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REVIEW

GRECO-EGYPTIAN INTERACTIONS: LITERATURE, TRANSLATION, AND CULTURE, 500 BCE–300 CE

edited by Ian Rutherford
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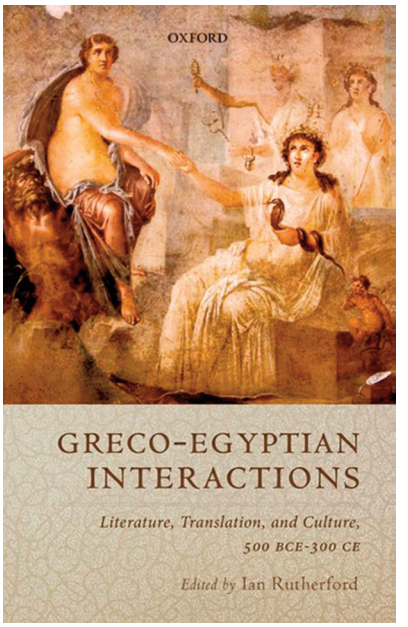

This edited volume seeks to advance the discussion of interactions between Greek and Egyptian culture between 500 BC and 300 CE, focusing almost exclusively on written sources; through fourteen chapters written by thirteen authors, the book succeeds in this ambitious aim. However, with 800 years' worth of material to cover, and with Rome appearing alongside the titular cultures, it is understandable that the volume's greatest challenges arise from its concentration of an enormous subject area into a series of short papers. The scope of the book also presents a challenge for this review. Review of each individual chapter is the only practical way to assess the book, considering that the essays and their hugely varying subject matter are, perhaps understandably, not drawn together within a single theoretical framework or by any concluding discussion, instead acting as largely separate, independent pieces revolving around a common core theme. Space will only allow for a brief consideration of each contribution, and these summary comments may not draw out all of the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Chapter 1, by Ian Rutherford, introduces the aims of the volume and some of the sources that are used throughout, as well as providing an overview of the broad topics of literature, translation, and cultural engagement. It also provides chapter summaries, giving a clear impression of the content of each. Rutherford's introduction serves its purpose, but there are a couple of notable issues. As a result of the variety and scope of the book, there is no way for the introduction to present a theoretical, methodological, or historical context that will remain relevant throughout the entire work. Also, the background to Greek-Egyptian interactions and the study of these is treated rather summarily. It is possible that in the field of literature, this decision was influenced by the existence of Ian Moyer's previous work (*Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism*, 2011), in which he gave a fuller consideration of Egypt's place within Classical scholarship. The few references to Egypt and Greece's material interactions in the Early Iron Age and Archaic Period leading up to 500 BCE need updating, as relevant phenomena in Greek-Egyptian cultural interaction during these periods would quite possibly be of interest to the reader. Considering the scale of the book's task, it is unsurprising that the introduction simply feels too slim to fully introduce all of the

material and issues relevant to its goals.

The remainder of the chapters are organized in the volume to proceed in roughly chronological order, but in reviewing them it makes more sense to group them by their key themes.

Chapters 2, 3, and 10 introduce evidence for Egyptian cultural themes in Greek texts of different periods and genres. In Chapter 2 Susan Stephens highlights possible Egyptian elements in Plato's *Republic*, a topic that is certainly not new, but receives good treatment here. It would have been beneficial, however, for the Egyptian concepts and constructs that are proposed to appear in the *Republic*, namely *maat*, to have received more close attention in Stephens' chapter. This would have better clarified which aspects may have been mostly Greek invention, which might reflect interaction with concepts within contemporary Egyptian culture, and how these elements were transmitted. Chapter 10 offers a comparison of two texts, the demotic *First Tale of Setne Khaemwas* and the Greek *Aithiopika* of Heliodorus. Steve Vinson focuses on the role of women in each text, tackling the difficult subject of the possible influence of Egyptian mythology on the development of the Greek novel, a subject cautiously avoided by R. Jasnow later in this volume. Significant differences between the structure and function of Greek and Egyptian texts are well set out, and the motifs presented from Greek and Egyptian texts are treated as parallels as opposed to being causally linked. The concluding remarks leave the final judgment on the question of cultural influence largely open to the reader. Chapter 3 does not deal with an individual text or genre. Instead, Alexandra von Lieven discusses how the Greek (and Roman) names given to Egyptian deities were chosen, for example through function, form, and marital relationships. This is an important question that has not received enough attention in previous scholarship, and cannot be fully explored in a single chapter—but the work here prompts interesting questions, and highlights the rich potential of the topic.

Chapters 4 and 5 are concerned with the influence of Greek culture on Egyptian literary and historical narratives. Chapter 4, by Ian Rutherford, examines the hypothesis that aspects of the "Inaros Narratives" reflect the influence of Homeric epic on Egyptian literary culture as early as the Persian occupation of Egypt. The approach is critical, and introduces a number of possible explanations for the Narratives' dramatic departure from traditional themes of Egyptian texts, including influences from now-lost cultural traditions in Libya or the Near East. While doing so, however, it also presents a compelling case for an environment in which the Narratives' parallels with Homer could have developed as a result of Greco-Egyptian interactions. The theme of new literary genres reappears in Chapter 5, by John Dillery, with the discussion of the unprecedented (in Egypt) historiographical approach of the Egyptian priest Manetho in his *Aegyptiaca*. Dillery begins by defining, for his purposes, synchronism (not to be mistaken with syncretism), usefully outlining the idea of "internal" and "external" synchronisms in Manetho's work. The remainder of the chapter discusses these synchronisms, such as regal dates and the flood of Deucalion, and concludes that they act as indications not only of the importance, in Ptolemaic Egypt, of relating Egyptian history to critical events in Greek (mythical) history but also of the possible influence of a Greco-Roman concept of synchronism in the recording of important events.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on politicized interactions of Greek and Egyptian culture. Chapter 7, by Ivan A. Ladynin, discusses the *Potter's Oracle*, an anti-Ptolemaic demotic text known through its Greek translations alongside pro-Ptolemaic texts such as the *Romance of Alexander* and the *Dream of Nectanebo*. Ladynin demonstrates well the flexibility of Egyptian "virtual history" for constructing politicized narratives on the place of foreign rulers in Egyptian cultural history. In Chapter 7, Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones and Stephanie Winder use Egyptian iconography and Callimachus' *Coma Berenices* to dip into a deep subject little discussed in this volume—the projection of the Ptolemaic royal family in Egyptian religious guises. The authors present and contextualize the promotion of a Hathoric image of Berenice II well, but the chapter would certainly benefit from more explanation of who the audiences for this constructed identity were, and how this played into the elements of Egyptian and Greek culture interwoven in the creation of the Hathoric image.

Chapter 8, by Nikolaos Lazaridis, is distinct to many of the other chapters in the volume in that it initially seeks definitions of fundamentally important terms such as "parallels," before presenting a range of such parallels and considering their relative "weight" in evidencing Greek-Egyptian cultural interaction. Such a discussion is highly useful and could have been presented earlier in the overall volume, though this might have created the impression that other contributors work within Lazaridis' definitions, which is not (at least not explicitly) the case.

Chapters 9 and 12 both analyze Greek texts preserved on the ruins of Egyptian/Nubian temples. Ian Moyer's discussion of Isodorus' hymns (Chapter 9), inscribed on

the surface of a gateway into the temple of Isis-Hermouthis at Narmouthis situates itself well within a broader theoretical discourse on syncretism. As such, it asks a question integral to the goals of the book as a whole—how should we judge what our sources tell us about syncretism in Greco-Egyptian culture? This chapter is also one of the most successful in the volume at tackling the varied and interlocking contexts of the source material, including physical context and authorial identity, and as a result successfully presents not only evidence for syncretism in Isodorus' hymns, but also an approach to understanding syncretism. In Chapter 12, by Gaëlle Tallet, we return to a similar theme in a different spatial and chronological context. Tallet introduces a series of Greek inscriptions on the wall of a temple of Mandulis at Talmis-Kalabsha, Nubia, dating from the Roman Period. After providing a brief historical context to the site, the chapter focuses on the dichotomy of "Hellenism" and "Egyptian Culture" and how we can identify aspects of both cultures within these inscriptions. Tallet's conclusions on the political pragmatism of syncretism at Talmis-Kalabsha are convincing, though the deliberate, hard separation of Hellenic and Egyptian elements in the discussion of the inscriptions would benefit from more consideration of the cultural identity(ies) of the viewer(s), especially considering that the source material dates to the latter end of the book's time span.

Chapters 11 and 13 also address texts written, at least originally, in Egyptian languages, and both chapters prioritize careful treatment of the source material over broader analysis of the issue of cultural interaction. Chapter 11, authored by Joachim Quack, is one of the volume's shorter entries and covers evidence for the translation of the substantial *Book of the Temple* from Egyptian texts into Greek. The source material is presented with a clear and succinct commentary and a range of mistakes and preconceptions in the scholarship on the subject to date are explained or rectified. However, there is very little discussion of the sorts of relationship that this source may suggest between Egyptian and Greek culture. Chapter 13 focuses closely on the contents of a Demotic text, the *Book of Thoth*, and presents a careful and cautious analysis of a possible relationship between this text and themes in Classical literature, in particular the writings of Diodorus of Sicily. The tone of this chapter emphasizes that the author, Richard Jasnow, considered his paper an introduction to a topic deserving further attention. Nonetheless, his tentative findings are well presented, with the many references to the *Book of Thoth* and extensive bibliography providing opportunity for further exploration of the subject.

The final chapter, by Gideon Bohak, further stretches the chronological scope of the project beyond its specified chronological and cultural limits by examining the diffusion of Greco-Egyptian magical tradition in Late Antiquity, primarily into the Roman Empire. Despite limited space, Bohak is able to discuss both the iconography and language employed across a range of sources, including amulets and magical papyri. A passing reference to work on pre-existing cross-cultural funerary practices of Hellenistic and Greco-Roman Egypt may have helped further contextualize ideas of cultural fusion in the area of magic. The identification of Egyptian priests as the agents responsible for conveying such beliefs could also use more development—especially regarding the likelihood that "genuine" Egyptian priests were in fact so widely distributed in the Roman Empire as the evidence for use of Egyptian-styled magical objects. The paper successfully demonstrates the spread of Egyptian cultural impact beyond Egypt's limits, but the explanation of how and why this occurred are less convincing.

Overall, all of the authors have provided thoughtful, readable, and careful contributions, giving detailed consideration of a variety of media and allowing the reader to trace broad themes through nearly 1000 years of cultural interaction. Images are used sparingly where needed to accompany discussion, and are of adequate, but not especially high, quality. As mentioned above, the book does not include an overall concluding statement, and does not appear to seek to bring the respective elements into a single narrative, with contributions varying in their treatment of theoretical and methodological questions surrounding the book's core aims. It is clear that, in the future, works could, and hopefully will, be produced on a number of the themes and periods present in this book, and with the luxury of more space will be able to contain more rigorous and cohesive discussions of syncretism, contexts, and audiences than the present volume allows. The result of this wide-reaching and ambitious

collaboration is, however, a compact and very informative collection of papers, which will certainly advance the appreciation and awareness of Greco-Egyptian cultural interactions.