Roman attitudes towards Egypt. He gives a more nuanced view of the subject by reference to the visual material available, which shows that Egypt played an important cultural role in Rome. That is, despite their animosity toward contemporary Egyptians, the Romans were obviously fascinated with Egyptian realia and religion. He then continues:

"In order to let Rome remain the ideal center of the world, there also had to be negative properties to counterbalance these dominant [Egyptian] influences.

Amongst others for these reasons the unreliability of the Alexandrians is

³²J. Gwyn Griffiths, The Isis-book of Apuleius (Leiden: Brill, 1975). There are references to Egypt elsewhere in the novel, beginning in the first sentence, which characterizes the work as "papyrum Aegyptiam argutia Nilotici calami inscriptam" (Egyptian paper inscribed with the sharpness of a Nilotic pen).

³³D. Selden, "The Genre of Genre," in J. Tatum, ed., The Search for the Ancient Novel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 39-64.

³⁴Selden, "Alibis." See also I. Rutherford, "The Genealogy of the Boukoloi: How Greek Literature Appropriated an Egyptian Narrative-Motif." JHS 120 (2000), 116-18.

emphasized and not the cultural prestige of the city; the Isis cult is associated with shady amorous practices and not with the immensely popular goddess whose Navigium Isidis ceremony coincided with the official opening of the Roman shipping season, etc. A similar reaction can be observed with regard to the Greeks and Greek culture. The conceptualization of the Greeks, as reflected in the literary sources, is in general distinctively negative as well, and an attempt is thereby also made to have their merits have nothing to do with contemporary Greece and the Greeks in the Roman reality."³⁵

In turning to the image of Egypt in the ancient novels, it is important to remember the way that, in negative stereotypes perpetuated by Romans, the Greeks often find themselves lumped together with Egyptians as "Orientals." One of the ways that Romans negotiated their own ambivalence towards the Greeks was to make a distinction between "classical" Greece and contemporary Greece, the latter having none of the fame of their ancestors, a maneuver that both Greeks and Romans frequently turned against Egypt as well. It was suggested by Moses Hadas that the ancient novel's origin could be traced to the desire of marginalized ethnic and religious groups to represent themselves in a more positive light, as an act of cultural resistance to Roman political hegemony;³⁶ and this has been advanced as a rationale for literary developments in the renaissance of Greek letters in the Roman period, the so-called "second sophistic," the period that is contemporary with the flowering of the novel.³⁷

³⁵Versluys, Aegyptiaca, 440.

³⁶M. Hadas. "Cultural Survival and the Origin of Fiction." South Atlantic Quarterly 51 (1952), 253-60. Cf. S. West, "Joseph and Asenath: A Neglected Greek Romance." CQ 68 (1974), 70-81.

³⁷E. L. Bowie, "Greeks and Their Past in the Second Sophistic," Past and Present 46 (1970) 3-4; B. Reardon, "The Second Sophistic and the Novel," in Approaches to the

The extant Greek novels studiously avoid making reference to the Roman political realities of their own day. They do, however, make frequent reference to Egypt and Persia, which, like Greece, are cultural powers from the past that are now politically marginalized. Is it possible to see a latent anti-Roman sentiment expressed in the peculiar alignment of Egypt and Greece that sometimes emerges in the novels? Such an alignment is taken for granted in the many calumnies directed at "Alexandrians" catalogued by Reinhold, a term that often lumps together a variety of ethnic backgrounds in this multicultural city.³⁸ It is perhaps in this context that we must understand the persistence in the novels of the "herdsmen" of the Delta region, infamous as political resisters to Roman hegemony in the second century of the common era. These "herdsmen" (boukoloi) seem to be a privileged example of the interpenetration not only of Greek and Egyptian sources, but also of fictional and historical texts.³⁹ Although it is no longer thought that the novel genre arose directly from Egyptian literature, the more modest claim that certain interpenetrations between

Second Sophistic, ed. G. Bowersock (University Park, PA: American Philological Association, 1974), 23-29; S. Swain, Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50-250 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 101-34. E. Finkelpearl, Metamorphosis and Language in Apuleius. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), discusses examples of Apuleius rewriting Roman stories from a "north African" perspective.

³⁸For anti-Roman sentiment in the so-called Acts of the Pagan Martyrs, see H. A. Musurillo, ed. Acta Alexandrinorum (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 256-58.

³⁹J.J. Winkler, "Lollianos," 155-81; B. C. McGing, "Bandits, Real and Imagined, in Greco-Roman Egypt." BASP 35 (1998), 159-83; I. Rutherford, "Boukoloi," JHS 120 (2000), 106-21; R. Alston, "The Revolt of the Boukoloi," in K. Hopwood, ed. Organized Crime in Antiquity (London: Duckworth, 1999), 129-53.

Greek and Egyptian literature occurred in them seems much more securely established. And it is perhaps the very porousness of the novel "genre" itself (or "anti-genre," as Bakhtin calls it), its ability to absorb and juxtapose heterogeneous elements in various "sylleptic" combinations, that makes it the privileged form for this interpenetration.

Egypt in the Greek Novels

I would like to turn now to the Greek novels that make reference to Egypt and explore in a preliminary fashion, the metaphorical resonances that Egypt has in them, in order to see what those resonances can tell us about the literary aims of our authors. The five extant Greek novels span the first to the third centuries of the common era. They share a handful of basic characteristics, including heroes who are beautiful and chaste young lovers, separated and reunited at the end in legitimate marriage.⁴⁰ The emphasis on fidelity and reciprocal heterosexual love is remarkable and has been viewed as part of a shift in cultural ideals.⁴¹ Despite these similarities, aspects of plot among the individual novels, as well as tone and style, vary widely. Theories about the origin and purpose of the genre have sometimes focused on Egypt or on the mystery

⁴⁰A good overview both of the texts themselves and the critical issues raised by them can be found in G. Schmeling, ed., The Novel in the Ancient World (Leiden: Brill, 1996). English translations of all major texts can be found in B. Reardon, Collected Ancient Greek Romances (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

The fragments are collected and translated in S. Stephens and J. J. Winkler, eds., Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁴¹M. Foucault, The Care of the Self, tr. R. Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1986); D. Konstan, Sexual Symmetry.

religions of Egypt, but these ideas have not gained wide acceptance.⁴² The novels draw on a number of Greek narrative traditions--epic, drama, history--but it is their heterogeneity that is paramount, and the proper paternity of the novel has never been adequately identified: it may even be the wrong question to be asking.⁴³ Exactly how or to what extent they circulated in antiquity is also a difficult question to answer; but earlier theories that they were a "popular" literature for naive audiences (youth or

⁴²Religious origin: R. Merkelbach, Roman und Mysterium in der Antike (Munich: Beck, 1962), restated without apology in R. Merkelbach, Isis Regina - Zeus Sarapis (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995). The view is critiqued by, among others, R. Beck, "Mystery Religions, Aretalogy and the Ancient Novel," in G. Schmeling, ed., The Novel in the Ancient World, 131-150; Egyptian origin: J.W.B. Barns, "Egypt and the Greek Romance," in H. Gerstinger, ed., Akten des VIII internationalen Kongress fur Papyrologie (Vienna, R. M. Rohrer, 1956), 29-36; and G. Anderson, Ancient Fiction: The Novel in the Graeco-Roman World (London: Croom Helm, 1984); critiqued by S. Stephens and J. J. Winkler, Fragments, pp. 11-18. The argument has been raised again by I. Rutherford, "Kalasiris and Setne Khamwas: a Greek Novel and Some Egyptian Models," ZPE 117 (1997), 203-9. M. Futre Pinheiro, "A Atração pelo Egipto," makes the more modest claim that Egypt is a favorite mise en scene for Greek storytelling from Herodotus to Heliodorus, a tendency which becomes fully developed in the Greek novels.

⁴³S. Nimis, "The Prosaics of the Ancient Novel," Arethusa 27.3 (Fall 1994), 387-411. Genre questions are reviewed thoroughly in S. Swain, "A Century and More of the Greek Novel," in S. Swain, ed., Oxford Readings in the Greek Novel (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), 3-35.

women) have found no more acceptance than religious interpretations.⁴⁴ The novels have persistently proved impervious to monolithic readings of their purposes, and this multiplicity and heterogeneity is central to my own view of them. Of the extant novels Longus' Daphnis and Chloe does not involve travel and makes no explicit reference to Egypt. I will look at each of the other four novels in turn.⁴⁵ In general, it will be seen that Egypt retains an ambivalence in the novels: often the site of excessive cruelty and barbarism, Egypt is also the site of religious wisdom and mystery that can have a more positive valuation. It may be, as Brioso Sánchez has argued, that it is precisely this combination of popular interest in the wonders of Egypt and the shady reputations of Egyptians themselves that made Egypt an attractive locale for stories of adventure.⁴⁶ In any case, the political impotence of Egypt in Roman times, linked with its rich cultural

⁴⁴E. Bowie, "The Ancient Readers of the Greek Novels," in Gareth Schmeling, ed., The Novel in the Ancient World, 87-106; M. Brioso Sánchez, "¿Oralidad y literatura de consumo en la novela griega antigua?: Caritón y Jenofonte de Efeso," Habis 31 (2000) 177-217 and 32 (2001) 425-461, arguing against M. Fusillo, "Letteratura di consumo e romanzesca," in G. Cambiano et al., eds., Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica (Rome: Salerno, 1994) I.3, pp. 233-273.

⁴⁵Earlier discussions of Egypt in the novels include E. M. Smith, "The Egypt of the Greek Romance," Classical Journal 23 (1927), 531-37; M. Brioso Sánchez, "Egipto en la novela griega antigua," Habis 3 (1992), 197-215, who includes extensive discussion of the fragments. L. Plazenet, "Le Nil et son delta dans les romans grecs," Phoenix 40 (1995), 5-22, looks carefully at the rhetorical topos of the Nile, which provides each author with a pretext for defining his literary goals rather than for the sake of realism.

⁴⁶Brioso Sánchez, "Egitto," 213-15.

heritage, creates a parallel to the situation of the Greeks themselves, particularly for the "Hellenized barbarians" who authored the novels.

M. Bakhtin speaks of the abstractness of space and time in these novels in the following way: "All adventures in the Greek romance are governed by an interchangeability of space; what happens in Babylon could just as well happen in Egypt or Byzantium and vice versa."⁴⁷ Chariton's Chaereas and Callirhoe (ca. 1st C CE) is typical of Bakhtin's point. The story begins in Syracuse near the end of the fifth century, then travels to Miletus in Asia Minor, to the capital of the Persian empire in Babylon, then to Syria and Egypt. The Persians prove to be more dangerous to the hero and heroine than the Egyptians in this story, but they are all for the most part basically Hellenic in their manners and aspirations. Certainly there is no problem acknowledged for Egyptians, Greeks and Persians in understanding each other.⁴⁸ At the end of Book 7, the "innate fear of royalty" of the Egyptian guard is referenced as an assumption that Greeks could make about Egyptians; and similar remarks are made about the servility of Persian characters as well, so there is an underlying "Hellenic bias" in the novel. Books 6-7 recount an Egyptian revolt against the Persian empire, which the hero Chaereas exploits to regain his wife from his rivals Dionysius of Miletus and the Great King of Persia. This revolt seems to draw certain details from several real Egyptian rebellions in the classical period, in some of which Greeks and

⁴⁷M. M. Bakhtin, The Dialogical Imagination, tr. C. Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 100. On Chariton's Egypt in particular, see K. de Temmerman, "Institutional Realia in Chariton's Callirhoe: Historical and Contemporary Elements," Humanitas 54 (2002), 181-3.

⁴⁸With one minor exception at 7.2.2.

Egyptians were allies against the Persians.⁴⁹ These historical parallels make it seem natural for the Greek hero to side with the rebellious Egyptians against the "tyrannical" Persians. Prominent in the forces led by Chaereas are the 300 Dorian Greeks, who are clearly meant to recall the 300 Spartans who defended Thermopylae against the Persians in the zenith of Greek political power. However, Chaereas also leads the Egyptian fleet to victory against the Persians, and they return to Syracuse with him and are rewarded with parcels of land. Rome is not a force in the Mediterranean at the putative setting of the action in classical Greece, but nevertheless it is evoked indirectly in several ways. D. R. Edwards has argued that Chariton's representation of Aphrodite, the patron goddess of his home city Aphrodisias, as the deity "whose power encompasses even the Roman empire" is a strategy for asserting that city's prestige in the Roman world.⁵⁰ K. Haynes suggests in the conclusion of her study of the novel that the scenario of a heroine resisting overwhelming force expresses a resistance to Roman hegemony, sometimes itself expressed iconographically in sexual terms.⁵¹ J. Alvares

⁴⁹P. Salmon, "Chariton d'Aphrodisias et la révolte égyptienne de 360 avant J.-C." Chronique d'Egypt 36 no. 72 (1961), 365-76.

⁵⁰D. R. Edwards, "Surviving the Web of Roman Power: Religion and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles, Josephus, and Chariton's Chaereas and Callirhoe," in A. Loveday, ed., Images of Empire (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 200. He notes that Aphrodite's prominent role in the Julio-Claudian family is something that the city of Aphrodisias promoted in other contexts. M. LaPlace, "Les légendes troyennes dans le "roman" de Chariton," REG 93 (1980), 83-125, sees a political message in parallels between Roman figures, such as Aeneas, to characters in the novel.

⁵¹K. Haynes, Fashioning the Feminine in the Greek Novel (New York: Routledge, 2003), 160-1.

has identified a number of elements in the novel's cultural and political setting that would recall realities of the Roman empire. This description of Persian settings by means of Roman detail "would have encouraged some readers to see in the events narrated by Chariton a meaningful commentary on Roman-era conditions."⁵² Alvares calls attention to the phrase with which Chaereas introduces himself to the Egyptian king as an especially resonant moment (7.2.4): "The Persian King has tyrannized me too." It is unlikely that Chariton has a primarily political agenda in this story; but at the same time his choice to make a sudden, if only partially successful, revolt by Egyptians against an oppressive "evil empire" central to the resolution of his love story could indicate a certain enthusiasm for the discomfort of contemporary ruling powers. Even though the Egyptian revolt fails, the Greek hero gets the better of the Great King in part by strategically siding with his "enemy's enemy."

Unlike Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus makes no effort to anchor the setting of his novel, An Ephesian Tale, in any particular time frame, although there are some indirect references to the author's contemporary world of the second century Roman empire.⁵³ The geography of the novel is rather vague and abstract, predicated on the

⁵²J. Alvares, "Egyptian Unrest of the Roman Era and the Reception of Chariton's Chaereas and Callirhoe," Maia 53 (2001), 11. See also his excellent discussion of the Egyptian revolt in "Some Political and Ideological Dimensions of Chariton's Chaereas and Callirhoe," Classical Journal 97.2 (Dec.-Jan. 2001-2002), 113-144; and the thoughtful discussion of S. Schwartz, "Rome in the Greek Novel? Images and Ideas of Empire in Chariton's Persia," Arethusa 36 (2003), 375-94.

⁵³J. Rife, "Officials of the Roman Provinces in Xenophon's Ephesiaca," ZPE 138 (2002) 104-107, arguing against J. O'Sullivan, Xenophon of Ephesus: his Compositional Technique and the Birth of the Novel. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1995), who dates the novel earlier than Chariton. F. Sartori, "Italie et Sicile dans le Roman de Xénophon

needs of the story rather than any strong desire for authenticity in details, although the author's knowledge of the delta region is quite accurate.⁵⁴ There are several episodes in books 4-5 that take place in Egypt, and it is easy to see why they have inspired religious interpretations of the novel. The hero Habrocomes is crucified twice, but each time he is miraculously saved by the gods of Egypt, who are called philanthropotatos, "most generous to men" (Eph. 4.2.4; 5.4.10). The heroine, meanwhile, is buried alive together with wild dogs, but survives this ordeal as well.⁵⁵ Equally significant is the account of an important secondary figure, Hippothous, who is a man of means compelled to turn to a life of crime as the result of a disastrous love affair. Although his actions in the story are thoroughly discreditable, he is associated with the hero, who joins his band temporarily at one point. Moreover, Hippothous is redeemed at the end of the novel as part of the happy ending; and therefore, unlike the hero and heroine, he is transformed by his experiences in the novel. His brigand career takes him all the way to upper Egypt, where it is specified that he and his men operate out of caves. After a

d'Éphèse," Journal des Savants (1985), 161-186, hears in Xenophon "echoes of an anti-Roman polemic."

⁵⁴H. Henne, H., "La Géographie de l'Égypte dans Xénophon d'Éphèse," Revue d'histoire de la philosophie et d'histoire générale de la civilisation 4 (1936) 97-106; J. Schwartz, "Quelques remarques sur les Éphésiaques," Acta Classica 54 (1985), 200-203. A more generous assessment of Xenophon's "documentary value" is given by F. Sartori, "L'Egitto di Senofonte Efesio," in L. Criscuolo and G. Geraci, eds. Egitto e Storia Antica dal'Ellenismo all'Età Araba (Bologna: CLUEB, 1989), 657-69.

⁵⁵For religious interpretations of these events, see R. Merkelbach, Isis Regina - Zeus Sarapis (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995), 356-61. Brioso Sánchez, "Egipto," 204-5, argues that Xenophon represents a break in the traditional representation of Egypt by his centralization of the religious character of the place.

number of adventures, Hippothous finally flees Egypt and gives up his brigand ways, and it is tempting to see his Egyptian career as a kind of symbolic death and resurrection parallel to that of the heroes' more literal brushes with death. "Hippochoos descends into caves as though into the realm of the most dreadful abjection and death, finally emerging from this moral and social degradation to reenter society and legality and to take up a new living standard."⁵⁶ Again, the novel is not primarily a religious text, anymore than Chariton's is primarily a political one; but Egypt is emerging as a potent metaphorical element that can be deployed with complex resonances.

This is certainly the case with the most peculiar figure in the whole story: the fisherman, Aigialeus. He is a Spartan exile and a man whose story of mutual and reciprocal passion for his wife, Thelxinoe, is also a parallel of sorts to the hero and heroine. After falling madly in love and escaping Sparta together in order to flee social censure of their passion, they lived together poorly, but happily, in exile in Sicily. Now years later, he has preserved his dead wife "in the Egyptian manner," (etethapto taphei Aigyptiai) and "continues to speak with her and lie down with her (!), and sees her as she used to be" (Ephesiaca 5.1.10-11). This scene links Egyptian mummification with necrophilia, a link that goes all the way back to Herodotus, and is one of the practices that quintessentially differentiates the Egyptians from Greeks and Romans. However, Habrocomes' reaction is somewhat surprising: He sees Aigialeus as an inspiring example of love that transcends death and it spurs him on to continue seeking Anthia.

⁵⁶A. Scaracella, "The Social and Economic Structures of the Ancient Novels," in G. Schmeling, The Novel in the Ancient World, 238. On the comparison and contrast between the hero and Hippothous, see J. Alvares, "The Drama of Hippothous in Xenophon of Ephesus' Ephesiaca," Classical Journal 90.4 (1995), 393-404.

"Anthia, when will I ever find you, even as a corpse? The body of Thelxinoe is a great comfort in the life of Aigialeus, and now I have really learned that true love knows no age limits" (Eph. 5.1.12).

Habrocomes seems to be especially capable of what Stephens calls "seeing double," able to see not only a Greek perspective, in which bodies are for burying or burning, not for preserving or having sex with, but also an Egyptian perspective, in which mummification is a preoccupation not with death, but a celebration of life. In a reciprocal gesture a few pages later, Anthia prays to Isis in Memphis either to restore her to Habrocomes or to make her "faithful to his corpse" (Eph. 5.3.4: sophrinousan toi nekroi). Once again an Egyptian context sounds the theme of permanent mutual fidelity that David Konstan has argued is so central to this novel.⁵⁷ Alongside other strategies Xenophon employs to articulate this difference, we can add the introduction of this "Egyptianized Spartan" living in Sicily, whose practices can be read both as excessive and utopian.

The middle section of the novel of Achilles Tatius, Leucippe and Clitophon, takes place in the Delta region of Egypt, at Pelusion and then Alexandria. Achilles also avoids mention of the Romans and evokes a Hellenized mediterranean world. Achilles Tatius is remarkable for the large number of descriptive passages he includes on the wonders of Egypt (phoenix, the Nile, crocodiles, etc), in what seem to be digressions unrelated to the course of the story. Plazenet has argued that these descriptions must be understood in terms of the rhetorical tradition of commonplaces, so that they provide a means for Achilles Tatius to formulate a critical discourse on the

⁵⁷D. Konstan, "Xenophon of Ephesus: Eros and Narrative in the Novel" in J. R. Morgan and R. Stoneman, eds., Greek Fiction: the Greek Novel in Context (New York: Routledge, 1994), 49-63.

writing of fiction.⁵⁸ Plazenet's reading of these scenes reminds us of the degree to which Egypt is, for both Romans and Greeks, a place of the imagination, a literary topos, despite the increase in real knowledge about the place from autopsy.

In the story, the two young lovers flee to Egypt from their parents in Tyre, together with two other characters, one of whose gay tragic story has been recounted in the first part of the book. They encounter in their travels an Egyptian character, Menelaus, who is Egyptian only in the lightest sense. He tells his own tragic gay story, which led to the exile from which he is now returning to Egypt after three years. His name cannot but recall his famous Homeric namesake and his episode in Egypt, where he acquired, depending on the account, secret knowledge or his wife back. In a discourse on the relative merits of love objects, the novelistic Menelaus vigorously defends the love of boys against the love of women, wherein he shows himself to be well-versed in Greek philosophical discussions of the subject.⁵⁹ Generic considerations once again make it difficult to attach too much seriousness to this scene, but some ironies emerge when the scene is considered in the context of Greek Egyptology. Menelaus the Egyptian defends a supposedly more traditional form of love, which is, somewhat surprisingly, claimed to be something more current (L&C 2.35.2: epichoiraze nun), recalling the numerous reversals in relative chronology of Egyptian and Greek culture. At the same time, the passage suggests how Egypt has come metaphorically to represent an interior space, so that a trip to Egypt can be seen as an encounter with a prior intellectual tradition. The two sides of the debate are certainly both parts of a Greek discourse on love, but the fact that one side is given to a Egyptian gives a kind of spatial and temporal dimension to the debate. I would like to connect that possibility with the dramatic scene at the beginning of Book 5, where the city of Alexandria

⁵⁸Plazenet, "Le Nil," 12.

⁵⁹S. Goldhill, Foucault's Virginit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

unfolds before the eyes of Clitophon in a remarkable adynaton that to me clearly suggests an inner journey of sorts:⁶⁰

The beauty of the city struck me like a flash of lightening. The things to see outstripped my sight; the prospects lured me on. Crossing the city center is such a long journey that you would think you were going abroad though you were staying home (endemos apodemia).

This last expression, endemos apodemia, juxtaposes and fuses "being at home" and "being abroad" in a way that recalls Freud's notion of the "uncanny" (Unheimlich). Its occurrence here in a passage of heightened emotional effusion indeed suggests the "strangely familiar" sensation produced, in Freud's account, by an encounter with a former aspect of the self that has been estranged by repression. This portrayal of Egypt as an interior space is particularly relevant in the case of Alexandria, the key point at which the Greek world penetrated the body of Egypt politically, socially and religiously. At the same time, it recalls other "uncanny" trips to Egypt, such as that of Solon in the Timaeus, who discovers there long-forgotten information about the past of his city. Legendary traditions about Greek wise men going to Egypt produce a tendency to make Egypt a metaphor for an interior journey to this site of religious wisdom; but literal trips into the deserts of Egypt by the holy men of late antiquity will also make this metaphor more concrete.⁶¹

Finally, mention must be made of the role of the boukoloi, the "herdsmen" of the Delta region, in the third book of the novel. Their appearance and violent actions against the heroine here are filled with stereotypes about xenophobic and seditious

⁶⁰Leucippe and Clitophon, 5.1.1-3. This is a precis of a longer passage that I have analyzed elsewhere: S. Nimis, "Memory and Description in the Ancient Novel," Arethusa 31.1 (Winter 1998), 99-122.

⁶¹P. Brown, "The Rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," JRS 61 (1971) 80-101.

Egyptians, including human sacrifice and cannibalism. Attempts to clarify the relationship between these fictional herdsmen and a variety of historical, or supposedly historical, instances of brigandage in the Delta regions, have shown a complex interpenetration of fact and fiction. A famous revolt by Egyptian boukoloi in the second century of the common era is reported by Cassius Dio (72.4), whose account bears striking resemblances to the scene in Achilles Tatius and to a substantial fragment from the Phoinikaka of Lollianus. It is likely that the Egyptophobe Cassius Dio spiced up his account with some typical slander from the world of fiction. But the existence of demotic material, which also involves "herdsmen" revolting against central authority and which seems to be an example of Egyptian nationalist propaganda, complicates the picture.⁶² If Cassius Dio borrowed material from a Greek tradition to spice up his story, the actual rebels in the second century may have done something similar in order to set themselves in their own native tradition of heroes. This means that the novelistic representations of the boukoloi might require a "bicultural" interpretation, as Rutherford has shown. In Achilles Tatius, Menelaus the Egyptian, who can speak both Greek and Egyptian, who can become initiated as a boukolos and who also knows how to manipulate the equipment of a Homeric rhapsode, is the one who manages the heroine's escape from the herdsmen. If the boukoloi in this novel are portrayed negatively for the most part, the culturally diverse Menelaus is a far more attractive character than his Homeric namesake, who, according to Herodotus, really does engage in human sacrifice in order to effect his escape from Egypt.

The final text I would like to consider is Heliodorus' An Ethiopian Tale. Most of this novel takes place in Egypt and the parts that takes place in Greece are narrated in

⁶²Rutherford, "Boukoloi," 113-16.

flashback style from within Egypt, so that this is the most Egyptian of all the novels.⁶³ The fictive date of the story is sometime during the Persian occupation of Egypt; the opening locale of the story is precisely identified as the site of the future Alexandria. In the course of the novel, two beautiful young lovers, Charikleia and Theagenes, travel from Greece through Egypt to Ethiopia, where they are married and installed as the rightful heirs to the throne. Two Egyptian characters, Kalisiris, a priest from Memphis, and his son Thyamis, who is the leader of a group of bandits, play major supporting roles, along with an Athenian youth, Knemon, whose own unhappy story is told in the novel. Once again we have a band of desperadoes, recognizable as the boukoloï of Achilles Tatius and other sources. The Persian Empire is the central authority against whom they fight in Heliodorus, and their occasional success against the Persians, who are destined to be thrown out of Egypt by the Greeks, creates a vague political alignment between Greeks and Egyptians, and later between Greeks and Ethiopians as well. The novel thus poses a spatial devaluation of the center for the periphery, whether that is the politically central Persians or even Athens, represented in the novel by Knemon and his family romance, which gives a rather negative view of that city and its institutions.⁶⁴

⁶³For the accuracy and sources of Heliodorus' descriptions of Egypt, see P. Cauderlier, "Réalités égyptiennes chez Héliodore," in M. F. Baslez et al., eds., Le Monde du Roman Grec (Paris: Presses de l'École normale supérieure, 1992), 221-231.

⁶⁴For the cultural and genealogical inversions in the novel, see T. Whitmarsh, "The Birth of a Prodigy: Heliodorus and the Genealogy of Hellenism" in R. Hunter, ed., Studies in Heliodorus (Cambridge, 1998), 93-124. For Heliodorus' treatment of Knemon and the Greeks, see D. N. Levin, "Aethiopica III-IV: Greek Dunces, Egyptian Sage," Athenaeum 80 (1992), 499-506.

Heliiodorus' initial portrayal of Thyamis and his Egyptian bandits in Book 1 alludes to a number of stereotypes about Egyptians: Charikleia's beauty vanquishes the brigand heart of Thyamis, proving that nobility of appearance triumphs over even the "harshest of natures" (Aithiopika 1.4.3). Charikleia also chides Theagenes for entertaining the absurd notion that she might prefer a "barbarian to a Greek" (Aith. 1.25.5); later in Book 1, the author notes that once embarked on a course of action, "the heart of a savage brooks no turning back"; and when a barbarian loses all hope of his own preservation, "he will usually kill everything he loves before he dies" (Aith. 1.30.6), this again in reference to the Egyptian Thyamis. I catalogue these sententiae only because in the course of the novel, there is a reappraisal of Thyamis and his Egyptian friends, who become allies of the Greek heroes against the Persians.⁶⁵ And as the Egyptians in the story become rehabilitated, the Persians, particularly the degenerate sister of the Great King himself, emerge as the real enemies of everything good and true in the world. This discovery that the "other" is really the "same" in disguise has parallels in other contexts where it serves to articulate new alliances that must be redrawn due to shifting positions.⁶⁶ Whereas in Chariton, the Egyptians are settled in Greece at the end of the story, in the Aithiopika, Knemon the Athenian settles in Egypt, and the Greek hero Theagenes settles in Ethiopia. It is possible to see in this "decentering" a reflection of resistance against the Roman "center," even though the

⁶⁵Thyamis' rehabilitation is made more plausible by the fact that he is a priest who has been driven to banditry by his scheming brother, a rare example of "social banditry" in antiquity, which is paralleled in a demotic story, the Contest for the Benefice. See Rutherford, "Boukoloï," 109-13. For "social banditry" see McGing, "Bandits."

⁶⁶See F. Jameson, The Political Unconscious (Ithaca: Cornell University press, 1981), 118-19, for a parallel in medieval French romance.

fictive date of the story predates Rome's preeminence by many centuries. In addition, in another reversal of the relative cultural dependence of Greece and Egypt, Homer, that central figure in Greek culture, is repatriated to Egypt by Kalisiris' account of his origins. He makes the assertion that Homer is an Egyptian, ostensibly the son of an Egyptian priest, but actually the son of Hermes himself (Aith. 3.14.1-4). Knemon the Athenian finds the idea quite acceptable, based on Homer's "typically Egyptian combination of concealed meanings and sheer enjoyment in his poetry" (Aith. 3.15.1). G. Sandy has demonstrated that this "typically Egyptian" idea is closely connected to contemporary Neoplatonic ideas.⁶⁷ It also reflects a regular assertion by Greek intellectuals, especially in this later period: barbarian wisdom is older and profounder.⁶⁸

Also noteworthy is the way that the Isaic priest Kalisiris is a figure for the narrator himself. Morgan notes that "the performance of Kalisiris is in many ways emblematic of the whole novel, intensely self-aware, theatrical, manipulative, enigmatic.... He is both a solver and setter of riddles."⁶⁹ Winkler's assessment of Kalisiris as a figure of the author focuses on the way he "goes with the flow" and allows things to emerge in their own time, in contrast to characters who violently impose their own meaning upon events.⁷⁰ Clearly we have in the figure of Kalisiris a more positive valuation of certain aspects of "Egyptianness." The stereotypes of Egyptians as

⁶⁷G. Sandy, "Characterization and Philosophical Decor in Heliodorus' Aithiopika, Transactions of the American Philological Association 112 (1982), 141-67.

⁶⁸Hartog, "Greeks" p, 224.

⁶⁹J. R. Morgan, "The Aithiopika of Heliodorus: Narrative as Riddle," in J. R. Morgan and R. Stoneman, eds., Greek Fiction: the Greek Novel in Context, 108.

⁷⁰J. J. Winkler, "The Mendacity of Kalisiris and the Narrative Strategy of Heliodorus' Aithiopika." Yale Classical Studies 27 (1982), 130.

passive and crafty become refigured in the character of Kalisiris as an essential component of his barbarian wisdom, a wisdom which can bring about a successful conclusion to the events in the story, even against the overwhelming forces of corrupt central authority.⁷¹

The superiority of Kalisiris is foregrounded in the interaction between him and Knemon during the former's long flashback narrative. The naive Knemon's lack of aesthetic distance and insatiable appetite for romance is several times noted. He repeatedly interrupts Kalisiris, asking for elaborations on parts of the story that the priest deems irrelevant; he identifies with the characters in the story so completely that his emotions rise and fall with their fortunes, exclaiming at one point that Kalisiris' narrative had made the scene so real that he thought he actually saw the two heroes in the flesh. Knemon's comic outbursts confirm to Kalisiris that he is a true Athenian, intensely interested in incidental spectacle (Aith. 3.1.2) Knemon insists that Kalisiris continue the story deep into the night, stating that there can never be enough of love, either in its experience or in the telling (Aith. 4.4.3). These barbs at Knemon, the representative Athenian in the story, should be compared to the reactions of the Delphic Greeks to Kalisiris' appearance there: They ask him questions about the wonders of Egypt, for "Greeks find all Egyptian lore and legend irresistible" (Aith. 2.27.3). In contrast, after seeking and hearing an account of the usual wonders of Egypt, the Ethiopian king Hydaspes is unimpressed and asserts that all these supposed Egyptian wonders are actually wonders of Ethiopia, where the Nile has its origin (Aith. 9.22.7).⁷²

There are also several instances of a contrast made by Kalisiris between true celestial Egyptian wisdom and the base magic which Egyptians are commonly asserted

⁷¹I. Rutherford, "Kalasiris," 203-9, gives a bicultural reading of Kalisiris' name and character.

⁷²On the significance of this passage, see Plazenet, "Le Nil," 20-21.

to have, again at the expense of the Greek characters in the story.⁷³ When the Egyptian Thyamis has a dream, the author clearly condemns his interpretive attempt in which he "forced the interpretation to conform with his own desires" (Aith. 1.18.5) But a similar criticism is voiced by Kalisiris when he describes the Delphians' attempts to extract the meaning of the oracle, "each understanding it in a sense that matched his own wishes" (Aith. 2.36.1). Similarly, an old crone at the end of Book 6 uses her Egyptian magic to force information from the body of her dead son and is roundly condemned by Kalisiris for practicing this base form of Egyptian wisdom. But it is precisely this baser Egyptian magic that the heroine's adoptive father, Charikles, and the lovestruck hero, Theagenes, each request Kalisiris to use in order to enact their desires for the heroine. It is this same Charikles, a priest of Delphi, who shows up at the end of the story, accusing the now dead Kalisiris of being a charlatan and demanding satisfaction from Theagenes for his daughter's theft. Heliodorus thus goes out of his way to set up this confrontation between the Delphic and Isaic priests, so that Charikles is able to find out that Kalisiris was a holy man, not a charlatan, that he was the one assisting the fulfillment of the gods' plans, against the inappropriate private designs of the Delphic priest.

Finally, it is important to note the way that Heliodorus, via his Egyptian internal narrator Kalisiris, assimilates the Homeric tradition to his novel. As we are introduced to Kalisiris and his story in Book 2, there are numerous explicit references to Homer, particularly the Scherian episode of Odysseus. Kalisiris himself seems to be occupying the position of Odysseus telling his story, for example, when he quotes directly the opening lines of Odysseus' own flashback narrative (Aith. 2.21.5; cf. Od. 9.39). And their generous host Nausikles, who is scrupulous in respecting Zeus the god of guests and suppliants, reminds us of the good host Alcinous--his name even recalls that of the

⁷³Sandy, "Characterization," gives a full account of these instances.

Scherian king's daughter, Nausikaa. But at the same time Nausikles is characterized as a wanderer who has "visited many cities and seen into the hearts and minds of many people" (Aith. 2.22.3) in a reminiscence of the opening verses of the Odyssey.

Charikleia employs Penelope-like ruses to hold off unwanted suitors, but it is also she who dons a disguise and witnesses a necromancy scene, recalling famous episodes of the hero himself from Odyssey 11 and 13. And yet it is Theagenes who has a distinctive wound on his thigh from a boar hunt similar to Odysseus' (Aith. 5.5.2). Moreover, before meeting Kalisiris, Knemon the Athenian covers himself in leaves in the manner of Odysseus just before his episode in Scheria (Aith. 2.20.3; cf. Od. 5. 481-3). Despite the density of Homeric references, the Odyssey is evoked as an intertext in an inconsistent way, indicating that it is no more of a clef for decoding the meaning of the novel than the philosophical ideas about Egyptian wisdom analyzed by Sandy.

Knemon compares Kalisiris to the Homeric Proteus of Pharos: "So far I have found you just like Proteus of Pharos, not that you take on false and shifting forms as he did, but you are forever trying to lead me in the wrong direction" (Aith. 2.24.4). This reference to the wise old man of the sea whom legend says inhabits the water near the setting of the novel, seems like a perfect figure for Kalisiris. But we perhaps hear also an echo of Herodotus' Proteus, the good king of Memphis who protects Helen until her rightful husband can come for her. There is a kind of uncanniness in the way these allusions work in the text, suggesting provocative connections that aren't fully developed in the course of the novel and thus have the appearance of interpretive dead ends. Indeed, Heliodorus himself is a slippery figure like Proteus. Insofar as it is characteristic of the novel to introduce multiple and shifting perspectives which are often resistant to monolithic readings of the meaning of the work, the idea of a secret coherence underlying the entire work is something that must be alluded to periodically, by gestures that promise an ultimate illumination to come if we just keep reading, so that reading becomes a kind of wrestling match with a Proteus-like figure.

When we get to the end of the Aithiopika, there are a lot of fireworks and epiphanies, but nothing really that could account for the elaborate journey we have taken; for it is not the arriving, but the journey itself that is important. And it is in this way that Egypt is central to this novel: it is neither the beginning nor the end, but the in-between land, the land of exile and resurrection, the land of age-old wisdom as well as charlatans, the land of twists and turns of plot and fate. Egypt in this novel reflects the conceptualization of Egypt that was destined to dominate Europe from the end of antiquity on: a mystery always to be pondered and never solved, but continuously offering itself as a pretext for contemplation and self-examination.⁷⁴

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