

6 August 2023 Essex Egyptology Group **The Persians in Egypt** Prof. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, Chair of Ancient History at Cardiff University.

In August, Prof. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones spoke to the group via Zoom about the Persians in Egypt. The Achaemenid Persian Empire (559-331 BCE) was centred in modern day Iran and stretched from the Nile to the Indus in ancient times. The Persian Empire was an unrivalled super power that lasted over 200 years, maintaining its effectiveness through efficient communications, governing systems that employed satraps (regional governors), and a lingua franca - a common, Aramaic-based language.

Cyrus the Great

In 526 BCE, during the reign of Cyrus II (the Great), the Persians looked south to Egypt - the 'bread basket of ancient world' - towards the end of the Saite Period [the 26th Dynasty reigns of Amasis II (570-526 BCE) and his child successor, Psammetichus III (526-525 BCE)].

Conquest of Cambyses II

Cambyses II, the eldest son of Cyrus II, was the second king of the Persian Empire. He had received a good education in government and was a good, tactical soldier. In 525 BCE, he entered in Egypt via Pelusium and took Memphis with ease as the Egyptians surrendered themselves to Persians.



Udjahorresnet

Udjahorresnet, a naval commander under the Saite rulers, was stripped of his military post but retained an honoured social position with Egyptian society. His statue shows him holding Osiris within a naos. Udjahorresnet's detailed (auto)-biography is inscribed on the statue's long garments, and he is regarded as an important, authentic Egyptian source, though he has been viewed as having an agenda, and of collaborating with the Persian army. Udjahorresnet was dismissed by Psammeticus for selling out Egypt, but benefitted under the new Persian rulers, and was given the title of 'royal friend' - a very special position. However, some academics dispute his branding as a collaborator on the basis that Egypt's Persian conquerors had been willing to become Egyptianised.

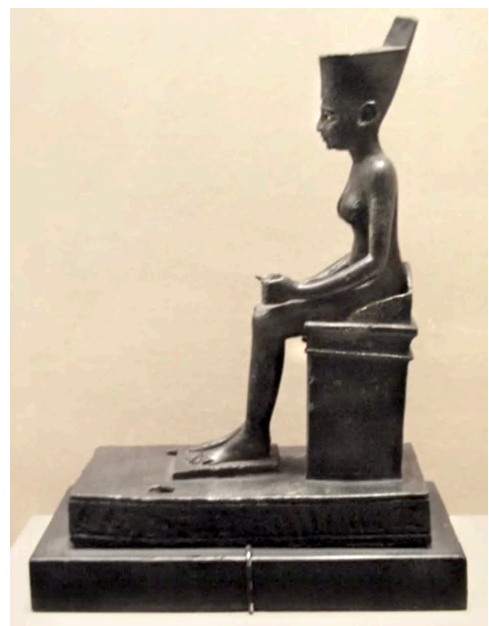
Cambyses II

The coronation of Cambyses took place at Sais, and involved him ritually prostrating himself before Neith as previous pharaohs had done, and the making of offerings to that goddess.

The seal of Cambyses included his cartouches in hieroglyphs on a cuneiform clay tablet.

Cambyses' Nubian campaign stretched as far south as Meroe, though he didn't hold it for the entirety of his reign.

Cambyses' reputation as one of sacrilege, cruelty and incest, is entirely down to Herodotus' biased account on the basis of unfavourable, prejudiced information he received from temple priests (whose income and power had been curtailed). The Demotic papyrus decree details tax exemptions that were stopped as priests were not compliant with the stated conditions, so the tax was reimposed.

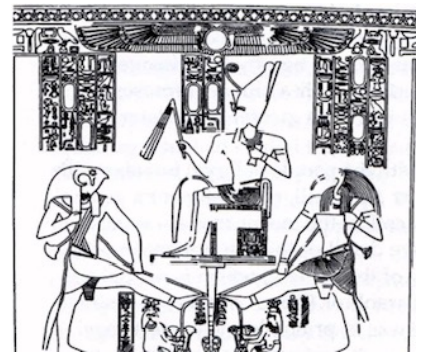




Herodotus erroneously accused Cambyses of desecration of Amasis II's mummy, the Apis bull, and its temples. He decided that Cambyses was cruel & 'completely out of his mind'. There is also no evidence of Cambyses marching and losing his army across the western desert beyond Herodotus' unsubstantiated account. Two stele survive from the Saqqara Serapeum showing the king kneeling before the Apis bull - one from Amasis' reign, the other dates to regnal year 6 of Cambyses, indicating that one Apis bull died and was succeeded by another. This contradicts Herodotus' account. There is also an inscription in hieroglyphs on an Apis bull's granite sarcophagus at the Serapeum with Cambyses' names as King of Upper and Lower Egypt together with his dedication to the recently deceased Apis bull. The surviving top of a stela during the reign of Darius the Great as pharaoh also shows him offering jars to the Apis bull.

Darius I

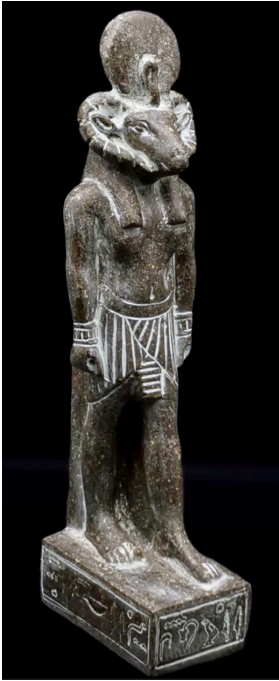
The Persians understood the importance of Egypt as a unique cultural centre. They caught onto the divine attributes of the Egyptian pantheon and played the expected roles and expanded temples. Darius I built the Temple of Hibis at el-Khargeh. Its inscribed relief scenes list his titles and epithets and show him with various Egyptian gods as well as enthroned in full Egyptian regalia with Horus and Thoth securing the Sema-tawy chords beneath his seat.



A wooden door from a shrine inlaid with semi-precious stones has Darius' name feintly visible in a cartouche, and a headless statue of Darius at Susa (south-western Iran) is reminiscent of New Kingdom pharaonic language, but shows an amalgam of Egyptian & Persian styles and bilingual inscriptions. On the base of this statue, the peoples comprising his empire are depicted lifting him up from their underneath kneeling positions.

By comparison, a stela citing Ahuramazda (a great god of the Armenian pantheon) states that he had made Darius king. Darius refers to himself boastfully as 'the Great King, King of Kings, King of this Earth, son of Hystaspes, the Achaemenid'. Written in Persian hyperbole, Darius is more forceful here in asserting himself as conqueror of Egypt. The stela also mentions that Darius ordered the digging of a canal to enable ships to pass from Persia and Egypt.



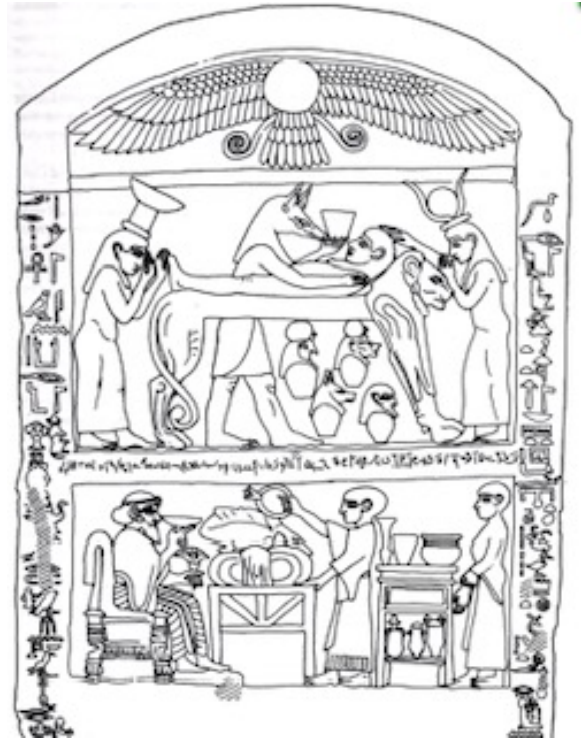


On Elephantine island (near Syene - ancient Aswan), a Jewish settler community had existed for over 400 years. During the absence of the satrap Arshama, the priests of the Temple of Khnum (the Aswan triad of Khnum, Selket & Anukis) colluded with the military governor to organise the destruction of the Jewish temple because of their practice of sacrificing goats and sheep - an affront to the ram-headed Khnum. A letter from the Jewish priests at Fort Elephantine details the razing of their temple to Yahoo (/Yahweh/YHW) in the 14th regnal year of Darius I, petitions for aid and seeks retribution from the Persian rulers against those responsible. The Persian authorities responded by punishing those responsible and the Jewish temple was rebuilt with royal finances.

Xerxes

A funerary stela from Saqqara (c525-404 BCE), erected in honour of Djerbherbes, son of a Persian settler named Artam and an Egyptian woman Tanofrether, shows

the assimilation of Persian imagery into Egyptian iconography. The deceased lies on a leonine bier and is attended by Anubis and supported by Isis and Nephthys. Four canopic jars are shown under the bier. The lower scene is more Persian in style, though the traditional Egyptian profiles are maintained.



Revolt against the Persians 404 BCE -> 30th Dynasty: Nectanebo I - II

In 404BCE the Egyptians revolted and drove out the Persians, thus establishing the 30th dynasty.



Second Persian Period c343 - 331 BCE

However, in around 343BCE a second conquest of Egypt, much harsher and brutal than the first, was led by **Artaxerxes III**, a fierce warrior king who took no prisoners, and sold women children into slavery. A cylinder seal shows Artaxerxes III leading bound prisoners, and coins showing him as an archer and on horseback with a spear emphasises his strength and victory. Artaxerxes III is also shown as very un-Egyptian looking pharaoh on a coin from Cilicia.

At Tuna el-Gebel, the tomb of Petosiris shows an amalgam of Egyptian and Persian styles. In 332BCE, Alexander's arrival in Egypt was greeted with enthusiasm. His rule was quickly legitimised by his adopting traditional Egyptian style.

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Q & A:-

Q: Barbara Y - Did conquered people have any choice other than to show enthusiasm?

A: Lloyd: Yes, Cambyses chose to present himself as a pharaoh rather than imposing a Persian persona on the Egyptians.

Q: Barbara P - So, is the lost army of Cambyses a total fiction?

A: Lloyd - Yes - but Cambyses is still considered a successful warrior king.

Q: Barbara P: The canal that was dug - do we know where?

A: No, but it existed and was wide enough for ocean-going merchant ships. It may have lasted into Alexander's reign or even the Ptolemaic period. Trade records survive of people using it.

Q: Janet B: The popular image of the battle of Pelusium shows the throwing of cats ?

A: Purely down to Herodotus' story that shows the (untrue) sacrilegious nature of Cambyses.

Q: Gwynne W - Lloyd: what first grabbed your attention about this period?

A: The Greek / Persian interaction - and the perjorative, base picture of how the Persians were represented (by Herodotus), I tried to rebalance what Greeks were saying.

Q: What did the Persians bring to Egypt?

A: Lloyd: They offered the benefit of being organised, their empire was never defeated internally. Also, they never imposed their culture on conquered peoples, unlike the Roman or British Empires, but picked up on best indigenous aspects and assimilated those into their society -

a sense of 'better together' propaganda as a projection of power - which was revolutionary in antiquity.

Q: Barbara Y: Babel ? - linguistic differences ?

A: The Persians held onto their own, but emphasised similarities over differences as had Hatshepsut had done with Punt.

Q: Barbara P - Udjahorresnet - why did he become a 'collaborator'?

A: He acted like a sort of middle manager, stepping in to help & support his people and make the best of the prevailing situation by anticipating and making the best of the inevitability of a Persian takeover.

Egyptian texts tend to be boastful & hyperbolic.

Artaxerxes repairs and honours statue of Udjahorresnet - over 200 years later.

Michael Tweddle,

15/8/23