

## BOOK REVIEW

*Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism*. By IAN S. MOYER. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. x + 347. \$119.00. ISBN: 978-0-521-76551-0.

Ian Moyer recently received the CAMWS First Book Award for *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism*, a much deserved commendation not only for the insight his book provides on Greco-Egyptian cultural exchange but also for the much needed methodological reassessments he makes, especially on the interpretative model based on a Greek/barbarian binary. While the binary framework has led to important scholarship on Greek ethnographic practices, it also subsumes non-Greek cultures into the narrative of Hellenism. Moyer accomplishes this reassessment by writing “microhistories of Egyptian-Greek interaction” through four case studies that draw upon models from history, anthropology, and postcolonial studies that have “reconfigured relations between Europe and its others as dialogical and transactional” (35). Each chapter weaves Egyptian literary and cultural history into the analysis of a particular text, but he does not assume that the reader shares his faculty with Demotic material and provides summaries that make his work accessible to non-specialists.

In the introduction, Moyer locates the thread that unravels the history of scholarship on Greece’s interactions with Egypt in the justification given by Arnaldo Momigliano in his *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* for excluding Egypt from his study. Momigliano’s justification is two-fold: first, the Greek view of Egypt as a land of “strange customs” and “unusual knowledge” remained largely unchanged from Homer down to the Hellenistic period; second, Greek control over Egypt led to the decline of Egyptian culture. Each of these views, which Moyer traces through the history of scholarship, beginning with Droysen’s *Geschichte des Hellenismus*, subordinates Egypt to Hellenism and reveals how “Egypt and Egyptians have not been historical subjects, but absent objects of representation” (2).

Chapter one re-examines Hecataeus’ encounter with Egyptian priests at Thebes (Hdt. 2.143). Moyer argues that though analogizing Herodotus to the modern ethnographer has elucidated the role of the ethnographies in formulating Greek identity, it has obfuscated the the *realien* of the Egyptian contribution to his

historiographical project. Moyer reads Herodotus through James Clifford's *Predicament of Culture*, in which Clifford argues for the development of multivocal ethnographies that highlights the field setting and the direct speech of the native informant. The statues seen by Herodotus reflect a genealogical practice of late period Egyptian priests that legitimates their present status through a direct line back to the distant past. Herodotus relies on this Egyptian "historicity" (a term frequently employed by Moyer but only clearly explained in the epilogue) in his critique of Greek mythological thought by placing the murky past of Greek myth into the definitive chronologies provided by Egyptian history. Moyer's argument represents a major development in Herodotean studies since he demonstrates that one can recuperate an Egyptian voice from his ethnographies, which are traditionally read through a structuralist lens that focuses on how Greek identity is constructed through the representation of the Egyptian "other."

Chapter two focuses on Manetho's *Aegyptiaca*. Moyer identifies two interpretative trends in previous scholarship. The first sees *Aegyptiaca* growing out of a native's encounter with Greek historical conventions, thereby placing it within the stemma of Greek historiography. The second, relying on a postcolonial framework, highlights the negative, oppressive aspects of colonization behind the work. The former share in the civilizing narrative of Droysen's *Hellenismus* and subsumes Manetho into "a universalizing history of the colonization of the mind" (99). The latter takes Manetho to the other extreme: a native informant aiding the colonial government in the appropriation and reorganization of indigenous knowledge. Against these two trends, Moyer places Manetho in the "discursive space created between and by the indigenous elite and the Ptolemaic court" (103.) Manetho structures his work along the Egyptian historiographical convention of the king-list, which he prioritizes over narrative continuity. The narratives function to explain the meaning of the Egyptian past, indicating that Manetho appropriates the Greek historiographical convention of narratives in order to teach outsiders, namely the Ptolemies, how to read Egyptian history in an Egyptian fashion.

In chapter three, Moyer's discussion moves out of Egypt and to Delos and the aretalogy of Sarapis inscribed on one of three Sarapieia located on the island. The inscription relates in prose and hexametric versions the lineage of the priest Apollonius and his legal victory over some unnamed opponents. Scholars have frequently approached this text—and the cult of Sarapis more broadly—through the analytical lens of syncretism, but this lens assumes asymmetrical relations between the two cultures. Instead of focusing on Hellenization or acculturation, Moyer shows how this text, provided with translation in Appendix I, engages with both

Greek and Egyptian discourses of authority and authenticity to claim legitimacy for Apollonius' priesthood and the sanctuary itself.

Moyer reveals the complexity of Maiistas' allusions to Homer, which scholars have long undervalued. More than mere Hellenization, Maiistas' blend of Greek literary tropes and Egyptian narrative patterns represents a claim to a dual literary and cultural heritage. Maiistas is not a Hellenized barbarian who can "almost but not quite" work in the Greek genre and literary tradition but a product of a hybrid culture who claims legitimacy in the discourses of both. Moyer's forthright criticism of previous scholarship is loudest in this chapter. He refers to Homi Bhabha's discussion of colonial mimicry in the essays in *The Location of Culture* and implicates the work of previous scholars in perpetuating the imperialist ideal of colonial mimicry, namely the acculturation but incomplete assimilation of the native to the colonialist's culture.

The final chapter focuses on *De virtutibus herbarum*, a second-century astro-botanical treatise prefaced with an autobiographical epistle to the Roman emperor. The epistle contains one of the earliest depictions of Egyptian priests as purveyors of magical wisdom, a stereotype that, according to David Frankfurter, some priests come to exploit. Moyer adds that Thessalos does much the same in appropriating the role of the Egyptian priest and his authority over authentic wisdom, which he accomplishes through the discourse of priestly initiation and allusions to the Nechepso-Petosiris tradition. Drawing on Arjun Appadurai's discussion of commodification in the introduction to *The Social Life of Things*, Moyer sees Thessalos' treatise as the commodification of Egyptian wisdom to a Greco-Roman audience, an active process which also changes the meaning of significant elements of the Egyptian priesthood when understood in Greek categories.

Moyer makes a significant contribution to the Greco-Egyptian cultural history. Equally important are the methodological interventions he makes along the way. His work reveals the limitations of several of the standard models of cultural interaction, but he is judicious in his use of comparative material and does not merely replace one model with another. Instead, he demonstrates the determinative role our theoretical models can play and the necessity of investigating the specifics of the agents involved and their historical and cultural contexts. This requires the type of wide reading and multiple expertises that Moyer exhibits. Moyer ends with the hope of other scholars taking on the task of rediscovering or reimagining other such ancient encounters; he has provided an excellent model for scholars who would take on the challenge.

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