062: Ptolemaic Egypt – Egyptians in a Greek Land

For thousands of years, since the first gods emerged from the primordial waters of creation, Egypt has been the envy of all who gazed upon it. While it had been centuries since the glory days of Thutmose or Ramesses, the children of the Red and Black Lands nevertheless held fast to their traditions and history with proud hearts, undeterred by outside invaders – the Hyksos, the Nubians, the Persians. Ignorant as they may have been, they either fell into the alluring embrace of Egyptian culture, were too small to make an impact, or were far enough away to either ignore or revolt against. But the arrival of the kings from across the Great Green, the Argead and Ptolemaic dynasties of Macedonia, were quite different. While the Ptolemies were eager to insert themselves into the traditional role of Pharaoh, they brought with them tens of thousands of settlers from their homelands, constructed new Greek-styled cities on a colossal scale and scope, and seemed to reshape the land at their whim. This all came at a price, which was to be paid for through the exploitation of the gifts of the Nile, and through a new tax regime designed to squeeze as much revenue from the peoples of Egypt. In this episode, I want to look at the other side of Hellenistic Egypt, to see how the native Egyptians reacted and responded to the arrival of a new political, social, and cultural elite.

Of all the lands that Alexander took from the Persian Empire, Egypt proved to be the easiest to oversee the smooth transition of power from Persian satraps to Greek governors. His death then opened the door for Ptolemy I to claim Egypt as his spear-won prize, using his great wealth combined with military forces to secure his control, establishing a dynasty that lasted 300 years. How did the Egyptians feel about this? One indirect response might be through the Alexander Romance, a collection of vulgate traditions about the sensationalized life of Alexander the Great that is thought to have originated in Egypt during the late 4th/early 3rd century. In it, the last Egyptian pharaoh Nectanebo II flees to the court of Macedonia under the guise of an astrologer and sleeps with Olympias of Epirus, who then gives birth to Alexander nine months later. Effectively, Alexander is reclaimed as an Egyptian.[1] The reframing of Alexander as a legitimate pharaoh may have worked to the benefit of the Ptolemies, who styled themselves explicitly as Alexander's successors, but the Egyptians may have adopted the conqueror as one of their own as a way to rationalize or cope with the realities of Greek rule. Truthfully though, we don't have much in the way of direct evidence indicating how they felt towards Alexander and the early Ptolemies. Greek accounts of Alexander's arrival are remarkably rosy and optimistic, and the Ptolemaic takeover is not well documented beyond focusing on Ptolemy's interaction with the other players in the Wars of the Successors.

But while a large army and lots of money can do wonders, the Ptolemies could not have realistically maintained control or properly implement an effective taxation program without coming to terms with the Egyptian elite: the priestly, administrative, and military families of Egypt. By doing so, they were better able to utilize the tried-and-true machinery of governance that had been developed in Egypt for over three millennia. Some of these families have left an impressive archaeological and epigraphical

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[1] Jasnow, R. 1997: 95-103

record, and we can see that many high-ranking officials and positions were dominated by a single family throughout the Ptolemaic period. For example, one family's service as high priests of Ptah in Memphis can be documented for 10 generations.[2] A stelae indicates that personal retinue of Ptolemy II included bodyguards recruited from the sons of upper-class Egyptians.[3] Biographical inscriptions written in hieroglyphic can be found on the graves of Egyptians who were in service to the crown, and they proudly display a highlight reel of their careers. Such a practice was commonplace throughout Egypt's history, and this includes the Hellenistic period. One of these is Senenshepsu, an Egyptian official during the reign of Ptolemy II. Senenshepsu informs us that he had served the royal family as the overseer of the harem, which means that he was probably the chief attendant to Queen Arsinoe II and managed the women's quarters of the palace in Alexandria.[4] Much of his language is very formal, and stresses his personal relationship with the king and queen, a recurring theme in these stone resumes. Another is Pasherenptah, a priest of Ptah in Memphis from approximately 75-41 BC, whose grave stelae happily recounts the story of Ptolemy XII Auletes granting him the role as high priest of the Ptolemaic royal cult:
I betook me to the residence of the kings of the Ionians which is on the shore of the Great Sea to the west of Rakoti. The king of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Master of two worlds, the Father-loving Sister-loving God, the New Osiris, was crowned in his royal palace. He proceeded to the temple of Isis, the Lady of Yat-udjat. He offered unto her sacrifices many and costly. Riding in his chariot forth from the temple of Isis, the king himself caused his chariot to stand still. He wreathed my head with a beautiful wreath of gold and all manner of gems, except only the royal pectoral which was on his own breast. I was nominated Prophet, and he sent out a royal rescript to the capitals of all the nomes, saying: "I have appointed the High Priest of Memphis, Pasherenptah, to be my Prophet." And there was delivered to me from the temples of Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt a yearly revenue for my maintenance…I was a great man, rich in all riches….[5]

The experience of Pasherenptah is but one example of the relationship between the temples and the crown. As it always had been, temples remained an integral part of the Egyptian way of life. To clarify: in Egyptian religion, the temple was not a house of worship akin to a modern church or mosque. It was a sanctuary for the gods, statues of whom would be housed in the center, closed off from much of the public eye and the outside world. The priests, as the stand-ins for the pharaoh, would perform the necessary rituals and libations to appease the deities. Festivals would be organized, of which there were plenty, and the sacred animals (incarnations of their gods, like the Apis bull) would be looked after. By doing this, the priests were ensuring the stability and order of the cosmos.

But beyond the religious aspect, temples played other important roles as well. For starters, they were centers of economic activity. Diodorus in the 1st century suggests that up to 1/3rd of all land in Egypt was owned by the priests, and even if we assume this an gross overestimation, it is still a significant amount of land available for exploitation.[6] In addition to agricultural products, there were temple-run

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[2] Quaegebeur, J. 1980: 52
[3] Mendes Stelae; Fischer-Bovet, C. 2014: 116
[4] Stele of Senenshepsu (Stele CCG 70031); Lloyd, A.B. 2002: 123-127
[5] Stele BM 886, translation taken from (http://www.attalus.org/egypt/psherenptah.html)
[6] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 1.73.2-5

"businesses" like textile mills, and plenty of money was to be made from appealing to the religious sensibilities of the community through the sale of votives like animal mummies.

Another role of the temples would ultimately be that of administration. Though priesthood was hereditary and passed from father to son, prospective priests needed to be sufficiently educated. Literacy was extremely important in this regard. Beyond the knowledge of incantations and magical spells, the priests developed a scribal tradition that allowed them to act as an extension of the Egyptian government. Most native Egyptians could go to the temples to draw up legal documents such as marriage contracts, business loans, and even taxation-related matters. If there was litigation to be done between Egyptian parties, it was to be in front of a tribunal of priests. This would prove to be invaluable to the Ptolemaic government, which is why they would immediately seek to court them. Starting from the time of Ptolemy I onwards, state-backed temple construction and patronage would be a common feature of the relationship between the Ptolemies and the priests.[7] It would not be far-fetched to say the bulk of our best-preserved temples, what we often associate with "Egyptian" culture, were built on the order of the Ptolemies and the later Roman Emperors.[8] It was a mutually beneficial relationship: the priests received donations of land and associated revenues/tax exemptions, along with a guaranteed protection of their religious rights and customs, whereas the Ptolemies could rely on the priests to act as mediators to the Egyptian populace on their behalf.[9] For instance, the Rosetta Stone was as much honoring King Ptolemy VI for his donations to the temple as it was a tacit approval of his legitimacy – contextually speaking, it was set up by the Memphite priesthood during a turning point in the great revolt that had seized much of the country for over a decade.[10]

Let us look at one of the most important priests of the Ptolemaic period. In a previous episode on the Seleucid Empire, I talked about a man known as Berossus. As a refresher, Berossus was a Babylonian scholar who worked underneath Seleucus and Antiochus I, notable for writing about the history and mythology of Babylonia.[11] The remarkable thing about his work is that it was written in Greek, and intended for a Greek-speaking audience, but it was also a manifestation of an author's pride for his culture. At around the same time, there existed another figure in Egypt in the Ptolemaic court that shared some striking similarities with Berossus. This individual was named Manetho, an Egyptian by birth, though we only have the Hellenized rendition of his original name. Born and raised in the settlement of Sebennytos along the eastern Nile Delta, Manetho served as a priest at the temple of sun god Ra in the city of Heliopolis. His priestly role ensured that he was both literate and well-versed in the traditions of Egypt, and Sebennytos was the holdout of the last indigenous dynasty prior to the Persian reconquest – a dynasty that both Alexander and the Ptolemies consciously sought to link themselves to. Perhaps it is because of this that Manetho found himself a high position at the court of Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II. Tradition maintains that he was heavily involved in the mediation between the Egyptian

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[7] For temple building in the time of Ptolemy I, see Minas-Nerpel, M. 2018:165; Clarysse, W. 2010: 275-276

[8] Chaveau, M. 1997: 102

[9] Manning, J.G. 2010: 82-83; Clarysse, W. 2010: 281-283;

[10] BM EA 24, (http://www.attalus.org/egypt/rosettastone1.html)

[11] For a discussion of Berossus' life and a compilation of quotations of his work, see. Verbrugghe, G.P. and Wickersham, J.M. 1996; Kurht, A. "*Berossus' Babyloniaka and Seleucid Rule in Babylonia*" in "*Hellenism in the East: The interaction of Greek and non-Greek civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander*", Pgs. 32-56

populace and the new Greek rulers: Plutarch states that Manetho was part of the think-tank that helped establish the worship of Serapis.[12]

But the most famous contribution by Manetho was the *Aegyptiaca*, a history of Egypt in three books from the primordial creation down to the flight of the last native pharaoh Nectanebo II. Unfortunately, most of the work does not survive, but what we have is incredibly insightful. The *Aegyptiaca* is a unique specimen: drawing upon oral traditions and the heavily curated Kings-Lists of the Egyptian priesthood, Manetho organized an extremely accurate chronology of Egypt's rulers that has proved invaluable to later Egyptologists who often used it as a comparative work during their research. Rather than a strict list of names and dates, Manetho drew upon the Greek historiographical tradition, and wove the chronology with a narrative of each ruler. It was he who also pioneered the concept of organizing the pharaohs into "dynasties", a practice that we continue to rely upon in the present day.[13]

Why did Manetho write the *Aegyptiaca*, and who was his intended audience? Given that it was written in Greek, it is a logical conclusion to assume that it was meant for educated Greeks. Some suggest that it was commissioned on the orders of Ptolemy I, potentially to legitimize his family by weaving them into the traditional narrative of the Egyptian monarchy. Manetho was clearly a learned man, possessing a good enough grasp of Greek that he was able to read and emulate the historiographical style of those like Herodotus and Thucydides. But unlike Berossus, who seems to have also modeled his writings in the manner of Herodotus, Manetho heavily scolded the golden boy of Halicarnassus for his flawed reporting on Egyptian customs and history.[14] He even went so far as to dedicate an entire book to his criticisms, referred to as "*Against Herodotus*".[15] This may suggest that Manetho's literary endeavor was a self-imposed project to correct the Greek perception of Egypt, a conscious display of pride for Egypt's antiquity and culture, while at the same time communicating through Greek means.[16]

Certainly the elite was able to come to some sort of arrangement with the Ptolemies for their own gain. However, an important question to ask is if your average Egyptian was capable of any degree of social mobility in a system that seems to have favored Greeks?

One tried and true route was the army. It has been commonly asserted that the Ptolemies were notoriously reluctant to incorporate Egyptians into the military, citing Polybius' account of the Battle of Raphia in 217 and the subsequent consequences of doing so.[17] While there may be a grain of truth to this argument, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Egyptians had been serving in the army in significant numbers throughout the entirety of the dynasty's reign.[18] As early as 312, Ptolemy I raised Egyptian levies styled in the Macedonian phalanx against the armies of Demetrius Poliorcetes.[19]

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[12] Plutarch, *Moralia*, 361F-362A

[13] Verbrugghe, G.P. and Wickersham, J.M. 1996: 95

[14] Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.73

[15] Eusthathius, *Commentary on Homer's Iliad*, 11.480

[16] Moyer, I.S. 2011: 140-141; Moyer believes that Manetho's work is less derived from the Greek historiographical tradition, and more an emphasis on the Kings Lists.

[17] Polybius, *The Histories*, 5.65.9, 5.107.1-3

[18] Fischer-Bovet, C. 2014: 161-166; Johstono, P. 2020: Pgs. 249-254

[19] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 19.80.4

One of the most common designations we find for Egyptian soldiers is the term *machimoi*. This is a controversial topic, and one subject to lots of debate. It has often been asserted that any Egyptian serving in the army that was to be given land would fall under the title *machimoi* instead of *cleruch*, as the class of the *machimoi* may have roots in the organization of the Egyptian army during the Late Period as described by Herodotus.[20] The term "second-rate" appears frequently in scholarly works, and the payout was appropriately small: they would usually receive plots of land between 5 and 10 *arouras* in size, roughly 4 to 7 acres or 1.5 to 3 hectares. Many modern historians challenge these assumptions. The *machimoi* were not exclusively made of Egyptians, as there are Greek *machimoi* attested to in surviving papyri. Instead of being considered a mere mob of peasants, we find Egyptian *machimoi* employed in a variety of roles both in battle and in security with considerable professionalism.[21] The Battle of Raphia does mark a turning point though, as we see an increase in the number of Egyptians serving in the Ptolemaic army from the late 3rd to the early 1st century.

When it came to more domestic matters, the police force was an excellent avenue for Egyptian social advancement, serving as law enforcement officers known as the *phylakitai*. These were the men responsible for leading criminal investigations, overseeing the apprehension and detainment of suspects, or acting as personal guards for VIPs or important cargo. Comparing the ethnic makeup of the army and that of the police, we find that the *phylakitai* have a greater representation of Egyptians within its ranks.[22] When you also consider that perhaps upwards of 3% of the total adult population in all of Egypt were active police, this is a substantial number.[23]

As we mentioned earlier, the arrival of the Ptolemies did not mean the exclusion of Egyptians from enrolling in the civil service. In the last episode, we looked in the archive of Diophanes, the governor of the Arisinoite nome during the late 3rd century. By contrast, we also have a collection of papers belonging to an Egyptian official named Menkhes. Menkhes was a government scribe in the Arsinoite village of Kerkeosiris from approximately 119 to 110 BC, giving us a unique perspective of an official on the lower levels of the Egyptian bureaucracy.[24] While Diophanes' papers were related to his power as an arbitrator of legal disputes, Menkhes' position as a village clerk required him to act as the overseer of agricultural and taxation-related matters. This includes the surveying of land at all stages, such as recording the area of cultivatable land by taking regular measurements of both the flooded area and crop yields. By doing so, he could calculate the rent and tax duties owed to the state by the tenants.

However, Menkhes found himself in a uniquely challenging position: when he had been reinstated in his role in 119, a decade-long civil war between Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II and III had just been brought to a close, leaving behind a lot of farmland that had been abandoned or neglected by its occupants in the face of brigands and plundering armies. It was therefore up to him to restore land that had either been flooded or succumbed to the salination problem that so commonly afflicted estates in the Fayyum.

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[20] The continuity of the Herodotean *machimoi* is tenuous at best, see Fischer-Bovet, C. 2013: 209-219
[21] Johstono, P. 2020: 249-251
[22] Fischer-Bovet, C. and Sänger P. 2019: 170
[23] Bauschatz, J. 2013: 53-64
[24] Discussed in detail in Lewis, N. 1986: 104-123; Waebens, S. 2019: 205-206; Chaveau, M. 1997: 76-77, 80-82

But rather than viewing the job as a sort of menial or ho-hum task, the position of village clerk was quite prestigious and a good opportunity for making money. In order to even be considered for the position, Menkhes had to bid for the contract and get approval from the village elders, and the government required him to take on about 10 *auroras* of unproductive land out of his own expenses. He seems to have thrived though, and engaged in side operations to collect a nice profit on fixing up reclaimed land.

There were, however, obstacles that needed to be dealt with beyond taxation. As a government intermediary, Menkhes received petitions and appeals for him to bring to his superiors. The instability of the period made crime relatively commonplace, with incidences like smuggling, theft, and embezzlement. Poverty and high tax demands from the crown incited a strike from tenants in Kerkeosiris who sought sanctuary in one of the local temples until the government renegotiated, which Menkhes had to mediate.[25] It could also affect his personal well-being: after a night of drinking and eating at a local tavern with a group of friends, Menkhes and his compatriots were arrested and jailed because a local (who had been also drinking at the same tavern) accused the group of poisoning him. Our clerk was soon let go – presumably when the prosecuting party failed to demonstrate any real symptoms, such as dying – but Menkhes suggests that the man was trying to extort him for money.[26]

Menkhes was but one of many of these village clerks, who were necessary to keep the Ptolemaic tax regime operational, even as it was on the decline. Turning to those same villages, we can try and recreate the social and economic life of lower-class Egyptians. Like with the Greeks, agriculture remained the primary occupation for most Egyptians. A common form can be seen with the royal peasants, tenant farmers working on crown land. Unlike cleruchs, these peasants were given far less autonomy in what they could plant, and they needed to provide a percentage of their crop following the harvest.[27] They could also work as day laborers for government projects, such as the building of temples or irrigation dikes – though the Arsinoite nome has the reputation of being the most "Hellenized" part of Egypt, internal immigration from Egyptian workers taking part in the reclamation of the Fayyum meant that the Greeks were still a minority population.

One of the most important Egyptian industries was tied to beer, the alcoholic drink of choice for Egyptians which functioned in a similar manner for sustenance and social settings as wine was for the Greeks and Romans. Grain mash, yeast and warm water would be combined to create the conditions necessary for fermentation, and a designated area of the kitchen would be reserved for personal brewing.[28] Beer could be used as wages for laborers, and there were government and privately-run breweries for those looking to make it in mass quantities. Such shops could be run by the same family for generations, including women. One letter from an elderly Egyptian woman demanded the return of her daughter who eloped with a Greek vineyard worker – she felt that the Greek "deceived" her child into marrying him, and now that the mother had entered her golden years she was unable to work and

[25] *P. Tebt.* I 61b
[26] *P. Tebt.* 43
[27] Chaveau, M. 1997: 88-90
[28] David, R. 2003: 365

needed the daughter to take up ownership of her brewery for financial support.[29]

The religious beliefs of Egyptians remained largely unaffected by the arrival of the Greeks as well. The attempt to introduce new gods like Serapis into the mix did little to capture interest of the Egyptians, who went about worshipping their traditional pantheon as they always had. But the Ptolemaic royal cult did prove to be somewhat of a success, as several Egyptian daughters would bear names of Ptolemaic queens like Arsinoe.[30] While the temples retained a position of importance for religious matters, Egyptian homes could be found with niches in their walls intended to hold sacred objects, and allow for the private veneration of the gods. These range from bronze and terracotta statuettes to wooden placards bearing the painted images of the divine – perhaps a forerunner to the later Christian icons.[31]

One fascinating example of Greco-Egyptian confluence can be found in their funerary customs. Mummification, perhaps the most iconic aspect of Egypt alongside the pyramids, continued to be practiced in significant amounts and remained a closely guarded secret. Professional organizations and families of embalmers were scattered throughout the cities plying their trade. It wasn't just limited to human subjects either, as there was an entire industry dedicated to raising animals the sole purpose of being killed and mummified, then selling the animal mummies to pilgrims and tourists in need of a votive to dedicate to the respective god: a traveler may buy a cat for Bastet, or an ibis for Thoth. Despite there being literally millions of these mini mummies, they are still remarkable to look at up close.[32] As a brief aside, when I was a biology undergraduate, I had the luxury of accidentally discovering a mummified falcon in my university's collection of preserved ornithological specimens that was forgotten for decades. While I did not realize how relatively common such an item was in the grand scheme, being able to physically interact with a piece of Egyptian culture was very exciting. But anyways, back to the task at hand.

Eventually, these Egyptian burial practices would blend with Greek artistic traditions, the most spectacular of these being the famous Fayyum mummy portraits. Though our best examples emerge from the Roman period, the changes began to occur under Greek rule. Following the mummification process, the deceased would have a wooden mask placed upon their face, or on a nearby placard. On the mask would be incredibly lifelike paintings of the departed, sharing strong similarities with the frescoes and wall paintings so popular throughout the Greco-Roman world. With some confidence, many of the subjects can be determined to be of an Egyptian ethnic background, but the paintings are a mix of expressions. Men and women would sport hairstyles, clothing and jewelry that were popular at the time of their death. These were predominantly Greek or Roman in style, such as togas for men or oak wreaths. But these would be complimented by representations of the Egyptian pantheon or funerary texts written in much the same fashion as they were thousands of years before.

[29] *P. Lond. 7.1976*; Pomeroy, S.B. 1984: 163
[30] Carney, E. 2013: 107-108
[31] David, R. 2003: 166-169; Chaveau, M. 1997: 109-110
[32] Chaveau, M. 1997: 106-108

As their funerary practices suggest, to be an Egyptian under Ptolemaic rule required two "faces", for lack of a better word. Because Greek had become the main administrative language and the language of the elite, many Egyptians quickly had to become at least somewhat bilingual. Double names were present in other parts of the Hellenistic world as well, such as in Seleucid Mesopotamia, but there is a far greater amount of evidence for such practices in Egypt. There are several reasons to do so: many Egyptians would use their Greek names on legal documents like petitions to the king or business contracts, in part because it probably gave them a greater chance of being heard by higher levels of the government. For instance, our village clerk Menkhes also had the name Asklepiades, which was used in documents directed to his superiors.

The other important reason is because it may have allowed them to achieve greater social mobility. Although I don't believe that Hellenization was a consciously enforced policy for any of the Successor kingdoms, non-Greeks who were more receptive to adopting Greek customs and practices would be more favored by the king than those who were not. Such was the case in Hellenistic Judea, where factionalism between the pro-Hellenic and conservative Jewish communities would lead to the outbreak of the Maccabean Revolt. By being able to read and write in Greek, the number of opportunities for promotion in the government expanded.[33] Officials that were more openly Egyptian – or, rather, those can be confidently identified as Egyptian by modern scholars – tend to be clustered around the lower levels of the bureaucracy.[34] To be able to participate in Greek institutions, such as the *gymnasia*, would confer a marker of privilege and status, and it is worthy to note that we find more Egyptians enrolling in and being accepted by the *gymnasia* from the late 3rd century onwards.[35]

This ties in with the concept of ethnicity within Ptolemaic Egypt. All individuals were placed into legal brackets based upon their origins and backgrounds: Greek (with various subgroups like Cretans or Macedonians), Egyptian, Jewish etc. Those within the Greek bracket would receive tax privileges, such as avoiding taxes issued per head of the household. By virtue of the predominance of Greek culture and language within the ruling body of the government, those who were perceived to be Greek and placed within that category would attain a higher social distinction over those who were not.[36] For judicial matters, a similar system would be in place: legal disputes between Greek parties would be subject to Greek tribunals and law, and Egyptians would follow the pre-existing customs of the land.[37] At first glance, the emergence of a legal system and socio-economic hierarchy based on ethnic identity has drawn concerning comparisons to modern colonial empires and apartheid states. There is rationale to this argument, but the concept of ethnicity is much more fluid in Hellenistic Egypt than what ought to be believed. Increasingly, scholars have argued that these designations are not based on a sense of a racial superiority as much as they were an economic descriptior.

What we find is that the distinction between Greek and non-Greek was not as concrete from a legal

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[33] Johnson, J.H. 1983: 144
[34] O'Neil, J.L. 2006: 17-18; Scheuble-Reiter, S. and Bussi, S. 2019: 284
[35] Benaissa, A. and Remijsen, S. 2019: 389; Fischer-Bovet, C. 2014: 280-290
[36] Clarysse, W. 2019: 304-305;
[37] Manning, J.G. 2010: 181-184

standpoint as one might expect. There are many individuals in the records who have an almost entirely Egyptian background, yet they were placed within the Greek tax bracket. Indeed, we have plenty of evidence that the double name convention was not, strictly speaking, all-or-nothing in practice. Even for Egyptians who were heavily Hellenized, we still see that the use of personal Egyptian names never really abated in the home. Legal documents and personal correspondence could be written in Demotic. Even the government was bilingual to some extent, though Demotic was primarily used in the lower levels of administration. As one moved south into Upper Egypt, the need for bilingualism was less pressing, especially if one could request a Greek-speaking member of the community to write a petition on your behalf.[38]

To better illustrate the complexities of ethnic and cultural identity, let's look at archives of the family of Dryton. Covering much of the 2nd century BC, the recovered papyrus and ostraca fragments provide us with a fascinating look at the dynamics of a multicultural military household, along with the roles of Egyptian women. Of Cretan ancestry, Dryton was born in the city of Ptolemais in the Thebaid during the 190s BC, likely the son of a military veteran. He clearly was of some means, as he was able to serve as a cavalry commander in the Ptolemaic army, enlisting during the tumultuous period that saw the 6th Syrian War and native rebellions. Originally stationed around his native city, Dryton married a woman of Cretan descent named Sarapias, who later conceived a son by the name of Esthladas. At some point, Sarapias either died or was divorced, and Dryton was permanently reassigned to the city of Pathyris in 152 BC, some 100 kilometers south of Ptolemais. While both Ptolemais and Pathyris were in Upper Egypt, Ptolemais had been established by Ptolemy I in the manner of a traditional Greek *poleis* (of which Dryton held citizenship to), whereas Pathyris was thoroughly Egyptian both in terms of culture and population.[39] So how did Dryton adapt to his new home?

Within a short time following his transfer, Dryton was married to a young woman of the area named Senmonthis, who was quite different from his previous wife.[40] Senmonthis was of Egyptian origin, from a military family that had enrolled as infantrymen in the Ptolemaic army for multiple generations.[41] Dryton had actually served with her father in the unit stationed at Pathyris, and it is presumably through their contact that the marriage had been arranged between the two families. Marriages between Greeks and Egyptians – almost exclusively Greek men and Egyptian women – are not especially common in the papyrological record, at least in terms of sheer numbers, but they are present. This may be aggravated by Egyptian wives using their Greek names in legal paperwork, and the general lack of Greek women for the earliest military colonists meant that soldiers could take wives from the local communities that they garrisoned with, as was the case for Dryton.[42]

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[38] Tovar, S.T. and Vierros, M. 2019: 490
[39] Strabo, *Geography*, 17.1.42
[40] *P. Dryton* 2
[41] In legal documents, Senmonthis' family is listed as "Cyrenean", leading some scholars to think that her original ancestors were Greek mercenaries from Cyrene that had intermarried with the Egyptian population. It is likely that the status (and associated tax privileges) were acquired through military service, and demotic documents evidence shows that her grandfather is described explicitly as an ethnic Egyptian, see Dem. Conf. 7 p. 244, no. 8
[42] Clarysse, W. and Thompson, D.J. 2006: 297; Manning, J.G. 2020: 370-371

While we can only speculate at the bride's thoughts on the groom – especially when we consider that she was roughly 15-17 years of age, whereas he was in his forties – there were many perks to this match.[43] Dryton was educated or at least literate, capable of both reading and writing in Greek. In contrast to her father and grandfather's "lowly" status as foot soldiers, her husband was *hipparchos*, a cavalry officer which commanded a high amount of prestige and pull within the social network of the military and the community at large. Such a position meant that he was a man of some means as well, able to supplement his larger army pay with his substantial holdings and property.[44] By marrying Dryton, Senmonthis was able to greatly improve her economic and social standing, which she took full advantage of. Why Dryton sought this match is unclear. Egyptian women held more legal rights than their Greek counterparts, meaning they possessed more control over the household and the marriage contract itself. But perhaps as a Greek living in a predominantly Egyptian community, Dryton sought a chance to get involved in the social network of the region, and having an Egyptian wife to act as either an intermediary or guide could certainly provide an excellent opportunity.

From what we can tell, the marriage was successful and long-lasting. Senmonthis provided Dryton five children, all daughters, who eventually reached adulthood and were married off. This is quite remarkable: the practice of infanticide, especially regarding unwanted daughters who could be seen as financial burdens, was not uncommon in Greek society. By contrast, infanticide was either illegal or highly frowned upon in Egyptian communities. While it's possible that this was due to the greater financial stability enjoyed by the family or a father's love for his children, perhaps Senmonthis' cultural attitudes had rubbed off on her husband.[45] Dryton's son Esthladas was not neglected in favor of his new family either. In the many wills Dryton drew up over his comparatively long life, Esthladas is named the main beneficiary, unsurprising given his status as both the eldest child and sole male heir. From what evidence is available, he seemed to be on good terms with his stepmother and half-siblings. Having followed his father's footsteps into the army, Esthladas wrote a letter on January 15th of 130 BC just before embarking on an expedition during a civil war that gripped Egypt at the time:
"Esthladas to his father and mother, greetings and good health. As I tell you over and over again in my letters, keep up your spirits and take good care of yourself till things settle down. Now again [I say] please reassure yourself and our family, for the news that [General] Paos is sailing up the river next month with sufficient forces to subdue the mobs in Hermonthis and deal with them as rebels. Look after my sisters…Goodbye."[46]

What information can we glean from the records regarding the identity of the family members? Dryton and Esthladas remained conservatively Greek in terms of language and culture. All of their private letters were written in Greek, and the vast majority of Dryton's contracts were in Greek with very few exceptions.[47] It is unclear how much Demotic he picked up during his residence in Pathyris, but given his involvement with the Egyptian community and having an Egyptian wife, I wouldn't be surprised if he

[43] Pomeroy, S.B. 1984: 107
[44] Fischer-Bovet, C. 2014: 276-277
[45] Lewis, N. 1986: 94; Pomeroy, S.B. 1984: 110-111; Thompson, D.J. 2002: 149-154
[46] *Sel. Pap.* I, 101, translated in Lewis, N. 1986: 98
[47] *P. Dryton* 36-44

acquired a passing knowledge of it to some degree. It is when we turn to Senmonthis and her daughters that we gain a greater insight as to the cultural dynamics of the family. Following her marriage to Dryton, Senmonthis took on the name Apollonia. This is not unusual – both her father and grandfather possessed Greek names in addition to their Egyptian ones as well, and as we have already discussed double names were common in Hellenistic Egypt. But she was now married to a Greek officer with considerable personal wealth, and so her use of Apollonia in official documents carried a distinctive gravitas to it when compared to your average Egyptian.

Senmonthis' self-presentation as Apollonia stands out, especially when we look at how she kept herself occupied during her marriage. The family's comfortable financial position enabled them become lenders in both money and in kind. Senmonthis herself was responsible for drafting several loans, and while she would follow Greek or Egyptian custom by having either a male guardian (Dryton) or a notary of one of the local temples sign off the agreement, she nevertheless exerted a degree of economic independence that would be envious to Greek women of any class.[48] She certainly had experience overseeing their estate and probably managed her own agricultural plots to sell and trade, but she seems to have also been quite a usurious lender: one loan of money to an Egyptian family was termed of four and a half months with an interest rate of five percent, while Ptolemaic law should have fixed the rate at two percent.[49] Another loan was drawn up by Senmonthis with a clause that guaranteed no interest, but in reality the principal was adjusted so that she would be compensated by the lump sum payment anyways.[50] Whether her husband's lofty position as an officer or him being Greek enabled her to skirt around the legality of her loans is unclear, but she was able to make a nice stipend for herself.

As much we can assert that Senmonthis eagerly sought to Hellenize, several pieces of evidence challenge that viewpoint. Despite being the children of a Greek father and an Egyptian mother who enjoyed presenting herself as a dutiful Greek wife, the daughters of Dryton and Senmonthis all possessed Greek and Egyptian names: Apollonia-Senmonthis, Aristo-Senmonthis, Aphrodisia-Tahkhratis, Nikarion-Thermouthis, and Apollonia the Younger-Senmonthis. The girls who were later married all took Egyptian husbands, and their children possessed only Egyptian names.[51] Similar to how the personal correspondence between Dryton and Esthladas remained in Greek, Senmonthis and her daughters' personal letters were in written in Demotic Egyptian. On them, she would sign her name as Senmonthis rather than Apollonia – the "face" she presented in business and legal transactions. With the case of Senmonthis, we see how the concept of Greekness could be used to improve one's social standing, that it did not require a complete abandonment of her Egyptian identity in favor of a Greek one.

In contrast to Dryton and Senmonthis, we also have the records of another mixed military family of a lower standing, that of Dioynsius-Plenis in the mid-late 2nd century.[52] Though from a predominately Egyptian background, Dionysius had a mixed ancestry that included Greeks as well. His father, Kephalas,

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[48] Broux, Y. 2019: 399
[49] P. Grenf. I 20; Lewis, N. 1986: 94-95; Pomeroy 1984: 113-114
[50] P. Grenf. I 18; Lewis, N. 1986: 95
[51] Broux, Y. 2019: 399
[52] Discussed in detail in Lewis, N. 1986: 124-139; Chaveau, M. 1997: 156-160; Fischer-Bovet, C. 2014: 277-278

had served as an infantryman in the army. Kephalas' technical designation was *misthophoros*, which means that he was paid with regular wages rather than being incorporated into the cleruchic system and given a piece of property. This does not mean that the family was poor: Dionysius was sufficiently literate in both Greek and Demotic, capable of writing letters in both languages, and was even given a minor priestly role as a caretaker of sacred ibises.

Though his status is listed as a royal peasant, much like the cleruchs, Dionysius was able to use his income from his priestly duties and family plot to invest in land and have it rented out to other farmers.[53] Most of the documents preserved from his collection relate to loans of grain borrowed from other soldiers or farmers in an attempt to speculate and capitalize on market prices on wheat. It may have not been the most stable of incomes, so he needed to find something more reliable. In about 106 BC, Dionysius had followed his father's and his brother Paesis' footsteps by enlisting in the army as a *misthophoros*. He was stationed full-time in the important garrison town of Akoris in Upper Egypt. The steady wealth gained from service would allow him to engage in the same sort of speculation and agricultural ventures as before, albeit with a greater allowance.

Dioynsius' papers also reveal the complexities of Ptolemaic ethnic terminology. Initially, he can be found listed as a "Persian", a term that still is under debate from scholars. It may be used to describe the descendants of garrisoned soldiers from the Persian occupation – whether they were ethnically Persian or not. Following his induction into the army, we see in Greek documents he takes the designation "Macedonian", while in Demotic documents he takes the title "Greek". Adding more confusion to the mix was Paesis, who is described as a "Libyan". Through his service, Dionysius' ethnicity had changed as he moved up the chain of command, reflecting how the army was an important avenue for social mobility for indigenous Egyptians. Even Paesis was eventually promoted to the rank of cavalryman, placing him in the same social class as Dryton and Esthladas.

To bring our episode to a close, it is worth it to look at some of the more troubling aspects of Ptolemaic and Greek rule over Egypt. Though the Ptolemies went to great lengths to try and paint themselves as legitimate pharaohs, passing comments from Demotic or Hieroglyphic sources may reveal more ambivalent attitudes about them from the Egyptians. Despite fulfilling the roles necessary for an Egyptian ruler, the Egyptians themselves never truly forgot the foreign origins of the Macedonian-born dynasty – even the positively inclined Pasherenptah, the Memphite priest promoted by Ptolemy XII to head of the Royal Cult, still referred to them as "Ionian" or Greek kings nearly 300 years of rule. The Egyptian name for the royal capital of Alexandria is *Ra-qed* or Rhakotis, literally meaning "Construction Site".[54] This is perhaps just a reference to the lengthy amount of time it took to build the city, but one can't help but wonder if it was intended to be a slight when compared to great Egyptian-built settlements like Thebes or Memphis.

It is also important to consider how Greeks perceptions could affect the way they treated the Egyptians.

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[53] Lewis, N. 1986: 127-128
[54] Chaveau, M. 1997: 57

Authors like Herodotus and Strabo clearly admired the antiquity of Egypt's past. Beyond the awe-inspiring monuments like the Pyramids of Giza or the Colossi of Memnon, Egyptians collectively were praised for their knowledge of astronomy, medicine, and philosophy.[55] On the inverse, prejudices (if not ignorance) regarding the customs of Egypt certainly are present in the sources as well. Egyptians were often described as superstitious to an absurd degree, and a commonly shared misconception was that they worshiped animals – the most infamous was their supposed reverence and veneration of cats, who were protected by the law and the threat of capital punishment.[56]

Such prejudices, when combined with a general sense of superiority tied to economic or social status, can result in poor treatment of non-Greeks. While perhaps not explicitly from an Egyptian, a letter to a Greek estate manager expressed the sense of injustice that non-Greeks could face:
To Zenon, greeting… You know that you left me in Syria with Krotos and I did everything that was ordered in respect to the camels and was blameless toward you. When you sent an order to give me pay, he gave nothing of what you ordered. When I asked repeatedly that he give me what you ordered and Krotos gave me nothing, but kept telling me to remove myself, I held out for a long time waiting for you; but when I was in want of necessities and could not get anything anywhere, I was compelled to run away into Syria so that I might not perish of hunger. So I wrote you that you might know that Krotos was the cause of it. When you sent me again to Philadelphia to Jason, although I do everything that is ordered, for nine months now he gives me nothing of what you ordered me to have, neither oil nor grain, except at two month periods when he also pays the clothing (allowance). And I am in difficulty both summer and winter. And he orders me to accept ordinary wine for salary. Well, they have treated me with scorn because I am a "barbarian". I beg you therefore, if it seems good to you, to give them orders that I am to obtain what is owing and that in future they pay me in full, in order that I may not perish of hunger because I do not know how to act the Hellene…[57]

One of the most common types of petitions made between Greek and Egyptian parties were property disputes. For all the work done by the Ptolemies to expand the amount of cultivated land in the Fayyum, Egypt remained the most densely settled region in the world, and the introduction of thousands of immigrants – many of them soldiers for hire – would probably exacerbate the issue.[58] It is probably no coincidence that the earliest known Greek papyrus dated to the Hellenistic period is an order from Alexander's governor Peucestas barring the seizure of the property of a priest.[59] An example of such a dispute landed on the desk of Diophanes, the *strategos* of the Arsinoite nome:
To King Ptolemy, greetings from Pasis, a[n Egyptian farmer] of Polydeukia, I am wronged by Geroros, a [Greek] holder of seventy auroras. I own a house in the village, and I have been thrown out by him by force together with my cattle, which are wandering loose in the open air, even though he has a place in the village that was given to him as his lodgings. I therefore, beg you, O king… [do not] allow him to

[55] Strabo, *Geography*, 17.1.3; Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.4
[56] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 1.83; Juvenal, *Satires*, 15.1-13; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 7.299e-300b; Strabo, *Geography*, 17.1.40; Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.37
[57] *P. Col. Zen.* 66, translation from (http://www.columbia.edu/itc/classics/bagnall/3995/readings/b-d2-8.htm)
[58] Chaveau, M. 1997: 154-155
[59] Turner, E.G. 1974: 239-242

throw me out of my own house, so that I may be able to attend to my farming and through you, O king, the common saviour of all, I may obtain justice.[60]

Even in times of peace and prosperity this was a common affair. A letter from Ptolemy II to a subordinate reveals how the government was aware of soldiers going about and throwing the previous inhabitants out of their homes, and in his defense he was actively attempting to put a stop to such an action.[61] But in times of civil strife, we find complaints lodged against wayward soldiers taking advantage of the lack of government oversight and ransacking the homes of locals. The archive of Menkhes has five separate petitions relating to a particularly violent cavalry officer, who attacked several homes on August 23rd in 113 BC. One of them reads as follows:
To Menkhes, village clerk of Kerkeosiris, from Harmiysis son of Sarapion, a crown-land farmer of the said village. On the 8th of Mesore of year 4, my house was invaded by Pyrrhichos son of Dionysios, one of the cavalry colonists, and Herakleios son of Posedippos of the same village, together with very many others armed with swords. Forcing their way in they broke the lock of my mother's room and carried off the objects listed below, although I had done nothing to offend them. I therefore submit [this complaint] to you in order that you may add your signature regarding the details, and forward a copy of the complaint to the authorities concerned, so that I may recover my property and they suffer the appropriate punishment. Farewell.[62]

The underlying tension between the Greek and Egyptian communities could result in outbreaks of violence. In the last episode, we discussed the experiences of Ptolemaeus, the recluse in the Serapaeum of Memphis. Despite living among them for several decades in a holy sanctuary, no less than three petitions were sent out by Ptolemaeus during the turbulent 160s recounting how he had been assaulted and nearly killed by the local Egyptians.[63] Both Ptolemaeus and other Greek petitioners accusing Egyptians of assault tended to emphasize their status as Greeks to magnify the seriousness of the crime, reflecting the hierarchical nature of Egyptian society and the uneven application of justice.[64]

This resentment would eventually be too much to contain. Rumblings of discontent could be felt in the time of Ptolemy II and III, though they are poorly described due to a lack of sources for much of the 3rd century. But during the reign of ineffectual Ptolemy IV, a massive revolt would erupt across much of the Thebaid and Upper Egypt. Its exact causes have been heavily debated, but Ptolemies would see the establishment of a rival dynasty headed by pharaohs of indigenous Egyptian origin that would entrench itself in the south for almost 20 years. By neglecting the Egyptians and with improper government, the peoples responded with enough ferocity that they would nearly destroy what had been the economic superpower of the Hellenistic world – an event which the Ptolemaic kingdom arguably never recovered from.

[60] *P. Ent.* 11; Translated by Lewis, N. 1986: 60
[61] *P. Hal.* 1
[62] *P. Tebt.* 46; Translated by Lewis, N. 1986: 121
[63] For example, *UPZ* 15
[64] P. Ent. 79; *UPZ* 15

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Plutarch – Life of Alexander
Plutarch – Moralia
Strabo – Geography

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Stele of Pasherenptah (BM 886)

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