**Schemes of Egyptian History in the Works of Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus:**

**A History-Writing of Renaissance?**

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The paper I am going to present is, in fact, not so much new compared to some things I have already stated; I hope, however, it will be successful as a sort of re-grouping this earlier material and re-placing some accents in its interpretation. Four years ago, in early September 2014, I presented at a conference organized by the Perm’ branch of the Higher School of Economics a paper entitled “The ‘Crisis of the Pyramid-Builders’ in Herodotus’ Book 2 and Diodorus’ Book 1, and the Epochs of Egyptian History”. My aim was to investigate the reasons that led both Herodotus’ and Diodorus’ following Hecataeus of Abdera to place the reigns of the great pyramid builders belonging, as we know, to Dynasty IV in the mid-Third Millennium B.C. between the reign of king with a name derivative from the name “Ramesses” (Herodotus’ Rhampsinitus and Diodorus’ Rhemphis) and the time of the Ethiopian domination. Translating this relative chronology into real figures is, of course, an implausible and illogical operation; however it would bring us to conclude that these Greek authors placed the building of the great pyramids sometimes between the 13th and the 8th centuries B.C. This false chronology contradicts not only the present knowledge but also the knowledge of the Egyptian historiographers of the Late Period: one can see from the work of Manetho that they were able to place the pyramid building rightly in time. One might conclude that the anachronism of Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus is due either to their blatant ignorance or to the ignorance of their informers: and it has once been assumed that Herodotus had fallen victim to the services of ordinary tourist guides. But an attentive look discerns in the narrations of both Herodotus and Diodorus a rather elaborate scheme of Egyptian history; so a more plausible option is that this anachronism resulted not from ignorance but from a conscious manipulation. In my idea, this manipulation was backed by the authentic Egyptian notion that the pyramid building preceding and probably provoked a great catastrophe: this notion can be detected more explicitly in the Westcar Papyrus and more vaguely in the Prophecy of Neferty. In real history this catastrophe was the First Intermediate Period; but for one or another reason the informers of Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus must have taken the Ethiopian advent and subsequent shortcomings, including the conflict with Assyria and the anarchy before Psammetichus I (the alleged “dodecarchy”), for an unrivaled disaster and placed the pyramid building before it.

Beside this conclusion I made in my paper of 2014 a number of observations that seem important. To begin with, one can say there is a coincidence of the sequences of kings given by Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus for the early Egyptian history (i.e. the period before the Ethiopian conquest). Certainly, the account of Hecataeus/Diodorus is longer, it has a more detailed and better discernible structure, and it enumerates a greater number of kings than Herodotus does; but the important point is that it neither omits a figure of a king known to Herodotus nor changes its relative place in the sequence. Besides Dr. Askold Ivanchik has once observed in his research of the tradition about Sesostris that the accounts of Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus about this king develop similar subjects; but they are narrated differently, so that there is no question of Hecataeus taking his information from Herodotus; he rather used an Egyptian tradition known to him independently and heavily influenced by folklore. This means that the Egyptian tradition Herodotus knew and used was still circulated more than a century later, when Hecataeus of Abdera was compiling his work on Egypt at the court of the Satrap Ptolemy. Let us say that this specific tradition was by no means unrivalled as a source of information available to Hecataeus: apart from it there was, to say the least, the “academic” version of the Egyptian history represented probably some 40 or 50 years after Hecataeus in the work by Manetho. If Hecataeus choose another tradition he did it not just following Herodotus: he not only told much more than the latter but also confronted him in a number of points [Priestley, 2, 128 ff, 138 ff] (skepticism about Herodotus is indeed a well-known trend in the Classical writing). Thus, Hecataeus’ preference must show that in Egypt of the late 4th century this tradition, quite independently of the Greek historiography, was prominent enough to serve a base for the work by Hecataeus, who was probably writing an “official” Ptolemaic history of Egypt addressed to an early Hellenistic Greek-speaking reader!

What are the features of this tradition basically common to the narrations of Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus? To begin with, they both give to Egyptian history a certain structure, much easier to notice with Hecataeus/Diodorus. These authors show three sequences of Egyptian kings: first started with the founder-king Menas is not attached to any specific place; the second including Osymandias is Theban; and the third, started with the king Uchoreus, is Memphite. Dr. Arkadiy Demidchik, a researcher of the First Intermediate Period in the history of Egypt, assumed probably fairly that Uchoreus is a replica of Khety WAH-kA-Ra of Dynasty X (mid-21st century B.C.), probable author of the *Teaching to the King Merikare*, who tried to resume pyramid building and transferred his residence and capital from Herakleopolis to Memphis in an attempt to restore the state of the Old Kingdom. Dr. Demidchik also turned my attention privately to the fact that 12 kings between separating Uchoreus from Moiris, according to Hecataeus/Diodorus, is a highly likely number of kings between the historical Khety WAH-kA-Ra and Amenemhat I at the start of Dynasty XII. Thus, the start of the third sequence of kings in the scheme of Hecataeus/Diodorus is obviously a replica of the late First Intermediate Period and the early Middle Kingdom. The Theban sequence before it is a reflection of the New Kingdom and a rather notorious interpolation, which does not prevent the reminiscences of the same period from reappearing in the third sequence. That sequence comprises in fact the replicas of the Middle and the New Kingdom and of the Late Period; and Hecataeus/Diodorus say that the capital of Egypt remained in Memphis all the way to the foundation of Alexandria (*Diod*. I. 50.6-7).

As for the work of Herodotus, I believe that our guest Roberto Gozzoli was one of the few researchers of his evidence to indicate in it “few separate blocks” corresponding to the epochs of Egyptian history [Gozzoli 2006, p. 172-173]. The best-marked boundary between such blocks is defined by the sum of 330 or 341 generations of kings from the reign of Min at the start of history and to the rule of a “priest of Hephaestus” named Sethos: his rule followed Ethiopian conquest, and after it the reigns of the Saite kings went. Thus, this reign actually marked the boundary between the “ancient” and “modern” history of Herodotus’ Egyptian informers. The final boundary of the first period of Egyptian history (as well as the very existence of such period in Herodotus’ narration) is less discernible. This period is opened by the reign of the king-founder Min: after the story of his reign Herodotus says that 330 other kings followed him and tells at length about the only female among them, the queen Nitocris. Completing her story Herodotus says: “But of the other kings they related no achievement or act of great note, except of Moiris, the last of them” (101.1: [τῶν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=tw%3Dn&la=greek&can=tw%3Dn0) [δὲ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=de%5C&la=greek&can=de%5C0&prior=tw=n) [ἄλλων](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=a%29%2Fllwn&la=greek&can=a%29%2Fllwn0&prior=de%5C) [βασιλέων](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=basile%2Fwn&la=greek&can=basile%2Fwn0&prior=a%29/llwn) [οὐ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=ou%29&la=greek&can=ou%290&prior=basile/wn) [γὰρ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=ga%5Cr&la=greek&can=ga%5Cr0&prior=ou%29) [ἔλεγον](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=e%29%2Flegon&la=greek&can=e%29%2Flegon0&prior=ga%5Cr) [οὐδεμίαν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=ou%29demi%2Fan&la=greek&can=ou%29demi%2Fan0&prior=e%29/legon) [ἔργων](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=e%29%2Frgwn&la=greek&can=e%29%2Frgwn0&prior=ou%29demi/an) [ἀπόδεξιν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=a%29po%2Fdecin&la=greek&can=a%29po%2Fdecin0&prior=e%29/rgwn) [καὶ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kai%5C&la=greek&can=kai%5C0&prior=a%29po/decin) [οὐδὲν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=ou%29de%5Cn&la=greek&can=ou%29de%5Cn0&prior=kai%5C) [εἶναι](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=ei%29%3Dnai&la=greek&can=ei%29%3Dnai0&prior=ou%29de%5Cn) [λαμπρότητος](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=lampro%2Fthtos&la=greek&can=lampro%2Fthtos0&prior=ei%29=nai), [πλὴν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=plh%5Cn&la=greek&can=plh%5Cn0&prior=lampro/thtos) [ἑνὸς](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=e%28no%5Cs&la=greek&can=e%28no%5Cs0&prior=plh%5Cn) [τοῦ](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=tou%3D&la=greek&can=tou%3D0&prior=e%28no%5Cs) [ἐσχάτου](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=e%29sxa%2Ftou&la=greek&can=e%29sxa%2Ftou0&prior=tou=) [αὐτῶν](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=au%29tw%3Dn&la=greek&can=au%29tw%3Dn0&prior=e%29sxa/tou) [Μοίριος](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=*moi%2Frios&la=greek&can=*moi%2Frios0&prior=au%29tw=n)). Formally the “other kings” mentioned in this phrase must be those 330 kings summed at the start of the preceding chapter; however, Moiris in Herodotus’ narration is by no means the last of them, and the historian tells a lot about those who ruled after him. Judging from this Moiris must be the last in the elusive first sequence of Egyptian kings: Herodotus told nothing of its members except Nitocris and probably did not quite understand the principle of its definition, as he made an obvious mistake when speaking of its last king. However, this principle is obvious: the Royal Canon of Turin and Manetho’s evidence makes it clear that Nitocris was thought to belong to the late Old Kingdom, and Moiris, the builder of two pyramids near the lake he ordered to dig, definitely marks the start of Dynasty XII. Thus, the boundary between the sequences of kings in Herodotus’ narration is very much the same as drawn by Hecataeus/Diodorus between the Theban and Memphite epochs in Egyptian history.

Notably, all these boundaries are oddly bloodless and unproblematic. For the early history of Egypt before the pyramid building and the Ethiopian conquest Herodotus would notice the individual faults of some kings, like the greediness of Rhampsinitus, but he does not know crises that would shatter the foundations of the Egyptian state. In the narration of Hecataeus/Diodorus the start of the second, Theban, period of Egyptian history as well as the transition from it to the third, Memphite, period are not marked by any catastrophe. Thus, the informers of Hecataeus/Diodorus somehow forgot is the First Intermediate Period, though Manetho must have known it well enough. Neither Herodotus, nor Hecataeus/Diodorus know the Hyksos conquest that Manetho described perfectly at length: Hecataeus/Diodorus narrate a suspicious story of a cruel king Amasis, whose reign someplace in the middle of the Memphite period was followed by a short Ethiopian conquest of Egypt under King Actysanes. The place of this episode evidently after the reigns of the historical Middle Egyptian kings calls for an association with the Hyksos conquest: however, the episode is very brief, and Actysanes is depicted as a good Egyptian ruler, so this is also not a lasting crisis of the Egyptian state. Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus tell about King Proteus, or Cetes, who lived in the time of the Trojan War and received in Egypt Alexander and Helen; but they know nothing about the wars with the Sea Peoples, which were probably reflected in Manetho’s story about the Hyksos and the lepers seizing Egypt at the end of Dynasty XIX. Herodotus tells a lot about the wars of Sesostris and Hecataeus/Diodorus about the wars of Osymandias and Sesoosis: the expansion under those kings ultimately failed, but this was only natural for the attempts to get hold of the entire world and did not affect in any way the life inside Egypt. To sum up, the Egyptian informers of Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus ignored (to be sure, not of ignorance) all major crises and military catastrophes in the early history of their country: they represented it as a structured but basically uninterrupted process that continued without any considerable turmoil till the time of pyramid building.

Another omission of both Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus not often discussed by scholars is their ignoring the Lybian time. For a contemporary Egyptologist this epoch, especially its start is certainly the cradle of the Late Egyptian society with its specific social order and somewhat weakened royal power. The Egyptians of the Late Period seem to have not forgotten this: in the late 4th century B.C., closely to the time of Hecataeus, Aristotle’s pupil Dicaearchus called the most ancient Egyptian king-founder with the name Sesonchosis, probably taking this knowledge directly or indirectly from the Egyptian tradition; and some decades later Manetho gave this name to the first king of his Dynasty XII, the historical Senwosret I, renowned as a great king-founder of his time. It is hardly needed to prove that the name Sesonchosis is derived from the Lybian-Egyptian name Shoshenq, and the reason to transfer this name on the rulers of much earlier past was probably the notion that the first Lybian king of Egypt at the start of Dynasty XXI Shoshenq I was a king-founder himself. Again, a look at Manetho’s kings’ list shows that in the early Hellenistic time Lybian dynasties were remembered not in all details but quite distinctly; and probably at the same time the Demotic *Epic of Petubastis* with its specific setting in Late Lybian Egypt was codified. Some more than a century ago Eduard Meyer suggested, probably, rightly that Diodorus’ account about the creation of a specific class of warriors-landholders by King Sesoosis must correspond to the real activities of Shoshenq I. However, the image of King Sesoosis obviously amalgamates the reminiscences of the historical Senwosret I and III, so ascribing to this king the innovation of the historical Shoshenq I is somewhat similar to transferring his name on the historical Senwosret I in Manetho’s kings’ list. Herodotus did not describe such reform explicitly: but he spoke about the privileges of Egyptian warriors, who held the land plots of 12 arouras free of taxation (168), and in other context he said that the distribution of land in equal plots was carried out by King Sesostris (109), i.e. by the historical Senwosret III. It is logical that the privilege of warriors had to be introduced simultaneously with the all-embracing distribution of land; but then, in Herodotus’ idea, the privileged military class was also created by a historical king of Dynasty XII. Thus, the founding activities of the early Lybian time happen to be detached from it and assigned to much earlier epochs of Egyptian history.

As for the Lybian time as such, Herodotus, indeed, mentions a King Asychis, who ruled after Mycerinus, built the forecourt of the temple of Hephaestus, gave a law “allowing a man to borrow on the security of his father's corpse” and erected a pyramid of bricks (136). A parallel to Asychis in the narration of Hecataeus/Diodorus seems to be Sasychis, a second greatest lawgiver of Egypt, who codified ritual and invented geometry (Diod. I.94.3). The position of these rulers before the Ethiopian conquest corresponds to that of the historical Lybian time; and the building of Asychis, according to Herodotus, might be seen as a replica of archeologically attested activities of Shoshenq I at Memphis. This led Alan Lloyd to equate both Asychis and Sasychis with Shoshenq I and to see in this image the reflection of the early Lybian time. Two things, however, allows doubting that such equation is quite true and that it was thought of by the creators of this image. First, both Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus on this king do not tell that this king created the military class, though this doing would have been legitimately connected with the personality of the first Lybian king. Second, no convincing argument has been given so far as to which Egyptian royal name underlies the name Asychis, or Sasychis. So far the most consistent interpretation was to see in it a Hellenization of the Egyptian name aSA-xt – “rich (lit. many, multiple) of things”; but none king bore it. However, the founder of Dynasty XXIV Tefnakhte had Horus’ and Two Ladies’ names %iA-Xt “Wise with his belly”; moreover, these names are quite significant, as, according to Robert Ritner, they allude to the Old Kingdom royal protocol (Ritner did not make his idea more clear, but he probably meant the two-partite Horus’ names with the second component –Xt belonging to Djoser, Sekhemkhet, Menkaure and Shepseskaf)[[1]](#footnote-1). The transformation of the Egyptian name %iA-Xt into the Greek Sasychis is plausible, while the form Asychis in Herodotus’ account might be its corruption (anyway, the connection between them seems likely to most students). There is another reason to see Tefnakhte in Asychis/Sasychis: Hecataeus/Diodorus tell that Menas had once been a founder of “luxurious life” but later King Tnephachthus experienced great hardships during his war against Arabia, “denounced luxury and pronounced a curse on the king who had first taught the people their extravagant way of living” and wrote down his curse in the temple of Zeus. Tnephachthus is called the father of Bochoris, so his identity with Tefnakhte is certain. According to this statement Tnephachthus formulated some basic principles of life, and this is also comparable with Sasychis’ codifying rituals, introducing the fundamental law on borrowing on the security of mummy and inventing geometry. In fact it is significant that the founder of the Saite royal house is portrayed as a sort of cultural hero; however, if my interpretation is correct, the images of Lybian kings and any notion of their founding activities are absent from the narrations of Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus.

Still more importance to the Saite house in the traditions discussed is given by the image of King Bocchoris, which is presented by Hecataeus/Diodorus, though absent in the narration of Herodotus. A label of Bocchoris is his wisdom, which made him a famous law-giver; however, his image is not entirely positive and he is shown not just wise but also as cunning person. Similar image was given by Herodotus to Rhampsinitus, whose wisdom provided to Egypt the best laws but who was also greedy and cunning; symptomatically, his reign is the eve of the great trouble of pyramid building. The reign of Bocchoris also precedes the trouble of the Ethiopian conquest, though Hecataeus/Diodorus say somewhat oddly that the Ethiopian Sabacon ruled much later than Bocchoris. In fact, such saying wants some explanation: not only the advent of the Nubian king Shabaka must have fallen in the time of the real King Bocchoris but also Manetho says that he was burnt alive by the invader. Beside Manetho there is rather a good deal of evidence about Bocchoris in the tradition of the Late Antiquity: Plutarch says that the goddess Isis put on his head a snake, which caused him to decide different matters fairly and prevented his cruelties; and Claudius Aelianus ascribed to him an intention to have an ordinary bull fight the sacred bull Mnevis. However, two evidences are crucially important: first, the famous *Oracle of Lamb* dates to the reign of Bocchoris the prophecy of miraculous lamb about hardships of Egypt under foreign rule, and similar statement is given by Manetho. Second, according to Lysimachus of Alexandria quoted by Josephus and Tacitus Bocchoris sent to desert a mass of ritually impure suffering from skin diseases, which eventually gave origin to the people of Jews. The latter statement has an easily recognizable parallel in Manetho’s story about similar iniquity of King Amenophis at the end of Dynasty XIX, which provoked the downfall of Egypt to the power of the Hyksos allied with Egyptian lepers. These evidences definitely state that in the time of Bocchoris not only the later turmoil of foreign conquest was predictable but also it was caused by his own misdoings. Probably, the statement of Manetho about the predictions of lamb registers the existence of this considerably negative image of Bocchoris by the early Hellenistic time; however, its negative message can hardly be inspired by some tendency of this time and must come back to earlier epoch, when it could be more or less topical. Traces of the same attitude are seen in the evidence of Hecataeus/Diodorus about the cunning Bocchoris; but here his negative features are softened greatly, to the degree of some ambivalence in his image. Perhaps, this softening might explain why Hecataeus/Diodorus made of Sabacon a remote successor of Bocchoris: a distance between them would not let to hold Bocchoris responsible with his iniquities for the trouble of the Ethiopian conquest! For some reason the inspirers of the tradition represented by Hecataeus/Diodorus wanted not only to make of Tefnakhte a sort of cult figure but also to create an unblemished image of his son.

The observations I have made seem sufficient to sum up and to derive some conclusion. As I have just shown, the tradition represented by Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus is highly loyal to the Saite royal house at its very origin. It is a triviality that the evidence of both narratives is especially detailed and trustworthy as far as the history of Dynasty XXVI is concerned; and Herodotus drew a rather taking image of Amasis, a trickster on the throne though an able ruler. However, Dynasty XXVI had been the last dynasty and Amasis had been the last king before Egypt lost its independence to Persians; so their generally positive presentation could be explained by the intention to contrast this reminiscence of lost independence to the foreign rule. Such explanation would not work for Dynasty XXIV: that its rulers Tefnakhte and Bocchoris are deliberately idealized is likely to be explained with loyalty towards the Saite royal house as a matter of principle, independent of any contrast to what followed later. Another important point is the omission of the Libyan time in the tradition discussed. Incidentally, there was an urge to idealize it and to present it as the great heroic past of Egypt; this urge brought to life the Demotic *Epic of Petubastis*, probably, first codified in the early Hellenistic time but likely to emerge earlier. The partisans of this tradition must have been those who had once flourished in the Libyan time, i.e. the Libyan princes and, in due course, their descendents; however, the contrary urge to forget the Libyan time and even to ascribe its important doings to much earlier epochs had to come from the foes of the Libyan princely hierarchy, i.e. from the Saite rulers fighting for Egypt’s unification since Dynasty XXIV. This deliberate oblivion is not merely a sign of hostility: if the Libyan time were represented in the scheme of Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus in its own right, it would inevitably have become a certain reference point, a *Neubeginn* that started the “modern” history of Egypt separated from the great antiquity. Probably, the creators of this tradition were willing to keep in their mind only two reference points, or rather a reference period and reference point: the great antiquity ending with pyramid building and Ethiopian conquest; and the start of the Saite Dynasty XXVI as a restoration of normal order of things. Finally, quite tell-tale is the very desire to represent the Ethiopian conquest of Egypt and its aftermath as the major turmoil in the history of Egypt, the preceding epoch of the pyramid building as an iniquity causing in a way that turmoil and still earlier history of Egypt as a structured but virtually uninterrupted and unproblematic time of the great rulers! This tendency fits excellently with the notable aspiration to resurrect the idealized great past merging together both the Old and the Middle Kingdom, which was characteristic for the time of the Saite Dynasty XXVI often denoted as the epoch of Renaissance.

Thus, the conclusion, which I feel legitimate to make, is that the scheme of Egyptian history reproduced in the narratives of Herodotus and Hecataeus/Diodorus was backed and largely formed by the ideological trends of the Saite Renaissance. It is rather natural that the informers of Herodotus fed to him exactly this scheme: after all, the Renaissance was the motto of the period that immediately preceded the Persian rule. It is not so clear why the scheme retained its importance still in the 4th century B.C. and why Hecataeus made use of it at a time when the Renaissance ideology was hardly topical and this scheme obviously had alternatives (to say the least, the one represented in the work of Manetho). I must confess that at present I do not know the answer to this question and should welcome suggestions about it.

1. Djoser – nTry-Xt; Sekemkhet = sxm-Xt; Menkaure – kA-Xt; Shepseskaf – Sps-Xt. It was the idea of old Egyptologists (Hall, Ancient History of the Near East, p. 127; Laut, ZAeS 6 (1868), 4-44) that Diodorus’ Sasychis has to be identified with Shepseskaf; partly it was resumed by Kenneth Kitchen, who thought this image to be a confusion of Shoshenq I with Shepseskaf, due to Herodotus’ ascribing to Asychis a pyramid of bricks = “Pharaoh’s Mastaba”. However, shall the idea of such confusion be true, it might be rather a confusion of Shepseskaf and %iA-Xt-Tefnakhte, whose Horus’ names are really similar with their component -Xt. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)