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A brief remark on the philhellenic policy of Amasis at the *emporion* Naucratis

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ABSTRACT
The Greek emporia (Al-Mina, Naucratis, etc.) were usually founded on the sea shores or in the estuaries of large rivers because they served as important trade routes to the hinterland. Some countries were much more active in the effort of accepting new inventions than others. Thus, no wonder that the further existence and prosperity of emporia depended on a wide range of specific local conditions; in the case of Egypt, essentially on the attitude of the king to foreigners. An excellent example is certainly the famous Greek *emporion* Naucratis and its place in the Egyptian economy under the rule of Amasis (Ahmose II) and his reforms, as were recorded by Herodotus.

KEY WORDS
Amasis; Saite Dynasty; Herodotus; *emporion* Naucratis; East Greek cities; traders.

INTRODUCTION

The Greek *emporia* situated mostly on the shores of the Mediterranean or the Black Sea, are rather well-known and a frequently discussed phenomenon (Bouzek 1990, 169–186), also due to the new and still surprising discoveries. For instance, Pistiros (Bouzek 2013, 20–27), located in the westernmost part of the upper Thracian lowland, which attracted Bouzek's attention for a long time, or Thônis-Héracléion, the important port guarding the mouth of the Canopic branch of the Nile, which seemed to be a very busy contact zone for the exchange between Egypt and the Mediterranean (Fabre 2007, 194–220). Egyptian kings, or more exactly the Saite dynasts from Pssamtek I (664–610 BC) onwards, encouraged the East Greek cities and Phoenician merchants to trade with Egypt through their newly established ports of trade such as Naucratis, which enjoyed the advantage of its strategical position in the north-west Delta on the Canopic branch of the Nile, near the capital Sais (Diodorus I.68, 8), and Thônis-Héracléion (**Fig. 1**). By concentrating the trade at these prosperous *emporia*, it could be effectively regulated and customs dues easily collected. Moreover, the Greek community, like any other foreign settlers, were permitted to build temples for their gods as well as other institutions.

Besides written sources, the archaeological evidence clearly proves (Petrie 1886, 1–54; Leonard 1997, 1–35) that Naucratis was founded long before Amasis became king (570–526 BC). The earliest Greek traders seem to have been Corinthians, but it was the Milesians and a number of other groups who were most influential in the Saite era. A large amount of pottery is datable even to the end of the 7th century BC and was recovered from the temple precincts of Chian Aphrodite, Samian Hera, Milesian Apollo, and the Dioscuri. So, one can suppose that there were Greeks at Naucratis by 630–620 BC or perhaps some decades earlier (Villing – Schlotzhauer 2006, 1–10), which was roughly the time of the beginning of the distant commercial colonising era of the East Greek city-states. The last and the largest of the group of purely Greek sanctuaries was the Hellenion (Hogarth 1905, 103–136), serving the

Fig. 1: Archaic Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea (after Villing – Schlotzhauer 2006).

communal needs of these prosperous East Greek cities. Crucial for this interpretation are the unique inscriptions on the vases which name different Greek gods; however, the most significant bear dedications to 'the Gods of the Hellenes' (Boardman 1999, 118–128). The earliest votive vessels discovered here date to the second quarter of the 6th century BC, i.e., to the reign of Amasis, so it may well be that the Hellenion was founded as a result of his reorganization of the status of Naucratis, giving the port of trade new trading rules (**Fig. 2**). Indeed, the abundant quantity of pottery and the architectural remains of Greek sanctuaries are rather eloquent witnesses. The same is true of Herodotus' account (Waterfield 1988, 166–167).

He describes the foundation of the *emporion* as follows: *Amasis became a philhellene and one of the ways he showed this, among the various favours he did Greeks, was to give them the city of Naucratis as a place where any Greeks who came to stay in Egypt could live. Moreover, any Greeks who made voyage to the country without wishing to settle were given plots of land where they could set altars and precincts to their gods. The largest of these precincts, as well as being the most famous*

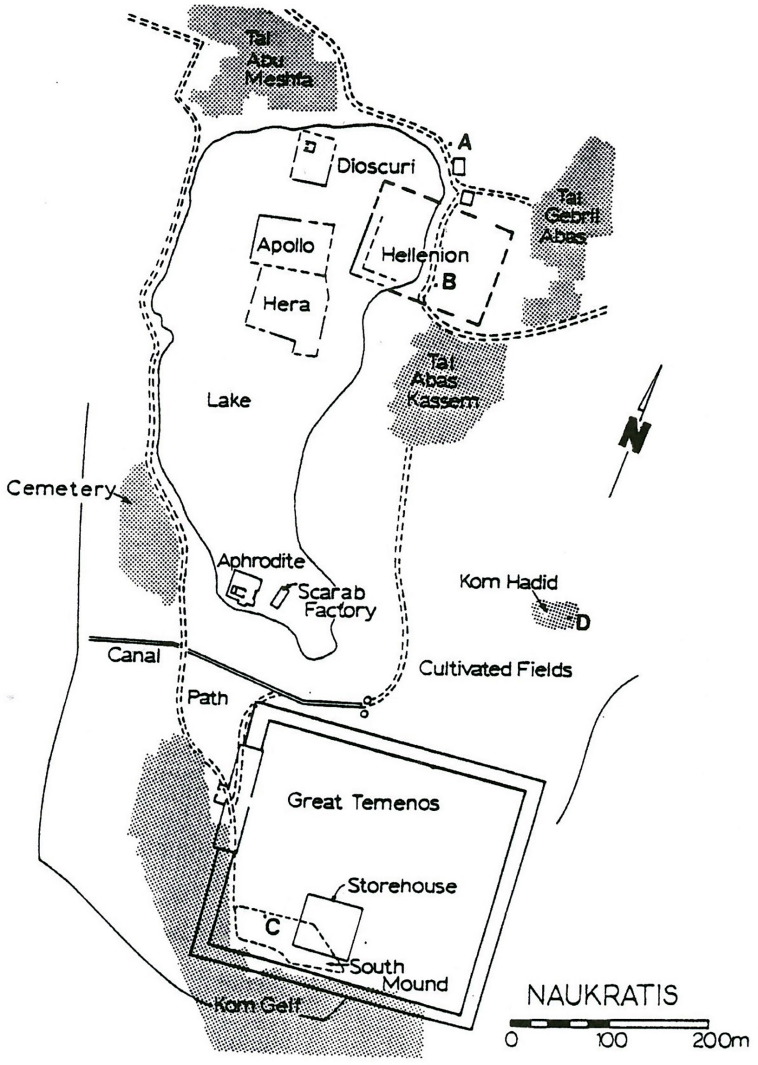

Fig. 2: The composite plan of the Greek emporion Naucratis (after Johnson 1982, fig. 5).

and popular, is called the Hellenion, whose foundation was a joint venture undertaken by a number of Greek communities. The Ionian places involved were Chios, Teos, Phocaea, and Clazomenae; the Dorian communities involved were Rhodes, Cnidos, Halicarnassus, and Phaselis; and the only Aeolian town involved was Mytilene. These are the cities to which the precinct belongs (they also supply the officers who are in charge of the trading-centre), and any other communities which lay claim to it are making a claim to something they have no share in. However, precincts sacred to Zeus, Hera, and Apollo were built separately by Aegina, Samos, and Miletus respectively.

Originally, there was no other trading-centre in Egypt apart from Naucratis. If someone fetched up at any of the other mouths of the Nile, he had to swear that he had not done so deliberately, and then after making this statement under oath bring his ship round to the Canopic mouth. Alternatively, if contrary winds made it impossible for him to take his ship round, he had to transport his goods around the Delta by baris *and get to Naucratis that way. That is how important Naucratis was* (Herodotus II, 178–179).

PHILHELLENE AMASIS AND HIS PRAGMATIC POLICY

The reliability of the philhellenic policy of Amasis has been questioned on several occasions (Vittmann 2003, 206); his (and his predecessors') ambivalent approach to the increasing number of Greeks (and other foreigners) living in the country seems to be more accurate. The Egyptians controlled their activities, but they could not completely restrict them, since the merchants brought much needed commodities with themselves, and the mercenaries formed an indispensable part of the Egyptian army (Austin 1970, 44). In this respect Amasis had inherited and not created the philhellenic strategy of the Saite kings. A true philhellenic policy of Amasis became imperative towards the second half of his long reign, when he tried to forge alliances among the Greek city-states, which were also menaced by the Persian Empire, by sending gifts and contribution to the rebuilding of the temple of Apollo at Delphi. He also formed a pact with Polycrates of Samos, and Cyprus was conquered, among other events (Lloyd 1988, 220–229). Thus, Herodotus' narrative had its origin in contemporary Egyptian (pro-Amasis) sources and Amasis clearly benefits from it in the years of the Greek audience; it is necessary to mention that Herodotus visited Egypt during the First Persian occupation, in the 440–430 BC.

Amasis' career was rather unusual and it is worth reviewing it briefly. Amasis, a former army officer, started his rule after a civil war which broke out between King Apries, supported largely by 30,000 Ionian and Carian mercenaries, according to Herodotus, and the nationalists benefiting from the anti-Hellenic feeling of the natives. As a result, the legitimate king was dethroned. The troops of *machimoi* under the leadership of General Amasis (the future Ahmose II) claimed total victory in 570 BC, and he usurped the throne of Egypt. Under such circumstances, it would be essential for him to seek to reduce the influence of foreigners, mainly Greeks, who had sheltered Apries for a long time (Smoláriková 2008, 40–41).

The thorough control and tax collection of incoming ships and their imported commodities by an army of Egyptian officials was in operation at the mouth of the Nile as early as the New Kingdom (Möller 2000, 29). The concentration of Greek commercial activity at Naucratis (surprisingly, Herodotus ignored Thônis-Héracléion, which lay also on the Canopic branch), perhaps was aimed at a new phase of commercial expansion or may have been due to its tighter control. The trading posts were at that time taxed and regulated by Egyptian officials holding the title the 'Overseer of the Gate of the Foreign Lands of the Great Green'. They would have been responsible for the smooth administering of trade taxes on behalf of the Egyptian state (Pressl 1998, 70). This policy of the pharaoh may also have been intended to restrict very ambitious Greek merchants by establishing an easily monitorable location close to the capital Sais. By the way, the same pattern was used in the relocation of Greek mercenaries from their garrisons on the eastern Delta to Memphis (Herodotus II, 178). In such a way, the reorganization of the country was ongoing through increasing control over various aspects of taxation, including custom duties on commodities entering the country through the trading posts, as well as changes in the secular and religious contexts (Jelinkova-Reymonds 1956, 251–253).

As mentioned above, philhellenism cannot be the reason for Amasis' intervention in the trade at Naucratis. On the contrary, the measures must have been extremely inconvenient to Greek commerce, and their restrictive character is clear. Since he was brought to power thanks to a strong anti-Greek movement, he would have been forced to fulfil a nationalistic policy for the first phase of his reign at least; surprisingly, Herodotus does not mention these crucial events. Thus, by putting this into a broader context, the monopoly was hardly intended to honour Naucratis (Lloyd 1988, 229–231).

CONCLUSION

Herodotus is still, despite many vague statements, our major written source for the foundation of Naucratis and the close entanglement between Egypt and Greece during the archaic period, but archaeology and its findings have provided distorted information concerning certain foundation dates. His account contains numerous evident inaccuracies, mainly the distortions of Philhellene Amasis' motives in his treatment of Naucratis. Rather than referring to the foundation of the *emporion*, the record draws attention to promoting the presence of substantial Greek communities in the city, and the pharaoh's effort to significantly regularize their position there as well as to restrict enthusiastic commercial activities of Greeks elsewhere in Egypt. One wonders also how deeply Herodotus misinterpreted Amasis' activities on the Naucratis *temene*, where he assumed that the small temple precincts of Hera, Apollo, Aphrodite, and Zeus, belonging apparently to the initial period of the city under Psamtek I, except the Hellenion, were contemporary and all fell into the reign of Amasis. The foundation of the Hellenion, the largest and the most splendid of the Greek temples in Naucratis, seems to be the meeting place where citizens from different *poleis* came together and through the unique joint worship, offered their gifts to the Gods of the Hellenes, and where, in such a way a Greek cohesive identity could flourish in the milieu of the surrounding Egyptian society (Höckmann – Möller 2006, 11–22). In a class of its own is Herodotus' misunderstanding of Amasis' reorganization of Egypt after the deposition of Apries, here is evident his over-schematization of a large set of reforms realized during the reign of the Saite kings, from the founder of the dynasty Psamtek I onwards.

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