

THE SAITE PERIOD

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After the domination of Libyans and Ethiopians, Egypt enjoyed a period of independence and prosperity. The Saite period represents the last great age of pharaonic civilisation.

In 670 B.C., the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon, defeated the Ethiopian king, Taharka, and Memphis was captured. Taharka fled southwards to Napata, and Egypt became under the rule of the Assyrians. Local princes, such as Necho of Sais and Memphis, became vassals of the invaders. Various attempts to expel the Assyrians failed.

Later, as the Assyrian forces were engaged in wars in Babylon and Elam, Psammetichus of Sais, son of Necho, with the help of Gyges, king of Lydia, tried to liberate his country. In 654 B.C., while the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, was attacking Babylon, Psammetichus gained Thebes where the last Ethiopian king, Tanutamen, had died or retired to Napata. Ethiopian rule thus came to an end.

It was not an easy task for Psammetichus to unite the country and consolidate the kingdom. The twelve kings mentioned by Herodotus (II, § 151), symbolize the internal political divisions of Egypt since the Ethiopian rule which confronted Psammetichus.

To overcome these difficulties, he had to provide himself

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with the economic and military means to fulfill his ambitions. Egypt opened herself up to new trade and established connections with Greece and its colonies in Asia Minor, and old commerce with the coast cities of Phoenicia.¹

Foreigners played an important role in meeting his military needs. No doubt the majority of Psammetichus army was composed of native Egyptians, but he also engaged mercenary troops, particularly Carian and Ionian Greeks. When he established his power on this basis of military and economical strength, Psammetichus had first to face the rival princes. In the Delta, he brought them under his rule by voluntary submission or involuntary suppression. In Middle Egypt, a more subtle method was employed; Psammetichus was able to neutralize his rivals by exploiting his close relationship with Petiese and his son Somtutefnakht, "shipmasters" and rulers of Herakleopolis, the most important city in the area. So, in year 8 of his reign the whole Delta acknowledged his rule, and with a strong ally in Middle Egypt, Psammetichus could now look southwards towards Thebes.²

In year 9, Psammetichus decreed that he would offer to Amon his daughter Nitocris as the future "God's wife of Amon". In 656 B.C., a series of large ships under the command of Somtutefnakht, shipmaster of Herakleopolis, conveyed Princess Nitocris south to Thebes. There, she was presented first to the god Amon, and then to the reigning god's wife Shepenupet II (sister of Taharka, the Ethiopian king), and her apparent heiress Amenardis II. They both accepted and

1- Drioton(E.) et Vandier (J.) 1962. Les peuples de l'Orient Méditerranéen. II, L'Égypte. Ch. XIII : De Psammétique I à Alexandre le Grand. Presse Universitaire de France. pp. 574.

Kitchen (K.A.) 1973. The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt. Ch. 24 : The Saite Triumph. Aris & Phillips. Warminster, England. pp. 399.

Trigger (B.G.), Kemp (B.J.), O'Connor (D.), Lloyd (A.B.) 1983, Ancient Egypt, A Social History. Ch. 4 : The Late Period. Cambridge, University Press. pp. 279.

2- Trigger et al., op. cit., p. 284.

adopted her as their successor. Extensive endowments were bestowed on Nitocris from the 7th to the 20th nomes of Upper Egypt, and from both east and west sides of the Delta. These were recorded on a splendid granite stela erected at Karnak temple.¹

To secure the frontiers of Egypt, Psammetichus stationed Ionian and Carian mercenaries on the north eastern frontiers at Daphnae. In the western Delta, he put a garrison at Marea, to the west of Alexandria, near lake Mareotis, considered at that time as the frontier of Libya. In the south, at Elephantine, a similar garrison was maintained to guard against any invasion from the south.²

Psammetichus was now the undisputed master of all Egypt. By 640 B.C., he felt himself strong enough to resume the old projects of conquest in Asia Minor, to revive Egypt's claims upon Syria and Palestine, and to dispute their possession with Assyria. Later, in 616 B.C., Psammetichus' relations with Assyria changed; the Egyptian army operated on behalf of the Assyrians against Chaldae, but it was beyond Egypt's capacity, and was conquered in 610-609 B.C.³

Necho II (610-595) B.C.

Necho II succeeded his father Psammetichus on the throne of Egypt in 610 B.C. After his accession, he immediately began to realize his father's imperial designs in Asia. In his first year, he invaded Palestine where he defeated Josiah, king of Judah in Megiddo. Necho then pressed on to the Euphrates, where he did not find any army there to meet

1 - Cairo Museum J. E. 36327, published by Caminos (R. A.) 1966, in JEA 50, pp. 71-101. pls. 7-10.

Cf. Kitchen, *ibid.* § 202-204. pp. 236-238.

2 - De Meulenaere (H.) 1961. Herodotus over 26ste Dvnastie. Bruxelles. PP. 38-40.

3 - Trigger et al. *op cit.*, pp. 338-339.

him. He then returned home after having recovered the whole of the old Egyptian conquests of the empire with the help of the Greek mercenaries to whom he owed his success.¹

Within two years after Necho's victorious campaign, combined forces of Babylon and the Medes overthrew Nineveh. The two conquerors divided its territory; the Medes took the north and northeast, and the Babylonians, the south and southwest. In this way, Syria fell by inheritance to Nabopolassar who sent his son Nebuchadrezzar to oppose Necho. At Carcamich, was defeated. The victory was so decisive that Necho did not try to make another attempt to save Palestine. Thus, Syria-Palestine became Babylonian domain.²

Necho now employed his energies in commercial enterprises. He tried to redig the ancient canal in the Delta which connected the eastern branch of the Nile with the Red Sea, but did not finish it.³ The purpose of Necho's project was to facilitate navigation of ships from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, and vice versa. It was probably intended to revive Egypt's traditional commercial interest in the Red Sea which gave access to the Land of Punt, a source, in particular, of incense essential for Egyptian religious rituals.⁴

Circumnavigation of Africa

Necho sent a crew of Phoenician sailors with instructions to sail around Africa, or, as Herodotus calls it,

1 - Breasted (H.) 1948. A History of Egypt. Ch. XXVIII : The Final Struggle. Hodder & Stoughton. London. PP. 583.

2 - Breasted (H.) op. cit. pp. 583-584.

3 - Herodotus II, § 158-159.

4 - Lloyd (A.B.) 1977. Necho and the Red Sea, Some Considerations, in JEA 63. pp. 142.

Libya.¹ The Egyptians had from the earliest times supposed their land to be surrounded by sea, Okeanos of the Greeks, with which the Nile had a connection in the south. The circumnavigation of Africa was accomplished in about three years. They sailed from Egypt by the way of the Erythraen Sea (a name which Herodotus employs for the Gulf of Aden) into the southern sea. The expedition returned by the way of The Pillars of Hercules (The Straits of Gibraltar), and the Mediterranean Sea (see map).

Psammetichus II (595-589 B.C.)

Psammetichus II followed his father Necho II. According to tradition he decreed in the first year of his rule that his daughter Ankhnesneferibre should be adopted by Nitocris, as the latter had once been adopted, as "divine consort of Amon" at Thebes.²

As Psammetichus was pessimistic regarding Egypt's prospects in Asia, he returned to the south. His expedition against Nubia in 593 B.C., is commemorated in the well-known inscription on one of the colossal statues of Ramses II, at the entrance of his famous temple of Abu Simbel, as well as in Herodotus (II, 161) and a number of Egyptian monuments.³

Apries (Hophra in the Bible) (589-570 B.C.)

Apart from his successful campaign against Cyprus and Phoenicia, and his expedition of a large force of native

1 - Herodotus II, § 42.

Ball (J.) 1942. Egypt in the Classical Geographers. Cairo. pp. 13.

2 - Stela in Cairo Museum J. E. 36906. Legrain (G.) 1905, in ASAE V, pp. 84-90; Breasted (H.) in A. R. § 988A-988J., pp. 503-506.

3 - Yoyotte (J. and Sauneron (S.) 1952. La campagne nubienne de Psammétique II, et sa signification historique, in BIFAQ 50. pp. 157.

For the Greek inscription of Abu Simbel : Meiggs § Lewis 1969. A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions, no. 7.

Egyptian troops to put an end to the trouble caused by the Greek city of Cyrene, Apries erected two obelisks at the entrance of the main temple of Sais, the capital. These obelisks were later removed to Italy.¹ He also built for himself a palace on the northern side of Memphis.²

Amasis (570-526 B.C.) :

Amasis was the last great pharaoh of the Saite Period. Herodotus (II, 177) speaks of the immense prosperity of the country under his rule. But though the country might have prospered, it was in continual danger of foreign attacks, first the Chaldaeans, and later from the Persians. So Amasis devoted much of his time and energy to this problem. An Army of Egyptians and mercenaries was maintained, while alliances were also concluded against Chaldaea and later, against Persia.³ As Amasis felt endangered by external forces, he looked towards his Greek allies for help. At that time, Naukratis was established as a Greek outpost on the Canopic branch of the Nile, in western Delta. Amasis introduced the newly created city to serve as a home and market for the Greeks.

On the other hand, the Egyptians in the time of Amasis enjoyed the greatest prosperity, and Herodotus (II,177) declares that the land "contained at that time, twenty thousand cities". Amasis revised the system of laws. One of these required that every Egyptian "should yearly declare his means of life to the ruler of the province, and failing to do so or to prove that he had a just way of life, specified that be

1 - Habachi (L.) 1978. The Obelisks of Egypt. Dent & Sons. London. pp. 101,129.

2 - Petrie (W.M.) 1909. The Palace of Apries. British School of Archeology in Egypt.

Kemp (B.) 1972. The Palace of Apries at Memphis. MDAIK 33. pp. 101-107.

3 - Drioton et Vandier, *ibid.* pp. 587-588.

Trigger et al. *op. cit.* pp. 285-286.

punished to death. Solon, the Athenian, got this law from Egypt and established it among his people. May they ever keep it ! for it is a perfect law".¹

During the reign of Amasis, the temple of the Oracle which still stands on the rock of Aghurmi at Siwa oasis, in the western desert, was built. The oracle of Amon at Siwa was already famous all over the Mediterranean countries by that time. About 550 B.C., Croesus, king of Lydia, a contemporary of Amasis, thought to test the knowledge of the oracles of the world in order to consult them concerning his future attitude towards Cyrus of Persia. Herodotus (II, 46-49) tells us that Croesus sent to seven well known oracles of that time, six Greeks and the oracle of "Amon of Libya". The story shows clearly that the oracle of Siwa was considered one of the seven most famous in the ancient world.²

Psammetichus III (526-525 B.C.)

Psammetichus was the victim of the events which had occurred in western Asia over a period of more than thirty years. Astyages, king of Medes, a cruel tyrant, went to war against the Persians. The latter were victorious, and Cyrus the Persian became ruler of the Medes and Persians in 555 B.C. In the same year, Nabonid, king of Babylon, formed an alliance with Croesus, king of Lydia, the Spartans in the west, and Amasis, king of Egypt. Cyrus attacked Croesus, and before the allies could move together, Croesus was defeated and dethroned in 546/5 B.C. Cyrus then turned to Babylon, which fell in 539 B.C. Amasis felt powerless at the time when the Persian power was looking towards Egypt. With the fall of

1 - Lloyd (A.) 1975. Herodotus Book II. Interoduction : Solon's visit to Egypt never took place. pp. 11-17.

De Meulenaere op. cit. : accepts the visit, while denying the borrowing of the laws. pp. 115.

2 - Fakhry (A.) 1973. The Oases of Egypt. I : Siwa Oasis. Egypt. pp. 79.

Psammetichus, Egypt belonged to a new world in which she could no longer play a part.

Administration :

The king was theoretically the source of all authority; in principle, officials held power as his deputies and they functioned in central or provincial government.

The king had the right to appoint officials, but in practice, hereditary claims to office exercised as powerful an influence in the Saite period as they had done earlier. Once appointed, officials who gained royal favour could still acquire an array of functions combining at the same time civil, military and priestly duties. Montouemhat was the fourth priest of Amon, count of Thebes, and governor of Upper Egypt during the XXV-XXVIth dynasties.¹ The old court titles such as "sole companion and acquaintance to the king", continued and showed that the officials in question enjoyed a high level of intimacy with the king.²

The old title of vizier (t3ty) still occurs, but whether this dignity continued to function as the head of the administration is questionable.³

Settlements :

The development of commerce with the northern world and related reasons made a northern shift inevitable. Psammetichus and his descendants lived in their native city Sais, which now became the capital of Egypt. There were other important cities in the Delta such as Athribis and Buto. The religious, like the political, centres completely shifted to the

1 - Leclant (J.) 1961. Montouemhat, Quatrième Prophète d'Amon. BdE XXXV. IFAO. Le Caire. Ch. Index des titres. pp. 251.

2 - Ibidem, pp. 251.

3 - Statue of Nespekashuti (c. 580 B.C.). Cairo Museum J. E. 36662.

north. Thebes no longer possessed either political or religious significance. Some few buildings were added to the great temple of Amon, but there were no longer sumptuous festivals as the pharaohs of the New Kingdom had celebrated.

Sais

With the rule of the 26th dynasty, Sais became the capital. It is situated in the western Delta, not far from the present Rosetta branch, and its present name is "Sa el-Hagar". It shared the fate of most of Lower Egypt cities. Today, it has disappeared almost completely from the face of the earth. Not a single stone remains of what Herodotus lauded as the great and marvellous palace of Psammetichus and the marvellous temple of Athena (Neith), or of the obelisks, huge images, and man-headed sphinxes. Concerning the tombs of the kings, Herodotus says that the tomb of Apries lies within the temenos of Neith, "this wall encloses the tomb of Amasis as well as that of Apries and his family (II, 169). It encloses also the tomb of Osiris which stands behind the temple, large stone obelisks and a lake built with stones on which Egyptians represent the suffering of Osiris. About its temple, Herodotus says that Amasis added a propylon, a number of colossi, and several sphinxes (II, 170-171).¹

On the basis of Herodotus description, Champollion visited the site in 1828, and made a plan of the buildings within the temenos wall (see plan) which helps to give an idea of the probable appearance of the enclosure wall of the temple.² Later in 1850, Mariette did not find anything of importance in the site.³

1 - Habachi (L.) 1942. Sais and its Monuments, in ASAE 42. pp. 369.

2 - Champollion (F.) 1868. Lettres écrites d'Égypte et de Nubie. pl. 96.

Habachi, op. cit. pp. 327. fig. 96.

3 - Habachi, *ibid*, pp. 373.

Naukratis

Naukratis was situated on the Canopic branch of the Nile. The city arose during the reign of the Saite pharaohs. When Psammetichus I became master of united Egypt, Greeks came to Egypt and remained, first as mercenaries and then as settlers. The establishment of the city would have been about 656 B.C., at the time during which Psammetichus I achieved the reunification of Egypt. By the reign of Amasis (570-526 B. C.), Naukratis flourished through its own monopoly of Greek trade, as he concentrated all Greek important export trade there. The city established itself as a noteworthy Greek outpost. Later, the foundation of Alexandria diminished its former commercial prominence.¹

Naukratis displayed an independence which never appeared before, in issuing its own civic coinage, which continued till after Alexander's appearance.²

As a Greek city, the precise structure remains difficult to determine. Most of the evidence, it is later than the Saite period. But it definitely bore the aspect of a full polis with its chora. From the constitutional point of view, we hear of πρόστα
ταὶ τοῦ ἑμπορίου who may have been the supreme magistrates. Possibly, they were chosen and elected by the residents of the city. It is probable that there, there was a βουλὴ and an ἐκκλησίαν in the 6th cent. B.C., as certainly were in Hellenistic times.³

1 - Petrie (F.) 1888. Naukratis. I and II. Egypt Exploration Fund. London.
Coulson (W. and Leonard (A.) 1981. Cities of the Delta : Naukratis. Undena Publications, Malibu. pp. 6.

2 - Coulson et al. op. cit. pp. 15.

3 - Lloyd (A.) *ibid.* p. 24.

The greatest and most visited temple in the city was the "Hellenion" founded jointly by three Hellenic tribes : Dorian, Ionian and Aeolian. Nine cities representing these tribes, contributed to the building of this remarkable temple. Certain other Greek states founded sanctuaries for themselves dedicated to their national gods. A temple of Aphrodite, the knidian goddess, was erected as early as 688 B.C. There was also a temple of Melesian Apollo, to whom Necho II, in 608, dedicated his cuirass (II, 159). Herodotus (II, 178) says that the latest Greeks of Naukratis had in the time of Amasis, temples of Zeus, Hera, and Apollo (c. 570 B.C.)¹. The temple of the Dioskouroi dates about the 6th cent. B.C. No traces of Athena temple, nor of Zeus temple which were built by the Aeginetans were found.² (see plan).

Among the manufactured items which the city used to export were siver implements. Further, wine, typical Egyptian goods, like linen, papyrus, faience, and ivory were exported from Naukratis. Iron tools found there prove that iron was actually smelted and manufactured on the spot, and Naukratis was a great center of iron trade.³

Daphnae (or Daphnneh-Nebesheh)

Daphnae is situated in the eastern Delta, about eight miles southeast of Tanis. It belonged to the XIXth nome of Lower Egypt, its capital was Imet and its principal goddess Wadjet. The city Imet was re-established under the Saites. Apparently, some Cypriote mercenaries were stationed there during the military organisation of Psammetichus I, where he established the Greek garrison of Daphnae, some miles to the east to guard the eastern frontiers. The guard which Psammetichus posted there consisted of Carians and Ionians.

1 - Petrie. op. cit. p. 11.

2 - Ibidem. p. 17.

3 - Ibidem. pp. 38 and plan coulson et al. op. cit. p. 13.

During the reign of Psammetichus II and Apries there was not much activity in the place.

When Naukratis was established and Amasis restricted the Greek trade to it, Daphnae suffered from his policy, and the king deported the whole Greek garrison. The Carians and Ionians were stationed in Memphis. A garrison of Egyptians was put instead to keep the fort. These were succeeded in later times by a Persian garrison.¹

Art and Literature

Psammetichus I created a new consciousness of life among the Egyptians. After the foreign rule of the Libyans and Ethiopians, the Egyptians looked back at the remains of the glorious past, and drew inspiration from the work of their ancestors. The "Pyramid Era" loomed as the "Golden Age".

Artists tended to employ old forms for their creations. Most wall reliefs were either slavishly copied from ancient originals or are executed in novel "Neo-Memphite" style, based on earlier styles.²

A new rapid form of cursive writing, better suited to the needs of practical business and administration, and being in daily use, was developed. It was known to the Greeks as "demotic" writing, a term still applied to it. It represented the language then spoken, while the hieroglyphic of the time, which continued to lead an artificial existence employed the archaic forms of the language which had prevailed centuries before. As for the old "Pyramid Texts", they were yet copied on the walls of tombs and coffins, though their language and meaning were only partially or not all understood. The "Book

1 - Petrie (F.) 1888. Tanis. II : Nebesheh - Tell Nebesheh. Egypt Exploration Found, London. Ch. I. pp. 4.
Trigger et al. op. cit. pp. 319-321.

of the Dead", which now received its last redaction, became a long roll of papyrus. There was clearly a revival of this ancient mortuary Literature.¹

In tomb-chapels, we find again the fresh and pleasing representation of the life of people in meadows, in workshops and shipyards. They are perfect reproductions of the relief scenes in the mastabas of the old kingdom.

Old canons and conventionalities in art still prevailed in general with a touch of freedom. This freedom, to see things as they are, inspired a school of portraiture whose works surpassed the best works of the old kingdom.

The worship of the kings who ruled at Memphis in those remote days was revived, and the ritual of their mortuary service was maintained. The royal statues were copied from old kingdom representations. Ancient forms of headdress, such as the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, the blue crown and the "nemes" retain their popularity.

The royal titulary used since the old kingdom, was still in use. A good example is the Apries stela at Memphis (Mit Rahina), which imitated the language and structure of old kingdom decrees and even the very shape of old kingdom stelae.²

Statues of officials during that period continued the trends that were already prominent in previous times, but distinguished by realism. The statue of the vizier Nespekashuti (c. 580 B.C.), represents him as a squatting scribe, holding his papyrus roll open with his two hands. This is the pose of the scribe, one of the most ancient of Egyptian statue types and one that never fell out of favour. The

1 - Steindorf § Hoyningen-Huenc. 1945. Egypt. Photographed by Hoyningen-Huenc with text by Steindorf. New York.

2 - Gunn (B.) 1927. The Stela of Apries at Mitrahina, in ASAE XXVII. pp. 211.

incipient smile on the aimable features, is a reflection of the archaic smile in the private statues of that period. The softly polished, fine-grained stone, represents the Saite style at its best¹. (photo).

Montouemhat, the fourth priest of Amon, count of Thebes, and governor of Upper Egypt during the XXV-XXVIth dynasties, left more than a dozen statues in various poses, materials, and fashions of dress. One of the most complete is the standing grey granite statue of Karnak, showing him almost life-size in the heroic "royal" pose, with a strong youthful body of classic Old Kingdom². (photo).

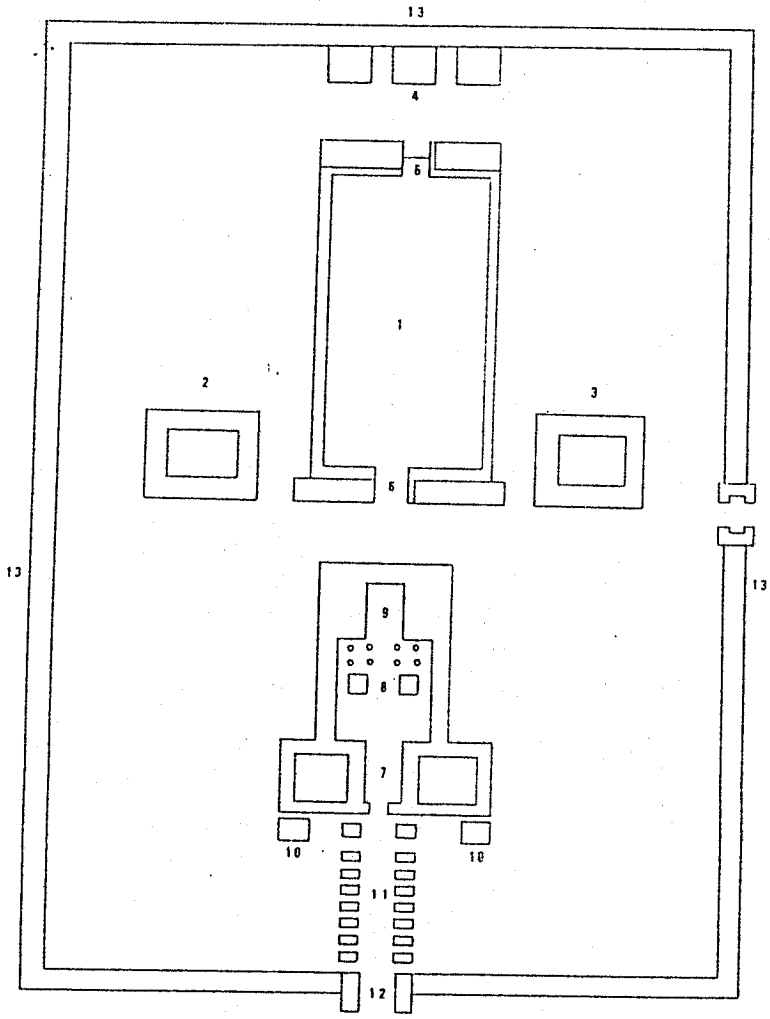
The Egyptian sculptor of that period turned his attention to carving large statues of animals. In the reign of Amasis, the high official Psammetichus commissioned a statue of the goddess Hathor as a cow protecting her own dedicatory figure. The composition was traditional as the famous statue of the Hathor cow from Deir el Bahari mortuary temple of Queen Hatshepsut of the XVIIIth dynasty, emerging from a thicket of papyrus, guards the figure of a king. In our statue, we notice that the sculptor rejected the concept of negative space. The four legs of the animal in the walking pose are shown on each side of the massive space.³ (photo).

The casting of statues in metal was pursued with vigour during this period. Numerous bronzes of Egyptian gods during the Late Period were mold-made and mass-produced.

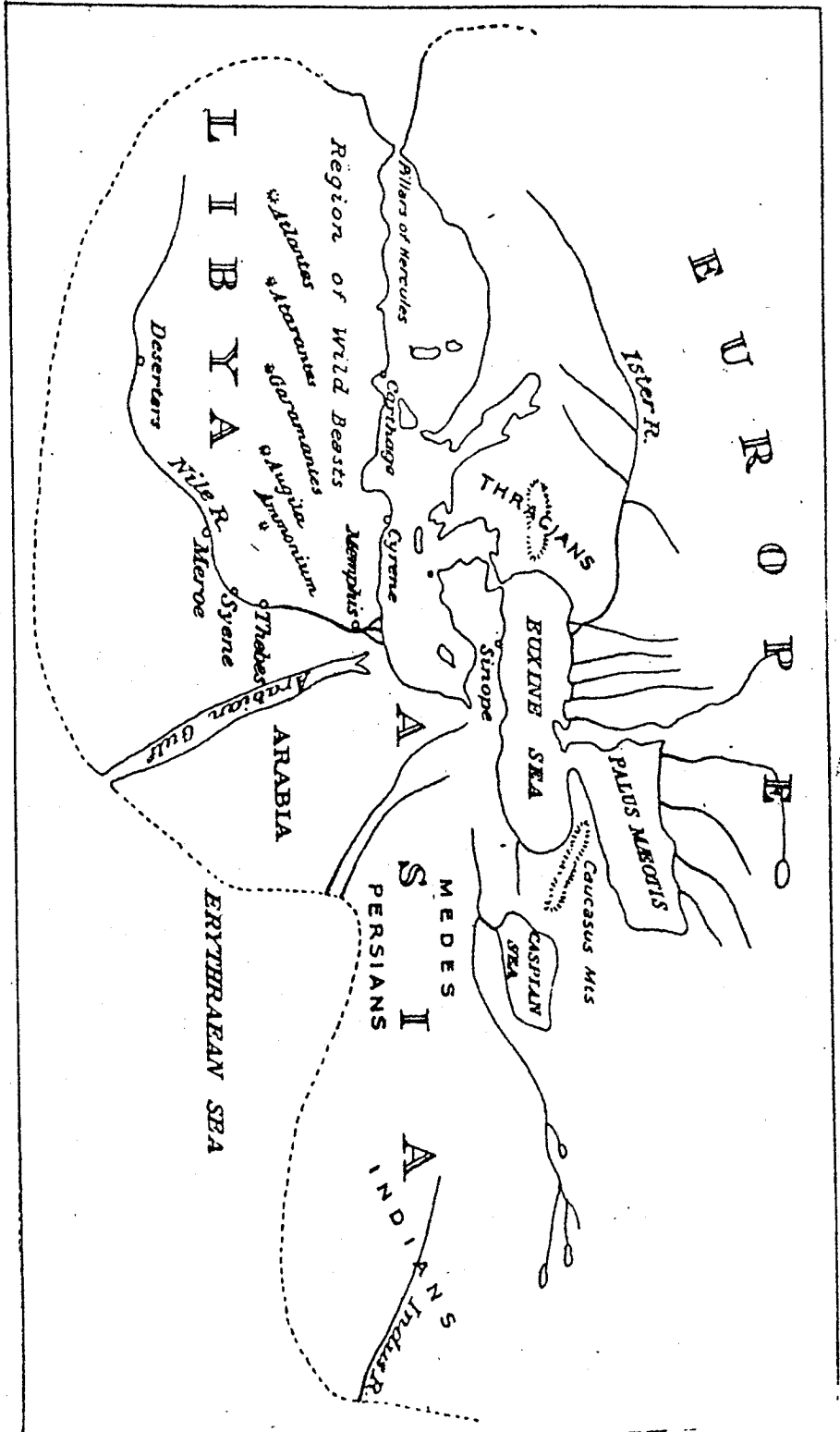
1 - Aldred (C.) 1980. Egyptian Art in Days of the Pharaohs, Thames & Hudson. § 190. pp. 228.

2 - Russmann (E.) & Finn (D.) 1989. Egyptian Sculpture, Cairo and Luxor. The American University Press, Cairo. § 82-84, pp. 179.

3 - Aldred (C.). op. cit. p. 231. fig. 192.
Russmann & Finn. *ibid.* § 86, p. 186.

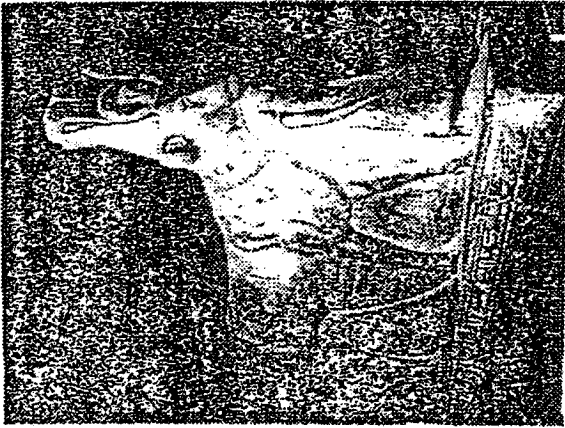


- 1) The Great necropolis.
- 2) Tomb of Apries and the Saite Kings.
- 3) Tomb of Amasis.
- 4) Sacred Tombs.
- 5-6) Pylons
- 7) Temple of Neith
- 8) Obelisks of Amasis.
- 9) Terrace wall of the temple
- 10) Colossi of Amasis.
- 11) Sphinxes of Amasis.
- 12) Propylon of Amasis.
- 13) Girdle wall of the sacred buildings.



-THE WORLD ACCORDING TO HERODOTUS

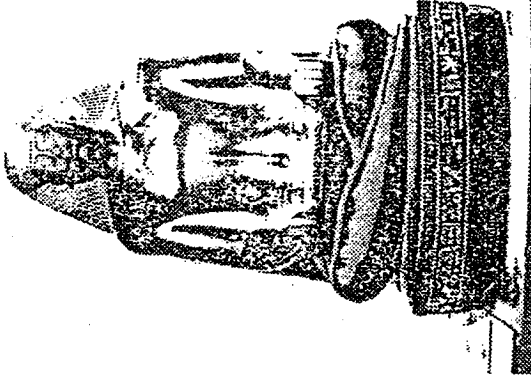
(After BUNBURY, History of Ancient Geography, Plate III)



3-A statue of the goddess
Hathor protecting Psommetichus



2-The statue of
Montouemhat



1-The statue of the vizier
Nespetkashuti

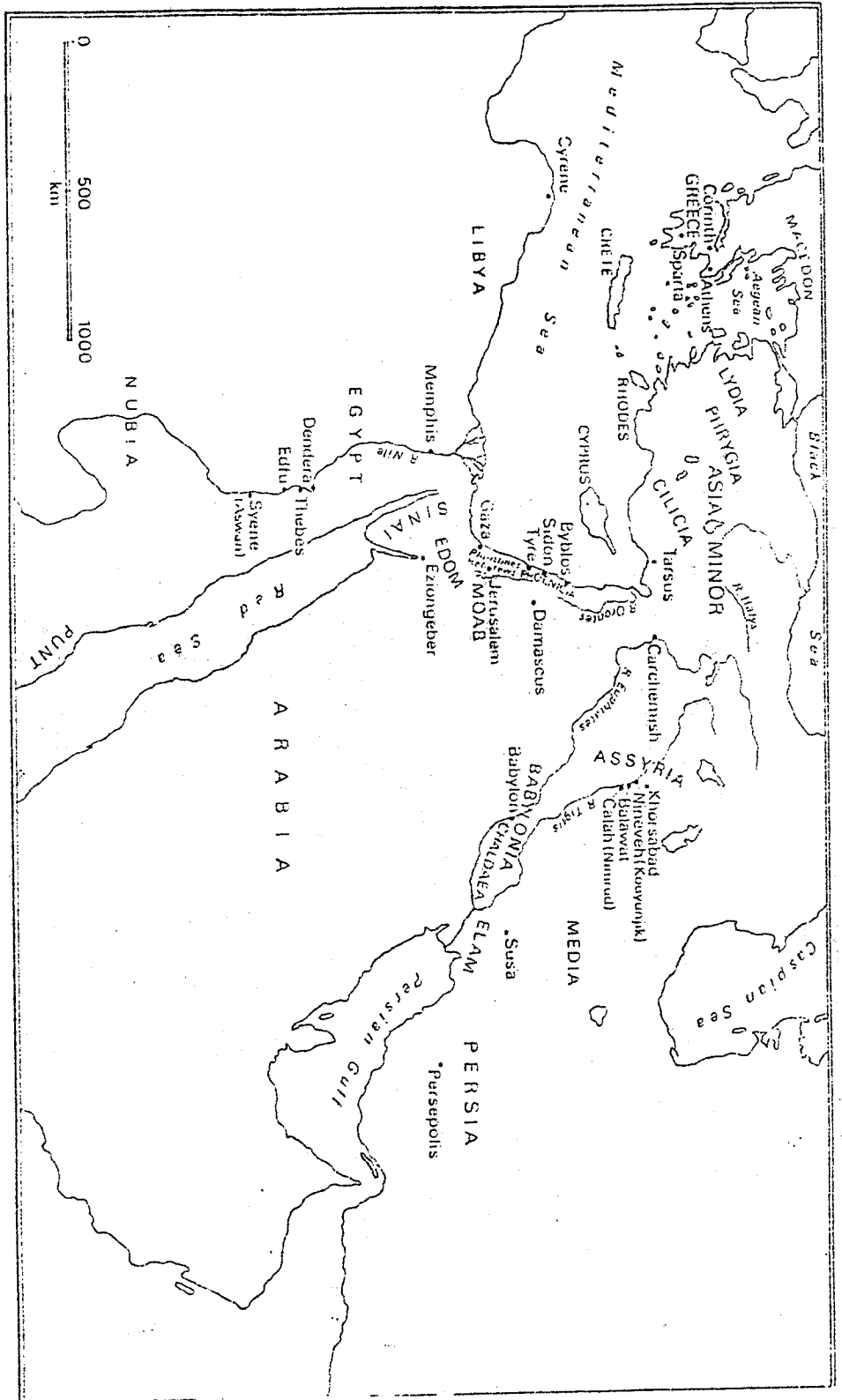


Fig. 4-1 Egypt, the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East in the first millennium BC.
Trigger et al.: *Ancient Egypt - A Social History*, p. 283.