

EGYPTIAN SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR THE PTOLEMAIC PERIOD

By

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The history of Egypt presents two great phases; the one Active, during which she created and developed her own culture; the other Passive, during which she was subjugated to foreign powers.

The first phase covers about three thousand years (3200¹--332² B.C.) comprising thirty Dynasties and known to Historians as the Pharaonic period. During this phase, Egypt passed through three distinctive historical periods, interrupted by two intermediate ones. The Old Kingdom was a period of growth and undisturbed development. The Middle Kingdom, was a period of prosperity which came to be regarded, in the later periods, as the classical period. During the time of the New Kingdom, Egypt rose to greater prosperity and power and reached its zenith. Then follow periods of temporary foreign domination and a short period of Renaissance after which Egypt reached the end of its long Active phase.

The second phase begins with the conquest of Alexander the Great (332 B. C.) and ends with the declaration of the Republic in 1952 A. D. In this phase Egypt ceased to be for the Egyptians and the Empire of the Pharaohs lost its political independence. It became then a part Alexander's Empire that is to say a part of the Hellenistic World. And when suddenly (in 323 B. C.) the young Emperor died of a fever in Babylon, the Government of Egypt passed to one of his Generals- Ptolemy son of Lagos- and remained in his family, for about three hundred years (323-31 B. C.). This time, known to Historians as the Ptolemaic

1. The beginning of the History of Egypt with the rise of Menes, the first Pharaoh in the first Dynasty.
2. When Alexander the Great conquered Egypt.
3. From this time Egypt begins another Active phase.

period, can also be described as the political approach to the classical World for, it brought Egypt for the first time in its history under a European rule. It is one of the most important epochs in the evolution of Egyptian civilisation.

The history of these three centuries displays the great work of reform which the Ptolemies carried out in the field of Politics and Economics in order to build their Estate. This reform enabled them to create a strong and well organised State which was the last among the leading Hellenistic powers to succumb to the domination of Rome. The general system of Government which the Ptolemies adopted was to some extent linked with the Old System of the Pharaohs with one fundamental change — that is — Ptolemy took the place of Pharaoh. Apart from creating the three Greek City States there is hardly any kind of Greek innovation in the administration of Egypt. This history could be traced with tolerable certainty and almost with accuracy.

But at the same time we are faced with a set of problems which have not yet been solved. For, during this period we have an interesting contrast: on one side, a minority of Greeks with their language and culture; on the other, the mass of the native population "with a language, culture and a highly organised religious system of their own, going back to an antiquity long before the name of Hellas had been heard". To what extent the plan of Alexander namely to spread the spirit of Greece did really affect the natives? Did they stick to their old traditions and live in that atmosphere of the Past or did they change their outlook and admit the modes of the Present? What was the influence of Greek on Egyptian Culture and customs? In a word what was the fate of Hellenism in Egypt? An answer to these questions may be sought in Egyptian sources written in the Egyptian language.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

In the last century, Historians used to depend on what the classical authors had said about Egypt; indeed they had no choice. But with the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, a clue was found to the decipherment of Hieroglyphic Writing. The Egyptian Monuments then were allowed to speak for them-selves. A large number of these monuments are inscribed or painted with Hieroglyphic writing or pictorial scenes. These revealed to us a new picture of the people who made them. Instead of a race considered little developed by Herodotus and others,

we began to see a highly civilised people who occupied an exalted position and who became, at least for a time, a great universal power. Since that time, scholars have been studying the immense amount of texts which turns up year after year as a result of Excavation. Modern scholars especially Egyptologists began then to question even the credibility of Herodotus' account of Egypt.

Although these monuments give us a most complete picture of the life of the Ancient Egyptians throughout the pharaonic period, yet they show the people as kings, high officials and citizens performing religious rites or public duties. We look in vain to find in them a true picture of the private affairs and the humane nature of human life. No wonder then if we turn our faces to look for the different aspects of Social Life in Papyri; for, it is on these fragile rolls that the Egyptians wrote down their thoughts.

THE SCIENCE OF PAPYROLOGY

At the end of the 19th century, this fascinating science of Papyrology was developed. It is the science dealing with those ancient documents written in Hieroglyphic Hieratic, Demotic, Greek, Latin, Coptic and Arabic - on Papyri found in Egypt. Those in Greek and Latin cover a period of about one thousand years, from the establishment of the Ptolemaic Dynasty to the Arab conquest (332 B.C. - 640 A.D.). They have opened many fields for research in History - political and economic, in philology and in Sociology and Law. The collections recovered from Egypt, give a most complete picture of the whole range of Life that it is almost comparable to Modern History. In fact they have increased our knowledge of the life of the ordinary man in the ancient world.

Early in this century, scholars of classics have recognised the value of Greek papyri and published more than thirty thousand documents. The students of classics to day possess an established science equipped with a wörterbuch, a Namenbuch, a Sammelbuch and even a Kontraxindex. Scholars of Demotic, however, are nearly half a century behind not only because they possess nothing of the kind but also because of the difficulty of their studies.

DIFFICULTIES IN DEMOTIC

For although, Demotic Documents are less numerous than Greek, yet there are very few scholars who can read them. It often happens, in the course of Excavation, that one discovers at one and the same time Greek and Demotic Papyri. But whilst the former are rapidly deciphered and published, the latter continue to swell the unpublished archives of the Museums. Thus, it is nearly a hundred years since the first Greek Papyri of the Serapeum of Memphis were Published but we had to wait until 1941 to see the "Testi Demotici I" by G. Botti Publishing a few Demotic Documents of that find which gives us a glimpse of the non Hellenistic Society of the Serapeum. The British Museum has possessed Demotic Papyri since 1834 (Sidney Smith; preface to Glanville's Cat.). But apart from a few documents Published by Revillout, Reich, Griffith and Sir H.Thompson, we had to wait again until 1939 to see the publication of the first volume of a systematic Catalogue of the Demotic Papyri in the British Museum by the late Prof. Glanville. At Edfu, the Franco-Polish expedition discovered in 1937, Greek Papyri and Ostraca which were published almost the same year by Manteuffel whereas the Demotic documents found with them have not yet been published.

Thus, owing to the difficulty of the language, the small number of Demotists and the small number of Demotic Documents (about 2000 compared with 30,000 Greek), Native Egypt is less familiar to us than Hellenistic Egypt. For this reason also, when the Egyptologist-Historian reaches the Conquest of Alexander in his account, he usually leaves the subsequent period to the Hellenist-Historian. But this attitude is not above criticism. For, if we wish to obtain a true picture of Egyptian society in the Ptolemaic period we must consider also the Egyptian sources, written in Demotic.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF DEMOTIC

It was not before January 1948, when the late Professor Glanville delivered his Schweich lectures to the British Academy, that the contribution of Demotic to the Study of Ancient History, was illuminated. The study of Demotic has now reached a stage from which its further development promises to be full of interest. Many, indeed, are the discoveries which can be made by the Egyptologist who has

obtained the knowledge of Demotic. We may expect a brilliant future for the Demotic studies, important not only for philology but also, in combination with Greek papyri, for history in the widest sense of the word.

DEMOTIC PAPYRI

The existant Demotic Documents are about two thousands in number. They contain narrative, religious, magical, astrological and legal texts of various kinds which reflect the traditions and customs of those who wrote them.

It is hardly necessary to emphasise the value of Demotic legal texts for our knowledge of that much neglected branch of Ancient Egyptian civilisation i. e. Ancient Egyptian Law. This branch has not been fortunate enough to draw the attention of Egyptologists in spite of the fact that its value had been repeatedly stressed by the notable French Scholar, Eugene Revillout.

It is hardly necessary also to point out the importance of the study of ancient Egyptian Law. For, as it is the predecessor of Roman Law, a comparative study is highly important. It is also a part and parcel of the social and economic life of the Egyptians in the Ptolemaic period so that it illuminates the position of the natives who were living in semi-isolated communities and in a very bad state of poverty.

We possess already sufficient material of Demotic legal texts. A close study of the published documents shows that they are not exhausted but still give many interesting results which were sometimes overlooked by their editors. Unpublished documents too, will no doubt give valuable results. Needless to say that they explain and are explained in their turn by the published ones, besides the close connection which has been demonstrated between them.

DEMOTIC ARCHIVES

For the understanding of the documents as a whole, it is necessary first of all to know whether they come from official or private archives. Official archives, no doubt were known to the Egyptian administration from the most remote periods. There, the documents would not only

have been protected against robbery and forgery but also would have been guaranteed public credence. We have evidence that such an official archive was kept up most efficiently. For we know from the Inscription of Mes that his case was traced back for nearly three centuries. But unfortunately we have not yet come across such an archive.

Holscher, excavating at Medinet-Habu, did not come across any papyri. He explained this failure to be more than accidental. He assumed that "such papyri were not left as isolated rolls scattered here and there in private dwellings but rather that they had been deposited in official archives possibly in the houses of the judges or of priests". He concluded that "since the well known papyrus documents came on the market in groups of considerable size and not individually, it seems probable that, when the ruins of Medinet Habu suffered demolition, the fellahin discovered and plundered one or more such archives. "Hence" he continues "our chances of unearthing papyrus documents are very meagre".

But Holscher's assumption and conclusion, I think, require considerable modification.

First : It is true that most of these papyri were purchased but we know also of at least three cases in which they were found during scientific excavations.

- a) The unpublished Demotic papyri in Turin, were found in 1906 by Schiaparelli at Der el Medineh.
- b) Two well preserved Demotic Documents were found in a jar under the floor of the chamber of one of the Ptolemaic vaulted graves excavated at Dra' Abu-el Naga in 1912 by Carter-Carnarvon.
- c) The Philadelphia Demotic archive was found in two jars in a corner of a later house built against the pylon of Tomb No. 156 at Dra' Abu el-Naga excavated by Fisher in 1922.

The late Prof. Glanville has proved that five other collections (Strass, Bruss, Ryl., B.M. and Louvre) belong to a single archive and come from the same locality (Cat : XXV). Thus it is clear that these Theban Papyri were found at Dra' Abu el Naga and Der el Medineh, not at Medinet Habu.

Secondly : A close study of these archives shows always a central figure who is a party in a certain number of documents. Obviously it is to him and his family that they belonged. The contents of these papyri proved always that they did not belong to a Public Records Office but to a private archive (Glanville XXVI).

Thirdly : A Demotic document which proved to be a legal code was found in 1938 at Hermopolis by Dr. Sami Gabra. It was found in a broken jar in a ruined building which is believed to be one of the temple archives. It is evident also that such a temple archive did exist at Djeme in the Ptolemaic period. Thus we need not despair entirely of some happy circumstance one day bringing to light some Temple Archives. Our chances of discovering private Archives are not meager as it has been assumed.

THEBAN ARCHIVES

It would seem from the fact that these documents proved to have been the legal transactions of a single family and that they were always found in jars buried under a floor or hidden in a corner of some kind of dwelling—that these families were in the custom of preserving their deeds in that way. From generation to generation, they were in the custom of preserving the title deeds of their transactions as well as the documents relating to law suits which these transactions brought about. These family archives attest the continuity of a tradition which was not interrupted by the advent of the Greeks for, certain dossiers, built up in the course of successive generations, enable us to reconstruct a chain of transactions whose beginnings antedate the Conquest of Alexander.

It is perhaps interesting to note here that some of the Upper-Egyptian Archives belonged to Egyptian families who were under the influence of Greek culture and so were bilingual (e. g. Elephantine and Adler).

Many collections of Documents - Papyri and Ostraca — which may be considered as major publications and which are used to a certain extent in our study are presented here in their chronological order with a few general remarks :

(i.e. Pa-te-Mn-py) In fact the scribe was not careless at all. On the contrary thanks to him, for giving us a clue to the identification of many persons whose names are written sometimes in full and sometimes in a shorter form. Thus, for example from Doc. XIV we know that.

Pa na is the abbreviated form for Pa te' Mn' py

'Mn htp is the abbreviated form for Pa te nfr htp

Moreover we can infer that:

Pa na is the father of Hr s'st and Wn Mn

Pa te nfr htp s yrt rd (i.e. 'Mn htp s yrt rd) is the father of Ta-hb.

The relation between the Ryl. documents and those of Philadelphia lies in the fact that the 2nd party of Ryl. XII, XIII, XIV Ty'nty is also mentioned in Phil. XII where she leased the house to her sister Tyba. The story of the property could thus be traced: In the 21st year of Ptolemy Soter I, the woman Ty Hr acquired the house through her marriage with P m' h. In the 5th year of Philadelphus she sold the house to Ty'nty who, in the 8th year of Philadelphus, leased it to her sister. These Ryl. documents help in restoring the much mutilated document XII of the Philadelphia group.

4. *The British Museum Collection*

A. A group of Hieratic and demotic documents in the British Museum was published by Reich in 1914. This collection covers about four centuries beginning from Wahibre (568 B.C.) down to Ptolemy VI (176 B. C.). It comprises contracts dealing with embalment; choachytes; sales of land, tombs, houses and liturgies and oaths. Doc. No. 10073 of this collection dated 217 B. C. mentions the same persons who are mentioned in Doc. Berl. 3096 dated 222 B. C.

B. Another group of Demotic Papyri of the British Museum collection was published by the late Prof. Glanville in 1939. This group also presents a Theban scene with its unbroken history of a small property and of its neighbours during the first quarter of the third century. The importance of this group lies in the fact that it links up, in a direct succession three earlier documents (taking back the

history of the main property by another quarter of a century) with four later documents in the Rylands collection and another in Philadelphia. Philadelphia and the Louvre are also associated with them.

5. *The Carnarvon Collection*

These two Carnarvon Papyri were found at Dra^c Abu el Naga in 1912. They are dated the 4th year of the native king Harmachis and deal with a sale of land. The first party of Doc. I is the cousin of the second party. In Doc. II, the first party is the uncle of the second.

Apart from their legal interest, these documents enabled Carter to date the vaulted tombs in which they were found, to the Ptolemaic period. It was there also that the famous historical tablet referring to the expulsion of the Hyksos by Kamose and the second broken tablet, were found. These Documents were published by Spiegelberg in *Rec. Trav.* 35.

In addition to these major collections there are also many other minor groups which have been published in different periodicals and scientific journals during the last fifty years.

LITERARY DOCUMENTS

Although the prime sources for legal and sociological study are the contracts, yet texts of a purely literary character cannot be ignored. There too, reading between the lines, we can infer many a social custom and many a legal practice.

The story of Setna, for instance, is highly important as throwing light on marriage customs and ceremonies. It reveals also many traditions which are still preserved in Upper Egypt to the present day.

Half a century ago this story was the only oasis in the desert of Demotic literature but fresh discoveries have been made since then and many documents have been published by Griffith, Krall and Spiegelberg. The Danish Scholar Dr. A. Volten has been recently

working on many literary documents which have enabled him to publish many volumes on demotic texts relating to books of wisdom and philosophical poems. Here too, the documents reflect a picture of the traditions and social conditions of the Egyptian people.

OSTRACA

Of equal importance are the Demotic Ostraca which have helped us to understand the economic conditions. They also throw much light on legal terms and mention numerous geographical sites and personal names.

It was early in 1913 that the late Sir H. Thompson, when he published some Theban Ostraca, pleaded for the publication of the largest possible number of these documents so that we might arrive at definite results as to their meaning. This task was partly carried out by the Egyptian scholar Dr. G. Mattha when he took Demotic Ostraca as a field for his research. But the position still remains as it has been described by Sir H. Thompson "No large collection of Demotic Ostraca has ever been published and treated systematically in the way in which Wilcken has dealt with the Greek Ostraca."

After this somewhat discursive survey of demotic legal documents has been made, we may now ask the questions: Is it not unreasonable that the Egyptians of the Greco-roman period should be consigned to oblivion because we can read but a small number of the documents which would make them known to us? Is it a fair defence to say that the story of the Egyptians no longer justifies interest once the Greeks were established in the country merely on the grounds that Greek sources are so greatly superior and more numerous than the Egyptian?

Recently it has been shown that the native Egyptian in the Ptolemaic period differed in no way from his predecessor in the days of the Pharaohs. He also differed in no way from his successor at the present day. For, especially in the isolated districts of Upper Egypt, he unwittingly adopted the same hereditary traditional way of living handed to him down through the ages and thus he remained always in statu quo ante.

Can we regard as satisfactory and complete, a history which merely records the doings of the statesmen and the lives of the dominant personalities whilst the great mass of the people moves unrecognised and

indistinct in the background? How much can we learn about the ordinary obscure Egyptian citizens from such of their records as they wrote by their hands?

Surely, it is the duty of the Egyptologist to carry on and further the researches of the great Demotists Revillout, Spiegelberg, Griffith, Reich, Thompson, and Glanville so that their labours may come to full fruition. It is true that he is badly handicapped at present, through the lack of a standard Demotic Lexicon, a systematised Demotic Palaeography and a comprehensive Demotic Bibliography. It is true also that too often the earnest student of Demotic has to grope in the dark like a traveller without map or compass. But with this apparatus criticus, Demotic will no longer remain a terra incognita.

but we think that both of them depended mostly upon the same main source which was the official documents reserved in the first chancellery

AL-BALAWĪ An Unknown Egyptian Historian

By
GAMAL ELDIN ELSHAYYAL

al-Balawi Abu Muḥ. 'Abd Allah B. Muḥ. al-Madīni an unknown Egyptian historian who lived in the fourth century of Hidjra (10th A. D.)

He belongs to the Arab tribe Baliyy, a branch of Kuda'ah, which was scattered in different parts of Hidjaz, Syria and Egypt.

The dates of his birth and death are not known, but we can reasonably assume that he lived in the fourth century of Hidjra.

Ibn al-Nadim (died about 390 A. H.) was the first to write his biography in his book "*al-Fihrist*" in which he said that "'Abd Allah was one of Baliyy, a tribe which inhabited Egypt; he was a preacher, a theologian and a scholar. He wrote many books among which were: *Kitab al-Ahwab*, *Kitab al-Ma'arifah* and *Kitab al-Din wa Fra'idih*".

These books are all lost. He is well known now through another book; "*Sirat Ahmad B. Tulun*" (The Biography of Ahmad B. Tulun).

About the year 1935 the late Muḥ-Kurd-'Ali discovered a very old copy of this invaluable history in al-Dhahiriah Library in Damascus. He edited it with a long introduction and useful comments (Damascus 1939).

Kurd-'Ali took al-Balawi for an Isma'ili writer, a point of view which was proved to be wrong by Ivanow, the great Isma'ili researcher. Abu 'Abd-Allah al-Zinjani, the great Iranian scholar and the late professor 'Abd al-Hamid al-'Abbadi, the Egyptian historian.

There are other short biographies of al-Balawi in the later books of biography such as; *al-Tousi's al-Fihrist*, *al-Najashi's Kitab al-Riḡal*, *al-Dhahabi's Mizan al-'I'tidal* and *Ibn Hudjar's Lisān al-Mizan*.

RAPPORT SUR LA PROSPECTION DU TERRAIN DANS LA REGION DE LA MOSQUÉE DE NABI DANIEL

Par

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Le 4 Janvier 1958, ayant obtenu une permission spéciale du Ministère des Wakfs pour la prospection du terrain de la mosquée de Nabi Daniel, j'ai commencé à effectuer les dits travaux, assisté de MM. Dr. Fauzi Abdel Rahman El Fakharani et Leszek Dabrowski, architecte de la Mission Archéologique Polonaise en Egypte. Dr. Victor Guirguis, Directeur du Musée Gréco-Romain, devait aussi prendre part à nos recherches: mais ayant été retenu au dernier moment, au Musée, par des travaux urgents, il nous a généreusement prêté le matériel d'éclairage. La Faculté des Lettres a mis à notre disposition deux ouvriers et les échelles indispensables.

Nous sommes descendus dans le puits qui se trouve dans le sous-sol de la mosquée, à proximité du tombeau de Nabi Daniel et Sidi Loukman. Ce puits, aménagé dans le coin Nord Est de la dite mosquée, avait déjà été l'objet des recherches de M. Breccia. M. Breccia a bien reconnu ici une citerne ancienne (cf. Bull. Musée Gr.-Rom., Alex. 1928-31, p. 48), mais il a manqué de donner une description de ce monument, comme il s'est abstenu d'en proposer la date d'exécution.

Au cours de notre prospection, M. Dabrowski a pris toutes les mesures nécessaires, et a noté toutes les observations de détails. Son étude et ses dessins, attachés à mon rapport, présentent ainsi une première étude archéologique de ce monument.

Nous avons examiné en détail le mortier et les particules de ciment imperméable (*wasserdichterputz*) recouvrant les murs de cette citerne, lesquels sont construits en appareil irrégulier comprenant des blocs de calcaire et des briques cuites rattachés par des couches épaisses

de ciment. Cet appareil caractéristique, ainsi que la présence de colonnes romaines probablement de la fin du II^{ème} siècle, ici réemployées pour la construction des voûtes, nous offrent des données suffisantes pour dater le monument.

Il faut remarquer encore que la colonne appartenant au niveau le plus bas a été détournée et placée sur une base octogonale caractéristique de l'époque musulmane récente.

Je suis donc enclin à croire que nous avons à faire à une construction datant, au plus tôt, de l'époque byzantine, (par antérieure à la fin du IV^{ème} siècle, et reconstruite plus tard, à l'époque musulmane.

En effet, cette citerne n'a aucun rapport avec les constructions ptolémaïques et romaines découvertes dans cette région.

M. Breccia a percé deux trous dans le mur de la citerne. Il a aussi exécuté une fouille derrière le mur Nord Est contigu à notre citerne. Dans son rapport susmentionné, il a signalé des murs ptolémaïques découverts au cours de son sondage. Ces murs sont à présent recouverts par des décombres et de la terre.

Je suis persuadé que toute la région de la mosquée Nabi Daniel devrait être de nouveau l'objet de recherches archéologiques méthodiques surtout en la partie occupée autrefois par les tombeaux des sultans. L'emplacement de ces tombeaux, au Sud Ouest de la dite mosquée, n'a pas été jusqu'à présent étudié. On n'y a pas effectué de fouilles archéologiques ni de sondages. Je propose donc qu'un memorandum soit adressé par la Faculté des Lettres à la Municipalité d'Alexandrie et au Ministère des wakfs, précisant qu'on ne devrait accorder aucune autorisation de construire sur ce terrain avant d'y pratiquer une fouille archéologique méthodique.

Ce n'est pas seulement la question de savoir si le tombeau d'Alexandrie le Grand se trouve vraiment à cet endroit. Comme on sait, cette opinion a été soutenue par plusieurs fouilleurs et savants, comme Mahmoud El Falaka, Dr. Neroutzos, Zogheb, Botti, Hogarth (en partie), Thiele et d'autres. Mais, si nous considérons les données que nous possédons aujourd'hui concernant le plan d'Alexandrie à l'époque

gréco-romaine, ce terrain présente sans aucun doute un intérêt tout à fait particulier. C'est pourquoi, à mon avis, l'archéologie doit profiter d'une situation exceptionnelle mais passagère qui s'est produite par suite de la disparition des tombeaux des sultans, et procéder le plus tôt possible à fouiller d'une façon méthodique ce terrain très important.

En ce qui concerne l'étude de M. Dabrowski, je voudrais attirer votre attention sur la partie finale de son article. M. Dabrowski a mis en relief l'importance que présente pour tous les bâtiments modernes sur le sol d'Alexandrie l'existence d'une quantité de citernes et autres constructions souterraines. Elles présentent pour la stabilité du terrain d'Alexandrie un problème tout à fait particulier qui devrait être calculé par les architectes et dont ils devraient tenir compte dans leurs projets de construction.

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