

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MODERN AGREEMENTS BETWEEN GREECE AND EGYPT AS SECONDARY READINGS: THE ECHOES OF HERODOTUS AND THUCYDIDES

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Abstract

Greece and Egypt, developed individually in two continents Europe and Africa, respectively, have maintained long beneficial relations since pre-historic times. The earliest evidence of Greek-Egyptian relations was uncovered from Minoan excavations that date back to 3000 BCE. Considering the literary sources available to examine the nature of contacts between Greece and Egypt, the Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides from the 5th century BCE reveal evidently reliable information on the bilateral agreements that prevailed between the two nations. Historians relate stories on how these two nations significantly relied on times of need during the 5th century BCE war periods. While Egypt was the grain supplier for Greek city-states, specifically Athens, Athenians repaid Egypt by extending their military power to Egypt. Further, as history reveals, both nations maintained strong trade links. Fast-forwarding to modern diplomatic relations, Greece and Egypt have continued their relations with each other up to the 21st century, irrespective of the fact that the cultures of both nations have evolved with many developments and advances. This research paper explores the contemporary importance of the bilateral agreements between Greece and Egypt, drawing parallels with the historical narratives of Herodotus and Thucydides. The paper follows a historical method in analysing the narrative of history and an analytical approach in reading the modern agreements taken under discussion. The paper intends to analyse how modern agreements between these two nations reflect and reminisce the historical interactions, emphasizing the political, economic, and cultural significance between these powerful nations in the Mediterranean basin. By examining the historical context, the paper aims to shed light on the enduring diplomatic and cultural ties between Greece and Egypt, offering valuable knowledge for international relations in the present and future.

Keywords: Beneficial factor, Egypt, Greece, Modern Agreements, Reminisce

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Introduction

The modern world is evolving with diplomatic agreements and partnerships that profoundly impact international relations while creating beneficial opportunities for each country involved. Among these, the agreements between Greece and Egypt have attracted considerable attention due to their historical significance throughout many centuries and their contemporary relevance to modern-day issues. Many Greek historians, poets, geographers, and logographers have recorded instances where Greece and Egypt maintained different levels and types of relations with each other. While these records are evidently proven to be accurate through archaeological evidence, they provide first-hand evidence to examine and analyse the nature of Greek-Egyptian relations and prove that since the pre-historic times like the Minoan, both countries have maintained friendly bilateral relations. The echoes of history, particularly the accounts of Herodotus of Halicarnassus (484 – 425 BCE) and Thucydides the Athenian (460 – 400 BCE), provide valuable insights into the enduring relationship between these two nations. This research paper aims to analyse the importance of modern `bilateral agreements signed between Greece and Egypt, with a particular focus on how they resonate with the historical narratives of the aforementioned 5th-century Greek historians, Herodotus and Thucydides in historical narratives *Histories* and *The History of the Peloponnesian War* respectively.

Methodology

In this research, the main method of acquiring knowledge is a close analysis of the information provided by the historical narratives of Herodotus' *The Histories* and Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Modern agreements signed between Greece and Egypt after 2020 are read as recent cases to examine the nature of the bilateral relations between the two nations. Accordingly, the research followed a historic method under qualitative research methodology to analyse how modern-day agreements can be studied as secondary readings to recall the ancient narratives of Herodotus and Thucydides.

Results and Discussion

Modern Agreements between Greece and Egypt

Modern agreements between Greece and Egypt represent a continuation of their historical interactions. During the recent agreement signed between Greece and Egypt in November 2022 on maritime rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea, the Greek foreign minister Nikos Dendias emphasized the fact that both Greece and Egypt continuously come into beneficial terms "in the context of our regular contacts and a common approach on a wide range of issues" (ekathimerini.com, 2022). Further, he highlights that they have continued their relations with 'the long-standing Greece-Egypt strategic relations, developments in Eastern Mediterranean.'(ekathimerini.com, 2022). Apart from the particular agreement, the most discussed past agreements were the economic agreement between Egypt and Greece signed in 2020, a maritime treaty creating an exclusive economic zone for oil and gas drilling rights in the Mediterranean Sea. Again, in 2022, Egypt and Greece signed a protocol to support bilateral military cooperation, allowing the Greek army officers to enrol at the Nasser Military Academy, Egypt's highest military educational facility (ekathimerini.com, 2022). The recent agreement signed by Greece and Egypt in 2022 will be considered the present case study to reassess the enduring nature of the above relationship. There are no cultural similarities between ancient or modern Greece and Egypt, yet they proceed into bilateral agreements to maintain peace and cooperation. This agreement is a testament to the long-standing historical ties between Greece and Egypt. It highlights the importance of military cooperation in promoting bilateral relations in defence and security. By examining the continuous relations between Greece and Egypt, this research will provide valuable insights into the dynamics of long-term foreign relations between countries and the role of military strengths and cooperation in this regard.

These agreements encompass various domains, including politics, trade, culture, and tourism. Key agreements in the above agreements have solidified diplomatic ties and promoted cooperation on regional and global issues. The modern agreements between Greece and Egypt are instrumental in fostering regional stability and addressing shared challenges while recalling the strong bonds that prevailed between these two nations nearly 5000-2500 years back. These agreements involve cooperation on maritime boundaries, security, and counterterrorism efforts in the Mediterranean Sea. Notably, the 2020 Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) agreement between Greece and Egypt has drawn attention to its role in delineating maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Further, the agreements emphasize the unbreakable bond between Greece and Egypt, setting an example for the other countries. Further, they intend to solidify their strength among the countries in the Mediterranean basin. Economic factors between Greece and Egypt are pivotal in enhancing trade and investment opportunities. The cooperation in energy resources, particularly natural gas exploration and pipelines, holds significant economic potential for both nations. Furthermore, creating tourism opportunities aims to boost cultural exchange and strengthen ties. Cultural agreements between Greece and Egypt facilitate the exchange of art, heritage, and educational programs. These initiatives celebrate the shared history of the two nations, drawing inspiration from the rich heritage documented by Herodotus and Thucydides. The current agreements can be studied as significant secondary sources to examine the nature and continuation of Greek and Egyptian ties and further contribute to preserving and promoting their cultural legacies.

The modern agreements between Greece and Egypt echo the historical ties documented by Herodotus. They reflect the enduring cultural connections, highlighting the significance of ancient heritage in contemporary diplomacy. The exchange of artefacts, cultural festivals, and collaborative research projects demonstrate a commitment to preserving and celebrating their shared history. Herodotus's accounts of political interactions between Greece and Egypt serve as a backdrop to modern geopolitical considerations. Maritime disputes, energy cooperation, and regional stability have historical antecedents that inform contemporary decision-making. Herodotus's insights offer valuable context for policymakers navigating these complex issues.

Herodotus is often credited as the "Father of History" for his systematic approach to documenting events, geography, culture, and politics, laying the foundation for studying history. Herodotus in the *Histories* dedicates the second book, *Euterpe*, to the records of the fascinations of Egypt. Herodotus defines the source materials he referred to narrate the story of Egypt, saying that 'up to this point I have confined what I have written to the results of my own direct observation and research, and the views I have formed from them; but from now based on my story will be the accounts given to me by the Egyptians themselves-though here, too, I shall put in one or two things which I have seen with my own eyes' (the *Histories*, II.99). The Classical historian attempts to prove the reliability of his facts by this statement saying that he cross-checked or instead incorporate his own experiences into what he heard from others. As Herodotus compiles these descriptions, he claims he gathered information from Egyptian priests. Scholars highly argue this because this information was originally retreated by Hecataeus on his visit to Egyptian priests in the temple of Zeus-Karnak in Thebes, Egypt (the *Histories*, II.143). Even though Herodotus' Book II can be considered one of the best sources on Greek-Egypt relations prior to Alexander, doubts about the originality of information sometimes make him unreliable. Though Herodotus is known as the 'Father of History', he is also accused as the 'Father of lies' by later critics (Evans, J., 1968). Some of the stories compiled in the records of *The Histories* are identified as legends as well as fabrications by Herodotus himself, which threatens his reliability and ambiguity as a historian. His successor, Thucydides, indirectly disregards the reliability of Herodotus

in several points without mentioning his name. For instance, in Book 1, Thucydides mentions how his work 'will seem less easy to read because of the absence of a romantic element' (The History of the Peloponnesian War, 1.23). Irrespective of such criticisms, Herodotus' compilation of Egypt should be evaluated as it provides a broader understanding of Greek and Egyptian relations of the fifth century BCE.

Since his departure was hindered by unfavourable weather, and since it lasted for a long time, he decided to commit a despicable act: he had a local man's two children kidnapped and sacrificed. (The Histories, II. 119)

Herodotus describes an inland voyage, sailing upstream on the Nile. In the following description, Herodotus refers to the Greeks who had inhabited the areas of Egypt, proving the existence of a Greek community near the port cities of Egypt (The Histories. II.28). The particular reference further extends to Greek temples erected in the Egyptian land. A foreign community settled in another country takes action to meet their religious needs in due time. Athena's temple in the Egyptian city of Sais is a literary example to prove that Greek communities established foreign groups in the Egyptian land. Herodotus' references to different forms of Greek and Egyptian relations provide us with literary evidence to examine the nature of early Greek and Egyptian relations.

I will speak of Egypt more, for there is more wonderful in Egypt than in any other country, and it can boast of such accomplishments almost no words can describe.

(The Histories. II. 35)

Herodotus shows constant fascination towards Egyptian culture. Some of his descriptions go beyond reality and factual history. Nevertheless, Herodotus, a contemporary from the period, can be assumed that his records can be considered with filters, as he tends to add exaggeration and marvellous characteristics to heighten the reading value of his records. Herodotus is widely regarded as the father of history, and his work "The Histories" is a valuable source of information on the ancient world. However, when it comes to his account of Egyptian history, there are certain aspects of his work that raise questions about its reliability and accuracy.

In Herodotus's writings, Greece and Egypt are prominently featured due to their strategic locations and rich histories. Herodotus provided valuable accounts of the Egyptian civilization, including descriptions of the Nile, its customs, and the awe-inspiring pyramids. He also documented the interactions between Greece and Egypt, including the story of Pharaoh Psammetichus I and the origin of the word "barbarian." One of the main issues with Herodotus's account of Egyptian history is that he relied on second-hand information, often from Greek travellers and merchants who had visited Egypt. He also claimed to have consulted the Egyptian priests, who were renowned for their knowledge of ancient history, but his interpretation of their accounts has been called into question. Another issue is Herodotus's tendency to incorporate mythical elements into his historical accounts. Herodotus sees Egypt as the source of certain Greek values and customs. Herodotus's account of Egyptian history often reflects his own Greek biases and cultural perspective. For example, he interprets Egyptian customs and beliefs through the lens of Greek culture, which can lead to misunderstandings and inaccuracies.

Finally, it is worth noting that Herodotus's work was written several years after the events he describes. His account of Egyptian history must be cautiously approached and corroborated with evidence from other sources. In conclusion, while Herodotus's *The Histories* remains an important source of

information on ancient history, his account of Egyptian history should be cautiously approached and critically evaluated using other available sources and archaeological evidence.

Later, Thucydides, the Greek historian (460-400 BCE), also referred to Egypt in his historical record of the Peloponnesian War, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Thucydides is widely considered one of the most reliable and authoritative ancient historians who followed a scientific method of historiography. However, when it comes to his references to Egypt, there are certain aspects of his work that require careful evaluation. Thucydides' focus on Greece and the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) means his references to Egypt are often brief and incidental. For example, he mentions Egypt as one of the countries that supplied the Persian navy during the Greco-Persian Wars. While these references can be valuable indicators of Egypt's role in the wider ancient world, they may not provide a comprehensive or detailed picture of the country's history or culture. Nevertheless, his information is collected mostly from eyewitness accounts and official records; his interpretation of these sources may have been influenced by the cultural and intellectual context of his own time.

In Thucydides' account of Pentacontaetia, he records an incident where Athens and her allies sail up to the Niles to help Inaros, the son of Psammetichus against the Persian king Artaxerxes (*The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.104).

Moreover, Inarus, the son of Psammetichus, an African king, was confined in Egypt, making war from Mareia above Pharus, causing the most significant part of Egypt to rebel against the king Artaxerxes. When he took the government upon himself, he brought in the Athenians to assist him, who, chancing to be then warring on Cyprus with two hundred galleys, part their own and part their confederates, left Cyprus and went to him. Moreover, going from the sea up the river of Nilus after they had made themselves masters of the river and two parts of the city of Memphis, they assaulted the third part, the White Wall. Within were the Medes and Persians, who had escaped, and the Egyptians, who had not revolted amongst the rest.

(*The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.104)

Herodotus also passes by this incident (*the Histories*, 3.12, 7.7) but does not pay much attention. Thucydides briefly mentions the incident without any further description. As Westland argues, he was not descriptive in the middle of Pentacontaetia because his primary concern was highlighting the growing power of Athens. This reference is significant for examining the research on the nature of Athenian-Egyptian contacts as it provides evidence on whether this was a dispute. The reference becomes significant in scholarship as a later historian, Ctesias of Cnidus, has provided an account of the same incident of Athenians sending help to Inarus.

Thucydides' references to Egypt are scattered throughout his work and do not constitute a comprehensive or systematic treatment of the country's history or culture. Therefore, any analysis of Thucydides' references to Egypt must be complemented with evidence from other ancient sources, such as the works of Herodotus or Egyptian inscriptions and artefacts. While Thucydides' reputation as a reliable historian is well-deserved, his references to Egypt must be approached critically, considering the limitations and biases of his sources and his own intellectual context. Understanding ancient Egypt requires a multi-faceted approach that draws on various sources and disciplines. Nevertheless, Thucydides also provides insight into his own way of dealing with Greek-Egyptian relations and the role of beneficial factors for both nations.

Conclusion

The modern bilateral agreements between Greece and Egypt are not mere diplomatic arrangements but threads in the vast history that binds these two nations among all the other countries in the Mediterranean basin. Drawing parallels with the narratives of Herodotus and Thucydides, who portray the ancient Greek and Egyptian relations, this paper has illuminated the significance of these agreements as modern-day secondary readings in politics, economics, and culture. They symbolize a continuum of the enduring relationship between Greece and Egypt, transcending time and geography. As both nations look to the future, the lessons of their shared past, as chronicled by Herodotus, continue to guide and inspire their diplomatic endeavours. In the contemporary world, where the importance of diplomacy and cooperation cannot be overstated, the Greece-Egypt partnership serves as a testament to the enduring power of history to shape the present and the future.

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