The Journal of Hellenic Studies (2025), 1–6
doi:10.1017/S0075426925000059

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Egyptian grain to Athens: contexts of Philochoros 328 F 119

Nino Luraghi

University of Oxford, Oxford
E-mail: nino.luraghi@classics.ox.ac.uk

Abstract

Following on Josine Blok's article (this volume), this note assesses the possible historical contexts for the gift of grain to Athens recorded in Philochoros *FGrH* 328 F119.

Keywords: Athens; Egypt; grain; Philochoros; Didymos

I. Introduction

Josine Blok's detailed study of the scholia to Aristophanes' *Wasps* line 718 shows that here, contrary to Felix Jacoby's reading of the evidence, we are dealing with three separate fragments of Philochoros. One of them, Jacoby's 328 F 130, is quite straightforward, while another, the reference to the παρέγγραφοι, is very hard to connect to a specific historical event. The third fragment of Philochoros embedded in this scholion, namely the reference to the grain sent to the Athenians by Psammetichos, king of Libya in one version of the scholion, has, like the first fragment, a precise archon date, the archonship of Lysimachides, but unlike the first, it cannot be inserted comfortably into what we know from other sources about fifth-century Athenian history. A corollary of Blok's discovery is that Plutarch's reference to the same episode (*Per.* 37) most likely comes from Didymos' commentary on Aristophanes, and accordingly does not have the value of independent evidence.[1] It remains to consider briefly whether the occurrence of two Athenian archons named Lysimachides, one in 445/4 BCE and another in 339/8 BCE, may have contributed to the confusion detected by Blok. In the following, the two possible historical contexts for the shipment of grain from Egypt to Athens based on the dates of the two archons called Lysimachides will be considered, focusing especially on the circumstances in Egypt itself in the two historical moments.

II. Egypt after the revolt against Artaxerxes I

If dated to the 'first' archon Lysimachides (445/4), the shipment of grain to Athens by Psammetichos, king of Libya according to one version of the scholion to Aristophanes' *Wasps*, would have taken place soon after the end of Athenian involvement in Egypt and the Peace of Kallias. It comes as no surprise that modern historians have hitherto often regarded this episode with some misgivings: while outright rejection of its historicity is

[1] On Didymos' works on Attic comedy, see now Benuzzi (2020).

not frequent, it would be fair to say that it does not feature with any prominence in most reconstructions of events after the Thirty Years Peace of 446.[2] But what of the situation in Egypt? The Egyptian revolt, which had started soon after the death of Xerxes, may still have been ongoing after 449 BCE, at least in the Western Delta. Amyrtaios, Thucydides' 'king in the marshes', who had continued to fight the Persians from his regional strong point after Inaros had been caught and executed, received military help from the Athenians immediately before the peace, most likely in 450, and we cannot tell for sure when the Persians finally managed to defeat him.[3]

The main leader of the revolt was Inaros, whom Thucydides (1.104.1) calls 'a Libyan, king of the Libyans who lived towards Egypt'. A contract written in demotic from the archive of the temple of Osiris at Manawir, in the Kharga Oasis west of Thebes, may in some sense confirm this designation. It is dated according to the regnal year of Inaros 'prince of the Bakales', identified as a Libyan tribe known from a demotic document of Ramessid date and from Herodotus (4.171), who located it on the Libyan coast, between Euhesperides and Barke.[4] In any case, after Inaros was caught and executed by the Persians, Thucydides informs us that another leader by the name of Amyrtaios, whom he twice calls 'the king in the marshes' (1.110.2 and 112.3), continued the fight. There is at present no Egyptian documentary evidence proving that either Inaros or Amyrtaios ever really took the royal title. Contemporary Greeks could use the title *basileus* in reference to Egyptian leaders, and to foreign leaders more in general, with a certain nonchalance; even if the integration of an inscription from Samos recording a dedication by Inaros correctly restores his title as 'king of Egypt', not much weight can be put on it.[5]

For our purposes, however, what should be explained is the position of the two leaders before the revolt. Neither Inaros nor Amyrtaios invaded Egypt from the outside (despite the epithet 'Libyan' attributed to the former). When Thucydides says that Inaros 'set off from from Marea', that means that he was there already, not that he conquered the place;[6] as for Amyrtaios, the marshes in the Western Delta were presumably his base even before his revolt. Their role within Achaemenid Egypt is illuminated in a tantalizing way by Herodotus (3.15.3) in a passage that deals with the fate of the last pharaoh of the 26th dynasty, Psammetichos III, whom Herodotus calls Psammenitos. Here we learn that Inaros and Amyrtaios held some sort of *archē* before they revolted, and that their sons Thannyras and Pausiris were given back those same *archai* by the Persians, despite the great damage that their fathers had done to the Persians.[7] The underlying scenario would be one familiar to Egyptologists, best documented during the Third Intermediate Period. Before Psammetichos I managed to unify Upper and Lower Egypt and (probably in a second stage) to put an end to the Assyrian domination, the Delta area had been divided among principalities, typically centred around one of its main cities. Some of the rulers of these principalities used pharaonic titulary, with more or less justified claims, but most of them appear simply as leaders, with titles formally analogous to the one Inaros is given in the Manawir ostrakon referred to above.[8] Evidence on the fate of the families of these local rulers under the 26th dynasty is scarce; the Saite princes who went on to form the 26th

[2] Note the perplexities of Garnsey (1988) 125–27.

[3] For sources and bibliography on the Egyptian revolt in the second quarter of the fifth century, see Luraghi (2019).

[4] Chauveau (2004) and Winnicki (2006); see also Vittmann (2011) 400.

[5] See Osborne and Rhodes (2020) 110 B.

[6] On the situation at Marea under the Achaemenids, see Tuplin (2020b) 314.

[7] Since in 3.15.2 Herodotus says that the Persians traditionally respected the sons of kings, it is possible, although perhaps not certain, that he is by implication thinking of Inaros and Amyrtaios, too, as 'kings', in whatever sense.

[8] The correspondence of the title is pointed out by Winnicki (2006) 136. On the 'Libyan anarchy', see Yoyotte (2012) and Naunton (2010).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426925000059 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dynasty came from one of these families, and one doubts that they can have exterminated all their peers, rather than co-opting at least some of them in their new power system.[9] In this connection, it is worth pointing out, with respect to the fact that Thucydides calls Inaros a Libyan, that several of the princes of the Western Delta at the time of the Libyan Anarchy are called 'prince of the Libyans' in Egyptian documents,[10] to say nothing of the fact that basically all the dynasties of the Delta in this period appear to have been of remote or immediate Libyan origins.

Be that as it may, the *archai* of Inaros and Amyrtaios before the revolt can hardly have been anything but a new version of the Delta principalities so familiar from the Third Intermediate Period, and it would be worth trying to determine whether the two of them might actually have been descended from local leaders who held a similar position throughout the period of Persian domination and maybe even before, but this is a task for a different contribution. In any case, the prudent conclusion is that Inaros and Amyrtaios occupied positions of local power before the revolt, the former in and around Marea on the western border of the Delta, the latter in the Northern Delta close to one of the marshy areas: *exempli gratia* one can think, for different reasons, of Buto or Tanis, or maybe even Sais. Analogous positions, or rather, according to Herodotus, the same positions, were occupied by their sons. We have abundant parallels for local rulers integrated within the power system of the Achaemenid Empire, which often ended up ruling indirectly through these local rulers. We also have eloquent parallels for such local rulers revolting against the Achaemenids, most obviously in the case of the Ionian revolt. If Herodotus is right to suggest that, after extinguishing the revolt and killing its leaders, the Persians in some sense re-established the political *status quo ante* in the Delta, then it does not strain credulity to assume that our Psammetichos may have been a ruler of the area, most likely from the Western Delta and very possibly related by kinship to Inaros, whose father was also called Psammetichos, and in light of the fact that our Psammetichos of 445/4 is called, like Inaros, 'king of the Libyans' in one of the versions of the scholion.[11]

The donation would have come immediately after the Thirty Years Peace was signed in 446/5. In 446 Euboea had revolted from Athens, and regardless of how quickly the Athenians re-established control, they may well have needed some extra supplies in 445/4, or at any rate a helpfully minded friend may have thought in 446/5 that sending Athens grain from the harvest of the following year was a good idea. In any case, we do not need to see this episode as pointing specifically to the Athenians' need for external supply of food: the Egyptian context may provide a sufficient explanation. From the point of view of a dynast ruling in the Western Delta under Persian suzerainty, this was not necessarily a gesture tied to short-term political goals: rekindling friendship with a former ally may conceivably have been connected to a broader agenda, potentially also with an eye to trading relations.[12]

III. Egypt and Athens in 339/8 BCE

At some point between November 340 and the summer of 339, after a hard-fought campaign, Artaxerxes III managed to regain control over Egypt for the Persian Empire, routing the Pharaoh Nectanebo II and bringing to an end a period of over 40 years of

[9] See the discussion in Yoyotte (2012) 78–81 of the fate of the princes of Busiris, who seem to disappear under the Saites. On the process of unification under Psammetichos I, see the works of Olivier Perdu synthesized in Perdu (2010) 141–42.

[10] Yoyotte (2012) 34–47.

[11] Egyptologists speculate that Inaros may have been, or claimed to be, a descendant of the 26th dynasty; see Perdu (2010) 152 with further references.

[12] See the discussion of Hyland (2020) 253–54. On royal gifts in pharaonic ideology, see Bleiberg (1996).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426925000059 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Egyptian independence.[13] The second Persian conquest has often been depicted as particularly violent and devastating.[14] Unlike his predecessors from the late sixth and fifth centuries, Artaxerxes III made no attempt to depict himself as a legitimate ruler in the Pharaonic tradition: no Egyptian titulary is documented for him, and the silver coins he had struck in Egypt simply carried his name in demotic writing, accompanied by the royal title. In any case, his conquest opened a period of instability, during part of which Egypt appears again to have escaped Persian control. To be sure, when Alexander the Great invaded the Persian province in 332, it was ruled by a Persian satrap. A cluster of evidence, however, including the famous Satrap Stela of Ptolemy Soter, the funerary inscription on the sarcophagus of an Apis Bull from Saqqara and a marriage contract from Thebes attest to an indigenous Pharaoh by the name of Khababash who can only be dated to the years between Artaxerxes III and Alexander.[15]

Unknown to the literary sources, including Manetho, in the Satrap Stela Khababash is said to have ruled over Egypt after an enemy king, guilty of expropriating the temple of Horus at Buto, had been expelled alongside his son. The name of the enemy king is clearly a transliteration of the Old Persian name of Xerxes. Attempts at arguing that in fact the enemy king should be identified as Artaxerxes III have not persuaded everybody.[16] In any case, Khababash reinstated the fiscal privileges of the temple during a survey of the Delta in preparation to fend off a new Persian invasion. The date of the epitaph of the Apis Bull indicated that Khababash must have ruled for at least two years and three months.

The chronology of Khababash's reign is anybody's guess. Most often, the years 338–336 are pointed to as the most likely window, with some leeway at both ends. The death of Artaxerxes III in late August or September 338 appears like the most natural date for a new Egyptian revolt. It should be remembered that from Cambyses to Xerxes (inclusive), the deaths of Achaemenid kings had always been accompanied by revolts in Egypt (and we might have to include the death of Darius II in 404).[17]

The second archon Lysimachides (339/8 BCE) comes too early for Khababash to be a natural candidate as the benefactor of the Athenians. In order for this scenario to be possible, we would need to postulate the following two conditions. First, of course, we would have to admit that in Philochoros the familiar name 'Psammetichos' has replaced a much less well-known Egyptian king, in itself not unthinkable, and not without some approximate parallels.[18] Second, Egypt would have to have already been in revolt before the death of Artaxerxes III.[19]

Why Khababash might have turned to Athens is not difficult to imagine: Athenian generals and mercenary leaders had participated in defending Egypt against the Persians repeatedly during the fourth century (and some had occasionally also fought on the

[13] The chronology of Artaxerxes' conquest of Egypt is discussed in detail in Depuydt (2010); the more recent discussion of Wojciechowska (2016) 8–14 comes to the same conclusions.

[14] For different assessments, see Colburn (2020) 248–50 and Ladynin (2005) 103–11.

[15] On Khababash, see Huß (1994); Burstein (2000); Badian (2000) 252–54; Schäfer (2011) 139–44; Ruzicka (2012) 199–205; Wojciechowska (2016) 75–79.

[16] I personally would tend to side with Gorres (2017), who thinks that the name is indeed Xerxes and the reference needs to be read in terms of a highly ideological narrative of the past; see also Klinkott (2007) 37–40 and the detailed discussion of the text in Schäfer (2011) 146–51, concluding against the identification of the enemy king with Artaxerxes. However, Ockinga (2018) 192–94 makes a strong case for the enemy king, in the narrative of the stele, having withdrawn the fiscal privileges of the sanctuary *after* Khababash had granted them, that is, in chronological terms, between Khababash and Ptolemy.

[17] See Ruzicka (2012), McKechnie (2018) and Tuplin (2020a) 63–69 for the frequency and circumstances of Egyptian revolts during the fifth century.

[18] One thinks of Psammouthis, the early fourth-century usurper who probably hides under the name of Psammetichos in Schol. Ar. *Plut*. 178d, as shown by Carrez-Maratray (2005) 39, who offers a helpful synopsis of pharaohs and other leaders called 'Psammetichos' in the Greek sources.

[19] Artaxerxes III died in the late summer of 338 BCE; see Depuydt (2010) 211.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426925000059 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Persian side), so Khababash may have tried to re-establish a pattern that had been successful in the not-too-distant past. After all, Athenian involvement in Egypt was seen as a realistic possibility in those years. Before launching his invasion, in 344/3 Artaxerxes had sent embassies to the main Greek *poleis* in order to secure their neutrality, or even their support. On that occasion, we know that the Athenians had accepted the renewal of their friendship with Artaxerxes, promising not to oppose him as long as he did not attack any Greek *poleis* (Diod. Sic. 16.44.1; Philoch. 328 F 157). Then, in 341, we learn from Demosthenes' *Fourth Philippic* (10.33–34) of an offer of support from Artaxerxes, rejected by the Athenians. In other words, at this point the Athenians' attitude towards the Great King was ambiguously oscillating between friendship and suspicion.[20]

In the year of the second Lysimachides the Athenians were certainly in no position to get involved in military clashes elsewhere. Demosthenes' vivid description of the panic that seized Athens as the news arrived that Philip had occupied Elateia in Phokis late in 339 epitomizes the situation (*De cor.* 169). Less than a year later, on 7 Metageitnion in the archonship of Chairondas, in the high summer of 338/7, came the Battle of Chaironeia. We would need to imagine that, in the troubled run-up to Athens' defeat, a rebel pharaoh, himself probably not too steady in the saddle and not terribly up-to-date as to political developments in Greece, sent a gift of grain to an old friend of Egyptian irredentism, which however had in recent years been somewhat ambiguous and was now facing the power of Philip of Macedon: not an entirely impossible scenario, but on balance not a terribly likely one either.

Bibliography

Badian, E. (2000) 'Darius III', *HSPh* 100, 241–68

Benuzzi, F. (2020) 'Didymus and comedy', *BICS* 63, 51–61

Bleiberg, E. (1996) *The Official Gift in Ancient Egypt* (Norman)

Burstein, S.M. (2000) 'Prelude to Alexander: the reign of Khababash', *AHB* 14, 149–54

Carrez-Maratray, J.Y. (2005) 'Psammétique le tyran. Pouvoir, usurpation et alliances en Méditerranée orientale au IV^{e} siècle av. J.-C.', *Transeuphratène* 30, 37–63

Chauveau, M. (2004) 'Inarôs, prince des rebelles', in F. Hoffmann and H.-J. Thissen (eds), *Res severa verum gaudium. Festschrift für Karl-Theodor Zauzich* (Leuven) 39–46

Colburn, H.P. (2020) *Archaeology of Empire in Achaemenid Egypt* (Edinburgh)

Depuydt, L. (2010) 'New date for the second Persian conquest, end of Pharaonic and Manethonian Egypt: 340/39 B.C.E.', *JEH* 3, 191–230

Garnsey, P. (1988) *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis* (Cambridge)

Gorre, G. (2017) 'The Satrap Stela: a middle ground approach', *JEH* 10, 51–68

Harris, E.M. (1989) 'More Chalcenteric negligence', *CPh* 84, 36–44

Huß, W. (1994) 'Der rätselhafte Pharao Chababasch', *Studi epigrafici e linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico* 11, 97–112

Hyland, J.O. (2020) 'Aršāma, Egyptian trade and the Peloponnesian War', in C.J. Tuplin and J. Ma (eds), *Aršāma and His World: The Bodleian Letters in Context, Volume III: Aršāma's World* (Oxford 2020) 249–59

Klinkott, H. (2007) 'Xerxes in Ägypten. Gedanken zum negative Perserbild in der Satrapenstele', in S. Pfeiffer (ed.), *Ägypten unter fremden Herrschern zwischen persischer Satrapie und römischer Provinz* (Frankfurt) 34–49

Ladynin, I. (2005) 'Adversary Ḫšryš(ꜣ): his name and deeds according to the Satrap Stela', *CE* 80, 87–113

Luraghi, N. (2019) 'Herodotus, Egypt and the Athenian expedition', in A. Möller (ed.), *Historiographie und Vergangenheitsvorstellungen in der Antike. Beitrage zur Tagung aus Anlass des 70. Geburtstag von Hans-Joachim Gehrke* (Stuttgart) 73–90

McKechnie, P. (2018) 'The Greek wars: the fight for Egypt', in P. McKechnie and J.A. Cromwell (eds), *Ptolemy I and the Transformation of Egypt, 404–282 BCE* (Leiden and Boston) 27–45

Naunton, C. (2010) 'Libyans and Nubians', in A.B. Lloyd (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Egypt* (Oxford) 120–39

Ockinga, B.G. (2018) 'The Satrap Stele of Ptolemy: a reassessment', in P. McKechnie and J.A. Cromwell (eds), *Ptolemy I and the Transformation of Egypt, 404–282 BCE* (Leiden and Boston) 166–98

Osborne, R. and Rhodes P. (eds) (2020) *Greek Historical Inscriptions 478-404 BC* (Oxford)

[20] On this, see Harris (1989).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426925000059 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Perdu, O. (2010) 'Saites and Persians (664–332)', in A.B. Lloyd (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Egypt* (Oxford) 140–58
Ruzicka, S. (2012) *Trouble in the West: Egypt and the Persian Empire, 525–332 BCE* (Oxford)
Schäfer, D. (2011) *Makedonische Pharaonen und hieroglyphische Stelen. Historische Untersuchungen zur Satrapenstele und verwandten Denkmälern* (Leuven)
Tuplin, C.J. (2020a) 'Aršāma: prince and satrap', in C.J. Tuplin and J. Ma (eds), *Aršāma and His World: The Bodleian Letters in Context, Volume III: Aršāma's World* (Oxford) 3–72
— (2020b) 'The military environment of Achaemenid Egypt', in C.J. Tuplin and J. Ma (eds), *Aršāma and His World: The Bodleian Letters in Context, Volume III: Aršāma's World* (Oxford) 291–328
Vittmann, G. (2011) 'Ägypten zur Zeit der Perserherrschaft', in R. Rollinger, R. Bichler and B. Truschnegg (eds), *Herodot und das Persische Weltreich—Herodotus and the Persian Empire. Akten des 3. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum Thema 'Vorderasien im Spannungsfeld klassischer und altorientalischer Überlieferungen', Innsbruck, 24.–28. November 2008* (Wiesbaden) 373–429
Winnicki, J.K. (2006) 'Der libysche Stamm der Bakaler im pharaonischen, persischen und ptolemäischen Ägypten', *AncSoc* 36, 135–42
Wojciechowska, A. (2016) *From Amyrtaeus to Ptolemy: Egypt in the Fourth Century B.C.* (Wiesbaden)
Yoyotte, J. (2012) *Les principautés du Delta au temps de l'anarchie libyenne* (2nd revised edition) (Paris)

Cite this article: Luraghi N. Egyptian grain to Athens: contexts of Philochoros 328 F 119. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426925000059