The Once and Future King of Egypt. 'Apocalyptic' Literature in Egypt and the Construction of the Alexander Romance

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Beyond Conflicts

Cultural and Religious Cohabitations in Alexandria and Egypt between the 1st and the 6th Century CE

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The Once and Future King of Egypt: Egyptian "Messianism" and the Construction of the *Alexander Romance*[*]

Philippe Matthey

1. The Egyptian origins of the *Alexander Romance*

The origins and exact circumstances of the formation of the famous narrative known as the *Alexander Romance* have eluded specialists for quite a long time now. This piece of literary fiction, which tells a highly imaginative version of the Macedonian conqueror's life and deeds, was composed in Greek through the combination of multiple and heterogeneous sources, and was at first falsely attributed to the Greek historian and Alexander's companion Callisthenes. The narrative progressively encountered an incredible success as the Greek original was augmented and then translated, adapted and rewritten quite a few time in various vernacular languages throughout Europe, Africa and Asia until the end of the Middle Ages.[1]

In its first, Hellenic version, the *Alexander Romance* is known from a large number of manuscripts, split up in three main families, which often present considerable differences in the way they narrate Alexander's legendary adventures. What is probably the oldest version of the Greek *Alexander Romance* and the richest in details concerning the Egyptian background of the story is the recension α, which has been reconstructed from a single manuscript, Parisinus G. 1711, also known as text A.[2] Although this manuscript is dated from the 11th cent. CE, the text itself was probably composed between the 2nd and the 4th cent. CE, with many elements pointing to an early stage of redaction in Alexan-

[*] This article is a revised version of "Le retour du roi. Littérature 'apocalyptique' égyptienne et construction du Roman d'Alexandre." Pages 154–190 in *Alexandrie la divine. Sagesses barbares. Échanges et réappropriations dans l'espace culturel gréco-romain*. Edited by Charles Méla, Frédéric Möri, Sydney H. Aufrère. Geneva: La Baconnière, 2016.

[1] See Jouanno 2002.

[2] See the edition by Kroll 1926 and more recently Stoneman 2007 (with an introduction, commentaries and complete Italian translation). An English translation of some passages of text A can be found in Stoneman 1991. It should be noted that the Parisinus G. 1711 has several lacunae, and that Kroll reconstructed the Greek text with the help of two later translations of the text A's *Romance*: one in Latin by Julius Valerius (3rd cent. CE; Latin text and Italian translation in Stoneman 2007), and the other in Armenian (5th cent. CE; Wolohojian 1969).

dria during the early years of the 3rd cent. BCE.[3] The other main versions – the recensions β (with sub-recension λ) and ε (with sub-recension γ) – were mostly compiled during the Byzantine period.[4] For the purposes of the present article, only the most comprehensive version of the Greek *Alexander Romance* conserved in text L (Leidensis Vulc. 93, manuscript from the 15th cent. CE) will be considered: an atypical but very complete version belonging to the recension β, it is a rewriting of the story dated from the 5th cent. CE, which pays slightly less attention to the Egyptian background as what is depicted in the text A.[5]

One episode of the *Romance* in particular bears traces of heavy Egyptian influence. It is the famous introduction featuring pharaoh Nectanebo (1.1–14), a character inspired by the historical figure of Nectanebo II, last native ruler of Egypt from 361/360 to 343 BCE before the Second Persian domination. This episode presents a pseudo-historical narrative of the events leading to Alexander the Great's birth, beginning with the depiction of Nectanebo as a potent wizard who uses spells to keep Egypt's enemies at bay. Soon, however, the pharaoh has to relinquish his crown and to flee out of his country after realising that his own gods are backing up the Persian invaders, for reasons that remain unexplained in the *Romance*. An Egyptian prophecy, however, then reveals that the pharaoh will one day come back rejuvenated under the appearance of a younger king, who will avenge his predecessor by defeating the Persians. Meanwhile, Nectanebo, exiled in Macedonia and established at the royal court in Pella under the guise of an Egyptian prophet and astrologist, uses his wiles and his magical powers to convince the queen Olympias that she is fated to have intercourse with the god Ammon. He then disguises himself as Ammon before entering the queen's bed, thus becoming the true father of Alexander the Great, whose eventual conquest of Egypt can be presented as the return of the rightful king.

Such an intriguing narrative has quite often been understood as the result of a certain Egyptian "nationalistic propaganda,"[6] the product of an Egyptian (sacerdotal) collective whose purpose was to forge a tool of cultural resistance against the hegemony of foreign Greek rulers.[7] To employ the notion of "nationalism," of course, is in itself somewhat anachronistic because it presupposes

[3] For further discussions on the date of composition of the *Alexander Romance*'s (Hellenistic or Roman period), see Jouanno 2002: 13–17 and 26–28; Stoneman 2007: xxv–xxxiv; Stoneman 2009.

[4] On the textual tradition of the *Alexander Romance*, see Stoneman 2007: lxxiii–lxxxiii. A fourth tradition – recension *δ which was based on recension α but is no longer extant – was the main source used for the *Alexander Romance*'s other translations.

[5] Editions by Bergson 1965 and Stoneman 2007. Translations in Stoneman 1991 (English) and Stoneman 2007 (Italian).

[6] Whether the concept of "propaganda" is actually relevant to Hellenistic and Roman-era Egypt is discussed in Simpson 1996 and Vernus 1995a.

[7] See Eddy 1961: 257–294 and Lloyd 1982: 46–50. The theory is still advocated in Huss 2000: 123–126 and evoked in Whitmarsh 2010: 407–408.

that the Egyptian society during the Ptolemaic period was clearly divided in two opposing ethnic groups, with the Greek-Macedonians settlers on one side and the native Egyptians on the other side.[8] The political and cultural landscape of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt is, indeed, often presented as one of strife and conflicts, with the indigenous Egyptians set up against the Greek and Roman "invaders:" the various revolutions that took place during the "Ptolemaic period," for instance, tend to confirm this perception; the most important among them being of course the establishment, during the reign of Ptolemy IV (between 205 and 186 BCE), of a "native" Egyptian counter-kingdom in Upper Egypt by the self-stylised pharaohs Haronnophris (Herwennefer) and Chaonnophris (Ankhwennefer). Recent studies, however, tend to downplay the Egyptian nationalistic elements of such revolts, and to emphasise their social and economical aspects: although Egyptian "revolutionary" movements did integrate anti-Greek or anti-Alexandrian feelings, it's possible that they were being chiefly directed against the privileged status of the Greeks and of the Greek *poleis* instead of purely motivated by a "nationalistic" agenda.[9]

Elements that we would today call "nationalistic" did of course play a role in the historical insurrections and in the Egyptian literary bedrock on which the prologue to the *Alexander Romance* was built. But, as the present article proposes to argue, such "nationalistic" features might more precisely be coined as "religious" or "ethic" and their presence considered as the by-products of a long-standing Egyptian sacerdotal ideology whose origins can be traced back all the way to the New Kingdom, and which paralled similar ideologies developed at the same time in other regions of the ancient Near East.

To qualify the Nectanebo story in the *Alexander Romance* as the expression of a nationalistic conflict between Greeks and Egyptians, then, would probably be an oversimplification. Indeed, it seems that the Nectanebo prologue itself could serve two different but tightly interwoven purposes: it appears on one side to cater to an Egyptian readership by making fun of the Macedonian royal power through the description of Olympias and Philipp II's deception at the hands of Nectanebo, and by claiming that the former Egyptian sovereign gained his power back through the actions of his son Alexander. One the other side, though, it can also be understood as a way to legitimate the Ptolemaic rule in Egypt by presenting the Lagid kings as direct heirs to the pharaohs of old, rather as mere foreign invaders.

Considering the inherent double meaning of this narrative, the present article proposes to refrain from analysing it as the result of a deliberate propaganda

[8] For differing point of views on the importance of "nationalism" in Hellenistic Egypt, see Veïsse 2007 and McGing 2012. On the complex question of ethnic identities and "racial" stratification in Hellenistic Egypt, see for instance the critical studies of Gorre 2007; Torallas Tovar 2010; Tallet 2011; Fischer-Bovet 2013.

[9] See Clarysse 2004; Veïsse 2004.

project constructed in reaction to particular historical events (in this case the Lagid, and then Roman, domination of Egypt). Instead, it will aim to further delve into the complex question of the Egyptian sources of the Nectanebo prologue[10] and to consider it as the product of what Lévi-Strauss called a *bricolage*, assembled without a specific purpose through the workings of the mythopoietic *pensée sauvage* and the borrowings of literary components and sacerdotal traditions present in the intellectual horizon of Hellenistic and Roman Alexandria.[11]

2. "Apocalyptic" literature in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt

Among the main influences behind the prologue of the *Alexander Romance* are some texts belonging to the corpus of Graeco-Egyptian literature known as "apocalyptic" or "pseudo-prophetic."[12] The intrigue told in the Nectanebo story presents strong similarities with the core elements of this literary "genre:"[13] an impious pharaoh somehow realises that the Egyptian gods have decided to cast him down and let Egypt be invaded by chaos-sowing foreigners, but is also informed through a prophecy that justice and balance will eventually be restored in the future with the advent of a saviour king. Such a narrative framework is also consistent with a form of theodicy that was particularly important in Egypt during the Late Period, a trend describing the ideal pharaoh as a model of piety

[10] On the Egyptian influences on the *Alexander Romance*, see Merkelbach 1977; Barns 1955; Jasnow 1997; Dillery 2004; Matthey 2011; Moyer 2011; Rutherford 2013.

[11] Lévi-Strauss 1962: 26–36. In the prologue to the *Alexander Romance*, the descriptions concerning the "magical" operations accomplished by Nectanebo, particularly the so-called "lecanomancy," clearly appear to be reinterpretations of rituals belonging to the Egyptian sacerdotal tradition (Matthey 2012: 194–228).

[12] On "apocalypticism" in Antiquity, and on the pertinence of applying this category to Egypt, see below, as well as Raphaël 1977; Smith 1982; Hellholm 1989; Collins, McGinn, Stein 1998; Schipper 2002. In 1925, Chester McCown was the first to apply the designation "apocalyptic" to the Egyptian texts presenting similarities with the Judaeo-Christian apocalypses (Gr. *apokalypsis*, "revelation," in reference to the John's *Revelation*, 1st cent. CE), of which the oldest example would be *1 Enoch* (4th–3rd cent. BCE). See McCown 1925; Collins 1998. The Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" texts have some elements in common with the Judaeo-Christian genre, such as being heirs to earlier traditions of wisdom and prophetic texts, and being characterised by the integration of catastrophic descriptions in a pseudo-prophecy (a prophecy *ex eventu* or *post eventum*, written after the event it describes). "Apocalypses" of both traditions often also feature messianic announcements about the advent of a saviour figure and pay great attention to a theonomic conception of history according to which all events are planned in advance by the divinity (on the notions of theodicy and theonomy see further below, as well as Enmarch 2008 and Leuenberger 2012).

[13] "Literature," in the present essay, should be understood in a very wide sense, embracing every written source that is not classified as "documentary." The notion of "genre" in the Egyptian literature, similarly, is also to be employed in a very loose manner. See Tait 1992.

and observance of the divine law.[14] Generally speaking, the production context of such "apocalyptic" literature, in Egypt and elsewhere in the world, has often been linked to historical situations of crisis or conflict, and understood as the expression of revolutionary aspirations by a community suffering from a real or imagined loss of its privileged status, for instance after a foreign invasion or a sudden social upheaval.[15] But the extent to which these perceived conflicts are actually authentic can widely vary: as the present paper proposes to show, Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" narratives should not be taken to face value.

The tentatively called "apocalyptic" or pseudo-prophetic literature from the Late Period and Graeco-Roman Egypt actually consists in a very small corpus: it is comprised of three main texts known as the *Demotic "Chronicle,"* the *Prophecy of the Lamb*, and the *Oracle of the Potter*, to which can be added for the purpose of this article the complex narrative ensemble formed by the introduction to the Greek *Alexander Romance* and the Greek and Demotic versions of a text known as *Nectanebo's Dream*.[16]

The oldest of these texts, and probably the most complex to analyse, is the so-called *Demotic "Chronicle,"* a sequence of oracular answers accompanied by their explanations, conserved on a unique and very fragmentary manuscript.[17] These oracles were assembled in "chapters" (Eg. *ḥw.t*) of which only half a dozen are still conserved: they concern the Egyptian kings of the 28th, 29th and 30th dynasties and predict in enigmatic terms that a period of troubles will be caused in Egypt because of the impious behaviour of an unnamed pharaoh who can only be one of the rulers of the 30th dynasty, most probably Nectanebo I. The wrongful pharaoh will abandon the (divine) law (Eg. *hp*), be cursed by the gods, and will be responsible for the invasion of his realm by various foreigners, namely the Medes (the Persians) and the Greeks.[18] But the oracle also announces that a new king will arise in the town of Herakleopolis and drive the foreign rulers out of Egypt while bringing happiness and order back to the country. In its present state, the text shows different layers of writing: the oracles of the chapters 6 to 8 are pronounced by the ram-god Harsaphes (Heryshef) in his temple of Herakleopolis, and the prediction concerning the advent of the

[14] Johnson 1983; Enmarch 2008.

[15] See Cohn 1957 and Lanternari 1960 for the first academic theories linking the production of world-wide "apocalyptic" literature to social revolutionary movements designed as "millenarian" or "messianic" (i.e. expecting the advent of a golden age or of a saviour leader). More recently, see also Landes 2011 and Lincoln 2013.

[16] Bergman 1989; Griffiths 1989; Collins 1998; Blasius, Schipper 2002; Ryholt 2010: 718–719. For recent translations of some of these texts, see Hoffmann, Quack 2007 (in German).

[17] P. Bibliothèque Nationale 215 = TM No. 48875, dated between the end of the Ptolemaic era and the second half of the 3rd cent. BCE. See Spiegelberg 1914; Johnson 1983; Kügler 1994; Hoffmann, Quack 2007: 183–191; Quack 2009.

[18] On the concept of *hep*-law, linked to the observance of Egyptian *Maat*, see Nims 1948 and Griffiths 1989: 281–282.

saviour king explicitely depicts him as a prophet of the same god from Herakleopolis. In the other conserved chapters, however, the allusions to Heryshef and Herakleopolis are dropped altogether, probably because the *"Chronicle"* was updated and (re)written at a later time by authors who weren't interested anymore in referring to the Herakleopolitan background: it seems that the text was first composed under the reign of Nectanebo II as a requisitory against his immediate predecessors (Nectanebo I and Teos), but was then revised to address other topics such as the Persian domination and the arrival of Alexander the Great's armies.[19] Taken as a whole, however, the text's general theme seems to consist in a theory of Egyptian kingship according to which a pharaoh accomplishing good deeds (particularly towards the gods and their temples) is rewarded by a long and prosperous reign, while a ruler neglecting his duties leads the country to its downfall and its capture by foreign enemies.

The second text, known as the *Prophecy of the Lamb* or the *Lamb of Bocchoris*, is also conserved on a single fragmentary manuscript in Demotic.[20] It relates the story of a curse pronounced by a miraculous lamb in front of an Egyptian priest named Pasaenhor during the 6th reigning year of pharaoh Bakenref (Bocchoris, last pharaoh of the 24th dynasty from 718 to 712 BCE).[21] Inspired by the god Pre (Re), the lamb foretells a period of troubles in Egypt under the reign of Bocchoris, including a reversal of the social and moral norms, invasions by foreign armies (Assyrians, Medes and Greeks), and the pillage and plundering of the Egyptian temples and country. The lamb then dies and is buried in a golden shrine like a god, but not before having predicted his own return to bring back order to Egypt after a period of nine hundred years.[22] Even though the text of the *Prophecy of the Lamb* as such is only attested in a single manuscript, the story seems to have achieved a certain degree of popularity

[19] On the various writing stages of the *Demotic "Chronicle,"* see Quack 2009.

[20] P.Vindob.D 1000 = TM 48888; the scribe has dated the papyrus as having been written on the 1st of August in the year 4 CE. The composition of the text, however, probably goes back to the end of the Second Persian domination or the early years of the Lagid kings. See Kákosy 1981; Zauzich 1983; Thissen 1998; Simpson 2003: 445–449 (English translation).

[21] The prophecy is thus presented as having been pronounced during Bocchoris' final year of reign, just like in the cases of the foretelling revealed to Nectanebo in the *Prophecy of Petesis* (*Nectanebo's Dream*), and of his "discussion" with the Egyptian gods during his lecanomancy ritual in the *Alexander Romance* (see below). According to Manetho (fr. 66 and 67, *apud* Eusebius), Bocchoris was burned alive after having lost his throne to Shabaka, conqueror of Egypt and second pharaoh of the XXV (Nubian) dynasty. In a way, then, Bocchoris embodies another figure of the last native pharaoh before the invasion and domination of Egypt by foreigners, in this case by the Nubian pharaohs and then by the Assyrian kings (from ca. 710 to 656 BCE).

[22] Some consider that this mention of a nine-hundred years period could hint to a Graeco-Iranian influence in the composition of the *Prophecy of the Lamb*: it is the canonical length of zoroastrian cycle according to Plut. *Mor.* 370b–c (*Is. Os.* 47). See Griffiths 1989: 286; Hultgård 1998.

as it is referred to both in Manetho's *Aegyptiaca*[23] and in the Graeco-Egyptian apocalyptic text known as the *Oracle of the Potter*.[24] Another tradition attributed to Plutarch similarly evokes an Alexandrian expression, "the lamb spoke to you," which supposedly alluded to the prophecy revealed by a monstrous lamb to an anonymous pharaoh.[25] A last tradition of the 3rd cent. CE, finally, mentions the prophetic lamb of Bocchoris as a fabulous creature possessing eight legs, two tails, two heads and four horns.[26]

The third text, the *Oracle of the Potter*, is known through at least five fragmentary papyri dated between the 2nd cent. BCE and the 3rd cent. CE.[27] Although all copies of this tale are conserved in Greek, there is a good chance that it was translated from an Egyptian original.[28] The core narrative of all versions begins with the account of the encounter between a maddened potter and a pharaoh named Amenophis while the latter is visiting a sanctuary to Osiris and Isis on the "island of Helios." The potter, possessed by the god Hermes, utters a prophecy in front of the king revealing that Egypt will soon be laid to waste in a series of misfortunes apparently mirroring the way the potter's kiln was vandalised during the king's visit. Among the predicted calamities is the invasion by a foreign enemies referred to as "Typhonians,"[29] followers of the god Seth, and

[23] Manetho, fr. 64, 65a–b and b Waddell: "Bochchôris of Saïs, for 6 years (*44 years in Eusebius' version*): in his reign a lamb spoke [...] 990 years."

[24] P.Oxy. 22.2332, 32–34 = TM 64149: "But the one (ruling) for fifty-five years, because he is ours, will bring to the Greeks the evils which the lam{m}b announced to [B]acharis."

[25] Meyer 1909; Greek text in Crusius 1887: 12.

[26] Ael. *Nat. an.* 12.3.

[27] A first, anti-Alexandrian version of the text is conserved on three documents: two papyri from Vienna, P.Graf (G. 29787 = TM 68639, referred to as "P1" in Koenen's edition; 2nd cent. CE) and P.Rain.G. 19813 (TM 63927 or "P2;" 3rd cent. CE), and on P.Oxy. 22.2332v. (TM 64149 or "P3," late 3rd cent. CE). Fragments of another recension featuring anti-Jewish and pro-heliopolitan elements are conserved on two documents: the PSI 982 (CPJ 3.520 = TM 64035, or "P4;" dated either from the 3rd–2nd cent. BCE according to Koenen 2002, or from the 2nd-3rd cent. CE according to the TM database) and the (still unpublished) P.Oxy. [26] 3B.52.B (13) (a) (TM 68640 = "P5," 2nd cent. BCE). See Koenen 1968; Dunand 1977; Bohak 1995; Kerkeslager 1998 (English translation); Koenen 2002: as well as Harker 2003: 123, n. 132 for references to further manuscript fragments.

[28] The scribe of P. Rainer claims in the colophon of his manuscript that the Greek text was "translated as best as possible" (*methermeumene kata to dynaton*). The original Demotic version is thought to have been composed sometimes around the 2nd cent. BCE.

[29] The "Typhonians" are related to the Greeks in the anti-Alexandrian version (esp. P.Oxy. 22.2332, 2.33 = TM 64149), but are explicitely identifed as Jews in the anti-Jewish version, probably as a parallel to Manetho's "proto-apocalyptic" narrative concerning the Egyptian origins of the Jews: according to this story, "impure" or "polluted" Egyptians once joined with the invading "Shepherd kings," i.e. the historical Hyksos whose tutelary god incidently was Seth/Typhon, before they all were chased out of Egypt back to Jerusalem where they became the Jewish people (Manetho, fr. 54 Waddell, *apud* Jos. *C. Ap.* 1.26–31). See Volokhine 2007 and 2010.

"girdle-wearers" (*zonophoroi*).[30] The main recension of the story depicts how these Typhonians and their impious kings move the Egyptian capital from Memphis to a new city that can be identified as Alexandria,[31] before their eventual self-destruction allows for the return of Egypt's exiled cult images to Memphis and the fifty-five years long reign of a just king appointed by Isis and Helios. The epilogue of the story tells how the potter dies and is buried in Heliopolis by the pharaoh. Since the story of the *Oracle of the Potter* takes place in Heliopolis, it has been argued that the first version of the text was produced there by Egyptian priests devoted to Khnum, a god often depicted as a ram-headed potter.[32]

A few other texts can be added to this corpus of Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" texts, but the present article will focus on the fragmentary story that can be reconstructed through the comparison of the Egyptian episode of the *Alexander Romance*, the document known as the *Prophecy of Petesis* (or *Nectanebo's Dream*), and its sequel called *Nectanebo and the Oracle of Haroeris*.

3. Apocalyptic elements in the *Alexander Romance*

As mentioned above, the *Alexander Romance* begins with a presentation of Egypt and of the magical skills of its king, pharaoh Nectanebo. While he's usually able to single-handedly defend his country from any menacing armies thanks to his thaumaturgical powers, Nectanebo one day realises, as he performs his ritual, that his own gods are set against him and are protecting the Persian armada invading his land:

καὶ μόνος γενόμενος πάλιν τῇ αὐτῇ ἀγωγῇ χρησάμενος ἠτένισεν εἰς τὴν λεκάνην. καὶ ὁρᾷ τοὺς τῶν Αἰγυπτίων θεοὺς κυβερνῶντας τὰ πλοῖα τῶν πολεμίων βαρβάρων καὶ τὰ στρατόπεδα αὐτῶν ὑπ› αὐτῶν ὁδηγούμενα. ὁ δὲ Νεκτεναβὼ τῇ μαγείᾳ πολύπειρος ὢν ἄνθρωπος καὶ εἰθισμένος τοῖς θεοῖς αὐτοῦ ὁμιλεῖν, μαθὼν παρ› αὐτῶν ὅτι τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς Αἰγύπτου βασιλείας † εἰσίν †, ἐγκολπωσάμενος χρυσίον πολὺν καὶ ξυρησάμενος τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τὸν πώγωνα

[30] For the potential interpretations of this otherwise unattested term, see Clarysse 1991 (it might allude to policemen or soldiers) and Koenen 2002: 180, n. 4 (possible Greek translation of an old Egyptian expression referring to foreign enemies – *rmṯ ḫr ʿgśw* "men wearing a girdle"). See also Dunand 1977, 42–43 concerning the improbability of an Iranian influence to explain this expression (sometimes falsely interpreted as a reference to girdle-wearing daemons in a Zoroastrian prophecy).

[31] P.Oxy. 22.2332 ("P3" = TM 64149), 1.1–4 (transl. Kerkeslager 1998): "And he will rule Egypt [after he has enter]ed into the city that is being created, which [will] make the gods anew for itself after it has cast (as in a mold) its own f[o]rm." The expression *ktizomene[n] polin* "town under construction" corresponds to the Egyptian name of Alexandria, *rʿ–qdt* "construction, building site" (Hellenised form "Rhacotis;" see Chauveau 1999 and Depauw 2000). The reference to new gods being fabricated there is of course an allusion to the invention of Sarapis.

[32] Kerkeslager 1998: 68.

αὐτοῦ καὶ μεταμορφώσας ἑαυτὸν ἑτέρῳ σχήματι ἔφυγε διὰ τοῦ Πηλουσίου. [...] Οἱ οὖν Αἰγύπτιοι ἠξίουν τοὺς ὡσανεὶ θεοὺς αὐτῶν, τί ἄρα γέγονεν ὁ βασιλεὺς Αἰγύπτου. ἦν γὰρ πᾶσα ἡ Αἴγυπτος ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων πορθηθεῖσα. ὁ δὲ ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ τοῦ Σεραπείου θεὸς αὐτῶν λεγόμενος ἐχρησμοδότησεν αὐτοῖς εἰπών· "οὗτος ὁ φυγὼν βασιλεὺς ἥξει πάλιν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ οὐ γηράσκων ἀλλὰ νεάζων καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἡμῶν Πέρσας ὑποτάξει." καὶ συνεζήτουν τί ἄρα θέλει τὸ εἰρημένον αὐτοῖς. καὶ μὴ εὑρόντες γράφουσι τὸν δοθέντα αὐτοῖς χρησμὸν ἐπὶ τῇ βάσει τοῦ ἀνδριάντος Νεκτεναβῶ.

And when he (*Nectanebo*) was alone he made all his usual preparations and gazed into the bowl. There he saw the gods of Egypt steering the ships of the barbarians, and the armies under the command of the same gods. Nectanebo, sbeing a man experienced in magic and accustomed to talk with his gods, realised that the end of the Egyptian kingdom was at hand. He filled his garments with gold, and shaved his hair and beard. Thus transformed in appearance, he fled to Pelusium. […] Meanwhile, the Egyptians asked their so-called gods what had become of the King of Egypt, since all of Egypt had been overrun by the barbarians. And the self-styled god in the sanctuary of the Serapeum spoke an oracle to them: 'This king who has fled will return to Egypt not as an old man, but as a youth, and he will overcome our enemies the Persians.' They asked one another what the meaning of this saying might be; but, finding no answer, they wrote down the oracle that had been given to them on the pedestal of the statue of Nectanebo.[33]

And Sarapis' prophecy indeed comes true, albeit much later in the story, when the young Alexander arrives in Egypt some time later:

Ὁ δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος παραλαβὼν τὰ στρατεύματα ἐπείγετο εἰς τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἀπελθεῖν. καὶ ἐλθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰς Μέμφην τὴν πόλιν ἐνεθρονίασαν αὐτὸν οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι εἰς τὸ τοῦ Ἡφαίστου θρονιστήριον ὡς Αἰγύπτιον βασιλέα. ἰδὼν δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐν τῇ Μέμφῃ ὑψηλὸν ἀνδριάντα ἀνιερωμένον ἐκ μέλανος λίθου ἔχοντα ἐπιγραφὴν εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν αὐτοῦ βάσιν· "Οὗτος ὁ φυγὼν βασιλεὺς ἥξει πάλιν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ οὐ γηράσκων ἀλλὰ νεάζων καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἡμῶν Πέρσας ὑποτάξει ἡμῖν." ἐπύθετο οὖν Ἀλέξανδρος, τίνος ἄρα ἐστὶν ὁ ἀνδριὰς οὗτος. οἱ δὲ προφῆται εἶπον αὐτῷ· "οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀνδριὰς ὁ ἔσχατος τῆς Αἰγύπτου βασιλεὺς Νεκτεναβώ. καὶ ἐλθόντων τῶν Περσῶν τὴν Αἴγυπτον πορθῆσαι εἶδε διὰ τῆς μαγικῆς δυνάμεως τοὺς θεοὺς τῶν Αἰγυπτίων τὰ στρατόπεδα τῶν ἐναντίων προοδηγοῦντας καὶ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ὑπ' αὐτῶν πορθουμένην, καὶ γνοὺς τὴν μέλλουσαν ἔσεσθαι ὑπ' αὐτῶν προδοσίαν ἔφυγεν. ζητούντων δὲ ἡμῶν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀξιούντων τοὺς θεοὺς ποῦ ἄρα ἔφυγεν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἡμῶν Νεκτεναβώ, ἐχρησμοδότησαν ἡμῖν, ὅτι οὗτος ὁ φυγὼν βασιλεὺς ἥξει πάλιν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ οὐ γηράσκων ἀλλὰ νεάζων καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἡμῶν Πέρσας ὑποτάξει ἡμῖν." ἀκούσας δὲ ταῦτα Ἀλέξανδρος ἐμπηδήσας εἰς τὸν ἀνδριάντα περιπλέκεται αὐτῷ λέγων· "οὗτος πατήρ μου ἐστίν, τούτου ἐγὼ υἱός εἰμι. οὐκ ἐψεύσατο ὑμᾶς ὁ τοῦ χρησμοῦ λόγος. καὶ θαυμάζω πῶς παρελήφθητε ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων τείχη ἔχοντες ἀκαταμάχητα μὴ δυνάμενα ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων καταβληθῆναι. ἀλλὰ τοῦτο τῆς ἄνω προνοίας ἐστὶ καὶ τῆς τῶν θεῶν δικαιότητος, ἵνα ὑμεῖς ἔχοντες εὔφορον γῆν καὶ γόνιμον ποταμὸν ἀχειροποίητον ὑποτεταγμένοι ἐστὲ τοῖς μὴ ἔχουσι <ταῦτα. εἰ γὰρ ταῦτα ἔχοντες> δωρεὰν καὶ <ἐ>βασιλεύετε, ἔθνησκον [γὰρ] οἱ βάρβαροι ταῦτα μὴ ἔχοντες."

Then Alexander hastened with his army towards Egypt. When he reached Memphis, the Egyptians put him on the throne of Hephaestus as king of Egypt. In Memphis Alexander saw a very

[33] *Historia Alexandri Magni*, 1.3 (text L; transl. Stoneman 1991). The same passage is present in all the different recensions, with a few minor variants. The mention of the god Serapis is of course anachronistic.

tall statue of black stone which was treated as holy. On its base was this inscription: "This king who has fled will return to Egypt, no longer an old man but a young one, and will subject our enemies the Persians to us." Alexander inquired whose statue this was, and the prophets told him: "This is the statue of the last king of Egypt, Nectanebo. When the Persians came to sack Egypt, he saw, through his magic art, the gods of the Egyptians leading the army of the enemy, and the land of Egypt being ravaged by them. So, knowing what was to come as a result of their betrayal, he fled. We, however, searched for him, and asked the god where our king, Nectanebo, had fled to. They gave us this oracle: 'The king who has fled will return to Egypt, no longer an old man but a young one, and will subject our enemies the Persians to us'." When Alexander heard this, he sprang up and embraced the statue, saying: "This is my father, and I am his son. The oracle that was given to you did not lie. I am amazed only that you were overcome by the barbarians, when you had these invincible walls, which could not be thrown down by any enemy. But this is the affair of Providence above and the justice of the gods, that you, with a fertile land and a river to nourish it – blessings not made with hands – should be subdued by those who do not have these things, and should be ruled by them. For without their help the barbarians would have perished."[34]

In an intriguing omission, the narrative of the *Alexander Romance* does not present any internal explanation concerning the reason why the Egyptian gods would be angry at Nectanebo or at Egypt in general to the point that they would decide to support the barbarian armies invading their own land. In order to answer to this question, we have to suppose the existence of a larger narrative concerning the fall of Nectanebo and the last days of the Egyptian realm. Luckily, a handful of other Egyptian surviving literary documents do contain elements of such a narrative.

The first set of documents consists of two versions of the text formerly known as *Nectanebo's Dream* (whose correct title should more precisely be the *Prophecy of Petesis*, see below): one is a Greek papyrus belonging to the Leiden National Museum and containing a unfinished copy of this narrative which was first found in 1820 in the Memphis Serapeum. The other is a very fragmentary Demotic version of the same story which was discovered in 1997 in the Collection of Carlsberg Papyri and which initially belonged to the Tebtunis temple library in the Fayum.[35] The Greek version of this *Prophecy of Petesis* relates the story of how, one night during the last year of his reign, pharaoh

[34] *Hist. Alex.* 1.34.2–5 (text L, transl. Stoneman 1991). This particular episode, presenting the coronation of Alexander in Memphis and the fulfilment of the prophecy evoked in 1.3, is only present in the older versions of the *Alexander Romance*, *i.e.* in the recensions α and β as well as in the Latin and Armenian translations directly derived from them.

[35] Greek version: P.Leid. 1.396 = UPZ 1.81 = TM 65612 (middle of the 2nd cent. BCE). This papyrus belonged to the archives of Apollonios, brother to the famous Ptolemaios, *katochos* in the Memphis Serapeum. The *editio princeps* is Leemans 1838: 122–129; see also Wilcken 1927 and Koenen 1985. An English translation in given in Oppenheim 1956; for more recent translations and commentaries, see Gauger 2002 (German), Quack 2007: 162–165 (German), Legras 2011: 216–226 (French). Demotic version: P.Carlsberg 562 = TM 56096 (1st–2nd cent. CE); see Ryholt 1998.

Nectanebo receives a dream in which he sees an assembly of gods complaining about his carelessness concerning a temple of the god Onuris (Ares) in Sebennytos, as the decoration of one shrine in this sanctuary was never completed. Upon waking up, Nectanebo takes steps to ensure that this oversight is corrected as quickly as possible: he appoints Egypt's best hieroglyph-carver, an individual named Petesis, and sends him to Sebennytos to take care of the problem, paying him a large salary. But it seems that the king's efforts will all amount to nothing, since the story breaks up just as Petesis, deciding to delay his mission as he longs for a drink, encounters a beautiful girl who seems about to make him forget his task.

The second set of document consists of three Demotic scribal exercises from the same Tebtunis temple library to which P. Carlsberg 562 belongs, now also in the Collection of Carlsberg Papyri. They contain fragments of a novel tentatively called *Nectanebo and the Oracle of Haroeris* that appears to be a sequel to the *Prophecy of Petesis*.[36] Allusions to the same characters, places and events as the ones evoked in the *Prophecy of Petesis* allow us to understand that the sculptor Petesis died under unknown circumstances after having predicted that foreign countries would soon rise against Nectanebo and invade Egypt. The fragmentary story ends on the preparations made by the pharaoh to consult an oracle of the god Haroeris in order to find out more information about what the future has in store for him.

These two texts present many formal and narrative similarities with the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" texts mentioned above. The Greek title of the *Prophecy of Petesis* for instance – Πετήσιος ἱερογλύφου πρὸς Νεκτοναβὼν τὸν βασιλέα "(Defence or letter) of Petesis the hieroglyph sculptor to the king Nectanebo" – parallels the title of the *Oracle of the Potter*, Ἀπολογία κεραμέως πρὸς Ἀμενῶπιν τὸν βασιλέα "Defence of the potter to the king Amenophis;" for this reason, it was proposed to more correctly call the Nectanebo's Dream the *Prophecy of Petesis*.[37] The whole narrative scheme of the *Prophecy of Petesis*, moreover, probably was very similar to that of the *Prophecy of the Lamb* and of the *Oracle of the Potter*. In the complete version, Nectanebo, warned by a dream about the rising anger of the gods, probably found himself unable to finalise the dedication of the Sebennytos temple to the god Onuris. The unfortunate Petesis, instrumental to this failure, would then reveal a prophecy announcing that, just as the decoration of Onuris' temple had been neglected, the gods themselves would neglect Egypt and allow its pharaoh to be overthrown by invading foreigners; Petesis would then meet an untimely death after having revealed the prophecy. That is at least what can be surmised from allusions

[36] P.Carlsberg 424 and 499 (= TM 56119) as well as P.Carlsberg 559+PSI 60 v. inv.D (= TM 56181), all dated from the 1st–2nd cent. CE. Edition, translation and commentaries in Ryholt 2002 and Ryholt 2013, 157–167.

[37] Gauger 2012: 197–198; Ryholt 2013: 232–234.

made by Nectanebo at the beginning of *Nectanebo and the Oracle of Haroeris*.[38] The death of Petesis, in particular, echoes the grim fate befalling the prophetic mediums and eponymous characters of the *Oracle of the Potter* and the *Prophecy of the Lamb*. In each tale, the tragic prophecy is written down at the behest of the pharaoh so that future generations will be able to learn from it.

It seems fairly certain, then, that what has been conserved of the *Petesis* story was actually a narrative setting introducing a prophecy whose text is now lost, but which probably ended with the promise of a saviour king destined to restore balance to the land and to regain the favour of the gods.[39] Moreover, the synopsis of the larger narrative that can be reconstructed by comparing the *Prophecy of Petesis* and its Demotic sequel *Nectanebo and the Oracle of Haroeris* would appear to have presented the situation leading to Nectanebo's demise – described in the *Alexander Romance* – as the result of his somewhat impious behaviour, or at the very least as the consequence of his inability to properly take care of Onuris' worship in his temple. As we will see, this fits exactly within the theodicean trend featured so prominently in the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" texts, especially in the *Demotic "Chronicle.*"

4. Development of the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalypticism"

The "apocalyptic" texts mentioned above seem to mainly revolve around the expression of a deep resentment against the invasion of Egypt by foreign powers, and the despair over the loss of a "golden age" caused by the improper ritual behaviour of a pharaoh. But the formulae used in these motifs, far from being invented during the Late and Graeco-Roman period, are actually inherited from earlier Egyptian literature. The catastrophic descriptions of a world plunged into

[38] *Nectanebo and the oracle of Haeroeris*, 5–8 (transl. Ryholt 2013: 164–165): "I am sad because of the (terrible) things that have happened to Petesis, son of Hergeus, the skilled sculptor of Aphroditopolis, in the temple of Sebennytos. [I] have given orders [to] find out the length of the time in which the said things will take place. I have given orders to find out the might of the foreigners that will come after me. I have given orders to find out the need which they will cause while they dwell in Egypt." The story's synopsis thus reconstructed perfectly matches the hypothesis proposed by Koenen 1985: 191–193.

[39] See Jasnow 1997. Ryholt 2013: 165–167 thinks that the *Prophecy of Petesis* would represent a first stage of the story composed shortly after the end of Nectanebo II's reign but before Alexander's conquest, wich would have focused on the catastrophic prophecy itself, maybe without mentioning or at least putting much emphasis on the identity of the saviour king. *Nectanebo and the Oracle of Haroeris*, on the other hand, would represent a later development of the story made necessary by the changes in the historical situation (the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great), which would have introduced a second prophecy revealed by the oracle of Haroeris about the advent of Alexander as the future redeemer and liberator of Egypt.

chaos, for instance, are directly borrowed from the *Chaosbeschreibungen* common in the Egyptian genre known as the "pessimistic" literature, represented by texts such as the *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, the *Lamentation of Khakheperre-sonbe* or the *Man Who Was Weary of Life*.[40] Composed for the most part during the Middle Kingdom, these laments already contain a good share of the *topoi* used throughout all ancient Egyptian history (and elsewhere in the world) to describe a situation of "national distress" and general chaos: war, death, and lawlessness are rampant, social conventions are turned upside down, every man steals his neighbour's goods, temples are being deserted, the son kills his own father, etc.[41] Among the texts belonging to this "pessimistic" literature, a closer precursor to the later "apocalypses" is the *Prophecy of Neferty*, the first example of the "sub-genre" of royal prophecies.[42] The *Prophecy of Neferty* makes use of a chaotic imagery similar to that of the lamentations, with the addition of a narrative frame involving the revelation of a prophecy to the king and elements of political criticism against the pharaohs of the past. In this story, the lector-priest Neferty is mandated at the royal court in order to entertain the pharaoh Snefru (founder of 4th dynasty). When offered the choice of hearing "a few fine words" concerning what has come to pass or what will come to pass, the king chooses the latter. Neferty then starts a long and dark description of the woes that will affect Egypt in a distant future, when foreigners from the East will invade the country. The account includes the *topoi* known from the pessimistic literature – "evil is spoken with impunity," "the sun is obscured," "the river of Egypt is empty," "I shall show you […] a son who kills his father," "the one who was slothful now is filled, but he who was diligent has nothing," etc. But these descriptions are complemented at the very end by a prediction concerning the advent of a saviour king named Ameny (probably the historical Amenemhat I, founder of the 12th dynasty), who will restore balance to Egypt, please the gods and defeat the foreign enemies and the rebels. It seems quite obvious that this pseudo-prophecy – composed *ex eventu* or *post eventum*, i.e. based on or after the events it is describing – was actually a glorification text written under royal

[40] Simpson 2003: 188–210 (Ipuwer), 211–213 (*Khakheperre-sonbe*) and 178–187 (The Man Weary of Life). See also Burkard, Thissen 2003: 123–136, 136–142 and 154–160. A much later, Ptolemaic example of the same kind of lamentation literature is also attested in the P.Berol. 23040 (= TM 69736; 300–240 BCE), another text interpreted as the expression of a cultural resistance against the foreign (Greek) invaders. This particular text, however, does not feature other elements typical of the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" corpus, such as a divine prophecy and the announcement of a saviour king (Burkard 2003).

[41] See Assmann 1989 for the ubiquitousness of such chaotic descriptions throughout the world's "apocalyptic" literatures.

[42] P.Hermitage 1116b = P.St.Petersburg 1116b (Hieratic, dated from the 18th dynasty but probably composed during the 12th dynasty; also known from smaller copies on wood tablets and ostraka). See Assmann 1989: 357–361; Burkard, Thissen 2003: 142–147; Simpson 2003: 214–220.

patronage in order to present Amenemhat I's rise to power in an auspicious light.[43] Incidentally, a great number of New Kingdom royal inscriptions make use of the same stereotypic formulae to describe the state of ruin and chaos in which the preceding ruler's impious behaviour had left the country and the temples of the gods, before the new pharaoh came and restored the social and cosmic balance.[44]

Some scholars have been tempted to understand the *Chaosbeschreibungen* present in the pessimistic literature as the expressions of a sacerdotal resistance against societal changes brought by the historical calamities experienced in Egypt after the First Intermediate Period and during the following periods. But the authenticity of these alleged misfortunes has more often than not been put into question. Today, the "pessimistic" descriptions are seen as an accumulation of literary stereotypes not necessarily in direct relation to the historical context in which they have been elaborated, but at the same time not totally impervious to it.[45] When it comes to the later apocalyptic literature, for instance, the long-lasting popularity of texts such as the *Oracle of the Potter* or the *Prophecy of the Lamb*, which were apparently reproduced, updated, and sometimes translated in Greek over the course of several centuries, implies that they must have been perceived during each of these period as being somehow relevant to contemporary, historical events. Invasions of Egypt by foreign peoples, in particular, seem to have left a predominant impression in later catastrophic descriptions. Consequently, it seems hardly surprising that the Egyptian pessimistic tradition was developed into the pseudo-prophetic/"apocalyptic" literature during the same period when Egypt repeatedly fell under the domination of successive foreign populations. The most important among them being without any doubt the invasion and domination of the Egyptian Delta by the Middle Eastern population known as the Hyksos during the Second Intermediate Period (17th–16th cent. BCE), before the rulers of the 18th dynasty chased them off. These "rulers of the foreign lands" (Eg. *ḥqꜣ.w–ḫꜣs.wt*, which the Greeks transcribed into *Hyksos*) remained in the Egyptian imagination as archetypes of the impious invaders, pillaging the temples and calling upon themselves the wrath of the gods. Memories of these Hyksos then resurfaced in some narratives of Egyptian origins, some of them belonging to the apocalyptic tradition.[46]

To even speak of a Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" literary genre is actually questionable, since the concept does not actually correspond to any internal Egyptian category. The proper title of the *Prophecy of the Lamb*, for instance,

[43] Posener 1956.

[44] The main documents are presented in Assmann 1989: 364–368 (see for instance the dramatic description of Egypt in the "restoration stela" of Tutankhamun).

[45] Assmann 1989; Burkard, Thissen 2003: 131–136.

[46] Concerning the Hyksos and their place in the Egyptian cultural memory (attested for instance in the Manethonian tradition), see Assmann 1998; Volokhine 2007; Volokhine 2010.

is given in its colophon as the "curse/execration (*sḫwy*) of Re against humanity." Both the *Oracle of the Potter* and the *Prophecy of Petesis* (*Nectanebo's Dream*) are labelled in Greek as an "apology" (or maybe a "letter" for the latter) addressed by the prophetic character to the king, and seem to be constructed as some sort of epistolary stories.[47] Contrary to the Judaeo-Christian apocalypses, the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" texts do not always focus on a revelation by a supernatural agent, nor do they provide an eschatological scope: in Egypt, the apparition of the saviour king heralds neither the end of history, nor the final judgment of the dead or the advent of an eternal golden age. The new pharaoh is never presented as anything but the founder of a new dynasty, whose role it is to initiate an era of political stability and religious piousness. Proper end-of-times narrative elements are only inserted much later in Egyptian texts inspired from the "apocalyptic" literature. Such as in the Hermetic treatise known as the *Asclepius*, where the divinity predicts the complete destruction of Egypt, foretelling that the gods will, one day, forsake the land and leave it to become a desert devoid of any life or civilisation.[48] Because of these very significant differences, some scholars have considered it more appropriate to speak of a "proto-apocalyptic" Graeco-Egyptian tradition,[49] while others think that the corpus of Graeco-Egyptian prophecies should more precisely be defined by its emphasis on political "messianism," since the announcement of a saviour king plays a central role in it, rather than be named in reference to a formal structure of supernatural revelation that isn't always relevant.[50] But to speak of a "messianic" trend in Egypt could once again misleadingly connote the phenomenon as being related to the Judaeo-Christian notion. While such an heritage is possible, as numerous mutual influences and interferences between the two cultures are well-documented, it must be noted that the theme of the king sent by the gods to restore social balance and justice is also present in the Egyptian royal ideology since quite a long period. In the Valley of the Nile, it is a *topos* deriving both from the concept of the pharaoh's divine filiation and from the notion of cyclic history with its idea of a return to order and of a "first time" (*sp tpy*) systematically repeated with each new ruler.[51]

[47] Quack 2005: 148.

[48] *Asclepius*, 24–25 (3rd–4th cent. CE). The *Asclepius* is a Latin translation from a (lost) Greek original. See Copenhaver 1992: 81–82.

[49] Smith 1978.

[50] Assmann 2002: 377–388; Gozzoli 2006: 302–304.

[51] Assmann 1982.

5. Historical theodicy in Egypt

There is another literary theme shared by the various Egyptian prophetic texts that provides an interesting parallel to the development of the apocalyptic trend in ancient Israel. This motif consists in a form of theodicy, *i.e.* the tendency to explain disastrous historical events as the consequence of moral transgressions and lack of respect for the divine law. It was at first dubbed a "deuteronomical" aspect by some Egyptologists, because it presented such close similarities with the pattern developed in the post-Exilic books of *Deuteronomy* or *2 Kings*.[52]

This pattern is especially prominent in the chapter 10 of the *Demotic "Chronicle,"* where law-abiding pharaohs are rewarded with a long reign while impious rulers can't live long enough to perpetuate their dynasty: the pharaoh Amyrtaeus, for instance, is said to have been overthrown because he had ordered the *hep*-law to be defiled (4.1–2) and another unnamed pharaoh is removed from the throne because he strayed from the god's path (4.7–8). Pharaoh Achoris' reign, on the other hand, is prolonged because he was generous to the temples (4.9–10).[53] The same trend is perceptible in the *Prophecy of the Lamb*, in the *Oracle of the Potter*, in the *Prophecy of Petesis* (*Nectanebo's Dream*), where Nectanebo seems to incur the wrath of the gods because he wasn't able to properly take care of Onuris' temple, and even in the *Alexander Romance* where Alexander, after having found out the existence of the Memphite prophecy announcing his arrival, explains to the Egyptians that their country could not have been invaded if their own gods had not allowed it (1.34.5). Outside of the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" corpus, an expression of the same theodicy is also very clearly formulated in the *Praise (or "Aretalogy") of Imuthes/Asclepius*, relating the alleged discovery of a sacred manuscript which begins by explaining how pharaoh Menechres' reign (*i.e.* Mykerinos, 4th dynasty) was blessed because he had been pious towards the gods:

> It is because of this, indeed, that Egypt was then in peace and copiously purveyed with earth's gifts. For the countries governed by pious kings are flourishing and, unlike them, countries with impious kings perish in misfortune.[54]

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[52] *Deut*. 17.17–20, for instance, contains instructions for the king of Israel to always carry a copy of God's law and heed it; only doing so will allow him to keep his throne and his children to remain in Israel. In *2 Kgs*. 1–20, the invasion of Samaria and Israel by the Assyrians is explained as the consequence of the divine wrath against the people of Israel, because they had strayed away from the customs and from the law ordained by God. For the first parallel established with the *Demotic "Chronicle,"* see Meyer 1915: 287–311; see also Assmann 2002: 384–385.

[53] See the complete analysis by Johnson 1983.

[54] P.Oxy. 11.1381 = TM 63689, 11.228–244 (Greek, supposedly translated from an unknown Egyptian original; 2nd cent. CE). Translation communicated by Franziska Naether and Heinz-Joseph Thissen during the 26th Papyrological Congress in Geneva; see Naether, Thissen 2012 for further references.

Similar theodicean opinions were actually pervasive in the Egyptian thought long before the Hellenistic period, and are notably expressed in the wisdom literature during the Middle and New Kingdoms. One such wisdom treatise on monarchy conserved on papyri dated from the 18th dynasty, the *Teaching for King Merikare*, provides a would-be king with advices on how to be a good ruler. Instructions include for instance "observe Ma'at, that you may endure long upon earth" or "erect [many] monuments for the gods, for this is a means of giving life to the name of him who construct them."[55] A much later Demotic text belonging to the same kind of wisdom literature, The *Instruction of 'Onchsheshonqy*, contains the same theory and explains how the reign of bad rulers, the upheaval of social order and the occurrence of foreign invasions are ultimately consequences of the god Re's wrath against a land:

O People […] listen to me concerning the way in which Pre will display anger at a land!
[If Pre is angry at a] land, he will cause […]; he does not […] it.
[If P]re is angry at a land, its ruler will abandon the law.
If Pre is angry at a land, he will cause the laws to cease within it.
If Pre is angry at a land, he will cause purity to cease within it.
If Pre is angry at a land, he will cause the truth to cease within it.
If Pre is angry at a land, he will cause value to be minimal within it.
If Pre is angry at a land, he does not allow trust to be [within] it.
If Pre is angry at a land, he does not positions of status […] to be taken within it.
If Pre is angry at a land, he will elevate its humble men, and he will humble its great men.
If Pre is angry at a land, he will cause the fools to be rulers of the educated.
If Pre is angry at a land, he will command its ruler to make its people fare badly.
If Pre is angry at a land, he will make its scribe to be the authority over it.
If Pre is angry at a land, he will make its washerman to be the chief of police.[56]

According to a theory of Pascal Vernus, the elaboration of this historical theodicy in Egypt would have taken place within the frame of an important ideological mutation that can be traced back to the New Kingdom: the apparition in Egypt of a new form of individual religiosity often called "personal piety," and of the idea that the demiurge god could exercise an influence not only on the individual destiny of a given person, but also on the collective events and on the Egyptian society in general.[57] This ideological mutation was characterised among other things by the development of a religious theory about history, a theory very similar to the one coined out in the 6th cent. BCE Judaea. Namely,

[55] *Teaching for King Merikare*, 47 and 61 (P.St.Petersburg 1116a[v.], other manuscripts include P.Moscow 4658 and P.Carlsberg 6; Hieratic, 18th dynasty; transl. Simpson 2003: 157–158).

[56] *Instruction of 'Onchsheshonqy*, 5.1–13 (P.Brit.Mus. 10508; Demotic, end of the Ptolemaic period; transl. Simpson 2003: 504).

[57] On this "great ideological mutation," see Vernus 1995b (especially 88–95). On the theories concerning the development of an "individual religiosity" or a "personal piety" at the beginnings of the Ramesside period, see Luiselli 2008.

that the succession of fortunate and ill-fated historical events is the direct result of a divine will. Vernus understands this major change in the royal ideology – officially proclaimed under Ramses XI's reign – as the first step on the path of the Theban theocracy's establishment during the 20th dynasty, whereafter the expressions of this Egyptian theodicy get more often attested as the ascendency of the Egyptian (Theban) clergy grows stronger. Just as in the "apocalyptic texts," local troubles and foreign invasions are presented as divine sanctions against the acts of an impious king. But a prosperous reign is the reward promised to the ruler who stays faithful to the gods, by following a code of proper religious behaviour whose composition is the prerogative of the sacerdotal circles. This ideological transformation in turn leads to an adaptation of the pharaoh's image, whose status and legitimacy appear to become more and more submitted to and sanctioned by a divine approval. Such approval is expressed for instance during oracular consultations and once again controlled by the clergy. According to Vernus' hypothesis, then, the importance of the theodicean aspects in the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalypticism" are directly connected to this evolution in the New Kingdom religious paradigm, and should primarily be understood as a sign of a sacerdotal takeover on the royal power.[58]

6. Production of "apocalyptic" literature in ancient Egypt. A conclusion

The long-standing tradition of defining the Graeco-Egyptian pseudo-prophecies according to their "apocalyptic" form, to their "messianic" content or to their use of a "deuteronomic" (theodicean) trend has been, of course, heavily influenced by the scholarly tradition of biblical studies. Such taxonomy should be used with a great deal of prudence, lest it leads to an erroneous understanding of these texts, of their function and of the way they were composed.

Nonetheless, it can be argued that the *Demotic "Chronicle,"* the *Prophecy of the Lamb*, the *Oracle of the Potter*, the *Prophecy of Petesis* (*Nectanebo's Dream*) and the beginnings of the *Alexander Romance* do share many similarities and constitute a literary corpus of some sort. Constructed as stories revolving around the pharaoh and providing a narrative setting for an *ex eventu* or *post eventum* prophecy, their content seems to be influenced – to an extent that remains to be determined – by historical events. And while these texts appear to have been developed as a form of propaganda material supporting a double ideology, both royal and sacerdotal, it would be an oversimplification to consider them as a literature of cultural resistance that was solely elaborated for contemporary political purposes. A vast catalogue of influences and literary borrowings played a crucial role in their composition.

[58] Vernus 1995b.

To better understand the construction process of apocalypticism in Egypt, it can be useful to conclude briefly on some reflexions by two famous scholars of the University of Chicago concerning propaganda production and the relationship between royal authority and intellectual elites in the ancient Near East in general, or in other words between kingship and scribalism.[59] In the eyes of J.Z. Smith and B. Lincoln, wisdom literature and pseudo-prophetic or "apocalyptic" literature both consist in a form of propaganda composed for the benefit of the king in the former case, or of a social, political and/or religious group in the latter. They share the common trait of equating the political order with the cosmic order itself, an element central to the agenda of any imperial propaganda. But they work in opposite ways. Royal propaganda (and wisdom literature) constructs an official and "sacred" history by rewriting the past in order to stabilise the present and prevent any future alteration to a situation presented as ideal. Apocalypticism, on the other hand, constructs a pseudo-prophetic utterance concerning the present or the future in order to bring change to a condition perceived as intolerable.[60]

Apocalyptic literatures all around the world, in Lincoln's view, are often produced within a social group that has lost its privileged situation or that feels threatened of losing it. More precisely, he observes that apocalypticism in the ancient world is mostly associated with the expression of "nationalistic" tendencies directed against foreign enemies and intended to restore a native form of authority. Lincoln partly bases his interpretation on previous observations by J.Z. Smith, according to whom wisdom literature in the Near Eastern context is usually produced by scribes under royal tutelage. But it tends to take on apocalyptic accents when a foreign king ascends the throne and when the scribal caste finds itself lacking a native royal patron.[61] Wisdom literature (which Lincoln calls imperial propaganda) and apocalyptic texts do share a similar narrative form, but the latter is actually produced by rebels challenging an established authority. Throughout history, some of those rebel groups were successful and adapted their apocalyptic narratives into proper imperial propaganda (Lincoln refers to the examples of Darius' inscription at Behistun). Most others failed, but even then the apocalyptic texts they had produced sometimes lingered on and were later adopted, updated and reused by other disgruntled groups. This constant updating process of apocalyptic narratives, attested in Egypt by the different versions of the *Oracle of the Potter*,[62] means however that they slowly lose the specificity of their original context, as former references to contemporary historical events become literary *topoi*.[63]

[59] See Smith 1978 (on Babylon and Egypt); Smith 1982 (Babylon); Lincoln 1998 (on the Persian empire); Lincoln 2013 (on the contemporary uses of apocalyptic discourses).

[60] Lincoln 1998: 466.

[61] Smith 1978: 86; Smith 1982: 94.

[62] Smith 1978: 77–78.

[63] Lincoln 1998: 468–469.

While Smith and Lincoln's theories pertain to the Near Eastern world in general, their conclusions do apply relatively well to the Egyptian situation and to the societal changes described by Vernus. The royal prophetic literature produced during the Middle and the New Kingdom by the Egyptian clergy does appear to serve the interests of the state propaganda, whether it is ultimately controlled by the pharaoh or by the priests. But the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" texts from the Late Period, on the other hand, seem to be mainly preoccupied with supporting the aspirations of various regional opponents to the central royal power perceived as impious and/or foreign. It might be an overstatement, however, to understand this literature solely as the expression of an authentic nationalist resistance pitting the Egyptians as a whole against foreign invaders such as the Persians or the Greeks. It is more probable that the circles who composed the various texts of the Graeco-Egyptian "apocalyptic" corpus chose the topics of their narrations according to interests and grievances focussed on the experience of their local community, and that these texts only infrequently attained a transregional or transnational echo: the revolt of the pharaohs Herwennefer and Ankhwennefer (205–186 BCE) would be a good example of such a far-reaching success, and the integration of the "apocalyptic" motif of Nectanebo's end of reign in the *Alexander Romance* would be another. But it would be excessive to search those Graeco-Egyptian apocalypticism for actual proofs of historical interethnic conflicts, and to understand them as the expression of an authentic despair of the native Egyptians confronted to the slow demise of their own culture, as has sometimes been the case in former studies. In conclusion, the long-standing literary motifs and themes used in said texts by their authors shouldn't be unilaterally interpreted as the true reflection of struggles and traumatisms sustained by Egypt.

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