

“Syrians call you Astarte . . . Lycian peoples call you Leto”: Ethnic Relations and Circulating Legends in the Villages of Egypt

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Introduction

The peoples referenced in the title of this paper—Syrians and Lycians—are among those that occupy the attention of one Isidoros, an inhabitant of an Egyptian village in the Lake district (Fayum) near the beginning of the first century BCE. We know nothing about Isidoros beyond what he reveals in the four hymns for the goddess Renenutet or Hermouthis (in Greek transliteration) which he had inscribed on monumental slabs at the entrance to a temple in the village of Narmouthis (modern Medinet Madi).¹ These inscriptions aimed at honoring a local goddess, remembering an ideal pharaoh who founded the temple (Amenemhet III), and bringing together local Egyptians and immigrants; altogether, they provide a fascinating glimpse into important dimensions of social and cultural life in this period.

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¹ On the transliteration, see Vanderlip, *Four Greek Hymns of Isidoros* (1972), 19.

In conjunction with papyrological and epigraphic evidence of foreigners settled in the Arsinoite district, the monumentalized compositions of Isidoros offer a concrete illustration of ethnic relations at the village level like very little other evidence from antiquity can. Rarely do we get such a down-to-earth picture of the potential for social interactions among different peoples, including the deployment of circulating legends about the accomplishments of figures from long ago. In fact, the hymns of Isidoros offer a springboard into folktales about the pharaohs Amenemhet, Senwosret, and other legendary counterparts from the earlier history of Egypt. The case of Isidoros in some ways provides a model for the local deployment of such tales in inter-ethnic encounters, but also for the cross-cultural transmission of local traditions with the possibility of reuse and transformation by non-Egyptians, including Greek and Judean authors.² Isidoros’ monuments show how claims of preeminence for Egyptians might subtly be made in these settings while also assuming ongoing active engagement with settled immigrants from other ethnic groups in the neighborhood.

² Cf. Moyer, *Egypt* (2011), 53–58, on cross-cultural transmission in connection with Ionians, Carians, and Greeks settled at Memphis in an earlier period.

This study of local social history and ethnic relations in Hellenistic Egypt takes a consciously decolonizing approach informed by postcolonial theoretical insights in the wake of contributions by the Roman archaeologist Jane Webster and others since 1996.³ Of course, this does not entail an over-simplified application or imposition of models from specific modern colonial situations onto ancient societies, as critiqued by Roger S. Bagnall with respect to Edouard Will's early (and understandably experimental) attempts to explore colonial dimensions of the Hellenistic world.⁴ As in my other research into related issues about ethnic hierarchies, claims to civilizational priority, and notions of the wise "barbarian," I take a decolonizing approach that aims to be alert to modern scholarly categories whose origins are rooted in colonialism, to decenter power-holders (modern or ancient), and to avoid the adoption of hegemonic perspectives on conquered peoples.⁵ In doing so, I also seek to understand non-dominant sources, perspectives, and experiences on their own terms and not merely for their value in understanding the nature of Ptolemaic, Seleucid, or Roman regimes.⁶

In significant respects, the ongoing debate about ancient Egyptian "nationalism" is bound up in this broader issue of coloniality. It is important, therefore, to clarify how this paper takes a different approach that shifts the focus to ethnicity. Beyond evidentiary difficulties with interpreting ancient Egyptian revolts in terms of "nationalism," the category of nationalism itself tends to presume the centrality of current power-holders, in that social, ethnic, and other interactions are framed primarily in terms of antagonistic political ideologies with

an opposition between Egyptian natives and Greco-Macedonian Ptolemaic rulers. On a related matter, it is problematic to approach conquered peoples in terms of a dichotomous choice between "Hellenization" on the one hand, and "resistance" and preservation of local or regional cultures on the other. Such categories tend to center concurrent power-holders in a way that closes out other explanations of social and cultural interactions, such as those that I explore in this piece.

Certain studies come close to my sociohistorical interest in the local circulation and deployment of traditions about figures like Amenemhet and Senwosret, for instance, but these studies also illustrate the constraints imposed by the category of "nationalism" in the attempt to understand ancient phenomena. In the late 1930s, Martin Braun engaged in a lively study of what he aptly considered "folktales" circulating in the populace at large about Senwosret and other heroes such as Nektanebo (among Egyptians), Semiramis (among Assyrians), and Moses (among Judeans).⁷ Yet as with other scholars contemporary with him, Braun's work is limited considerably by his oversimplified picture of an encounter between presumed dominant western powers (Hellenistic or Roman regimes) on the one hand, and a generalized "oriental" perspective on the other. Braun's approach—which of course long predates the important deconstruction of the category of "Orientalism" by Edward Said in 1978—seems to have been founded on the notion of a violent clash of civilizations: Occident vs. Orient, Europe vs. Asia.⁸

Furthermore, like some others after him, Braun tended to frame the discussion in terms of "politics" and "nationalism," with "resistance" to more distant foreign Hellenistic or Roman rulers as the principal focus. Consequently, there was less attention to local social situations and interactions between peoples, such as those we encounter in Isidoros' context.⁹ Other more recent scholars approach things in a similar manner. This includes Alan B. Lloyd, who added more nuance but still wrote in this tradition, speaking of Egyptian tales under the rubric of "nationalist propaganda" constructed by priests (specifically) who "aimed to shore up native Egyptian culture . . . in the face of pressure from the

³ For overviews of postcolonial studies generally, see Loomba, *Colonialism / Postcolonialism* (2015) and Young, *Postcolonialism* (2003). For careful postcolonial approaches to ancient materials, see Webster, "The Just War" (1994), "Roman Imperialism" (1996), "Ethnographic Barbarity" (1996), and "Creolizing the Roman Provinces" (2001); Woolf, "Beyond Romans and Natives" (1997); Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity* (2011); Gardner, "Thinking about Roman Imperialism" (2013).

⁴ Bagnall, "Decolonizing Ptolemaic Egypt" (2006 [1997]); cf. Manning (*Land and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt* [2003], 5–6) on Will, "Pour une 'anthropologie coloniale'" (1985). Bagnall makes no mention of the important and nuanced work by Webster and therefore too readily dismisses the potential value of postcolonial theory.

⁵ Harland, "Climbing the Ethnic Ladder" (2019); Harland, "The Most Ignorant Peoples of All" (2021); Harland, "From That Time, Nothing Else Has Been Discovered" (2022).

⁶ Cf. Said, *Orientalism* (1978), 108–109.

⁷ Braun, *History and Romance* (1938), 1–31.

⁸ E.g., *ibid.*, 1–2; see also Said, *Orientalism* (1978).

⁹ On Braun's context as a Jew in 1930s Germany, see Whitmarsh, "Hellenism, Nationalism, Hybridity" (2011), 220–23.

[culture] of foreign conquerors.”¹⁰ Despite admitting the sparse nature of literary evidence for nationalism, Brian C. McGing believes that “when it comes to revolt in the Ptolemaic period, the evidence requires us to apply the nationalist model as part of our attempt to understand what was going on.”¹¹ Yet many other studies of the revolts specifically offer a corrective by emphasizing instead the role of disaffected Ptolemaic elites (alongside native Egyptians) in uprisings, as well as the social and economic (rather than “nationalistic”) factors which contributed to clashes or uprisings.¹² The revolts are raised here not to engage with them fully, but rather to highlight how an overemphasis on “nationalism,” on phenomena categorized as “political,” and on “resistance” to current powerholders results in the scholarly neglect of local ethnic relations.¹³

Focusing on these local or regional ethnic relations, the present case study shows that the situation in Egypt was something far more complicated than discussions of Egyptian “nationalism” tend to allow. The legends in Isidoros’ hymns, for instance, do not take conscious aim at Greco-Macedonian hegemony in any obvious way, let alone approaching the negativity towards these foreign rulers (alongside opposition to other foreigners, such as Judeans, it should be noted) in some versions of the roughly contemporary *Oracle of the Potter*.¹⁴

¹⁰ Lloyd, “Nationalist Propaganda” (1982); see, more recently: Lloyd, “Egyptian Attitude to the Persians” (2014). Cf. Milne, “Egyptian Nationalism” (1928): 226–34; Eddy, *The King Is Dead* (1961), 272–94; Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition* (1992), 136 (on the “tension . . . between nationalism and Hellenism” but not limited to the Egyptian situation), 223 (on “national historians”); Huss, *Der makedonische König* (1994), 129–80; Huss, “Le Basileus et les prêtres égyptiens” (2000), 125–26.

¹¹ McGing, “Revolt in Ptolemaic Egypt” (2012), 515; cf. McGing, “Review of Veisse, *Les Revoltes Égyptiennes*” (2006): 58–63; McGing, “Revolt Subjects” (2016).

¹² See especially Préaux, “Esquisse d’une histoire des révolutions égyptiennes” (1936); Pestman, “Haronnophris and Chaonnophris” (1995); Clarysse, “Ptolémées et temples” (2000); Veisse, *Les revoltes égyptiennes* (2004); Veisse, “Retour sur les ‘révoltes égyptiennes’” (2013). Cf. Johnson, “Is the Demotic Chronicle an Anti-Greek Tract?” (1984), 115–16; Gorre, *Les relations du clergé Égyptien* (2009); O’Neil, “Native Revolt Against the Ptolemies” (2012); Johnstone, “Insurgency in Ptolemaic Egypt” (2016); Matthey, “Once and Future King of Egypt” (2017), 48–50; Dieleman and Moyer, “Egyptian Literature” (2014), 440.

¹³ For my working definitions of ethnicity and related social scientific concepts, see Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians* (2009), 5–14.

¹⁴ Koenen, “Supplementary Note” (1984): 9–13; Kerkeslager, “Apology of the Potter” (1998); Beyerle, “Authority and Propaganda” (2017). For anti-Judean versions, see especially *PSI VIII 982* =

Nor do the materials in Isidoros’ hymns express strong affiliations with, or support for, the Ptolemaic regime.¹⁵ In fact, they make no direct reference to the existence of the Ptolemies at all. As I demonstrate, phenomena sometimes pressed into the category of “nationalism” are better understood in terms of more wide-reaching processes of ethnic identification and differentiation which, although including interactions with or responses to dominant ethnic groups, were by no means limited to them. Decentering ancient hegemonic powers in scholarly explanations is desirable if our aim is to understand more fully some of these non-dominant peoples in the villages of Egypt, as I aim to do now.

Ethnic Diversity in Isidoros’ World

That ethnic interactions were not merely hypothetical or in elite imaginations about travellers in far-off lands is illustrated particularly well by local evidence from ethnically diverse villages in Isidoros’ world, the Lake district (Fayum; also known as the Arsinoite district after 267 BCE). Due to the survival of a concentration of taxation documents, we happen to know far more about the population in this area in the mid-third century. Important work by Willy Clarysse and Dorothy Thompson on the salt-tax documents from 254–231 BCE suggests that the adult population of the entire district at that time would have been 58,709, including more than 9,125 soldiers and perhaps 6,619 cavalrymen.¹⁶ Most of our information on the ethnic makeup of this population concerns the settlement of soldiers from the Ptolemaic army as plot-holders (*klerouchoi*, or cleruchs) beginning under Ptolemy I Soter. Ptolemy I Soter (305–282 BCE), Ptolemy II Philadelphos (282–246 BCE), and Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–221 BCE), along with their engineers, (e.g. Kleon and Theodoros), were instrumental in managing the waters to

CPJ III 520. For a primarily anti-Ptolemaic interpretation, see Collins, “The Sibyl and the Potter” (1994), 57–69. The *Demotic Oracle* likewise may not be as anti-Greek or anti-Ptolemaic as often assumed: Johnson, “Is the Demotic Chronicle an Anti-Greek Tract?” (1984). Quack (“As He Disregarded the Law, He Was Replaced During His Own Lifetime” [2015]) shows that virtually every named Egyptian pharaoh is criticized in the document, beyond the unnamed Nektanebo II.

¹⁵ See, for instance, an earlier example of what Lloyd has termed an Egyptian “collaborator” in relation to the earlier Persian hegemony. Lloyd, “Inscription of Udjahorresnet” (1982).

¹⁶ Clarysse and Thompson, *Counting the People* (2006), 2:92–102 (esp. Table 4:2 on 94), 195.

reclaim or maintain significant plots of land in the Lake district, and this is where many of the soldiers were settled.¹⁷ Mary Stefanou's updated study of evidence not available to Bagnall shows that the influx of soldiers as plot-holders continued at least up to 145 BCE and that these tenants were *not* "almost a closed class" (after Ptolemy I), as Bagnall had stated.¹⁸ Beyond military sources, voluntary migration for occupational, trading, or mercantile purposes would contribute to ethnic diversity as well, as Csaba A. La'da shows regarding the fifty-two non-Greek and non-Macedonian ethnic designations attested in Egyptian documents.¹⁹ Similarly, Katja Mueller's study of migration in Hellenistic Egypt generally shows what regional (rather than civic) ethnic designations happen to be most frequently encountered in surviving papyri, with Cyrenaicans (201) in the top position in terms of attestations, followed by Thracians (199) and Judeans (102), and with others from Asia Minor (Carians [53] and Pamphylans [40]) coming further down the list of 1,632 regional designations counted by her.²⁰ What is important for us here is a comparable situation of ethnic diversity likely continued in the Lake district into Isidoros' time, so that Greeks, Thracians, Lycians, Carians, Mysians, Syrians, Judeans, and others would encounter one another regularly in local villages.

The "peoples of all tribes" (παμφύλων ἔθνῶν in hymn 3, line 31) engaged in Isidoros' inscriptions are clearly present in this demographic evidence. The plot-holder and taxation papyri reveal that Greeks and Greco-Macedonians of various origins were a significant though not overwhelming portion of the population. Recent studies of these plot-holders in the third century BCE and after suggest that the percentage of Greco-Macedonian settlers would be far less than previously believed, though still significant: almost a quarter of the total population in this district is now considered to be Greek or Macedonian (with a lower percentage in most other Egyptian districts), though Greco-Macedonians did constitute about seventy percent of settled military plot-holders identified by ethnic-

ity.²¹ There would, therefore, be opportunities for local Egyptians and other settlers to interact with Greco-Macedonians in daily life. Greeks are among the first ethnic groups (after Thracians) to be mentioned by Isidoros (hymn 1, line 15). Of course, one of the reasons Isidoros composed and arranged to have these hymns inscribed was to translate and promote local traditions in a manner intelligible to Greek-speakers: "After carefully learning from men who investigate such matters, I myself had everything inscribed in order to translate for Greeks the power of a prince who was a god" (hymn 4, lines 38–40). Demographic information further confirms that a local Greek audience would have been real, not hypothetical.

Peoples grouped under the rubric of "Thracians" (from the southeastern Balkans) were the second most numerous contingent of foreign soldiers (identified by ethnicity) settled as plot-holders in this district.²² Although evidence from outside of Egypt shows that Thracians made up a significant portion of the slave population in certain Greek city-states, including Athens and Rhodes,²³ these Thracian soldiers in the Arsinoite district were not likely to have been as low on the regional socio-economic or ethnic ladder as some scholars had previously assumed.²⁴ It is notable that Isidoros gives prominence to Thracians, naming them before all others, mentioning them twice, and expressly placing them alongside Greeks (hymn 1, lines 15–20).

Then there were numerous other ethnic groups with smaller but notable representation among plot-holders in the Lake district, particularly peoples from Asia Minor including Mysians, Paphlagonians, Galatians, Carians, Pisidians, and Lycians, but also others from Arabia and Syria.²⁵ For instance, Andrew Monson has recently published a survey of crop output by plot-holders (in

¹⁷ Westermann, "Land Reclamation" (1917): 426–30; Thompson, "Irrigation and Drainage" (1999).

¹⁸ Stefanou, "Waterborne Recruits" (2013).

¹⁹ Now see La'da, *Ethnic Terminology* (2019); La'da, "Towards a History of Immigration to Hellenistic Egypt" (2020), 66–67 (on the numbers). Cf. La'da, *Foreign Ethnicities* (2002).

²⁰ Mueller, "Geographical Information Systems" (2005): 77.

²¹ Bagnall, "Origins" (1984); Bingen, *Hellenistic Egypt*, 104–13; Clarysse and Thompson, *Counting the People* (2006), esp. 2:90–102; Fischer-Bovet, "Counting the Greeks in Egypt" (2011), 149 (22%); Stefanou, "Waterborne Recruits" (Greco-Macedonians are ca. 71% of plot-holders). Cf. Uebel, *Die Kleruchen Ägyptens* (1968) and Sängler, "Military Immigration" (2015).

²² La'da "Towards a History of Immigration" (2020): 68.

²³ Harland, "Pontic Diasporas" (2020).

²⁴ On the Thracians, see Velkov and Fol, *Les Thraces* (1977), 22–71 and 97–102 (who problematically propose a very low status for Thracians in Egypt); Goudriaan, "Ethnical Strategies" (1992), 74–99, 77–79; Bingen, *Hellenistic Egypt* (2007), 83–93.

²⁵ See Bagnall, "The Origins of Ptolemaic Cleruchs" (1984), significantly updated by Stefanou, "Waterborne Recruits" (2013), 111–13 (table). Polybios, *Histories* 5.65 adds Galatians alongside Gauls and Libyans for Egypt generally under Ptolemy IV (221–204 BCE).

Demotic) which probably comes from the northeastern part of the Lake district and dates to around 200 BCE. Among the names of soldiers in this papyrus are numerous Semitic and specifically Syrian names, primarily theophoric names (such as those incorporating El, Nabu, and Hadad) that are matched by names found in papyri from Dura-Europos (e.g. Barathes, Matharaeus, Naboubarakos).²⁶ Judean settlers are the most attested from the Levant or Syria, but there were also Idumean and Sidonian plot-holders in the Arsinoite district.²⁷

Supplementing this demographic picture regarding military settlers are individuals and groups from these and other backgrounds found scattered throughout the papyri and inscriptions of the Arsinoite as well as other districts of Egypt.²⁸ The presence of foreigners at particular locales could be significant enough to warrant the formation of ongoing associations (*πολιτεύματα*) based on ethnicity, as was the case with Cilician soldiers in Krokodilopolis (*IFayum* I 15; third-second century BCE), with Cretan soldiers at Tebtynis (*PTebt* I 32; 145 BCE), and with Boeotians, Idumeans, and Judeans in other districts of Egypt.²⁹ The presence of Judeans in the Arsinoite district is further confirmed by epigraphic evidence, including the dedication of a prayer-house (ca. 245–222 BCE) by Judeans on behalf of king Ptolemy at Krokodilopolis (*IEgJud* 117 = *SB* V 8939 = *GRA* III 186).³⁰ Village names in the Arsinoite district also point to a significant presence of certain settlers, as in the case of a “village of Syrians,” a village called “Samareia,” and a “village of Arabs,” also known as

“Ptolemais of Arabs.”³¹ I would suggest this diverse situation provides a key to understanding local ethnic interactions as they are hinted at not only in Isidoros’ monumentalized hymns but also in circulating Egyptian legends about important figures of the past, legends that could be deployed in social encounters on the ground.

Isidoros’ Hymns at Narmouthis

A few words are in order regarding the temple at Narmouthis where Isidoros placed his inscriptions. This temple was in a village at the southwestern edge of the Arsinoite district, about thirty kilometres from the capital of Krokodilopolis (modern Faiyum). The inscribed monuments were positioned on both the left (two inscriptions) and right (two inscriptions) at the southern main entrance into the forecourt of the temple. This was a portion of the temple that was part of an expansion in the time of Ptolemy IX Soter (in 96 BCE), an area that would have been accessible to the general population, not just priests.³² The older, innermost section of this temple was built under the pharaohs Amenemhet III (son of Senwosret III) and Amenemhet IV of the Twelfth Dynasty and was devoted to the goddess Renenutet of Dja (the older name of this town) and her consort, the god Sobek of Shedet (later Krokodilopolis).³³ The alternative name of the goddess, Hermouthis (or Thermouthis), was a later Greek transliteration for this local goddess and, as Isidoros’ compositions reveal, she could be identified with Isis as well as other deities. Vera Frederika Vanderlip, whose publication, translation, and commentary on the inscriptions remains important, argues

²⁶ Monson, “Syrians in the Fayyum” (2014). Other Syrians: *PRyl* IV 554 (Sidonian; 258 BCE); *PMich* I 49 (250 BCE).

²⁷ Bagnall, “The Origins of Ptolemaic Cleruchs” (1984), 12. The ethnic designation “Judean” is the third-most attested among immigrants in Egypt overall (Greeks or Macedonians, Thracians, and then Judeans). See La’da “Towards a History of Immigration” (2020), 68.

²⁸ See La’da, *Foreign Ethnics* (2002); La’da, “Towards a History of Immigration” (2020).

²⁹ Boeotians in the Delta at Xoïs: *SB* II 6664 (165–145 BCE). Idumeans at Memphis: *OGIS* 737 = *SB* V 8929 (112/111 BCE); Rapaport, “Les Iduméens en Égypte” (1969): 73–82; Thompson, “The Idumeans of Memphis” (1984); Thompson, *Memphis* (2012), 92–96. Judeans at Herakleopolis in Upper Egypt (144–132 BCE): Cowey and Maresch, *Urkunden des Politeuma* (2001). See also Honigman, “Politeumata and Ethnicity” (2003).

³⁰ For text and translation, see: <http://www.philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/?p=31068>, accessed June 2021. Loan agreements from the district also attest to Judeans (descending from soldiers): *PTebt* III 817 = *CPJI* 23, also from Krokodilopolis (182 BCE); *PTebt* III 818 = *CPJI* 24, from Trikomia (174 BCE); *PTebt* III 815 = *CPJI* 20, fragment 2, recto, lines 17–21 (228–221 BCE).

³¹ “Village of Syrians” / “fortress of Syrians” (in Demotic): *PTebt* III 933 (3rd century BCE); *BGU* VI 1282 = *CPJI* 46 (2nd–1st century BCE). “Samareia”: *PPetr* III 66 and 139 (3rd century BCE). “Village of Arabs” or “Ptolemais of Arabs”: *PEnt* 3 and 47 (3rd century BCE). For other “Arabs,” see *PCairZen* II 59230, line 4 (Philadelphia, 253 BCE); *PTebt* III 736 (143 BCE); Clarysse and Thompson, *Counting the People* (2006), 159–61; Bauschatz, *Law and Enforcement* (2013), 156–57.

³² For a detailed study, see Vanderlip, *Four Greek Hymns* (1972), 63–74. Cf. Moyer, “Isidorus at the Gates of the Temple” (2016).

³³ For a full bibliography on the excavation of the earlier temple and the later Ptolemaic additions, see Vanderlip, *Four Greek Hymns* (1972), esp. 9–13 for a summary of the evidence, and the more recent study by Bresciani and Giammarusti, *I templi di Medinet Madi* (2015). For the hieroglyphic evidence, see Donadoni, “Testi [part 1]” (1947): 333–52 and “Testi [part 2]” (1947): 506–24.

that the inscriptions themselves were inscribed after 96 and likely in the 80s BCE.³⁴

We actually know very little about who Isidoros was, and the suggestion that he was a priest is merely a guess.³⁵ This good guess may be challenged by the way in which Isidoros refers to consulting those who have “read the sacred writings” (see below), as though he himself had not (at least, not in hieroglyphics [?]) and was instead dependent on oral communications. Isidoros has a Greek name (incorporating the Egyptian goddess Isis’ name) and never expressly self-identifies as “Egyptian.” Yet we will see that the central messages communicated by his hymns firmly place him alongside local Egyptians (rather than Greeks or other immigrants) who knew more than those others exactly who this goddess was. Isidoros uses an epithet in Demotic to express the true identity of Isis (see hymn 1, lines 23–24).

The first hymn focuses on the nature of the goddess Renenutet-Hermouthis and her wide-reaching favors to humanity. Isidoros attempts to place his local Egyptian goddess on the world stage in a way that includes settled immigrants in the district.³⁶ At the same time, he subtly pronounces the superiority of local Egyptian understandings of and honors for this goddess. Isidoros opens by praising the goddess for her virtues and gifts to humanity in a manner that is reminiscent of similar discourses about a deity’s virtues (as in, e.g., aretologies and hymns), including later ones for Isis from Oxyrhynchos, Maroneia in Thrace, and Kyme in Aeolis (claiming to be a copy of a monument at Memphis).³⁷ However, as Ian Moyer rightly argues, the

overall focus of Isidoros’ compositions is very much local, and this is by no means some standard Isis aretological tradition.³⁸ In fact, Moyer argues that Isidoros is conversant in and quite consciously mediates between a variety of traditions, moving from the more universal identification with Isis towards local Egyptian interpretations and meanings.³⁹ Moyer’s argument fits well with my points further below regarding local deployment of traditions and legends.

What is especially noteworthy for present purposes is that Isidoros emphasizes the *local goddess from this temple* as the bringer of gifts to all of humanity (hymn 1, lines 1–8):

Oh wealth-giver, queen of the gods, Hermouthis, lady, all-powerful Good Fortune, greatly renowned Isis, Deo, highest discoverer of all life, numerous miracles were your care until you provided a means of life to humanity and good order for everyone. And you taught customs so that justice might in some measure prevail. You gave technical skills that human life might be comfortable, and you discovered the blossoms that bring fruit.⁴⁰

As the hymn later underlines that Egyptians know her best among humanity (see below), this may suggest that it is they specifically who first knew her and received these favors from her. But what is most clear is that the hymn has a local Egyptian deity—rather than the god of some other ethnic group—as the bringer of civilization. The goddess Hermouthis is portrayed as a figure who brings a means of living (βίος) along with laws (θεσμίαι) to order society and to bring some level of justice (εὐδικία). Furthermore, she introduces or invents both technical skills (τέχναι) and agricultural production (καρποί).

Isidoros’ overall approach reflects an Egyptian perspective that puts the Egyptian village at the center. But

³⁴ Vanderlip, *Four Greek Hymns* (1972), 9–16. Other publications of the inscriptions: Vogliano, *Primo rapporto* (1936), 27–51 (with photos in plates 14–17); Vogliano, “Gli scavi” (1936); Vandoni, “Il tempio di Madinet-Madi” (1953); Bernand, *Inscriptions métriques* (1969), 631–52 (nos. 175–176); *SEG VIII* 548–51. Greek text (from Bernand) available online at: <https://inscriptions.packhum.org/text/217063>. Bollók (“Du problème de la datation des hymnes d’Isidore” [1974]) argues for a date between 217 and 206 BCE (time of Ptolemy IV) which, although not as convincing, would not affect the discussion here considerably. On the meter, see Faraone, “The Stanzaiac Architecture of Isidoros” (2012): 618–32 (with bibliography).

³⁵ Vanderlip, *Four Greek Hymns* (1972), 14, assumes Isidoros is a priest without further discussion.

³⁶ Cf. Moyer, “Isidoros at the Gates of the Temple” (2016), 218–19.

³⁷ *POxy XI 1380* (early second century CE); Bricault, *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques (RICIS)* 114/0202 (cf. Grandjean, *Une nouvelle arétologie d’Isis à Maronée* [1975]); Engelmann,

Die Inschriften von Kyme (1976) = *IKyme* 41 (second century CE). Cf. Diodoros of Sicily, *Library* 1.27. Earlier (284–246 BCE) are the hymns from Philai: Zabkar, *Hymns to Isis* (1988). Some recent studies of Isis hymns: Dousa, “Imagining Isis” (2002), 149–84; Gasparro, “The Hellenistic Face of Isis” (2007); Kockelmann, *Praising the Goddess* (2009); Moyer, “The Memphite Self-Revelations” (2017).

³⁸ Moyer, “Isidoros at the Gates” (2016).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁴⁰ Translations here are adapted from Vanderlip, *Four Greek Hymns* (1972), 17–74. The Greek text as published by Bertrand can be readily accessed on the PHI website: <http://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/217063>, accessed June 2021.

Egyptian traditions could travel and be deployed and reshaped to serve quite different constituencies. So, for instance, an inscription dedicated to Isis at Maroneia in Thrace (but likely composed or set up by someone from Attica) engages in what might be labeled cultural appropriation. That composition demonstrates the use of such traditions about the goddess Isis to further claims of preeminence for a people, but not for Egyptians. Isis' gifts to humanity remain language, writing, justice, laws, and civic stability. Yet the finale in that aretology is that, although from Egypt, Isis "particularly honored Athens within Greece." Isis makes the earth in Greece "produce food" and makes Athens "the ornament of Europe" with its mysteries for Demeter (identified with Isis).⁴¹

Isidoros' characterization of a local Egyptian goddess as a civilizing force takes on added significance for ethnic relations when we realize that it was a common strategy to claim that one's own people or that people's deity—and not that of some other ethnic group—was the first to introduce a civilized manner of life. This was a strategy employed within ethnic interactions in the Hellenistic period in order to claim the highest position for one's own group in an ethnic hierarchy of sorts.⁴² Writing shortly after Alexander's conquest, for instance, Bel-re'ushu (Berossos) relates a Late Babylonian (also Sumerian and Akkadian) tale of the earliest fish-man sage, Oannes (retrospectively associated with the legendary Adapa from Akkadian literature) sent by the god of wisdom to introduce knowledge of writing, calculations, and technical skills (τέχναι) of all types. This figure also establishes cities, temples, laws (νόμοι), and agricultural production (καρποί) (Berossos, *Babylonian Matters*, BNJ 680 F1b). Moreover, this mythical figure teaches the earliest Babylonians (not some other people) "all that pertains to civilized life," and Bel-re'ushu and/or the tradition he employs asserts that nothing important has since been discovered by subsequent peoples. This technique of claiming the superiority of one's own ethnic group over others continues

through the period with "everyone saying that they are the original people and the first of all humanity to discover the things which are useful in life," to quote Diodoros of Sicily's complaint at the beginning of his account of Egyptians (*Library of History* 1.9.3). Diodoros, who himself maintains the cultural preeminence of Greeks, also refers to Egyptian priests at Thebes who claimed "that they are the earliest of all humans, and that among them were the first people to discover love of wisdom (φιλοσοφίαν) and study of the stars" (Diodoros, *Library* 1.50).

Although Isidoros gives pride of place to local Egyptians, his story of Hermouthis as bringer-of-civilization was not limited to a local audience of Egyptians only. This is abundantly clear not only in the conclusion to the fourth hymn, where Isidoros clarifies that he writes to "explain" (ἐρμηνεύειν) local traditions so that Greeks can understand them (hymn 4, lines 36–42). It also stands out in this first hymn where many of the ethnic groups we just saw represented in the papyri from the Lake district are expressly involved. Various peoples are brought in by Isidoros (in hymn 1, lines 15–24) in a way that assumes their local presence and even their active participation in the festival in honor of this local Egyptian goddess (as further spelled out in the second and third hymns as well):

All mortals who live on the boundless earth, Thracians, Greeks and barbarians, express your fair name, a name greatly honoured among all. But each speaks in his own language, in his own land. The Syrians call you Astarte, Artemis, and Nanaia. The Lycian tribes call you Leto the Lady. The Thracians also identify you as Mother of the gods. And the Greeks call you Hera of the Great Throne, Aphrodite, Hestia the good, Rheia and Demeter. But the Egyptians call you 'Thiouis' because they know that you, being One, are all other goddesses invoked by the peoples (ὑπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν).

While somewhat inclusive of other ethnic groups, there is also a competitive edge here which gives primacy to an Egyptian position. Isidoros' hymn for the goddess Hermouthis acknowledges that all of humanity now in some sense knows her good and greatly honored name (οὐνομά σου τὸ καλόν, πολυτίμητον παρά πᾶσι) but expresses her name differently as, for example, Astarte, Leto, Mother, Hera, Demeter, or Isis.⁴³ Isidoros' expression

⁴¹ For text, translation and photo, see <http://www.philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/?p=14080>, accessed June 2021. In the Kyme aretology (*IKyme* 41), Isis is credited with assigning languages to both "Greeks and barbarians" (lines 31–32). See similar views expressed by Diodoros, *Library* 13.26.

⁴² See Harland, "From That Time, Nothing Else Has Been Discovered" (2022). See also Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition* (1992), 102–36 (on Berossos, Manetho, Josephus, and others as "apologetic historiography" and on the ways in which different non-dominant authors engaged in ethnic competition).

⁴³ The early second century CE Oxyrhynchos papyrus with praise for Isis is less localized. Nonetheless, it too is concerned with

for all of humanity beyond Egyptians here is “Thracians, Greeks, and barbarians.”⁴⁴ It is not clear whether Isidoros’ use of the term “barbarians” holds a pejorative sense, in which case he may not have included Egyptians under the term, or whether he employs the term merely to indicate peoples who did not traditionally speak Greek. The latter sense may be suggested by his subsequent reference to each speaking his own language (φωναῖσι φράζουσ’ ἰδίαις, line 17). What is clear is that his grouping of Greeks with Thracians suggests that (for Isidoros and likely other locals), Thracians were not in a particularly low social position and were placed alongside Greco-Macedonians.

Although certainly not starkly stated, Isidoros’ assumed ethnic hierarchy seems to have positioned local Egyptians at the top as those who knew the goddess most, Greeks and Thracians below that so long as they recognized the deity, and peoples like Syrians and Lycians lower still. This may be indicated by the order in which he addresses peoples, starting with Syrians and Lycians before dealing with Thracians and Greeks, and finishing with superior Egyptians. While non-Egyptian peoples are included in some positive sense because they recognize something about the goddess, the climax here is that it is Egyptians above all others that truly understand her as “the One” (θιοῦν) who is in fact all other goddesses “invoked by the peoples” (ὑπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ὀνομαζόμενα; line 24). The goddess’ title is likely a transliteration of a Demotic epithet (*t3-mr.t*), which further underlines the local native perspective, as Thomas M. Dousa argues.⁴⁵

This nuanced combination of inclusion of non-Egyptian ethnic groups who accept the local goddess on the one hand, and Egyptian preeminence over other peoples on the other, continues in hymn two (lines 21–24) and particularly in hymn three (lines 28–35). The hymns continue to underline the goddess’ role in fertility and agriculture while introducing her consort and son in connection with the main festival in her honor. Isidoros emphasizes that this village’s goddess, her consort Sokonopis (the crocodile god, Souchos, whose cult was so widespread in this district), and her son Anchoes are properly honored by, and therefore protective of, not

only Egyptians but also settled immigrants. However, the condition is that the immigrants in question must recognize the power of these neighborhood deities by contributing materially to the costs of the festival. After stressing Hermouthis’ active presence around the world from east to west and from north to south, Isidoros reaffirms her local presence in connection with her festival (hymn 3, lines 28–33):

Whenever you are present here too, you witness people’s individual virtue, delighting in the sacrifices, libations, and offerings of the people who dwell in the district of Souchos, the Arsinoites, people of mixed tribes who all, yearly, present on the twentieth of the month of Pachon and Thoth, bringing to your feast a tenth for you, for Anchoes, and for Sokonopis, most sacred of gods.

In this way, Isidoros stresses that it is only those pious immigrants who fully participate and support the Egyptian form of these deities at the local level who will fully share in the favors that these deities offer devotees (see hymn 2, lines 21–24 and hymn 3, lines 4–7).

Isidoros’ third hymn shows how the goddess grants all good things to all humanity, but the concentration here turns to rulers specifically. In the process, the hymn introduces another key player, the ideal Egyptian king or pharaoh, who in the fourth hymn continues to be a proxy for the preeminence of Egyptians. As we will see shortly in connection with legends that circulated about Senwosret and other royal figures, Egyptian pharaohs of the distant past could be exploited in order to make claims about the primacy of one’s own ethnic group. In hymn three, Isidoros clarifies that Hermouthis herself supports those rulers who depend on her, but the emphasis is on Egyptian pharaohs specifically, and kings of other nations are not even contenders, it seems (hymn 3, lines 7–18):

All those who live the most blessed lives, virtuous men, sceptre-bearing kings, and those who are rulers, if they depend on you, rule until old age, leaving behind bright and brilliant wealth in abundance to their sons, to their grandsons, and to men who come after. But the one whom the heavenly Queen has held the most dear of princes rules both Asia and Europe, keeping the peace. The harvests grow heavy for him with all kinds of good things, bearing fruit . . . and where there are wars and slaughter of great numbers of men,

surveying Isis’ various names in different parts of the world (*POxy* XI 1380, lines 76–119) while also giving priority to Egyptian instances, which precede in lines 1–76.

⁴⁴ Cf. Moyer, “Isidorus at the Gates” (2016), 218–19.

⁴⁵ Dousa, “Imagining Isis” (2002), 168–72; Moyer, “Isidorus at the Gates” (2016), 219.

your strength and godly power annihilates the multitude against him. But to the few with him, it gives courage.

In particular, Isidoros sketches out a picture of an ideal pharaoh—"the most dear of princes"—whom the goddess favors above all others. This is a pharaoh who rules both Asia and Europe, keeping the peace and ensuring abundant harvests while also annihilating enemies who threaten the realm. The precise identity of the pharaoh here is not stated, and Vanderlip speculates that Isidoros has in mind the contemporary Ptolemy IX Soter himself, to whom parts of the temple were dedicated.⁴⁶ If an identification with Ptolemy was the aim, however, then this could have easily been stated or more clearly indicated by Isidoros. It seems rather that the primary intent was to draw a picture of an ideal Egyptian pharaoh with great power and accomplishments who surpassed other renowned kings. In this respect, the king of hymn three segues well into hymn four, which does indeed identify specific ideal Egyptian pharaohs.

Isidoros' fourth hymn is almost entirely aimed at praising the founder of the original temple (hymn 4, lines 29–36):

What was the name of this person? What ruler, what king, or who of the immortals, determined it? Why the one who nurtured him, Sesosis (Senwosret), he who has gone to the Western Heaven, gave him a fair name, "Son of the Golden Sun." When the Egyptians say his name in their language, they call him "Porramanres, the Great, Deathless." I have heard from others a miracle that is a riddle: how he "navigated on the desert by wheels and sail."

Moreover, this and other portions of the inscription suggest ongoing priestly and popular attention to specific Egyptian pharaohs of the long past in the Lake district. Isidoros expressly builds on existing traditions to praise the royal founder of this temple as a god. There are several sources of information that Isidoros registers in connection with this fourth hymn, and these point to both oral and written traditions: he has spoken with "those who have read through the sacred writings" (οἱ τῶν ἱερῶν γράμμι ἀναλεξάμενοι in line 18, likely indicating hieroglyphics); he has heard from

⁴⁶ This is a suggestion made by Vanderlip, *Four Greek Hymns* (1972), 13–16.

"others" regarding details of the accomplishments of the pharaohs (line 35); he has consulted "men who investigate" such matters (παρ' ἀνδρῶν τῶν ἰστορούντων in line 37). Interestingly, Isidoros never claims to have read things for himself, and it is possible that he was primarily dependent on orally communicated information as the basis for these compositions.

The pharaoh who is credited with founding the temple (in hymn four) is identified in Greek as Pharaoh Manres ("Porramanres"). This is a common appellation for Amenemhet III (with transliteration variations including Marres, Mandres, and Moiris). This Amenemhet is also remembered in the hieroglyphic inscriptions in the Twelfth Dynasty inner chapel within this same sanctuary.⁴⁷ Isidoros identifies this pharaoh (reigned ca. 1831–1786 BCE) as son of Sesosis, namely son of Senwosret III (reigned ca. 1870–1831 BCE). Senwosret, who will occupy us more below, is described as being in the western heaven.

Returning to Isidoros' fourth hymn, beyond the founding of the temple itself, the accomplishments and miraculous feats detailed point to the richness of tales that continued to circulate, develop, and expand almost two thousand years after Amenemhet III's death. They also indicate his status as a god worthy of ruler cult, and he was not the only figure of the distant past honored in this way.⁴⁸ Amenemhet is viewed in the hymn as "divine king of Egypt" (line 7) and offspring of the Lake district's crocodile god himself, Souchos or Sobek. As such, the pharaoh is a "god with a power as no other mortal has possessed" (lines 39–40). "Earth and sea" are obedient to him (line 11). Moreover, much like the legends that attach to his father Senwosret, Amenemhet's power is expressed in terms of his status as "lord (κύριος) of all the land" (line 8).

Hints of two very specific episodes in circulating tales occur in hymn four: the first episode, which is also attested in Aelian (*On Animals* 6.7), refers to Amenemhet's reputation for having a messenger-crow (lines 17–20), and the second (which is in the passage cited above) has the pharaoh traversing the desert in

⁴⁷ See Vanderlip, *Four Greek Hymns* (1972), 11 (on the chapel), 67 (on the nomenclature). This contradicts the guess of Herodotos, *Inquiries* 2.101–102, who has Moiris / Manres as preceding Senwosret. Cf. Diodoros, *Library* 1.51.5. On the dates of the pharaohs, I follow Lloyd, ed., *Companion to Ancient Egypt*, 2 vols. (Malden, MA, 2010), 1:xxxii–xli.

⁴⁸ On local ruler cults, see Widmer, "Pharaoh Maâ-Rê (2002), 377–93; Łajtar, "Cult of Amenhotep" (2008), 113–23.

a wheeled cart with sails (lines 34–35).⁴⁹ Perhaps because it was so obvious to those living in this district, Isidoros does not mention that Amenemhet was likely remembered for his exceptional contributions to land reclamation and water management in connection with the lake long before the Ptolemies took on this role.⁵⁰

These idealizing tales of the god-like Amenemhet were also reflected in ritual contexts, suggesting that the Egyptian populace in this region along with settlers continued to think and talk about pharaohs like this one.⁵¹ The remembrance and relation of stories may well be intimately linked with such cultic activities. The general popularity of this pharaoh-god is indicated by personal names that incorporate Marres.⁵² While the surviving hieroglyphic evidence for this pharaoh merely consists in mentions of his name, Ghislaine Widmer has collected together the notable Demotic material. This includes papyrological references to cultic honors for Amenemhet in the Ptolemaic era: there are references to offerings at a temple at Krokodilopolis and to payment by an (unspecified) association to a female “reciter” at Ghoran (between the villages of Narmouthis and Magdola).⁵³ Howard M. Jackson’s study of the connection between Poimandres in the Hermetic literature and this very pharaoh Manres (Amenemhet III) gathers together the scattered evidence in Greek for the depiction of this pharaoh as a god and for his ruler cult.⁵⁴ It is possible that the rituals for this pharaoh originated in gatherings that took place at the pharaoh’s mortuary complex (what Herodotos calls a “labyrinth”) near the Nile at what is now Hawara.⁵⁵ Two dedications depicting the pharaoh-god in relief have been found at Hawara, and a papyrus in Demotic refers to a burial priest (χοαχύτης) of this pharaoh (dated 221 BCE).⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Cf. Moyer “Isidoros at the Gates” (2016), 232–35.

⁵⁰ See Herodotos, *Inquiries* 2.101, 150; Diodoros, *Library* 1.51.5–7.

⁵¹ On the cult for Amenemhet III, see Bresciani, “Iconografia” (1986): 49–58; Jackson, “A New Proposal” (1999): 95–106; Widmer, “Pharaoh Maâ-Rê” (2002).

⁵² Widmer, “Pharaoh Maâ-Rê” (2002): 378–79.

⁵³ *PCairo* CG 31178 (147 BCE); *PDemLille* 98. See Widmer, “Pharaoh Maâ-Rê” (2002): 384–87.

⁵⁴ Jackson, “A New Proposal” (1999). Cf. Bull, *The Tradition of Hermes Trismegistus* (2018), 121–31.

⁵⁵ Herodotos, *Inquiries* 2.148. Cf. Diodoros, *Library* 1.61; Manetho, *Egyptian Matters*, *BNJ* 609 F2. See Lloyd, “Egyptian Labyrinth” (1970).

⁵⁶ *SB* 5755 and Strack, “Inschriften aus ptolemäischer Zeit. III” (1906): 136 (no. 17), with the pharaoh’s name partially recon-

structed. For the papyrus, see Widmer, “Pharaoh Maâ-Rê” (2002), 384 (no. 6).

Roughly contemporary with Isidoros, there are two Greek inscriptions from Soknopaiou Nesos (located just north of the lake) dating to 104 BCE. The first refers to an association devoted to this pharaoh and depicts (in relief) the pharaoh with a serpent on his brow and a sceptre in his hand, sitting behind the crocodile god Sobek (*IFayum* 6 = *SB* 1269). The second is a dedication by Dionysios and Thases, along with their daughter Philon, which refers to the family’s contributions toward the cost of an altar and the cost of constructing a road leading to the temple of this pharaoh (*IFayum* 69 = *SB* 8884). Another sanctuary is attested earlier at Philadelphia, likely during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphos himself (*PMich* I 84, lines 18–19). Dating to Isidoros’ time is another votive dedication for the “great god” pharaoh Manres, which was found at Theadelphia, south of the eastern end of the lake (*IFayum* 111).

All of this evidence underlines the popularity of figures like this long-dead pharaoh who were nonetheless very much alive in memory and, therefore, in oral legend. If the somewhat contemporary cult of Imhotep and Amenhotep at Deir el-Bahari can be taken as an indicator of native visitors to such local cults devoted to Egyptian figures, then devotees of Amenemhet would likewise come from a variety of social levels, from craftsmen and other lower-level occupations to priests and a few persons of higher social standing.⁵⁷ This helps to confirm one of my overall points that the local populace would be involved not only in cultic honors but also in remembering and re-telling stories about their objects of devotion, and not only in written form.

Orally Circulating Legends and Inter-ethnic Social Encounters

Isidoros’ hymns indicate a lively interest in Twelfth Dynasty Egyptian pharaohs, but Isidoros was by no means alone in this focus on indigenous royals as we will soon see with the case of Senwosret(s). Broadening out from our case of Isidoros, the fact that peoples in various

constructed. For the papyrus, see Widmer, “Pharaoh Maâ-Rê” (2002), 384 (no. 6).

⁵⁷ At that other local cult, visitors with Egyptian names (written with Greek characters) include an oil-worker, a mender, a donkey-keeper, soldiers, and a freedman alongside priests and an elite family headed by Apollonides (a civic councillor). See Łajtar, *Deir El-Bahari* (2006), 83–84.

parts of the Mediterranean and Near East related orally circulating tales in social encounters when a person from one ethnic group met someone from another seems clearly recognized in antiquity. Although from an earlier era (ca. 440 BCE), Herodotos, a Greek from Halikarnassos in Caria, speaks as if he was engaged in conversation with Egyptian priests in temples at Memphis, Thebes, Heliopolis, and Sais, with functionaries explaining local oral and written traditions about their own pharaohs, temples, and customs.⁵⁸ Other examples of such cross-cultural encounters happen to come from the Roman era, but may readily be seen to reflect awareness of a general tendency in elite and popular storytelling. Thus, for instance, the Syrian author Lucian (ca. 165 CE) playfully reflects the practice when he stages a friendly conversation between a Greek and a Greek-speaking immigrant from Scythia, each of whom relates tales (about friendship) from his original homeland in order to claim the superiority of his own people over the other (*Toxaris*).⁵⁹ More specific to our interest in memories of royal figures (real or mythical), Plutarch (ca. 120 CE) refers to competing narratives: “great accomplishments of Semiramis are celebrated among the Assyrians and great accomplishments of Sesostris in Egypt. Until now, the Phrygians describe brilliant and amazing achievements ‘manic’ because Manes, one of their very early kings, proved himself a good man who was influential among them” (*Isis and Osiris* 360B).

Such tales of accomplished figures of the past could no doubt be orally transmitted from one cultural context to another by foreign travellers, mercenaries, and merchants, or they could be generated within a temple or within the court of a current ruler in order to enup an existing tale regarding another conqueror of the past, potentially entering into circulation or being echoed by a Greek author.⁶⁰ Yet encounters between

settled immigrants and natives like our Isidoros remain an important and neglected part of the picture which I consider here.

As Wouter F. M. Henkelman, Lawrence Kim, and Jacqueline E. Jay stress from different angles—and with Mesopotamian, Greco-Roman, and Egyptian contexts in mind—we need to remember we are dealing with primarily oral cultures: literary texts and the stories or opinions expressed within them are often the tip of an iceberg of orally transmitted local perspectives that were not necessarily limited to literary elites.⁶¹ As Jay notes in her study of orality and the Egyptian tales in Demotic, it is helpful to think in terms of “parallel and intersecting traditions of oral [folktales] and written literature.”⁶² Furthermore, there was likely (precisely in the Hellenistic period, as I will show) an increasing interaction between the realms of elite (e.g., upper-level priests) and popular storytelling.⁶³

It is true that many of our surviving tales in Demotic, for instance, may be linked to priests in temples, as with the Tebtynis temple “library” find with its papyri dating mainly to the second century CE, though reflecting earlier material.⁶⁴ Yet it is important to remember that it has been reasonably estimated that up to ten percent of the population in the Ptolemaic era would have at some time served in priestly roles, if only in lower-level positions.⁶⁵ So the potential for contacts between priests and the populace was by no means limited. Priests or other functionaries in the temples, particularly those in lower part-time positions, would have farmed or engaged in other occupations for a living in addition to their part-time priestly duties, and so occupational social networks add another point of contact between priests and the populace.⁶⁶ A further sign of the importance of lower socioeconomic segments of the populace is that about eighteen percent of soldiers in the Ptolemaic army who at some point assumed part-time priestly roles were drawn precisely

⁵⁸ Herodotos, *Inquiries* 2.3.1; 2.28.1–5. On the function of priests (especially at Thebes) in Herodotos’ Egyptian account see, most recently, Moyer, *Egypt* (2011), 42–83.

⁵⁹ Cf. Justin, *Epitome of Trogus* 2.1; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History* 22.15.2. Ivantchik (“Eine griechische Pseudo-Historie” [1999]) speculates that this goes back to Ephoros.

⁶⁰ On cross-cultural transmission from Egypt to the Greek world, see Moyer, *Egypt* (2011), 53–58 and Kim, “Orality” (2013), 300–21. On travellers and merchants, see Ktesias, *Indian Matters*, *BNJ* 688 F45 (ca. 400 BCE). Cf. Nichols, *Ctesias* (2011), 23–26; Stoneman, *The Greek Experience of India* (2019), 29. On myth-making in Alexander’s court, see Bosworth, “Historical Setting of Megasthenes’ *Indica*” (1996): 122–24.

⁶¹ Henkelman, “The Birth of Gilgameš” (2006), 810; Jay, *Orality* (2016), 19–126; Kim, “Orality” (2013). Cf. Hansen, *Ariadne’s Thread* (2002); Pretzler, “Pausanias and Oral Tradition” (2005).

⁶² Jay, *Orality* (2016), 6. Cf. Henkelman, “Beware of Dim Cooks and Cunning Snakes” (2010), 323.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 54–65.

⁶⁵ On the ten percent figure, see Clarysse, “Egyptian Temples and Priests” (2010), 288–89, and Clarysse and Thompson, *Counting* (2006), 2:195. Cf. Jay, *Orality* (2016), 67–68.

⁶⁶ Clarysse, “Egyptian Temples and Priests” (2010), 284, 288–89.

from the lower ranks of the army, not the elites.⁶⁷ And although (in an Egyptian setting) only purified priests could enter the most holy room where the statue of a deity would be housed, the area around a sanctuary and its entrance, where reliefs and inscriptions—such as Isidoros’ hymns or (likely) the Bentresh monument I discuss below—would be displayed, was an important gathering place for the populace generally.⁶⁸ Festivals like the one which Isidoros describes clearly involved interactions between many people of different backgrounds in connection with honoring both the deity and the founding pharaoh around the sanctuary. It is therefore important not to underestimate the potential for connections between elite or priestly storytelling (whether in oral or written form) on the one hand, and tales circulating orally among the populace at large on the other. We can now consider such tales associated with Senwosret and related pharaohs.

Legends of Senwosret and Related Pharaohs

Several kings by the name of Senwosret, meaning “son of Wosret” (*S-wsr*)—later transliterated differently or transformed as Sesostris, Sesosis (as in Isidoros’ hymns), and Sesonchosis—ruled during the Twelfth Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom in the early second millennium.⁶⁹ The exact location of the new capital (*Itjtawy*) of this united kingdom (after the move from Thebes) is not known, but it was likely near the royal tombs at modern Lisht, about forty kilometres south of Memphis. This was about sixty kilometres north-east of the later capital of our Lake district (Krokodilopolis) and about ninety kilometres from Narmouthis, where Isidoros was active.

Egyptologists generally place Senwosret I, Senwosret II, Senwosret III, and relatives named Amenemhet in the period 1985–1773 BCE.⁷⁰ Yet keeping various royal figures clearly distinguished in storytelling centuries later was not a concern, and so conflations occurred: scholars often view Senwosret legends as a combination of elements from the first three Senwosrets, along with much later kings such as Ramesses (II

and III) and Shoshenq I.⁷¹ It is important to remember that traditions concerning legendary pharaohs were diverse, as can be seen in Diodoros of Sicily’s complaint about “conflicting stories” about Senwosret (Sesosis) told both by Egyptian “priests and poets” and by Greek authors (Diodoros, *Library* 1.53).

There is a significant body of scholarly work on Senwosret and on later remembrances of him, particularly with regard to Herodotos’ account, but this work cannot be fully surveyed here.⁷² Some results of this work nonetheless help to frame the present discussion about the local circulation of Senwosret legends with a focus on the Hellenistic period as a way of providing context for Isidoros’ deployment of similar traditions and for ethnic interactions. Building on the work of Michel Malaise and others, Lloyd’s study of the Senwosret material in Herodotos helpfully outlines six contributing factors in the development of this pharaoh’s legend.⁷³ These include: reminiscences of the Twelfth Dynasty itself (as potentially encountered on monuments or other media); memories of pharaohs in subsequent dynasties that were then linked to Senwosret (e.g., Ramesses II, as discussed below); an image of the ideal pharaoh generally; folklore among the populace; traditions as remembered and developed by elite priests (what Lloyd problematically labels “nationalist propaganda”); and Greek re-shapings of Egyptian material. It is helpful to keep all of Lloyd’s categories in mind, but our present focus on the possible importance of these legends for Egyptian ethnic identification and ethnic interactions means that Lloyd’s third (idealized pharaoh), fourth (elite priests), and fifth (populace) categories will occupy us most.

Before turning to sources that offer lengthier accounts of the legends, it is crucial to recognize the substantial (if scattered and fragmentary) evidence for several stories of Senwosret circulating locally in the Arsinoite district or in nearby Oxyrhynchos (about

⁶⁷ Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society* (2014), 303–28, esp. 317–19.

⁶⁸ See Clarysse, “Egyptian Temples and Priests” (2010), 277–78.

⁶⁹ Malaise, “Sésostriis” (1966): 244–49. On the dynasty, see Williams, “The First Intermediate Period” (2010), 81–100.

⁷⁰ Clarysse, “Egyptian Temples and Priests” (2010), 35.

⁷¹ Malaise, “Sésostriis” (1966): 255–57; Moyer, *Egypt* (2011), 72–74; Trnka-Amrhein, “A Study of The Sesonchosis Novel” (2013), 9.

⁷² Studies on the legends: Maspero, “Review of Kurt Sethe, *Sesostriis*” (1901): 593–609, 665–83; Malaise, “Sésostriis” (1966); Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II: Commentary 99–182* (1993), 16–18; Os-somer, *Les campagnes de Sésostriis* (1989), 32–43; Ivantchik, “Eine griechische Pseudo-Historie” (1999); Ryholt, “A Sesostriis Story in Demotic Egyptian” (2010), 429–37; Trnka-Amrhein, “A Study of the Sesonchosis Novel” (2013).

⁷³ Malaise, “Sésostriis” (1966); Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II* (1993), 16–18.

sixty kilometers south), at least by the first century BCE (as already indicated by Isidoros' reference to existing legends of Senwosret and Amenemhet). First are two fragmentary papyri in Demotic associated with the Tebtynis temple "library" (first or second century CE) that relate a narrative mentioning Sesosis as *son* of Amenemhet, including content that lines up with Diodoros' story of a campaign into Arabia.⁷⁴ Second, and from the same find at Tebtynis, unpublished fragments of the so-called "Inaros Epic" (first or second century CE) in Demotic (correctly) make mention of Sesosis as the *father* of an Amenemhet.⁷⁵ Third, a pottery fragment (ostrakon) of uncertain provenance in Egypt (likely first century BCE or CE) has five fragmentary lines in Demotic of a story that mentions the "beneficent" king Sestrosis.⁷⁶ Fourth and finally (and moving outside of the Arsinoite district), five fragments in Greek from Oxyrhynchos pertain to the so-called *Sesonchosis Romance* (if it is only one novelistic work and not multiple ones).⁷⁷ These fragments relate adventures of a young Sesonchosis, including military skirmishes with Arabians and extensive conquests as far afield as Dacia, Germany, Italy, and perhaps the pillars of Herakles (the earliest papyrus dating to the second century CE). Here, the point is not to do a literary study of the fragments (on which, see Kim Ryholt's and Yvona Trnka-Amrhein's research) but to acknowledge these as further instances of people in the Arsinoite or other nearby districts drawing on and developing legends that circulated in oral and written form in the neighborhood.⁷⁸ In other words, Isidoros was not alone.

Added to this Egyptian material, which firmly roots the dissemination, communication, and retelling of tales of Senwosret in a local Egyptian context, there were earlier traditions discussed and modified or expanded by others. These traditions confirm that our materials from the Arsinoite district have much earlier counterparts that were more widely known. The aim here is *not* to suggest that works by Manetho (ca. 256 BCE), Diodoros of Sicily (ca. 36 BCE), or others were read by or known

to people in Egyptian villages. Rather, I am proposing that, at least at certain points, the authors of these writings and inhabitants of the Lake district would be drawing from similar streams of Egyptian traditions and putting components of legends to different uses, often with implications for our assessment of inter-ethnic encounters. Ryholt, whose knowledge of the Demotic tales is extensive, suggests that the narratives of Herodotos, Manetho, and Diodoros are "based on precisely the type of narrative literature which formed part of the Tebtunis temple library," though we also need to remember the importance of orally circulating tales that inform such literary versions.⁷⁹ In this way, these literary sources may indirectly reflect some possibilities for local traditions and ethnic relations on the ground, echoing what we have learned from the case of Isidoros.

The more substantial literary accounts in Greek draw attention to overall components of Egyptian legends and point to the prominence of two main themes in circulating stories about this ideal pharaoh: the pharaoh's military feats on the one hand, and his civilizing accomplishments (including building projects) on the other. As we have already seen with Isidoros' hymns, both of these same factors played a role in the traditions which Isidoros applied to the "most dear of princes" and the son (Amenemhet) of Senwosret (e.g., hymn 3, lines 7–18). Both of these components suggest that in some respects legends like these were developed and deployed in competitive contexts to assert the superiority of Egyptian rulers and Egyptian civilization generally, affirming the superiority of Egyptians over other ethnic groups in at least some cases. In other words, there were other Isidoroses making use of traditions like these in social encounters with other peoples and, like Isidoros, claiming a superior position for their own people by way of stories about prominent figures of the past.

On the first point regarding military accomplishments, it is noteworthy that Senwosret III's military might and success beyond his ancestors was a topic of royal propaganda in his own time. Hymns on papyri emphasize Senwosret's military defeat of both Asiatics to the north (as far as Ashkelon) and Nubians to the south, and a boundary monument erected at Semna stressed his ambition to extend and maintain his

⁷⁴ *PCarlsberg* 411–12: see Widmer, "Pharaoh Maâ-Rê" (2002), 387–93, and Ryholt, "A Sesostis Story" (2010), 432.

⁷⁵ PSI, inv. D 92 + *PCarlsberg* 77, described in Ryholt, "A Sesostis Story" (2010), 432–33.

⁷⁶ *OLeipzig* UB 2217.

⁷⁷ *POxy* 1826; 2466; 3319; 5262, 5263. Cf. Jay, *Orality* (2016), 316–19; Trnka-Amrhein, "The Fantastic Four" (2018); Trnka-Amrhein, "Interpreting Sesonchosis as a Biographical Novel" (2019).

⁷⁸ Trnka-Amrhein (*ibid.*) pieces together the fragments in a way that suggests they may form part of a "biographical novel."

⁷⁹ Ryholt, "Life of Imhotep" (2009), 311–12.

territory beyond the accomplishments of previous pharaohs.⁸⁰

Yet the extent of these claimed accomplishments in Senwosret III's own era pale in comparison to our later legends of the Hellenistic era. A surviving passage of *Egyptian Matters* by the Egyptian priest Manetho (perhaps writing at Heliopolis) claims that Senwosret conquered "all of Asia in nine years and Europe as far as Thrace." The figure of nine years is probably meant to have the exploits of Senwosret match the number of years associated with Alexander's conquests and, in some cases, exceed Alexander in terms of territory covered.⁸¹ Manetho also adds that Senwosret "was considered by the Egyptians to be foremost of their rulers, second only to Osiris."⁸² It is worth noting that, in emphasizing that the "most dear of princes" rules both "Asia and Europe" (hymn 3, lines 8–14), Isidoros seems to echo traditions regarding an ideal Egyptian conqueror, even though the focus of his fourth hymn turns to Amenemhet (the son of our Senwosret) specifically. Isidoros' ideal pharaoh is also characterized by military might and the annihilation of enemies (hymn 3, lines 17–19).

Other accounts by Greek authors, who drew to some degree on Egyptian traditions of Senwosret, expanded on the details. As early as Herodotos, who claimed to be basing his account on Egyptian priestly reports, Senwosret (Sesostris) was imagined to have conquered Ethiopia, large parts of Asia, and portions of Europe as far north as Kolchos and Scythia on the Black Sea.⁸³ The subjugation of Ethiopia in the south was consid-

ered an incomparable feat, and the pharaoh was often credited as the first to do so, though against competing claims for the Assyrian queen Semiramis.⁸⁴ Senwosret could also be seen to exceed later rulers such as the Persian Cyrus, as stories circulated regarding the failure of Cyrus to take Scythia.⁸⁵

More pertinent to the situation in the Hellenistic era, Diodoros of Sicily (ca. 36 BCE) draws on Egyptian reports about Senwosret's military accomplishments. These reports have Senwosret beginning in Arabia to the northeast before moving on to Libya in the west, Ethiopia to the south, and India to the east. Then he takes "all Asia" as far as Scythia to the far north, as well as the Aegean islands and Thrace, where his armies finally got tired.⁸⁶

Legends around pharaoh Ramesses II (reigned about 1279–1213 BCE), which sometimes blended with those of Senwosret, supply a similar though modified list of conquests to the same effect: Libya, Ethiopia, Syria, Armenia, Cappadocia, Bithynia, and Lycia, but also adding Bactria (instead of India).⁸⁷ The Bentresh monument discovered in a Ptolemaic-era temple of the deity Chons at Thebes presumes Ramesses' reputation as a world-ruler: the narrative begins with the princes of all foreign lands (including Bakhtan, most likely referring to Bactria) bowing and paying tribute to Ramesses, whose heroic victories are stressed.⁸⁸ The hieroglyphic inscription presents itself as contemporary with Ramesses but is in fact from a later era, probably some time after the 390s BCE when the chapel was likely built. This monument was probably produced by local priests in that temple of Chons to (in part) affirm the superiority of Egyptian figures by various means in a way comparable to the hymns of Isidoros. Not only is

⁸⁰ Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (2003), 301–306 (papyri translated); Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume I* (1975), 118–20 (inscription translated). See Gee, "Overlooked Evidence" (2004): 23–31.

⁸¹ Cf. Diodoros, *Library* 1.55.10. See Ryholt, "Imitatio Alexandri" (2013), 62.

⁸² *Egyptian Matters*, BNJ 609 F2 as preserved in Synkellos' *Chronography*. Cf. F3b.

⁸³ Herodotos, *Inquiries* 2.102.3. Cf. Strabo, *Geography* 15.1.6; 16.4.4; 17.1.5. There is not space to engage the debates about Herodotos' claims of Egyptian informers or autopsy here except to say that my views align with those who suggest that Herodotos reflects at least some genuine Egyptian traditions and perspectives: Lloyd, "Nationalist Propaganda" (1982); Lloyd, "Herodotus' Account of Pharaonic History" (1988); Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II* (1993), 16–18; Moyer, *Egypt* (2011), 42–83; Trnka-Amrhein, "A Study of The Sesonchosis Novel" (2013), esp. 56–58 (who critiques Armayor, "Did Herodotus Ever Go to Egypt" [1978]); Armayor, "Sesostris and Herodotus' Autopsy of Thrace" (1980); Armayor, *Herodotus' Autopsy of the Fayoum* (1985); Fehling, *Herodotus and His Sources* (1989).

⁸⁴ Strabo, *Geography* 16.4.4 vs. Ktesias, *Persian Matters*, BNJ 688 F1b = Diodoros, *Library* 2.14; Justin, *Epitome of Trogus*, 1.2. On Semiramis (based loosely on a conflation of Shammu-ramat and other figures), now see Stronk, *Semiramis' Legacy* (2017), 525–42.

⁸⁵ Justin, *Epitome of Trogus* 1.8.

⁸⁶ Diodoros, *Library* 1.55.1–7. On his visit to Egypt, see *Library* 1.44.1; 1.46.7; 1.83.9; 3.11.3; 3.38.1; 17.52.6. Diodoros likely made it as far as Thebes, where he claims to have spoken to priests (1.46.7). See Sacks, *Diodorus Siculus and the First Century* (1990), 85–86; Muntz, *Diodorus Siculus* (2017), 23.

⁸⁷ Diodoros, *Library* 1.47.6; Justin, *Epitome of Trogus*, 1.1; Tacitus, *Annals* 2.60.3.

⁸⁸ For Robert K. Ritner's recent translation of the Bentresh stela (Louvre C 284), see Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt* (2003), 361–66. I primarily follow the dating and interpretation offered by Ryholt, "Imitatio Alexandri" (2013), 62–72, who provides further bibliography.

Ramesses presented as a superior conqueror, but Egyptian superiority is emphasized by way of the Egyptian wise man Thothemhab and the local Egyptian deity Chons-the-Authority-in-Thebes, who together are said to have successfully exorcized the possessed daughter of a foreign king in a distant land.⁸⁹ The superiority of the Egyptian deity is recognized by the Bactrian king.

Adding to our picture of how tales of Egyptian world conquerors could be utilized, transformed, and contested in rivalries are alternative stories about Senwosret that seem to have developed and circulated among non-Egyptians. Some of these challenged the extent of Senwosret's military accomplishments in order to affirm the military superiority of some other ethnic group. According to Strabo and Arrian, Megasthenes (writing ca. 310–300 BCE) claimed access to information that refuted the notion that Senwosret (Sesoosis) successfully took India—in other words, repudiated the idea that he had gone beyond the achievements of Semiramis of Assyria or, more importantly, Alexander of Macedon.⁹⁰ Megasthenes framed the discussion as a comparison of the relative success of past Egyptian (Senwosret), Babylonian (Nebuchadnezzar), Ethiopian (Taharka), Scythian (Indathysis), and Macedonian (Alexander) conquests, with the intent of having Alexander as the winner, but also of explaining why Seleukos I was unable to incorporate India. Megasthenes was an ambassador to India for king Seleukos and therefore, as Paul Kosmin argues, would be writing to support the propagandistic or apologetic aims of the Seleucid court; yet there is no reason to deny that Megasthenes was nonetheless aware of competing traditions among subject peoples and was not creating the entire list of world conquerors from scratch.⁹¹ Writing in the time of Augustus—but perhaps reflecting earlier traditions that present Scythians as superior—Pompeius Trogus reported that Senwosret (Sesoosis) was, in fact, a failure in his military incursion into Scythia

specifically.⁹² Moreover, in the same section of the work, Trogus positively cited traditions about a long-standing debate between Egyptians and Scythians on which people were the most ancient and therefore superior, a debate that the Scythians clearly won in this scenario.⁹³

Beyond Senwosret's supposed military achievements, Greek accounts that built on Egyptian sources emphasized this pharaoh's supposed contributions to human civilization, the second main topic of the legends. Both Herodotos and Diodoros credited the Egyptian king with establishing the canal system (cf. Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.25), reorganizing the distribution and use of land (by establishing nomes), and shifting the revenue system of the kingdom in a way that supposedly benefited all strata of the population (Diodoros *Library* 1.55–58; cf. Herodotos, *Inquiries* 2.108–109).

We have already discussed how Isidoros' third hymn was aimed at asserting the role of local Egyptian royals as recipients of civilization from their goddess, and stories of native kings could function in a similar manner in competitive social encounters. We have also seen the case of Bel-re'ushu, whose work reflects traditions that assert the origins of all aspects of civilization among the superior Babylonians, rather than the Egyptians.⁹⁴

In connection with the supposed civilizational contributions of Senwosret and other pharaohs, the appropriation of such circulating traditions by other peoples settled as immigrants in Egypt is something to highlight here. Artapanos, who provides an example, seems to have been a Judean settled somewhere in Egypt. He attributes to Joseph and especially Moses many accomplishments that parallel those incorporated within legends of Senwosret and other pharaohs. The result is that Judeans (in Egypt), not Egyptians, become the source of key components of civilized life overall. These include advances in building techniques, management of water, the division of the land into districts (nomes), and the development of philosophy itself. In addition,

⁸⁹ Cf. Ryholt, "Imitatio Alexandri" (2013), 68.

⁹⁰ Megasthenes, *Indian Matters*, BNJ 715 F11 = Strabo, *Geography* 15.1.1–6 = Arrian, *Indian Matters* 5.4–7. Cf. Demodamas as cited by Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 6.49; Josephos, *Ant.* 10.227 on Nebuchadnezzar. Bosworth, "The Historical Setting of Megasthenes' *Indica*" (1996), 121–23; Ryholt, "Imitatio Alexandri" (2013).

⁹¹ Kosmin, *Land of the Elephant Kings* (2014), 37–53, esp. 51–52. Cf. Visscher, *Beyond Alexandria* (2020), 41–52 (including discussion of Demodamas' similar approach).

⁹² Justin, *Epitome of Trogus* 2.1–3. Ivantchik, "Eine griechische Pseudo-Historie" (1999), speculates that Ephoros (ca. 350 BCE) created this material and would have been a source for the pro-Scythian version of the war. Cf. Ivantchik, "Scythian 'Rule Over Asia'" (1999), 497–98; Ladynin, "Alexander, 'the New Sesonchosis'" (2018), 11–15, who modifies aspects of Ivantchik's views.

⁹³ This positive evaluation of Scythians contrasts to common negative stereotypes, on which see Harland, "The Most Ignorant Peoples of All" (2020).

⁹⁴ For a full discussion, see Harland, "From That Time, Nothing Else Has Been Discovered" (2022).

Moses is credited with assigning a mascot animal to each district and his overall achievements result in him being considered “worthy of godlike honor by the [Egyptian] priests.”⁹⁵

The legendary achievements attributed to Senwosret in Greek sources tend to remember his civilizing influence in the form of extensive construction work, including sanctuaries. Diodoros emphasizes the king’s massive building programs including the erection of many temples where local Egyptian deities could be fittingly honored (Diodoros, *Library* 1.56; cf. Strabo, *Geography* 16.4.7). This is a picture that matches up well with the perspective in Isidoros’ fourth hymn, although there it is Senwosret’s son Amenemhet who receives an entire hymn of praise and recognition of his godly power precisely in connection with his construction of the local temple for Hermouthis.

Employment of such local stories by Egyptians to establish their own position in relation to other peoples or in relation to those in power specifically is further suggested by other details in Greek accounts of Egyptian traditions. Diodoros refers to the Egyptian “priests” and “poets” who “sing Sesoosis’ praises” (*Library* 1.53). In this context of Egyptian claims, Diodoros relates that the pharaoh used Babylonian captives to accomplish his great building plans, which of course implies the inferiority of the Babylonians to their Egyptian masters (*Library* 1.56). Elsewhere, Diodoros reports that Egyptians employed these stories of Babylonian settlers to explain the primacy of Egypt over Babylon in the realm of astrological knowledge. Descendants of these Babylonian settlers transmitted Egyptian knowledge of the stars to Babylon rather than the other way around (Diodoros, *Library* 1.81.6). Here again, Egyptians spar with Babylonians, Assyrians, and Greco-Macedonians in claims of preeminence by way of legendary figures of the past. In many cases, our literary sources may be further engagements with or instantiations of the sort of inter-ethnic social encounters we witnessed on the ground in the Lake district.

Conclusion

As with many aspects of social history in the ancient period, ethnic relations are difficult to access due to the

limited nature of our sources; as usual, findings must remain tentative as a result. Yet, by juxtaposing papyrological, epigraphic, and literary evidence from the vantage point of our case study of Isidoros, we have been able to sketch out a realistic and at times probable picture of certain dynamics of ethnic relations at the local level. Relations were by no means entirely rivalrous, as we saw with the various peoples who participated in the local festival for the goddess Hermouthis. Yet, in such an environment, we can envision priests and average Egyptians—whether in Egypt or in the Egyptian diaspora (as with the priest who emigrated to Delos, for instance)⁹⁶—expounding tales about superior Egyptian gods and figures like Senwosret or Amenemhet when encountering people from other ethnic groups, including Lycians, Syrians, Judeans, Babylonians, Greeks, and Macedonians. Participants could do so in a way that affirmed the value, if not superiority, of their own ethnic group by way of that group’s legendary figures. It was not only Egyptians who engaged in this dimension of ethnic identification and differentiation, of course, as other peoples told their own stories about the most important achievements of humanity taking place among their own group and not some other.⁹⁷ Often, it is better for scholars of the Egyptian situation to think locally and refrain from assuming some widespread Egyptian “nationalism” aimed primarily at resisting more distant foreign powers, powers that were not always as much at the center of attention as they have been within certain scholarship. Nonetheless, this overall interactive and competitive atmosphere might sometimes directly or indirectly serve to attenuate Greek or Greco-Macedonian categorizations of—and claims to preeminence over—all conquered “barbarian” peoples, with these peoples instead claiming top rungs on an ethnic ladder.

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⁹⁵ Translation in Collins, “Artapanus” (1985). For further discussion of the potential competition with Senwosret specifically, see Tiede, *Charismatic Figure* (1972) and Harland, “‘From That Time, Nothing Else Has Been Discovered’” (2022).

⁹⁶ *IG XI,4 1299 = RICIS 202/0101* (ca. 200 BCE). Text and translation online: <http://www.philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/?p=1564>, accessed June, 2021.

⁹⁷ Harland, “‘From That Time, Nothing Else Has Been Discovered’” (2022).

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