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Fictions of Cultural Authority

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Abstract: The interactions between Greece and the East in fictional narrative remains problematic, because however scrupulous our attempts to disambiguate the ‘Greece’ interacting with the East, or to insist on Greek regional and temporal pluralities, the simple fact of one language versus many undercuts good intentions. Anyone writing in Greek (whatever his native language, cultural traditions, or time of composition) must have had a Greek education. This means exposure to and de facto absorption of the same but quite limited number of texts and the values thus encoded. As a result, a more or less unified set of assumptions are attached to writing a narrative in Greek—whether we want to imagine this as a full-blown paideia, or simply an inevitable cultural shorthand. If we shift our focus to a non-Greek perspective, a more useful question might be: what aspects of our non-Greek partners within the contact zone appear in Greek narratives (writ large), and to what extent are these narratives typical of the narrative fictions of that partner? In what follows I pursue this line of thought with focus on one ‘East’—Egypt—by considering first how Egyptians represent themselves in their own fictions before discussing the intricate levels of reception of these Egyptians within the milieu of Greek writing from Herodotus to the novels.

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Greece's literary fascination with Egypt began well before novel writing commenced. As early as the fifth century BCE, Herodotus devoted the second book of his *Histories* to Egypt, and in his presentation of native priests as the repositories of otherwise inaccessible historical and sacred knowledge and by his inclusion of picaresque tales like those about the pharaoh Rhampsinitus,¹ he replicates salient features of Egyptian self-representation. The Setne Khaemuas tales will serve to illustrate this point.² Originally, Khaemuas was the High Priest of Ptah in Memphis, who devoted his time to preserving the even earlier Egyptian past and recorded his efforts in inscriptions on statues and monuments for posterity. In the Ptolemaic period, if not earlier, he came to be the main character in what appears to have been a cycle of tales of magic and adventure, two of which have survived in considerable part.³

The first opens with Khaemuas searching for the magic book of Thoth. Entering a tomb, he encountered the ghosts of the tomb's owner, Naneferkheptah, his wife and son, and learns their history: Naneferkheptah himself had earlier searched for the book and recovered it from the depths of the sea. It now resided in his tomb. But by his theft he incurred the wrath of Thoth, and lost his wife and son, whose bodies were never recovered. Khaemuas plays a board game for the book, but when he loses, he steals it. In revenge Naneferkheptah, who even in death had retained his magic powers, contrives a punishment: Khaemuas finds himself fatally attracted to a woman of unsurpassed beauty, Tabubu, whom he saw within the precincts of the temple of Ptah in Memphis. But at the climactic moment, she disappears into thin air. Whereupon Setne finds himself lying naked on the ground as the pharaoh strolls by.⁴ Much chastened, Khaemuas returns the book, retrieves the bodies of Naneferkheptah's wife and son from Coptos and entombs them with him in Memphis. The second tale featured Khaemuas' son Si-Osire, who is in reality the son of the god Osiris, as the name (Si = son) makes clear. He has been made incarnate to defeat a Nubian sorcerer bent on destroying Egypt. The tale concludes with a duel between the two in which the more potent magic of Si-Osire defeats the Nubian.

These tales encapsulate a number of features of late Egyptian narrative that are deeply rooted in cultural circumstance. The characters tend to be high priests of the great shrines at Memphis or Heliopolis; they are skilled in magic that can be used for good or ill; ghosts and tombs and the recovery of the past may drive events. Characters are seekers after or possessors of knowledge that is usually secret or ancient or both. Egypt for millennia had

¹ Both Rhamsinitus and the thief (2.121) and Rhampsinitus playing dice with Demeter (Isis) in the underworld (2.122) have clear Egyptian analogues (see Lloyd 1975: 2.52-9).

² Khaemuas was the fourth son of Ramses II, the new kingdom pharaoh who ruled from 1279-45 BCE. Sem, Setem, Setna, and Setne are different vocalizations of the same priestly title.

³ Simpson 2003: 453-89 and Hoffmann and Quack 2007: 118-52.

⁴ Simpson 2003: 466.

been invested in tombs to preserve the body after death, but equally invested in discovering and preserving its own past. After the Persian and Greek conquests, when its long history as an independent country had come to an end, the priesthoods were left largely to their own devices under occupying governments; temples continued to be built, and scribal elites, particularly those attached to the Houses of Life, where sacred texts were stored, annotated, and copied, stepped up their efforts to gather and preserve the writings of the past. This last practice influenced the ways in which theoretically non-fictional writings might present themselves. *P. Oxy.* 1381 is an example. The surviving text is an aretology of the god Imouthes-Asclepius. In the framing narrative, a priest of the god explains that he found the aretology in an old book that was originally composed in the time of the fourth-dynasty pharaoh, Menkhaure. Subsequently the book was discovered and restored by Nectanebo (the figure who occurs also in the *Alexander Romance*), and now it resides in the care of the priests of the god. The author acts under a divine compulsion to make this translation—the god had come to him in a dream insisting that he complete the work (lines 107-40). Demotic papyri tell similar tales: the *Book of the Temple* is a manual of an ideal temple that begins with a frame in which Hardjedef, the son of another fourth-dynasty pharaoh, Cheops, is the author of a decree found in a ruined temple in Heliopolis.⁵ A more mundane version of Khaemuas' book of Thoth's wisdom was in wide circulation in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.⁶ It purported to be an instruction from the god ("he who praises knowledge") to a mortal ("he who loves knowledge") and to cover subjects like the scribal craft, sacred geography, the underworld, wisdom, and prophesy.

Though filtered through a Greek cultural lens, this Egypt pervades the *Histories*. Herodotus relies on priests and temples as authoritative sources of information (e.g., 2.142-4) and because of its undeniable antiquity he even derived some Greek religious practices from Egyptian (e.g., 2.171). Magic and ghosts are in short supply, but tombs and trickery are not. A century later Plato presents a more sober Egypt in the interlocked frames of the *Timaeus* and now incomplete *Critias* as a prelude to the myth of Atlantis. In conversation with Socrates, Timaeus, and Hermocrates, Critias relates a story told to him by his grandfather, who heard it from Solon (*Timaeus* 21a6-25d5). When Solon was visiting Egypt, a priest from the temple of Neith (Athena) in Sais informed him about the antiquity and interrelatedness of Athens and Sais.⁷ According to the priest, Egypt had a record system that allowed it access to the past with authority, and it had a hereditary priesthood to serve as the guardian of knowledge. In the dialogue, the age of Egypt and its stability guaranteed the even older history of Athens, which Greeks themselves had long forgotten, and by extension the values of that older Greek place.

Similarly with the story of the invention of writing: Theuth/Thoth (*Phaedr.* 274c5-275b1) was the patron of scribes, and by virtue of his relationship with writing, the Egyptian divinity of knowledge, both open and secret. Plato at least pretends to be suspicious of writing, since writing encourages a false sense of what is real (accessible only by the act of recollection),

⁵ Hoffman 2000: 125-7.

⁶ See Jasnow and Zauzich 2005.

⁷ The temple was well known in antiquity, and Neith was regularly identified with Athena (see Hdt. 2.170 and 175).

and even places this doubt (which echoes Socrates) in the mouth of the Egyptian king Thamus,⁸ to whom Theuth brings his invention. Yet it is that very fact of writing (in the *Timaeus*) that permits the Egyptian priest to speak with authority, and it is the Egyptian ability (conveyed by writing) to stabilize artistic codes that is for the Athenian stranger an object of admiration in the *Laws* (656d1-7b10). In Plato's fictions Egyptian priesthoods and writing systems, with their unique access to the past, serve as exempla for his own articulation of what constitutes well-regulated societies. Herodotus and Plato thus grant to Egyptian priests enunciative authority within their own texts, conceding to them—or at least employing them to give voice to—knowledge to which Greeks had no access.

This reception of Egypt becomes more pronounced in later writers like Plutarch. His essay *On Isis and Osiris* sets out to translate what are perceived as significant (however foreign) religious myths and rituals not just into a Greek vernacular but into a Greek philosophical language. Plutarch may have been following Plato's lead in according a genuinely serious status to typical Egyptian behaviors, but in the process he demonstrates considerable familiarity with Egyptian narratives—particularly the New Kingdom story known as the *Contendings of Horus and Seth* and probably *the Lamentations for Osiris* and *the Tale of the Two Brothers*. Like Herodotus, he could have acquired this material from oral sources, since he supposedly traveled to Egypt, but he is just as likely to have acquired it through previous Greek writing on Egyptian subjects.⁹ Plutarch goes well beyond Plato: in addition to Solon, he claims that Thales, Eudoxus, Plato, and Pythagoras had all gone to Egypt and learned wisdom from the priests.¹⁰ If we correct for genre and narrative strategies, these three Greek writers are remarkably consistent in their representation of Egyptian priests and their knowledge, and there is a high degree of overlap with the ways such figures were actually represented in indigenous writing, although corpses, tombs, and magic tend to be excluded.¹¹

At once the most complete Greek fictional account we have of Egyptian priests and magic, and one that speaks with the greatest cultural authority, is Nectanebo as presented in the *Alexander Romance*. Its Egyptian origin is undeniable and Demotic versions of it and the *Dream of Nectanebo* continue to come to light.¹² It would seem to have belonged initially to a set of fictions intended to prop up Egypt's image (for Egyptians) after the Persian conquest and the fall of the last independent pharaoh, but it was also an attempt to position Alexander as the legitimate heir to the pharaonic dynasties. Within the tale there is no conflict between Nectanebo II as pharaoh and Nectanebo as astrologer and magician. The one profession succeeds the other seamlessly. As pharaoh he employed magic to defeat his enemies by filling a bowl with water, fashioning enemy ships of wax and then destroying them.¹³ However, the gods finally desert Egypt, and he flees to Macedon disguised as a προφήτης, or priest—an obvious choice, because the pharaoh was de facto a high priest—and fathers

⁸ On the name see Hoffmann and Quack 2007: 164 n. 282.

⁹ Gwyn-Griffiths 1970: 195-218.

¹⁰ In *DIO* §10 the name of Solon's priestly informant is given as Sonkhis the Saite.

¹¹ Plutarch allegorizes what he can and adds a disclaimer on the rest, see, e.g., §20.

¹² See Hoffmann and Quack 2007: 162-7; Jasnow 1997; and Ryholt 1998.

¹³ The ritual fashioning and subsequent destruction of figures of an enemy was well attested, see Ritner 1995:161-7.

Alexander. In Macedon Nectanebo persuades Philip that Olympias' pregnancy was divinely ordained by sending first a hawk¹⁴ to tell the absent Philip that Olympias is pregnant, and when Philip balks, Nectanebo turns himself into a serpent that coils up at Olympias' feet.¹⁵ At this Philip acknowledges the divinity if not legitimacy of the heir's conceiving. This is rather tame by Egyptian narrative standards, and, in fact, Nectanebo fathers Alexander not by magic, but by deception. When Olympias consults Nectanebo about her childlessness; he persuades her that the god Amun desires her, induces a dream to that effect, and after she consents to experience the god's 'real' presence, Nectanebo himself, decked out in the theriomorphic mask of the ram-god, obliges her. The result is Alexander. As John Ray puts it:

This neatly combines the historical link between Alexander and the oracle of Ammon at Siwa with the myth of the divine birth of the Pharaoh...It had the advantage of turning Alexander into an Egyptian, with the right to rule the country in his turn...it was as if Egypt could only be conquered by one of her own sons.¹⁶

The Nectanebo episode of the *Alexander Romance*, then, not only presents an Egyptian version of Greek historical events, but assimilates Alexander into an Egyptian ideological landscape, where his outsider status is negated or erased by making him the ultimate insider. While Nectanebo may be less admirable than Plato's or Plutarch's Egyptians, his powers are not in doubt.

If we turn to the Greek and Roman fictional narratives that are roughly coincident in time with Plutarch, we find that the potency of Egyptian priests continues to manifest itself. In the final book of Apuleius *Metamorphoses*, for example, the main character, Lucius, is liberated from his ass form after a vision of Isis, in gratitude for which he not only converts to her worship, he becomes a priest of her cult in Rome. The very popularity and spread of Isis cult guaranteed that many aspects of Apuleius' narrative would have been familiar to his audience, and in fact, his descriptions of priestly appearance and ascetic behaviors correspond to what is known about Egyptian temple life: incubation and prophetic dreams, the wearing of animal masks to simulate the presence of the Egyptian theriomorphic deities (particularly, Anubis and Hathor), ritual implements, sacred books written in hieroglyphics, and magic spells.¹⁷ But the Isis book creates a sense of unease for modern critics—does Lucius undergo a true conversion, or is it part of an elaborate charade to tease the reader? Unease results not only from the incongruity of Lucius' previous adventures as an ass juxtaposed to serious conversion, but because the cult asks the Greek reader to enter into an alien and unfamiliar world—an Egyptian world—where people look, behave, and talk differently.¹⁸ However, Apuleius may have entered that world naturally. He was a resident of North Africa, accused of and tried for dabbling in magic, with sufficient interest in and/or affiliation with Hermes (Asclepius) cult that subsequent Greek and Christian sources could

¹⁴ *AR* 1.8. Nectanebo was worshipped as the Horus falcon at Edfu, see Ray 2002: 121-2.

¹⁵ *AR* 1.10.

¹⁶ Ray 2002: 128.

¹⁷ Gwyn Griffiths 1975: 217-8

¹⁸ Hence Winkler's interest in the semiotics of baldness (1985: 224-7); in contrast, see Plutarch's explanation of priestly purity, *DIO* §4.

attribute the Hermetic tract known as “Asclepius” to his authorship.¹⁹ Apuleius is a figure, who, like his protagonist, had considerable curiosity about a wide variety of phenomena along a continuum bounded by philosophy at one end and the occult at the other, and was—depending on your point of view—either pluralistic or indiscriminating in his tastes, but the tastes he reflects and his narrative incorporation of both serious philosophy and magic (not to mention salacious humor) finds a ready parallel in fictions like that of Setne Khaemuas.

In the Greco-Roman world the pervasiveness of Isis cult and its alien rituals led to misunderstandings and frequent allegations of chicanery. For example, in his *Jewish Antiquities* (18.63-8) Josephus relates an incident that led to the closing of the Isis temple in Rome. Paulina was a virtuous Roman matron devoted to Isis. Decius Mundus coveted her, but his approaches were repulsed. He then instructed his freedwoman to bribe the priests of Isis to inform Paulina that Isis’ divine companion, the god Anubis, wished to sleep with her. After consulting her husband, she acquiesced, and Mundus, now tricked out in the traditional theriomorphic mask of Anubis, spent the night with her in the temple, and so consummated his passion. When the treachery was revealed, Paulina’s husband appealed to the emperor Tiberius, who had the priests crucified and the cult expelled. In fact, Tacitus records in the *Annals* 2.85 that the cult was indeed expelled, though Josephus’ colorful anecdote was omitted.

Josephus’ Isiac priests, like Nectanebo, are engaging in genuine Egyptian religious practices though they have exchanged piety for deceit. This type appears also in Antonius Diogenes’ the *Unbelievable things beyond Thule*. Now surviving only in an epitome, testimonia, and at least four papyrus fragments,²⁰ it is assignable to the mid-second century CE.²¹ According to the epitome it falls into two discrete parts: the adventures of Deinias on the one hand and a sister-brother pair, Derkyllis and Mant(in)ias, on the other.²² Deinias and Derkyllis become lovers after they meet on Thule, where she recounts her adventures to him. Deinias then continues his adventures beyond Thule, while she and her brother return to their home, Tyre, where Deinias later joins them. A central character in the story is an Egyptian priest, Paapis.²³ It is difficult to estimate his role in the novel, though within the brother-sister tale is must have been extensive. Like Nectanebo, he has left Egypt when the country was in turmoil, and perhaps at the time when independent rule had come to an end, though Photius does not make this explicit. Paapis fled to Tyre, where Derkyllis’ family befriended him. He apparently rewarded their *philoxenia* by persuading Derkyllis and Mant(in)ias to increase their parents’ longevity with a spell of his providing, but in the event it served only to cast

¹⁹ Fowden 1993: 10.

²⁰ See Stephens-Winkler 1995: 101-57 and *P. Oxy.* 70. 4760 and 4761 for more recent fragments.

²¹ Bowie 2002: 58-60.

²² In Photius the name is Mantinias, in *P. Oxy.* 70. 4760 Mantias. See the discussion in that edition (2006:10).

²³ The name, Paapis, occurs in Manetho and Josephus, as that of the father of a famous sage, Amenophis, who was involved in the cleansing of the lepers from Egypt (fr. 54 Waddell). This Paapis cannot be the same man, but the choice of a name with historical associations may have lent a semblance of plausibility to the fiction.

them into a deathlike sleep. Derkyllis and her brother were then forced to flee Tyre. In the course of a series of increasingly improbable adventures, they again encountered Paapis, and this time they escaped with his satchel of herbs and spells.²⁴ Paapis catches up with them on Thule, and turns them into zombies—they die each day and live by night—by spitting into their faces. Throuskanos, who is in love with Derkyllis, in his outrage at this act, kills Paapis, and in his grief at Derkyllis' seeming death, kills himself as well. Yet another character retrieves the satchel and discovers how to reverse the spell on Derkyllis and Mantinias, and later their parents. Paapis does not fare any worse in Greek fictions than such a character would have in Egyptian, but he is completely separated from his own cultural milieu, where there would doubtless have been a good Egyptian priest-magician to counteract his spells. Instead he encounters a sword-wielding Greek.

Whether we choose to admire their learning or great them with skepticism and incredulity, all of these characters are represented as possessing powers and knowledge that Greeks do not. It would be a mistake to assume that they are merely projections of Greek chauvinism, because so much of what may seem negative by a Greek standard is culturally acceptable if not admired by an Egyptian. Paapis' behavior as priest and magician, for example, conforms to Egyptian ritual logic: spitting was a well-documented ritual practice to inflict harm, while books of spells were studied and copied in temple libraries.²⁵ But the relative cultural authority that these types of Egyptian characters have been granted in Greek writing—whether for good or ill—disappears when we turn to the five Greek novels that survive intact. In the novels of Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus, and Achilles Tatius the protagonists may experience hair-raising adventures in Egypt—traveling from Tyre to Alexandria, the Delta, and penetrating as far south as Memphis and Coptos. But there is little of the Egypt of arcane knowledge, temples, or magic. Instead there are Delta-dwelling robber bands known as *boukoloi*, who must have belonged to the Greeks' recent historical experience of Egypt.²⁶ In comparison to Herodotus, who details temples and temple worship, divinities, monuments, and unique religious behaviors, these idealizing novels erase Egypt's particularity. For three of them this shift in how to represent an 'authentic' Egypt makes sense. The presence of native priests and magic, to judge from Antonius Diogenes or Apuleius, would surely have altered the nature of the fictions.

However, this shift does pose questions for Heliodorus' *Ethiopica*. The bulk of his novel is not only set in Egypt, one of its three main characters, Kalasiris,²⁷ is supposed to have been an Egyptian high priest of Isis—although he is neither bald nor beardless. He claims that he left Egypt because because of carnal temptations, and in his place one of his two sons held his office, while his other son became the leader of a band of *boukoloi*. Kalasiris, like Nectanebo and Paapis, is a priest in exile, but nothing about his or his sons' behavior resembles his fictional counterparts. However convoluted or even deceitful his narrative may be, his behavior is often the inverse of other fictional Egyptians. For example, his excuse for

²⁴ *P. Oxy.* 70. 4760, fr. 2.4-9 mentions Paapis and his satchel of books.

²⁵ Ritner 1995: 82-7.

²⁶ Winkler 1980: 175-81, Rutherford 1997: 206-8.

²⁷ *Kalasiries*, according to Hdt 2.164, were one of the two classes of Egyptian military. See Rutherford 1997: 208 on Egyptian priests as warriors.

his exile—fleeing the seductive lures of the beautiful Rhodopis in the temple of Isis (2.25)—is clearly reminiscent of the seduction of Setne Khaemuas by Tabubu in the temple of Ptah.²⁸ But unlike Khaemuas, who succumbs with enthusiasm before he repents, Kalasiris sins only in thought, choosing a life of wandering, during which he reaches another temple community, Delphi. There he expounds Egyptian lore about the stars and the Nile to those in residence. But as Richard Hunter remarks:

Though [Kalasiris] prefaces his account of the Nile as ‘everything I knew, all that is recorded...in sacred texts, things of which none but members of the priestly caste may read and learn’ (2.28.2), he proceeds to give an account which would surprise no Greek interested in the subject.²⁹

To the extent that it involves legitimate priestly knowledge, it expresses a superficial assimilation of Egyptian ideas to Greek modes of thought, thus removing from Kalasiris any bid for cultural authority at the same time that he asserts it. Other elements of supposedly real Egyptian practice are dismissed as evil and unworthy of true priestly behavior (3.16).

On one level this may result from a straightforward need to recuperate suspect Egyptian behaviors for a Greek audience. Yet an incident at the end of book 6, where an old woman practices necromancy to learn from her dead son the fate of another son, raises more questions than it answers.

Supposing herself now secure against any intrusion or observation, the old woman began by digging a pit, to one side of which she lit a fire. After positioning her son’s body between the two, she took an earthenware bowl from the tripod that stood beside her and poured a libation of honey into the pit, likewise of milk from the second bowl, and lastly of wine from the third. Then she took a cake made out of fine wheat flour and shaped it into an effigy of a man, crowned it with bay and fennel, and flung it into the pit (6.14.3, J. Morgan, trans.).

Chariclea is intrigued and wanted to ask the old woman about Theagenes, but Kalasiris excoriates the old woman’s behavior in language that he had used earlier in book 3.16:

Saying that the mere sight of such things was unclean and that he could only tolerate it because he had no alternative; it was not proper for a priest to take part in or to be present at such rites; the prophetic powers of priests proceeded from legitimate sacrifices and pure prayer, whereas those of the profane were obtained literally by crawling upon the ground and skulking among the corpses, as the accidents of circumstances had permitted them to see this Egyptian woman doing (6.14.7, J. Morgan, trans.).

Unfortunately, the distinction Kalasiris makes did not exist within Egyptian thought. What is generally translated as magic—*heka*—according to Robert Ritner was:

Amoral and quintessentially effective, a power to which gods, men, and all of nature were subject, it was still the same force whether used by god, king, priest, private

²⁸ See Rutherford 1997: 205 and n. 8.

²⁹ 1998: 52.

individual, rebel, or foreign enemy, whether hostile or beneficent, whether sanctioned or suppressed.³⁰

The manipulation of this ‘energy’ constituted a sophisticated system of practical theology, a theurgy in which the priest performed the ‘power of the gods’. If Zeus has *kratos* and *biê* sitting by his throne, the pharaoh had *heka* and *sia*—magic power and knowledge—at his side. Priests, particularly the scribes of the House of Life, were trained in ritual magic and preserved the texts that contained their spells. To the extent that the old Egyptian woman was successful, she was no different than the priests, and her knowledge and theirs would, in principle, have been the same, and despite Kalasiris’ abhorrence of the practice, the rite is efficacious—it is from this source that he learns of the fate of his own sons.

Egyptian magic is a technology with an inherent logic that made it effective; but the rituals Heliodoros describes are over-determined if not nonsensical, and as a priest he should have understood the technology as well as or better than the old woman. She her rites begins by imitating the opening of *Odyssey* 11: Odysseus digs a trench, filling it with milk, honey, wine, and barley in order to summon the ghosts of the dead. Within its Homeric milieu Odysseus’ actions were potent and brought him the desired information. So prima facie this rite alone would have been enough. Next the old woman makes an effigy—probably meant to serve as the repository for the ghost of the dead man—that she throws into the pit.³¹ Finally she reanimates her son’s body. This act had already made its way into Roman fiction at least a century earlier. Apuleius, in his *Metamorphoses*, relates an incident in which an Egyptian priest of Isis, Zatchlas, reanimates a corpse so that the dead man could point to his murderer (2.28-30), and at least in Apuleius it is packaged as an act performed in the service of justice. Probably a genuine Egyptian ritual underpins these examples: the Opening of the Mouth ceremony that was performed on the mummified dead, even though that ceremony was not intended to reanimate the corpse, but to awaken the dead person’s *ka* (or soul) in the afterlife.³² Heliodoros’ old woman thus employs three types of necromancy—the first to recall ghosts, the second to provide a body for a specific ghost, and the last to reanimate a specific body. Only the last seems to achieve its goal, so why include the first two, which are in any case unnecessary?

This ritual profusion could result from the author’s lack of knowledge about true Egyptian magic practices, or alternatively, since what is related is not particularly arcane or secret, it could have been devised to blur cultural distinctions by deploring as Egyptian what was patently Greek. It is also possible that Kalasiris was engaging in deliberate obfuscation. In the third century CE, the Roman authorities made increasingly serious efforts to ban magic

³⁰ 1995: 247.

³¹ Egyptians might petition the dead, or use various parts of a corpse in certain spells (see Ritner 1995: 178-9). Also, tiny replicas of humans (*ushabtis*) were buried with the well-to-do to serve them in the afterlife, but they were not employed in necromancy. In fact, this passage provides a unique ‘Egyptian’ example of the use of a doll to represent the ghost of the dead; it was more commonly attested in Greco-Roman practice (see Ogden 2004: 187 and 202-8).

³² Pinch 1995: 152. The ceremony came to be performed for all Egyptian dead.

practice—a famous edict from Egypt in 199 CE makes it a capital crime.³³ Thus the fact that priestly learning would automatically have included the study and practice of magic probably encouraged strategies of deniability. What better way to deflect attention from Egyptian magic practices than (1) to distance them from true priestly behaviors and (2) to rewrite them as Homeric or as part of a generalized hocus pocus that was already familiar from Greek fictions? Yet in deploring magic practices Heliodorus deprives Egyptian priests of a culturally distinctive source of power, and that coupled with his already diluted priestly wisdom leaves them as nothing more than impotent relics of a once powerful culture.

What unites the novels of Chariton, Xenophon, Longus, and Achilles Tatius is the king's X of Hellenocentrism: Greek breeding lines allow the more or less anonymous teen lovers in these novels to enter a non-Greek environment and emerge intact, and in this respect their idealized love serves as a metonym for an ethnically intact Greekness in an ethnically fragmented world. The *Ethiopica* seems to question this idealizing model at the same time that it also seems to reinforce it. If the narrative itself moves from mainland Greece to Ethiopia, the new king and queen of that land will be a well-born ethnic Greek (Theagenes) and a white-skinned, Greek-speaking girl, who cannot speak her native language and does not even have an Ethiopian name. They do not return, but then they may not need to. They bring their Hellenic identities with them. Does Heliodorus seemingly radical inclusion of one of the most alien and distinctive figures of Greek writing—an Egyptian priest—within his own novel do no more than reinforce this model of Hellenism? Kalasiris, after all, chose to put off his Egyptian priestly appearance and distinctive beliefs, unlike Chariclea who was born white and raised in Greece from infancy. Or does Heliodorus create an Egyptian character whose embrace of Greek rationalism and rejection of Egyptian superstitions is cunningly constructed to remind us of the extent to which both categories are fictions?

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³³ P. Yale inv. 299, see Rea 1977, though necromancy is not one of the practices listed. See also *P. Oxy.* 70. 4760 n. 4-8.

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