



*The Twilight of Ancient Egypt: First Millennium B. C. E.*, K. Mysliwiec.  
Translated by David Lorton. Cornell University Press, 2000. ISBN  
0801486300. Pp. 272

Reviewed by Duane W. Roller  
The Ohio State University, USA  
[roller.2@osu.edu](mailto:roller.2@osu.edu)

For classicists, Egypt has always been an enigma. An integral element of Greek and Roman culture since earliest times, it has always remained alien. Its language is not read by most classicists, and its material culture and society, while having a continued impact on the Greco-Roman world, is not generally a focus of their study. Even the Hellenistic and Roman periods, when Egypt was actually ruled by Greeks and then Romans, often attract scant interest, except, perhaps, the first century B.C.

Yet classicists need to know something about Egypt, especially before the periods of direct Greco-Roman control. When Alexander the Great invaded in 332 B. C., Greeks had been involved in the culture of the region for hundreds of years, at least since the founding of Naukratis in the seventh century B. C. if not long before. Homer was familiar with the place, as were Greeks of the Bronze Age. And for substantial periods during those years from the founding of Naukratis to Alexander, the primary sources for Egyptian history are in Greek, whether Herodotos, Diodoros, or Manetho. Yet this is an environment not only largely ignored by classicists but less studied by Egyptologists than the flourishing eras of the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms. Mysliwiec has been excavating in Egypt for many years, a significant part of the Polish archaeological presence that has existed for nearly half a century. The focus of Polish archaeology in Egypt has been the period after the

Bronze Age, especially the Greco-Roman era, at sites such as Alexandria, Tel Atrib (also primarily Hellenistic), and Naqlun, site of an early Christian monastery. These excavations have helped elucidate those eras of Egyptian history of greatest interest to classicists.

In the present volume, Mysliwiec has provided a lively and interesting summary of Egypt in the first millennium B. C. Originally published in 1993 as *Pan Obydwu Krajów*, the work appeared in German in 1998 as *Herr Beider Länder*, a direct translation of the Polish title. The current English edition was prepared from this German one. After an introductory summary on the collapse of the New Kingdom, the book discusses the last six dynasties of independent Egypt, from the beginning of Dynasty 21 (ca. 1085 B. C.) to the Persian takeover in 525 B. C. The following chapter, the longest, examines the period down to Alexander, with brief comments on the Ptolemies and the Roman era. The final chapter is an interesting summary of Polish archaeology in Egypt, which has yielded extensive information about daily life in the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. Throughout the text there are constant points of contact with the classical world. Some are familiar, such as Herodotos' account of the Saite period. Others are less so, such as Egyptian involvement in Greek politics of the early fourth century B. C. The book is especially well illustrated, including over 20 color plates that allow a visual understanding of places long vaguely familiar to classicists, such as Sais itself. Many works of art also appear, including representations of Persian and Greek rulers in Egyptian style. One of the most intriguing is a statue of Darayavaush I of Persia, shown in a Hellenic-Persian manner but with hieroglyphs on his belt, and standing on a plinth which has a catalogue of the satrapies, remindful of that of Herodotos, but also in hieroglyphs. Mysliwiec is always careful to cite provenience and excavational history, and present location of each work of art discussed. Special attention is paid to the complexities of Egyptian art-historical interpretation, always a problem, but especially so in these late periods, in which archaizing and reuse were rampant. Other features include a number of intriguing personal anecdotes, especially the author's recovery of a relief of Amasis that had languished in Memphis, Tenn., and a valuable comparative chronology that allows classicists to relate Egyptian history to more familiar events. Two maps show the location of the sites mentioned in the text.

There are virtually no footnotes, and while this can be dangerous, it is not a significant problem. There are a few glitches in the handling of Greek material: the author seems unaware of the ongoing

uncertainties about the founding date of Naukratis (p. 121), and his chronological chart inexplicably places Themistokles before Kleisthenes (p. 223). It is implied that Rome had no awareness of Egypt before the time of Sulla (p. 188). These are all minor, however, and do not diminish the value of this book as a basic handbook for understanding the period when Greeks and Romans came best to know ancient Egypt.