CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE NEIGHBOUR OF PTOLEMAIC EGYPT (C. 332–30 BC)

From the earliest times down to Ptolemy surnamed Philadelphus not only had no Greeks penetrated into Aithiopia, they had not even come as far as to Egypt’s borders, so inhospitable in every way were these regions and so downright dangerous. But the above-mentioned king, with a Greek army, was the first who made an expedition into Aithiopia; and from that time knowledge about this country has been more accurate.¹

¹ Agatharchides in Diodorus 1.37.5, FHN II No. 144, trans. T. Eide.

1. Egypt in Lower Nubia before the Upper Egyptian Revolt (c. 332–205 BC)

1.1. The First Contacts

Agatharchides, the author of the note quoted at the head of this chapter on the expedition sent by Ptolemy II in 275 or 274 BC² to Nubia, may well have ignored the participation of Greek mercenaries³ in Psamtek II’s Nubian campaign in 593 BC (Chapter XIII.5.1) when he repeated the propagandistic topos about a great king who adds new lands to his empire. It is less likely that he did not hear at all about the punitive expedition sent to Lower Nubia between 319/8 and 311 BC (see below).

¹ Agatharchides in Diodorus 1.37.5, FHN II No. 144, trans. T. Eide.
² For the dating of the expedition, see Theocritus, Id. 17.87; Athenaeus, Deipn. 197ff.; Rice 1983; yet cf. also V. Foertmeyer: The Dating of the Pomp of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Historia 37 (1988) 94–104 (i.e., the triumphal procession following the campaign dated to 275 BC).
³ For their Nubian inscriptions, see FHN I Nos 41–43.
Ptolemy II’s military undertaking may have been a precaution but also a reaction on eventual incursions made by Nubians into Upper Egypt during the difficult decades that followed the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great (pharaoh of Egypt 332–323BC) in the last months of 332BC. Frontier squirmishes of the kind hinted at in a Greek letter from the first half of the third century BC may in fact have started in the very moment when the Lower Nubians and then the king of Kush have first learnt about the changes in Egypt. There existed a tradition in Hellenistic literature according to which Alexander was active in Aithiopia, and Arrian (Anab., 7.15.4) writes about an Aithiopian embassy to Alexander in 324BC. Hence Stanley Burstein suggested that Callisthenes led an expedition to Aithiopia in Alexander’s reign. This suggestion remains, however, far too hypothetical. Only so much seems certain that another data of Arrian (Anab., 3.2.7) concerning the early stationing of an Egyptian frontier force at Elephantine corresponds with reality. The predecessor garrison, viz., the Jewish military colony of Elephantine established under the First Persian Occupation, is well known from Aramaic papyri found on the island. It may also be explained by the existence of a frontier garrison at Elephantine that Alexander banished there the leaders of a revolt on Chios. According to the Satrap Stela, the people of Ḫrm had to be punished some time between 319/8 and 311BC because they committed a crime against Egypt. If the Ḫrmr were inhabitants of Lower Nubia, as suggested by Gauthier and Huss or of the Eastern Desert as suggested by Zibelius-Chen, their crime may have been

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4 For the conquest, see Höbl 2001 9ff.; Huss 2001 57ff.
7 S.M. Burstein: Alexander, Callisthenes and the Sources of the Nile. GRBS 17 (1976) 135–146.
9 Winnicki 1978 88.
11 Art., Anab., 2.1, 3.2.
12 Satrap Stela line 6.
13 Gauthier 1925–1931 I 93ff.
14 Huss 2001 136.
15 Zibelius-Chen 1994b 415.