



Irish Philosophical Journal Volume 1 Issue 2 / Autumn 1984

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Plato and The Wisdom of Egypt

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It was widely believed in ancient times that Plato had visited Egypt. Strabo, the earliest witness to this tradition, associated Eudoxus of Cnidus, the astronomer, with Plato's visit¹ and it is accepted that Eudoxus, who was Plato's pupil and friend, made use of an observatory in Egypt and composed a book in the tradition of Hecataeus, Herodotus and Ctesias, extant fragments of which relate to Egypt, telling of the inundation of the Nile, the rules of the Heliopolitan priests, one of the reputed burial places of Osiris, and the myth of Amun.² Cicero twice has Plato visiting Egypt before his journeys to Italy and Sicily, but we do not know his source for the story. Diogenes Laertius claimed that Plato went to Cyrene in order to visit his friend Theodorus (a partner in the dialogue *Politicus*), and Apuleius has this account too; after that, Diogenes claimed, Plato went to Italy to make the acquaintance of the Pythagoreans, journeying thence to Egypt "to visit the prophets" (*mantines*). Ammianus Marcellinus repeated the story of visits to Egypt by both Solon and Plato.³ In the late Roman imperial period, St. Augustine repeatedly linked Plato with Egypt, referring on several occasions in *De Civitate Dei* to his journeying there, and deliberately connecting the supposed visit with the wisdom of Egypt and of certain Jews who, Augustine thought, lived there.⁴

Modern scholarship is divided about the ancient report, many writers being sceptical of it on the grounds that it cannot be linked to any early and trustworthy documentary evidence of a visit, and also that the autobiographical letter of Plato, which gives such rich and precious information about his two Sicilian visits, is silent concerning Egypt. At the outset of this paper, I must make it plain that I cannot offer any new evidence and do not seek to prove that Plato journeyed to Egypt. My aim is, rather, to uncover what Plato knew of that land of fascination and how he employed his knowledge for his own philosophical purposes. I am interested, therefore, in the references to Egypt made by Plato in *Timaeus* and *Laws* and in the wisdom which Plato garnered and incorporated into those works of his old age. In association with the Egyptian material in *Timaeus* and *Laws*, I shall put forward some views about the shape of Plato's — 2 — philosophy in the concluding years of his life.

It is perhaps best to begin with an abbreviated account of the Myth of Atlantis (*Timaeus* 21A-26D), followed by a commentary on the story as it regards Egypt.⁵

I The Myth of Atlantis

First, the setting of the *mythos* of Athens and Atlantis. In the initial dialogue, Plato sets up the fiction that, on the day previous to the meeting of Socrates with Timaeus of Locri, Socrates had reported his own discourse upon the "best form of society and what sort of men would compose it" (*Timaeus* 17C). This is surely a reference to the *Republic*. His present hearers, Timaeus, Critias and Hermocrates, were the audience of the *Republic*; they express their approval of the institutions there outlined: the separation of craftsmen from defenders; the strict ideal education and common life of the latter; the education of women and the procreation of children. Socrates desires now to hear an account of how that ideal constitutional creature would fare in the world of action, war and diplomacy (19B-C). Finding himself incapable of the task, he appeals to his well-qualified friends, Timaeus, Critias of Athens and Hermocrates of Sicily, to undertake it. Critias is asked to repeat a story which he had told to his two friends on the previous evening and which may meet the request of Socrates. The tale is one which he began to recall while listening to the discourse on the *Republic*; he learned it "long ago", from his grandfather Critias, who had it in turn from Solon, the close friend and relative of *his* father, and it concerns an ancient exploit of Athens, one suitable for retelling on the present festival of Athena as "a true and merited hymn of praise" (21A).

The story goes back, it is said, to Solon, the wise lawgiver who was also a gifted poet but who, having been distracted by political faction and strife, never succeeded in finishing the poetic setting of the story he himself had brought back from Egypt. Solon travelled to Sais in the Delta and inquired from the priests there about ancient times, finding that "neither he nor any other Greek had any knowledge of antiquity worth speaking of". One of the priests contrasted the youth of the Greeks with the great age of his own people, whose continuously-kept temple records had been spared for thousands of years, never having been claimed by the natural catastrophes of floods and earthquakes which interrupted the civilisational life of other peoples, breaking their living connection with their own past and forcing them again and again to begin a new era. The history of Athens before the latest flood, for instance, has

been forgotten by the Athenians but preserved by the Egyptians, owing to their superior — 3 — records and to the kinship they feel for those ancient Athenians and for their youthful descendants.

Nine thousand years before, and a thousand years prior to the political creation of Egypt, Athens had her glory, through wise laws and the nobility of her people. Her laws bore a striking resemblance to those of Egypt at the time of narration, in the separation of classes, the care for wisdom, the derivation of the arts from the order of the world, and the acquisition of learning. Ancient Athens was gifted by Athena, “lover of war and of wisdom”, with all these features and more, so that it surpassed all mankind in every excellence, as though sprung of the gods and nurtured by them.

The superiority of Athens was shown most strikingly in her resistance to the evil and tyrannical imperialism of Atlantis, a gigantic island power which lay beyond the Pillars of Hercules. The kings of Atlantis took Africa as far as the border of Egypt, and Europe to the Black Sea, before bending their imperial intent upon Greece and Egypt. Athens was forced to stand alone, but proved victorious and restored the entire Mediterranean area to freedom. Afterwards, earthquakes and flood destroyed Atlantis, swallowing her up in the sea; the Athenian navy likewise perished.

Critias at this point turns to Socrates and says, “Now, Socrates, I have given you a brief account of the story told by the old Critias as he heard it from Solon. When you were speaking yesterday about your state and its citizens, I recalled this story and I was surprised to notice in how many points your account exactly agreed, by some miraculous chance, with Solon’s” (25E).

There we have Plato’s most extensive evocation of Egyptian society.⁶ Some would no doubt point to the significance of the story by placing it at the head of utopian thought (*New Atlantis*, Francis Bacon), or by finding in it a mythical or made-up summation of the Athenian historical myth concerning the noble defence of freedom against the mighty enemy, Persia; as it were, the Platonic replacement of the Periclean exaltation of Athens.⁷ Since I believe that in this story Plato neither created a utopia (for Atlantis represents sheer power, in Plato’s eyes an uninteresting phenomenon at the opposite remove from the *idea*), nor aimed at glorifying the Athens of his own time, which he considered to be beyond political redemption, I shall employ another approach to this myth. I will ask first the historical question, as to what Plato knew of Egypt and what the basis of information and the consciousness of Egypt were, upon which he drew for his story (I assume the myth of the struggle itself to be wholly fictional); — 4 — *secondly*, what the point of the myth is, linking as it seeks to do the politics of the *Republic* to the myth of world order in *Timaeus*; and finally, whether the myth sheds any light on the Platonic enterprise as it runs in continuity from *Republic* to *Laws*.

II Plato’s Knowledge of Egypt

Four features of Plato’s apparent knowledge of Egypt require particular consideration under the heading of “historicity”:

1. the mention made in the preamble of Egypt, Sais, King Amasis, and Neith;
2. the kinship which Plato postulates between Athens and Egypt: is it pure fiction, or is it indeed a feature of historical Athenian consciousness?;
3. the contrast between the youth of the Greek and the great age of the Egyptian people;
4. the Egyptian laws.

1. Plato and Herodotus

We cannot fail to note that Plato is at home in speaking of Egypt and does so in Greek terms that are apparently well established (the Nile, the Delta, the Nome of Sais, the goddess Neith) and which, apart from proper names (which appear in Hellenized forms) owe nothing to the Egyptian language. Plato is familiar with things Egyptian that have already been transposed into his own Greek tongue. Indeed, when we reflect on it, we moderns are in this respect the children and debtors of the Greeks, for we see Egypt through Greek eyes, using still words derived from Greek, both for things (pyramids, delta, crocodile, the name “Egypt” itself,⁸ Nile, the Sphinx, hieroglyphs, obelisk, papyrus) and for proper names (of cities: Memphis, Thebes, Heliopolis, Hermopolis, Elephantine; and of the Kings, the list of whom, with its division into dynasties, survives only in the Hellenistic Greek of the Egyptian priest, Manetho⁹); the only properly Egyptian words to have had a notable career in later languages appear to be “oasis” and “desert”.¹⁰ Upon reflection, it is natural enough that we should employ still the language of that Hellenistic era, which made Egypt fully part of the Mediterranean world and of the largely Greek-speaking *oikoumenê*. The ancientness of Egypt, its mysterious hieroglyphs, its priestly traditions, its fabulous temples and wealth and its legendary wisdom became, like the obligatory *topos* of the journeys of the philosophers to study there, commonplaces of Hellenistic and Roman literature (Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*). At the time of Plato, however, such widespread awareness of Egypt on the part of the Greeks cannot simply be assumed, and so we turn in the search for enlightenment first to the *Histories* of — 5 — Herodotus of Hallicarnassus who, a generation or so before the birth of Plato, included a book on Egypt (Bk. II) in a work which became a best-seller of the times.

Herodotus, being the product of the Ionian enlightenment,¹¹ brings to Egypt the interests of the geographer, traveller and anthropologist. He regards Egypt as the gift of the Nile. (just as does Plato). He describes its coast, the Delta with its cities, the great Moereotic lake, and the conditions of life in upper Egypt as far as Elephantine (or Aswan), that land fertilized by the annual inundation,

the course of which he recounts in great detail. He professes to have little interest in religion (for about the gods, he believes, one people knows only as much or as little as another¹²), but his profession is somewhat deceptive, as we shall see.

Herodotus's account of the Egypt he saw is too long, too detailed, too lively, and in some respects too problematic, to be summarized here with any adequacy. I must content myself with laying the Platonic references upon it as a sort of stencil, with the aim of bringing out those strictly relevant features which may illuminate the Egyptian myth of Plato. Plato refers, as we have seen, to "the city of Sais, from which came King Amasis". Now Herodotus mentions that city and the nome (or administrative district) of Sais, and in fact his book on Egypt concludes with a short biography of the last king to rule before Cambyses (Kambūjiya), son of Cyrus the Great and ruler of Persia between 530–522, invaded the country (in 525 B.C.) (*Hist.* III.1–15): that king came from the nome of Sais and from the town of Siuph; and he bore the name of Amasis.¹³ Here we have, no doubt, Plato's source, or one of his sources. With that connection established, let us move into the wider circle of questions we may now raise concerning Herodotus and Plato on Egypt and its connection with Greece.

2. The Alleged Kinship of Egypt and Greece

The goddess of Sais, Plato tells us, is called in Egyptian "Neith", "and in Greek, as they say, 'Athena'".¹⁴ The people of Sais are very *philathēnaioi* and say they are in a certain way akin (*oikeioi*) to the Athenians. What substance can be given to these remarks from the account of Herodotus? Let us take the first part, the identification of Neith with Athena made by Plato. Now Herodotus, even though professing little interest in religion, gives us a great deal of information concerning the Egyptian gods and goddesses. More remarkably still, he draws out the identification of each Egyptian deity with a Greek counter-part: Aphrodite stands for Hathor, the cow-goddess and fertility divinity; Osiris, "the Egyptians say", is Dionysus (II.42); — 6 — Artemis is Bast; Demeter is Isis (II.59); Athena is Neith, Ares is Seth (II.59); Horus is Apollo (II.144); and Amun is the Egyptian name for Zeus (II.42). As we become familiar with these identifications we observe occasional difficulties of detail troubling Herodotus, so seriously does he take the identification system: have the Egyptians, he wonders, that other Heracles whom the Greeks reverence—not, i.e., the son of Zeus/Amon, but the son of Amphitryon, the hero? Amphitryon and his consort Alcmene were Egyptians, Herodotus reminds us, so that Heracles was borrowed by the Greeks from the Egyptians, and not the other way round. Herodotus continues: Pan (=Min) is one of the Egyptian ogdoad ("the original eight gods") and is represented with the face and legs of a goat—just as he is in Greece. We begin to get some idea of Herodotus's general view—which he is not slow himself to formulate and to justify: the Egyptians were the first to name the gods and the Greeks learned from them, using Greek names instead of Egyptian. More than that, religious ceremonies like the Festival of Dionysus (II.48.50) were borrowed by the Greeks from the Egyptians, as was sacrifice; Herodotus wonders why circumcision was not taken over as well. It is clear that Herodotus considers the Egyptian and Greek pantheons to be strictly equivalent.

The theme of Greek borrowing in religious matters commingles in the account of Herodotus with that of the relative youth of Greece as over against Egypt (II.54, 64, 146). Only one borrowing in the reverse does he postulate, and it is a minor one (II.91). Herodotus claims that the Egyptians were the first to put forward the immortality of the soul and reincarnation, beliefs which were later adopted by certain Greek writers. He is, of course, mistaken about reincarnation, a belief which did not appear in Egypt.

To return to Plato: his identification of Neith of Sais with Athena can now be seen to be no accident; when read in the light of Herodotus's account it enables us to infer that Plato probably accepted the identification of the Greek with the Egyptian pantheon and believed that identification to be a feature of Egyptian consciousness—hence the kinship which, according to Plato, the people of the Saitic province claim "with our countrymen". Plato knows, presumably once again through Herodotus, that King Amasis came from the Province of Sais; of his friendship towards the Greeks there is no doubt at all, for Herodotus, in his biography of Amasis, recounts the dynastic marriage of Amasis with a daughter of the Greek nobility of Cyrene (II.180). Moreover, Amasis "favoured the Greeks", gave them Naucratis ("Sea Queen"), the only port on the Delta, in which to settle as traders, and granted lands for the erection of altars and the building of temples, the largest of which was the Hellenion. — 7 — Most of the Greek settlers were Ionian, Dorian (like Herodotus) and Aeolian, but the relationship extended to the Greeks of the mainland, for Amasis gave one thousand talents of alum for the rebuilding of the temple at Delphi. Athena figures largely in his gifts: to Cyrene he sent a statue of Athena and a painting of himself; to the temple of Athena at Lindos, two statues. The first building project of Amasis was, according to Herodotus, the marvellous gateway for the temple of "Athena" in Sais. We can only conclude that the attention bestowed by Amasis on Athena presupposed his acceptance of her identification with Neith, the goddess of his province and city. Plato's description of the king and his province as "*philathēnaioi*" is thus completely historical. We may say that he draws upon a general Greek consciousness of kinship with Egypt, rather than on any purely inventive caprice.¹⁵

I should at this point say a further word concerning Plato's other possible borrowings from Herodotus, before I leave the subject behind (for it is not the main theme of this paper). Firstly, the story of *Timaeus* has Solon travelling in the Delta and staying at Sais, talking history and origins with the priests. Now Herodotus reports that Solon borrowed the admirable custom of Amasis, and made it part of Athenian law, whereby "every man once a year should declare before the Nomarch, or provincial governor, the source of his livelihood;

failure to do this, or inability to prove the source was an honest one, was punishable by death" (II.177). That Plato knew Herodotus's account of the visit of Solon to Sais we can have little doubt.

Secondly, Plato's myth or story draws the parallel between existing Egyptian customs and those of the archetypal Athens: in the hierarchical structure of their society the Egyptians still insist on the separation of the priesthood from the other classes, those of craftsmen (as well as shepherds, hunters and farmers) and soldiers (who are forbidden by law to concern themselves with anything but war). Now this accords closely with Herodotus's description of the sevenfold class system of Egypt (II.166) and his insistence that the warriors "touch no trade of any kind but have a purely military education, son following father"—once again like the Greeks who, Herodotus remarks, count warriors the only true and real nobility.¹⁶

It is otiose to point out that the castes formed no part of the social system of ancient Egypt but were a phenomenon of its later, stylized or sclerosized form,¹⁷ so that Plato's assumption that the system was an original part of Egypt's ancient, unchanging strength is false. He could not have known any better, given the state of historical knowledge; Herodotus likewise had no such suspicion. — 8 —

3. Plato's Consciousness of Egypt

We turn now to the theme, common to Herodotus and Plato, of the ancientness of the Egyptians and the youth of the Greeks. We have explored it in Herodotus, where it takes the specific form of the derivation to the Greeks of the pantheon, the functions of whose member deities were first distinguished by the Egyptians, and the assumption that the influence was all one way. Herodotus, like all ancient visitors to Egypt, was deeply moved by the venerability of the monuments and the length of the kinglist. He was a willing victim of the pride of the Egyptian priests in their own culture, accepting from them that everything known in other lands had had its origins in Egypt and arguing, somewhat uncritically, that the culture which evolved later in Greek lands did so invariably under Egyptian influence, including the arts of the calendar, divination and astrology.

Plato makes the contrast between age and youth a central feature of his Egyptian Myth: the Greeks have a short memory, the Egyptians a long history. Time goes in cycles, the beginning and end of each cycle being marked by a natural catastrophe or by the turning of the Great Year; for the phenomenon of the precession of the equinoxes, referred to in *Timaeus* 22C, was interpreted as marking a great cycle in human affairs, a revolution, after which a new aeon commenced. The achievements built by men in time are fugitive and exposed to destruction; each age must rebuild, by first supplying the necessities and only afterwards evolving culture and political life. Egypt alone is spared being "the gift of the Nile", watered from below, not above,¹⁸ and therefore relatively free from catastrophes; hence the length of its present anamnestic cycle—eight thousand years, in roundly symbolic figures, from the time of Min. In reality, as we know, the Egypt of two kingdoms under the sole lordship of Min (Menes) dates back to c. 3000 B.C. Small wonder, then, that the Egyptian priests could impress the civilisationally younger Greeks with the overpowering age and continuity of their mysterious culture; in the report of Herodotus, "The Egyptians before the reign of Psammetichus used to think that of all races in the world they were the most ancient... [but] ever since his time the Egyptians have believed that the Phrygians surpass them in antiquity and that they themselves come second" (II.1).

With the evidence of such immemorial antiquity the span of the Greek memory, which traced its earliest mythical history back to Minoan civilisation, to the legends of Mycenaean warriors and seafarers, and to the great poets, Homer and Hesiod who, "about four hundred years before my time", as Herodotus says, gathered together the strands of earlier tradition into codified form, could claim no rivalry; nor did it. Already before the time of Plato, Egypt had deeply entered the Greek consciousness as the — 9 — measureless criterion of cultural lastingness and the progenitor of the arts and sciences, of divination and magic. The most an admiring Greek could do would be to claim kinship, for to rival Egypt would be a futile enterprise indeed. Roughly as we stand to our classical past, speaking of our classical heritage of culture, or of our Judaic heritage of faith, so did the Greeks of classical times to Egypt. That realisation is in itself an acquisition, for it makes us ponder and question the classics anew. There was scarcely a philosopher of note, from Thales to Pythagoras through Democritus of Abdera and Plato himself, who was not supposed to have studied in Egypt; doxographic as most of these traditions probably are, they bear witness to a generally-diffused mentality which did not begin with the Alexandrian age, but to which Herodotus, Isocrates and Plato had already paid deference and added their contribution; Aristotle was to continue in the same path. Paul Friedländer justly remarks that "Egypt, for Plato, was an astonishing example of an unchanging cultural and political existence in contrast to the unceasing changes in the Greek form of life; in Plato's systematically graded world, it became a political unit somewhere between Athens and the ideal state".¹⁹

It would be a thorough blunder on our part to suppose that Herodotus was Plato's only, or even his main source of knowledge concerning Egypt. For one thing, the more we probe the writings of Plato himself, the more knowledge appears of Egypt, most of it purely incidentally, some of it introduced playfully, all of it suggesting a strong interest in Egypt on his part. By the time of Plato, the Greeks of Ionia and of the mainland had been sending out colonies in every direction, under the combined pressure of land-hunger and trading ambition. From the eighth century B.C., they began to settle in colonies on the Euxine, around the Hellespont and in the northern Aegean.²⁰ By the end of the seventh century they had firmly established themselves in Sicily and southern Italy (the Tarentine

Gulf). From the eighth-century colony on Pithecusae, the island in the bay of Naples, they moved onto the mainland, founding Neapolis and Cyme (where it is thought they were first collectively called 'Hellenes'; up until then they went by the separate tribal names). The Phocaeans went further on the seas, to found Massalia, c. 600, and thence to the coast of Spain and to Corsica. Egypt remained closed to them until after the Assyrian conquest under Assarhaddon. After a generation of Assyrian rule, a general of Libyan origins, Psammeticus of Sais, called in Ionian and Carian mercenaries to help oust the conqueror. Thus Sais became the capital of a newly united Egypt; the Greek mercenaries were retained and strengthened; traders were permitted to settle in their wake, then were granted permanence, and the Greek city of Naucratis grew up at the mouth of the western or Canopic channel of the — 10 — Delta.

By the time of Plato, therefore, Egypt—or the Delta at least—had long ceased to be a foreign place to Greeks. Indeed, Plato himself makes mention of Naucratis (*Phaedrus* 274D). He knows something of the Upper Egypt also, for he writes that the city called by the Greek name of Thebes (Karnak) was the home of the god Ammon and a former capital of Egypt. He knows of the Egyptian custom of making ponds to keep fish from the Nile (*Politicus* 264C). Quite casually, he cites (in *Gorgias* 511D) the cost of the passage from Athens (Piraeus) to Egypt: two drachmae. He knows of mummification, of course (*Phaedo* 80C): Socrates speaks of the Egyptian attempts to halt the corruption of the body through embalmmnt. Plato also has views on “the children of the Nile”, not all of them complimentary, but no doubt reflecting current Greek prejudices: one associates the love of money with Phoenicia and Egypt as one associates the love of knowledge with “our part of the world” (*Rep.* IV.435C); the cunning of the Egyptians is to be blamed on the illiberality of their customs and possessions (*Laws* V. 747C); and they are guilty of lack of hospitality (*Laws* XII.953E). In other respects Plato holds up Egypt as a model; one example is the way in which they teach their children arithmetic by means of games (*Laws* VII. 819B); the other heads of praise are more substantial and directly germane to this discussion; I reserve them for the moment.

A final historical note: Pindar already mentioned the Theraean colony of Cyrene near the Libyan coast, the only Greek settlement on the African coast, as it happened, which attained to eminence and wealth. Cyrene acquired a special renown because it controlled access to the oasis of Siwa in the interior desert, and Siwa, famous for its shrine of Ammon, rapidly acquired fame throughout the Greek world, until it rivalled the oracles of Delphi and Dodona.²¹ There are several references to this oracle in Plato; perhaps these it was that prompted the belief of Diogenes and Apuleius that Plato had paid a visit to Cyrene. At the very beginning of the *Politicus*, Theodorus exclaims, with an oath, “By our god Ammon”: Theodorus is from Cyrene where that was the equivalent of the general Greek exclamation, “By Zeus”. In *Laws* V. 73B-C, Plato mentions the three great oracles, Delphi, Dodona and Ammon; and we know that the last named, that at Siwa, was widely consulted by the mainland Greeks of his time: Lysander, who died in 395, did so. In Plato’s own time, one of the theoric or ceremonial vessels of Athens was called “Ammonis”, after Ammon, and public sacrifice was made to Ammon by the magistrates of Athens.²² Herodotus, of course, spoke with interest of Siwa and of the oracle of Ammon; but that, I suggest, was because his Greek readers everywhere would wish to hear of it from one who had visited the African coast, and we need not assume that he was Plato’s only possible source of knowledge—far from it: — 11 — every Athenian knew of it, for Egypt had figured largely in the Athenian consciousness ever since the naval expedition of some two hundred galleys had been sent to aid the Egyptian rebellion against Persia, in 459 B.C., successfully capturing Memphis. Plato mentions the expedition (in *Menexenus* 241E), shortly after his evocation of the conquest of Egypt by the Persians (239E).²³

I may add that, besides Ammon, the high god of Thebes and one of the great figures of the Egyptian pantheon (at least from the age of the Tuthmoses kings), Plato knows of Toth (Theúth) as the god who is associated with the ibis bird and who is worshipped as the patron of grammar and phonetics (*Philebus* 18B) as well as of games and letters (*Phaedrus* 275C).²⁴ Plato may or may not have visited Egypt personally, but in any case his side references manifest a wide knowledge of it, something, I suspect, that was typical of the cultivated Athenian of his time.

If this were a paper addressed to historians, it could either stop at this point or pursue the inquiry into the origins of Greek mathematics, or the Egyptian influence on the Greek sense of form. In Plato, however, we find a philosopher of genius and a poet, who chose his materials carefully and constructed them with a definite purpose in mind. It is that purpose we must discover by an analysis of Plato’s art. I mention, merely as a clue, the passage on the Egyptian laws and the wisdom they enshrine: *Timaeus* 24B-C.

4. The Egyptian Laws

Now, where Plato speaks of laws we are to think, not of legislation in the modern sense, but of the whole historical ideal of a community embodied in a consensus and placed in a constitution, to serve and uphold the good order of that community. As a first finding, we may say that Plato exalts the Egyptian constitution, praising the immemorial importance it attaches to wisdom (*phronêsis*) in two respects: first, as found in the order of the world; and secondly, as deriving from those divine things the discovery of all arts, including divination and medicine.²⁵ There is, then, something in the Egyptian laws like a sacral element, a derivation of human action from the paradigmatic divine world-order; and associated with that relationship of society to nature is lastingness and resistance to the corrosion of time. This reflection of Plato far transcends the observations of Herodotus, which are at an altogether lower level of experience and analysis. With Plato, we are in the region of creative thought and have left behind problems of sources and influence.

We must try to approach Plato's own level. Fortunately, we have the invaluable help of the one considerable philosophical interpreter of Plato to have bent his mind in the — 12 — direction of Plato's Egyptian Myth, namely, Eric Voegelin.²⁶

How well or how badly did Plato understand the sacral justification of human culture and activity which prevailed in Egypt? Is his reference to the derivation of the arts from the order of the world correct, or is it on the contrary wide of the mark? The evidence upon which such questions turn lies squarely in the province of the Egyptologist and must be constructed from plentiful, but variegated and quite unsystematic sources of a generally mythological or pre-philosophical nature. The remarks which follow here cannot lay claim to any historical authority; however, in the present context of discussion some attempt must be made to outline the general features of Egyptian belief concerning the fundamental divine ordering of things, the nature of the social order of Egypt itself, and the relationship which was thought to prevail between the divine and social orders.²⁷

III Egyptian Order

The religious expressions of the Egyptians were of many kinds: among many others we may mention prayers for the living, magical texts to guard the dead, hymns for temple worship, genealogies of the gods, and the coronation and burial texts of the Pharaohs. They addressed a multitude of gods and goddesses, attaching animal representations to some of them, and developed a beautiful and intimate relation between the high gods and the sun. That is why Amun, a creator-god, was addressed as Amun-Rê, and Rê took other faces, such as Horakhte, the falcon-headed god of the sunrise. Of particular interest for our purposes are the elaborate parallels which are made between the order of heaven and the order of society in Egypt. The expression of political order by analogy with the cosmic order was a common feature of the "religions" of the Ancient Near East.²⁸ It assumed a characteristic form early in Egyptian history, perhaps as early as the union of the two lands of Upper and Lower Egypt under the first king, Menes, before 3,000 B.C.

For the Egyptian, a single order embraced all things; its force was divine, and it radiated from the gods to the world, drawing the earth out of the primeval chaos of waters, forming a sacred hill, the symbol of the land of Egypt that was expressed in the hill of the pyramid, securing for ever the unity of the two lands, and establishing the divine rulership of the Pharaoh. The symbols in which this belief was expressed were so dense and compact that our much more differentiated thinking is unequal to them. Accustomed as we are to a clear line of distinction between God, the world, society and man, the four great blocks into which being has been differentiated by centuries of revelation and philosophy, we are almost defeated by the — 13 — compactness of symbols, such as the crown, the pyramid, the Memphite theology, the sun-barque, symbols that are at one and the same time theological, cosmological and political. Taken all together and in their supercharge of meaning, these symbols made up a form of order which constituted for Egyptians the meaningful shape into which the individual life fitted unquestioningly, an order of justice under the Pharaoh, of life under the sun, the Eye of Horus, the god who had chosen Egypt as his beloved land. They believed that through the divine figure of the Pharaoh the order of the cosmos radiated into society, as the sun shines on the earth. So strong and enduring was this belief that it survived even two lengthy periods of invasion and internal turbulence; for those experiences of misery, dishonour and disorder did not succeed in bringing Egypt away from the belief that only within the true, Pharaonic order of things, the restoration of which was earnestly hoped for in times of trouble, could a blessed life be lived.

In one of the Pyramid texts of the Old Kingdom the truly divine status of the Pharaoh finds clear expression in its purity, after his death, when the gods greet the dead king upon his arrival:

This is my son, my first born....

This is my beloved with whom I have been satisfied.

This is my beloved, my son;

I have given the horizons to him, that he may be powerful over them like Horakhte.

He lives, king of Upper and Lower Egypt, beloved of Rê, living for ever.²⁹ The rule of the son of god channels the divine and cosmic forces into society, so that his coronation is the symbolic repetition of the original divine ordering of the world. The King is at his coronation to assume the place of the creator-god, standing on that hill of earth which first emerged from the amorphous waters, and which is identical with the kingdom of the two Lands:

Stand thou upon it, this earth, which comes forth from Atum....

Be thou above it; be thou high above it,

that thou mayest see thy father; that thou mayest see Rê.

He has come to thee, his father; he has come to thee, Rê.³⁰ The ascent to the throne mimes the paradigmatic ascent of the maker-god to the hill of order, symbolized by the pyramids and by the ground-plan of the temples of Egypt, which rose in stages to the altar-hill.

After his earthly life (for the Pharaoh will — 14 — die, like all his kind), his *ka* will ascend into the embrace of his divine father, whose lordship from eternity was manifest on earth through him and is continued through his successors. The coeval emergence of world-order and Pharaonic order underlies this salutation of a Pharaoh of the Middle Kingdom:

What is the king of Upper and Lower Egypt?

He is a god by whose dealings one lives,

the father and mother of all men,

alone by himself without an equal.³¹ In the Pharaoh are manifested the ordering creator, the divine father, the bright sunlike *maat*, or order of the gods, which radiates from him into every part of the land, as justice and religious truth; for all these senses can be found in the dense concept of *maat*. In the establishment of right order the Pharaoh is aided by viziers and governors, who carry his command through the realm; but they experience themselves in their different places as bearers of the one, immutable substance of the royal *maat*.

The compactness of these symbols resists transcription into the clarity of later human experience; but it possessed a clarity peculiar to itself, the clarity, as we might say, of the sun and of the sun-king, who together manifested the one ordering power that circulated from the gods through nature and society and returned to its origin. It assured the firm integration of man into society and of society into the cosmic order, and it proved for that reason extremely resistant to any reorientation of existence which the degeneration of the empirical order threatened to bring about.

IV Egypt and the Platonic Idea

With these general ideas concerning the relationship between society and cosmos, or justice and the divine world-order, firmly in mind, we are now in a somewhat better position to return to the Egyptian story of Plato, taking that as a clue at once to Plato's understanding of Egypt and to the gravitation of his most mature thinking concerning the embodiment of ideal or true reality in time. With regard, firstly, to the philosophical and literary location of the Egyptian story, I may say at once that I applaud and endorse the view of Voegelin concerning the continuity between the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. In the *Republic*, the idea of the *polis* appeared as a paradigm, but its status as the order of an actual *polis* was never completely clarified:

If we use a modern term, one might perhaps say of the description of the well ordered *polis* that it is a — 15 —

“projection” of the well ordered soul. The uneasiness about the status of the idea is the sentiment which leads from the *Republic* to the *Timaeus*.... Theoretically, the *Republic* ends with a great question. And this question is now answered by the *Timaeus*... through the myth which transposes the well ordered *polis* of the *Republic* from the status of a story to the status of an order in historical reality.³² The solution has to be found, then, in some historical terms; but of what kind? Plato does not have at his disposal the Judaeo-Christian idea of history as aimed at a world-transcendent end, nor the Marxist notion of historical dialectics. He must then frame the historical terms by using the highest, noblest view of time at his disposal, the view, namely, according to which time unfolds in cycles which imitate the cyclical movement of the cosmos. History must be interpreted, then, by analogy with nature and cosmic rhythm, that is to say, by reference to the cosmological myth, as we may term it.

The Egyptian myth of Plato emerges now in its crucial significance, as a story linking the *idea* (or reality simply speaking) to the world of time, birth and death. We note in passing the anamnesis theme in the myth, to which Voegelin has devoted his masterly exegetical skill: Critias, the narrator, has forgotten the story he heard in his youth and must recover it; the story broadens genealogically back to Solon, then goes beyond the Hellenic world altogether into the more ancient Egyptian one, and through the Egyptian register, “beyond the present aeon of the cosmos into the previous cycle”.³³ Parallel to the ascent in time to the origins is the motif of youth and age in the descent of the *idea* to the present - the Socratic present, in which the idea still lives: “The Egyptian myth of Critias confirms the Socratic *polis*”.³⁴ The way is open for Timaeus to unfold a future dimension of truth - the truth of the soul - in his myth of the genesis of the world order from the divine soul; for the Demiurge makes physical time as a moving image of eternity. The order of the world and the harmony of heavenly motion are the product of the well ordered soul of the god; the harmony of the human soul, therefore, is a microcosm of the universe itself, and the justice of the well ordered society of Socratic men finds its place between the other two embodiments of the idea. The myth is full of hope and encouragement for the human struggle, for as the god had to overcome the resistance of blind matter by persuading it to follow the orderly motion of reason (for the most part successfully), so the reason in us is invited to address its task of leadership in company with the divine paradigm. — 16 —

In the Egyptian myth Plato sets up a double relationship of the *idea* to time: mythically, to the Athens of the present cosmic aeon; and in the myth, but concretely, to Egypt *even as it is*. Why did he regard the Egypt of his own time as an embodiment—although admittedly an imperfect one—of the ideal *politeia*? A hint is given us in the myth of Atlantis: even when Greece was threatened with invasion, Athens stood alone because the *poleis* were incapable of going to war together; the cities could not federate into a panhellenic union, they were endemically divided in a war of all against all (the phrase comes from *Laws* ³⁵). We know that Plato was a politician and that at an early stage of his life he despaired of his native city, of Athens guilty of the blood of Socrates, Athens which by his time no longer had any collective faith in the divine measure of all being. I am convinced that his mind was drawn, through this disillusionment with his own city and with the Greeks, towards contemplation of the Egyptian success in sustaining a constitution and a people over an immemorial period of time in unity and strength and I believe that the evidence justifies us in finding Plato's own explanation of that

massive stability and immemorial survival of Egypt in its religion or, to put it more Platonically, in the harmony and attunement of its laws (*nomoi*) and culture (*technai*) with nature, and through nature with the divine power. I point to a passage from *Laws* in support of this hypothesis. The three old men who are partners in the reflection on the laws governing the festivals, education, music and theology of the true society agree in condemning the Greek city-cultures of their own time: in varying degree these all chase after novelty and licence in art forms and popular culture and have lost all reverence for sacred art. In Egypt, however, that is by no means the case:

Clinias: How, then, does the law stand in Egypt?

Athenian: It is marvellous, even in the telling. It appears that long ago they determined on the rule of which we are now speaking, that the youth of a state should practise in their rehearsals postures and tunes that are good: these they prescribed in detail and posted up in the temples, and outside this official list it was, and still is, forbidden to painters and all other producers of postures and representations to introduce any innovation or invention, whether in such productions or in any other branch of music, over and above the traditional forms. And if you look there, you will find that the things depicted or graven there ten thousand years ago (I mean what I say, not loosely but literally ten thousand) are no whit better or worse than the productions of today, but wrought with the same art. — 17 —

Clinias: A marvellous state of affairs!

Athenian: Say rather, worthy in the highest degree of a statesman and a legislator. Still, you would find in Egypt other things that are bad. This, however, is a true and noteworthy fact, that as regards music it has proved possible for the tunes which possess a natural correctness to be enacted by law and permanently consecrated. To effect this would be the task of a god or a godlike man—even as in Egypt they say that the tunes preserved throughout all this lapse of time are the compositions of Isis. Hence, as I said, if one could by any means succeed in grasping the principle of correctness in tune, one might then with confidence reduce them to legal form and prescription, since the tendency of pleasure and pain to indulge constantly in fresh music has, after all, not so very great power to corrupt choric forms that are consecrated, by merely scoffing at them as antiquated. In Egypt, at any rate, it seems to have no such power of corrupting—in fact, quite the reverse.³⁶

The conservatism of Egypt is praiseworthy, because it conserves and embodies that attunement to nature which is right and which permits a higher life to flourish under the blessing of the gods.

V Philosopher-king and Pharaoh

I conclude with a question which raises a tantalizing possibility, although in an area of conjecture. Is it not odd, we may wonder, that Plato, who knew so much about Egypt and was inclined to admire it, says nothing of that figure to whom the Egyptians themselves looked, as to a god, for the just order that flowed into the land like sunlight from his throne, namely, the Pharaoh? Now there is, of course, a kingly figure in Plato's work, an ideal of divine rulership by one who united in his own person power with love of wisdom, and that ideal was the focus of Plato's hope already at the period of his visits to Syracuse, long before it was enshrined in the figure of the philosopher-king, in the *Republic*. My question, then, is whether we do not have in the wisdom-loving ruler of the *Republic*, that Socratic soul in love with the *Agathon* which is the sun of the intelligible world, that most un-Greek of kings, through whom the sun of the *idea* radiates true justice into the world of time, a figure drawn from the paradigm of pharaonic rulership? Voegelin offers the following persuasive argument for thinking that Plato's political mind should have turned him in the direction of the Ancient Near Eastern conceptions of saviour kings, in search of a paradigm — 18 — for endangered Greece:

The evolution of Plato's conception of order toward the position of the *Laws* must be understood in the context of Hellenic politics. The *poleis* had never found their way towards unification on a national, territorial scale, even though the threat of the Persian great power was clear to everybody. The need for a more comprehensive organization must have been so obvious at the time, that Plato's vision of an Hellenic empire had nothing extraordinary on principle. It was so close indeed to the trend of pragmatic politics that it barely anticipated the solution which the problem found, in the generation after his death, in the imperial foundations of Alexander and the Diadochi. And his evocation of the philosopher-king is, under one of its aspects, no more than the expression of the search for an Hellenic figure that would correspond to the saviour-kings and pharaohs of the Near Eastern empires. The vision is so unextra-ordinary that it is even difficult to imagine how a political thinker in this situation could demand less than Plato does.³⁷

There is, fortunately, one remark of Plato himself which allows one to put forward this idea as something a little bit more substantial than pure speculation. In the *Politicus*, Plato argues that the very best constitution is not a written one, nor an oligarchic or democratic one, but kingship, carefully qualified in a number of ways to incarnate the *idea*. One of the qualifications of the kingly art is of particular significance in the present context:

Stranger: But let us draw a little closer still to those whom we have not yet examined. There are men who have to do with divination and possess a portion of a certain menial science; for they are supposed to be interpreters of the gods to men.

Young Socrates: Yes.

Stranger: And then, too, the priests, according to law and custom, know how to give the gods, by means of sacrifices, the gifts that please them from us and by prayers to ask for us the gain of good things from them; now these are both part of a servant's art.

Young Socrates: At least they seem to be so.

Stranger: At last, there, I think we are, as it were, on the track of our quarry. For the bearing of the — 19 — priests and prophets is indeed full of pride, and they win high esteem because of the magnitude of their undertakings. In Egypt, for example, no king can rule without being a priest, and if he happens to have forced his way to the throne from some other class, he must enrol himself in the class of priests afterwards; and among the Greeks, too, you would find that in many states the performance of the greatest public sacrifices is a duty imposed upon the highest officials. Yes, among you Athenians this is very plain, for they say the holiest and most national of the ancient sacrifices are performed by the man whom the lot has chosen to be the king.³⁸

It is clear that "the man whom the lot has chosen to be the king" should be construed as a reference to the second of the nine annually-elected archons of Athens. Plato's argument is a historical one, namely, that in Greece the oldest association of kingship was with sacrifice, but that only a trace of that ancient link remained in the Athens of his own day. In generalizing the argument, his mind turns quite naturally to Egypt, where sacral kingship, or that ancient association between kingly rulership and priesthood, is more signally preserved. The relevance of the passage to my general line of argument is clear, for it leaves the reader in no doubt that Plato was fully alive to the sacral character of Egyptian kingship. Even when we give full value to that explicit consciousness of Plato, however, there is admittedly no knock-down argument to show that Plato had the priest-kings of Egypt in mind as he developed the ideal of truly wise kingship. Yet the inherent plausibility of the suggestion is felt if we ponder, in turn, the savage indignation of Plato against Athens and Greece, his obsessive concern with right rulership, the admiration he felt for Egypt and his genial insight into its ancient ordering-principle, and, perhaps most importantly of all, that myth of nature in which his mature philosophical vision culminated.

Notes

¹ W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. IV, p. 14.

² Id., vol. V, pp. 451, 456.

³ For references to the ancient accounts of Plato's reputed visit to Egypt, see H. Leisegang, art. "Platon" in *Real-encyclopädie der class. Altertumswiss.* (Pauly-Wissowa), — 20 — 2. Reihe, XI. Halbb. (1941), 2350; J. Kerscheneiner, *Platon und der Orient* (Stuttgart, 1945).

⁴ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* VIII, ch. 9; on Plato and the Jews in Egypt, VIII, ch. 11.

⁵ The bibliography on the Atlantis story is immense. Guthrie gives a brief evocation of the main theories (which attempt to connect the Platonic myth with the destruction of the islands of Santorin by eruption, c. 1500 B.C., or with memories of Minoan Crete), and refers to surveys of the literature (including the utopias) which the story has spawned (vol. V, pp. 247–50). James Bramwell's *Lost Atlantis* (1937) outlines the various theories. The archaeologist, Nicolas Platon, argues in his *Zakros* (New York, 1971) that old memories of the Minoan civilisation, memories which may have been preserved in Egypt, have gone into Plato's picture of Atlantis. It should not be forgotten that Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias* are our only source for the Atlantis story.

⁶ I shall deal in due course with the briefer allusions made to Egypt in *Laws* and elsewhere.

⁷ Or even his reconciliation with Athens: see Paul Friedländer, *Plato, vol. I: An Introduction* (London, 1958), p. 203.

⁸ The Egyptians had "Hi-ku-ptah" (meaning "Mansion of the soul of Ptah") as one of the names of Memphis, but never used it of the country as a whole; see J. Cerný, "Language and Writing", in J.R. Harris (ed.), *The Legacy of Egypt* (second ed., Oxford U.P., 1971), p. 204.

⁹ Whom Josephus perceptively refers to in these terms: "Manethòs d'ên tò génos Aigúptios, anêr tês Ellenikês meteschêkôs paideias, ôs dêlon estin", and quotes extensively in *Contra Apionem* I. 14, §§ 73–92; repr. in *Manetho*, ed. Waddell (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1940).

¹⁰ The geographer Strabo was aware that the Greek word "oasis" was derived from Egyptian, but only in our own century has its exact origin been ascertained: the Egyptian word "wahet", meaning a cauldron. "Desert" comes from the Egyptian "dsrt", meaning red, which they opposed to the black (kême(t)) alluvial soil of the inundated river-borders. For other words in modern languages which are traced with varying degrees of probability to Egyptian origins (e.g. ebony; gum; sack; lily; the names of the animals ibis and uraeus; phoenix (a species of heron); basalt; alabaster; natron), — 21 — see Cerný, *ibid.*, pp. 201–8.

¹¹ For a recent overall assessment of the achievement of Herodotus, see R.P. Lister, *The Travels of Herodotus* (Gordon and Cremonesi, London, 1979), a work of popularization; J.A.S. Evans, *Herodotus* (Twayne, Boston, 1982), who devotes a chapter to Egypt; J. Hart, *Herodotus and Greek History* (Croom Helm, London, 1982). An original interpretation of the perspective of Herodotus is found in C.W. Fornara, *Herodotus: An Interpretative Essay* (Oxford U.P., 1971). The trustworthiness of Herodotus's account of Egypt has not, of course, gone unquestioned, any more than that of his work generally; as regards Egypt, the various judgments of historians are summarized and assessed by Friedrich Oertel, *Herodots Ägyptischer Logos und die Glaubwürdigkeit Herodots* (Bonn, 1970). From

the charge of cultural syncretism Oertel is inclined to defend Herodotus, by pointing to the reality of Graeco-Egyptian collaboration and its effects, which he terms “eine gräkoägyptische Kultur-Koine” (p. 14): “So kommt es zu einem Synkretismus, der ägyptische *und* griechische Züge trägt, und dessen Niederschlag wir bei Herodot antreffen, und der dann modernen Skeptizismus wachgerufen hat, wenn nur griechisch mögliche Erzähl ungen von Göttern und Heroen, aber auch von Pharaonen wie Amasis, von Mysterien, Orakeln und dgl. in ägyptischen Gewände oder ägyptischer Umgebung erscheinen. Griechen und Ägypter haben in der säitisch-persischen Epoche eben vereint an der gemeinsamen Tradition, die ägyptische Königsgeschichte eingeschlossen, gearbeitet, wobei eine Menge Novellistisches und Folkloristisches sich angegliedert hat, der Grundstock aber doch ägyptisch bleibt” (p. 17).

A significant contribution to the modern discussion of Graeco-Egyptian relationships was made by D. Mallet, “Les rapports des Grecs avec l’Égypte (525–331)”, *Mém. franç. d’arch. orient.*, t. 48 (1922). The whole subject of Herodotus’s Egyptian journey has been renewed by A.B. Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II* (Brill, Leiden, 1975), who has given by far the most thorough literal commentary to appear thus far: *Herodotus Book II Commentary 1–98* (Brill, Leiden, 1976). Although Lloyd admits (in his 1975 work, p. 193) that “there is good reason to suspect the handiwork of Herodotus in much of the chronology of Egypt and in the attempts to reconcile the contradictions which arose between that and traditional Greek chronology”, his judgment is fundamentally positive: “As for Egyptian chronology, Herodotus and his fellow researchers accumulated a large stock of information on the subject and found to their considerable embarrassment that its beginnings lay millenia before what they considered to — 22 — be the beginnings of their own history in the sixteenth century B.C. It is the traumatic effect of this discovery which caused Herodotus to devote so much time to chronological problems in Book II. The details of his Egyptian Chronology are surprisingly accurate” (p. 194).

¹² *Histories*, Bk. II, 3.

¹³ The biography begins at *Hist.* II. 163 and runs to the end of Bk II. Bk. III *in init.* tells of the death of Amasis, just before the successful Persian invasion.

¹⁴ Plato states quite unambiguously that the dwellers of Sais themselves both make the identification of Neith and Athena and claim kinship with the Athenians; not all the translators, however, render the Greek with adequate clarity at this point: “Ἔστι τις κατ’ Αἴγυπτον, ἐ δ’ὄς, ἐν τῷ Δέλτα, περὶ ὃ κατὰ κορυφὴν σχίζεται τὸ τοῦ Νεῖλου ρεῦμα, Σαῖτικὸς ἐπικαλούμενος νόμος, τοῦτου δὲ τοῦ νομοῦ μεγίστη πόλις Σαῖς, ὅθεν δὲ καὶ Ἄμισις ἐν ὁ βασιλεὺς οἱ τῆς πόλεως θεὸς ἀρχηγὸς τίς ἐστιν, Αἴγυπτιστὶ μὲν τὸν ὄνομα Νεῖθ, Ἑλλῆνιστὶ δὲ, ὄς ὁ ἐκεῖν ὁ λόγος, Ἀθῆνᾶ μάλα δὲ φιλαθῆναιοὶ καὶ τίνα τρόπον οἰκεῖοι τὸν δ’ εἶναι φασίν” (*Tim.* 21E).

¹⁵ In *Menexenus* 245D, it is said that the Greeks are the descendants of Egyptus, but it is hard to know how seriously the speech is meant.

¹⁶ Isocrates also lays stress on the strict class division of Egypt, which he praises; see *Busiris* 15–17. The admirable features of the Spartan *politeia* are attributable, he claims, to imitation of Egypt. The *Busiris* presents many parallels to Plato’s remarks on Egypt (its privileged climate, 12; artistic merit, 17; cultivation of wisdom, 21; of medicine, 22; of mathematics and astronomy, 23; true piety and obedience of its citizens, 28). Isocrates attributes the origin of Greek philosophy to a visit of Pythagoras of Samos to Egypt and his study of its religion, piety, sacrifices and ceremonial purity. Some claim to detect a reference to the Platonic *Republic* in the remark of Isocrates that “with respect to the system which enables them to preserve royalty and their political institutions in general, they have been so successful that philosophers who undertake to discuss such topics and have won the greatest reputation prefer above all others the Egyptian form of government...” (17). However, if *Busiris* was composed c. 390–385, this cannot be the case. — 23 — Regarding Naucratis, archaeological evidence has established the presence of Greeks there, from the latter years of the seventh century B.C. onwards, that is to say, well before the reign of Amasis; see art. “Naucratis” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 722–3.

¹⁷ On the general features of Egypt in the Saitic period, including its characteristic archaism in art and religion, its nostalgia for the Old Kingdom, the impact of foreign influences, and the separation of the castes, see Alan Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 355–6.

¹⁸ Cf. Herodotus, *Histories* II. 13.

¹⁹ *Plato*, vol. I, p. 201.

²⁰ J.B. Bury and R. Meiggs, *A History of Greece to the Death of Alexander the Great* (fourth ed., London, 1975), ch. 2.

²¹ Herodotus recounts two stories of how the oracles at Dodona and Siwa derived from Egyptian Thebes: II. 55.

²² See art. “Ammon” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, pp. 51–3.

²³ Which is wrongly attributed there to Cyrus. Friedländer suggests that deliberate carelessness of detail is a feature of some at least of the speech in praise of Athens in the *Menexenus*.

²⁴ At *Phaedrus* 275B, Phaedrus jestingly says to Socrates, “Ὁ Σὸκράτης, ραδίως σὺ Αἴγυπτίους καὶ ὀποδαποῦς ἀν ἐθελῆς λόγους ποιεῖς”: “Socrates, you easily make up stories’ of Egypt or any other kind you please”.

²⁵ *Timaeus* 24C: “τὸ δ’ αὖ περὶ τῆς φρονήσεως, ὅρας ποῦ τὸν νόμον τῆδε ὁσὲν ἐπιμέλειαν ἐποιῆσατο εὐθὺς κατ’ ἀρχὰς περὶ τὴν κίσην ἀπαντὰ, μέχρη μαντικῆς καὶ ἰατρικῆς πρὸς ὑγίαιαν ἐκ τούτων θεῖον εἰς τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἀνεῖρον, ὅσα τε ἄλλα τούτοις ἐπεταὶ μαθημάτων πάντα κτήσαντες. ταῦτ’ ἐν οὖν δὲ τὸτε ὑμῶν τῆν διακόσμησιν καὶ σύνταξιν ἐθεὸς προτέρους ὑμᾶς διακοσμήσατο

katôkisen...ôti phronimôtátous ándras oísoi”.

²⁶ E. Voegelin, “Plato’s Egyptian Myth”, in *The Journal of Politics* 9 (1947), pp. 307–24. See also the same author’s *Plato and Aristotle (Order and History, vol. 3)* (Baton Rouge, 1957), pp. 170–80. — 24 —

²⁷ In what follows I draw chiefly upon E. Voegelin, “Egypt”, in *Israel and Revelation (Order and History, vol. 1)*, pp. 52–110, which is a highly intelligent synthesis of the constructions of prominent Egyptologists.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, “Mesopotamia”, pp. 16–45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

³² E. Voegelin, “Plato’s Egyptian Myth”, p. 311.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

³⁵ *Laws* I 625E: “pólemos aei pâsi dià bíou xunechês esti pròs apâsas tàs póleis.”

³⁶ *Laws* II 656D-657B. Compare *Laws* VII 799A-B, where the discussion is about the need to conserve and continue the virtues of the good society even in music, which is the outward expression of the ways of good or bad men.

³⁷ Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, p. 223.

³⁸ *Politicus* 290C-E. The Greek words rendered in the Loeb edition by “holiest and most national” (etc.) are: “semnótata kai málista pátria tôn archaíôn thusiôn”.

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