

Support from Plato that Amasis governed Egypt during the second half of the 5th century B.C.

In two of the latest of his works, the *Critias* and the *Timaeus*, Plato describes a discussion that purportedly occurred among four Greek notables, Critias, Timaeus, Hermocrates, and Plato's renowned teacher Socrates. According to the vast majority of scholars, this hypothetical discussion took place around the year 425 B.C., though some date it a decade or so later. Our interest in Plato's version of the conversation is restricted to a brief statement with chronological import, not with the story about Atlantis about to be introduced, nor with the several contentious issues related to the genealogy of Critias, the main character in this portion of the dialogue. It should be noted in passing that the majority of classicists identify this Critias as the famous Greek tyrant who bears this name, whose dates are roughly 460-403 B.C. We have followed that opinion here.

To set the stage, we quote the relevant introductory remarks in the conversation. Critias is speaking to Socrates, and is about to relate the story of the ancient conflict between Athens and the fabled city state of Atlantis. The reader must take care not to confuse Critias, the speaker, and his namesake grandfather Critias, the latter mentioned throughout the dialogue. Henceforth, for clarity, we will refer to the younger of the two as the tyrant Critias, and to his grandfather as the elder Critias. The quotation is taken from Vol. IX of Harvard's *Loeb Classical Library* edition of Plato's works, translated by R. G. Bury. The tyrant is speaking to Socrates.

Crit. Listen then, Socrates, to a tale which, though passing strange, is yet wholly true, as Solon, the wisest of the Seven, once upon a time declared. Now Solon – as indeed he often says himself in his poems – was a relative and very dear friend of our great-grandfather Dropides; and Dropides told our grandfather Critias – as the old man himself, in turn, related to us – that the exploits of this city in olden days, the record of which had perished through time and the destruction of its inhabitants, were great and marvelous, the greatest of all being one which it would be proper for us now to relate both as a payment of our debt of thanks to you and also as a tribute of praise, chanted as it were duly and truly, in honour of the Goddess on this her day of Festival.

Soc. Excellent! But come now, what was this exploit described by Critias, following Solon's report, as a thing not verbally recorded, although actually performed by this city long ago?

Crit. I will tell you: it is an old tale, and I heard it from a man not young. For indeed at that time, as he said himself, Critias was already close upon ninety years of age, while I was somewhere about ten; and it chanced to be that day of the Apaturia which is called "Cureotis." The ceremony for boys which was always customary at the feast was held also on that occasion, our fathers arranging contest in recitation. So while many poems of many poets were declaimed, since the poems of Solon were at that time new, many of us children chanted them. And one of our fellow-tribesmen – whether he really thought so at the time or whether he was paying a compliment to Critias – declared that in his opinion Solon was not only the wisest of men in all else, but in poetry also he was of all poets the noblest. Whereat the old man

(I remember the scene well) was highly pleased and said with a smile, "If only, Amynder, he had not taken up poetry as a by-play but had worked hard at it like others, and if he had completed the story he brought here from Egypt, instead of being forced to lay it aside owing to the seditions and all the other evils he found here on his return, - why then, I say, neither Hesiod nor Homer nor any other poet would ever have proved more famous than he." "And what was the story, Critias?" said the other. "Its subject," replied Critias, "was a very great exploit, worthy indeed to be accounted the most notable of all exploits, which was performed by this city, although the record of it has not endured until now owing to lapse of time and the destruction of those who wrought it." "Tell us from the beginning," said Amynder, "what Solon related and how, and who were the informants who vouched for its truth."

"In the Delta of Egypt," said Critias, "where, at its head, the stream of the Nile parts in two, there is a certain district called the Saitic. The chief city in this district is Sais – the home of King Amasis, - the founder of which, they say, is a goddess whose Egyptian name is Neith, and in Greek, as they assert, Athena. These people profess to be great lovers of Athens and in a measure akin to our people here. And Solon said that when he travelled there he was held in great esteem amongst them; moreover, when he was questioning such of their priests as were most versed in ancient lore about their early history, he discovered that neither he himself nor any other Greek knew anything at all, one might say, about such matters. And on one occasion, when he wished to draw them on to discourse on ancient history, he attempted to tell them the most ancient of our traditions, concerning Phoroneus, who was said to be the first man, and Niobe; and he went on to tell the legend about Deucalion and Pyrrha after the Flood, and how they survived it, and to give the genealogy of their descendants; and by recounting the number years occupied by the events mentioned he tried to calculate the periods of time. Whereupon one of the priests, a prodigiously old man, said, "O Solon, Solon, you Greeks are always children: there is not such a thing as an old Greek." Timaeus 20D-22B

At this point in the dialogue the Egyptian priest proceeded to introduce and then recount the ancient tale of the conflict between Athens and Atlantis, which ended with the utter destruction of the latter, not by human cause, but via a phenomenon of nature.

The balance of this story would, without doubt, be of immense interest to the majority of our readers, and is certainly relevant to our revision, since we conjecture in our history that Atlantis was *likely* the volcanic island of Santorini (otherwise known as Thera), inhabited by ethnic Minoans, and that its eruption around 765 B.C. not only destroyed the Minoan civilization, but also brought an end to the 19th dynasty of Egypt and the nation of the Hittites. Be that as it may, our interest here is restricted to two sentences in the section of dialogue quoted above, highlighted in the text. We repeat them here:

"In the Delta of Egypt," said Critias, "where, at its head, the stream of the Nile parts in two, there is a certain district called the Saitic. The chief city in this district is Sais – **the home of King Amasis**, - the founder of which, they say, is a goddess whose Egyptian name is Neith, and in Greek, as they assert, Athena. R.G. Bury: (1960)

Two additional translations of the quoted passage, both by well respected scholars from late in the 19th century, will suffice for our purposes.

In the Egyptian Delta, at the head of which the river Nile divides, there is a certain district which is called the district of Sais, and the great city of the district is also called Sais, **and is the city from which King Amasis came**. The citizens have a deity for their foundress; she is called in the Egyptian tongue Neith, and is asserted by them to be the same whom the Hellenes call Athene. Benjamin Jowett (1871)

There is in Egypt, said Critias, in the Delta, at the apex of which the stream of the Nile divides, a province called the Saitic; and the chief city of this province is Sais, **the birthplace of Amasis the king**. The founder of their city is a goddess, whose name in the Egyptian tongue is Neith, and in Greek, as they aver, Athena R.D. Archer Hind (1888)

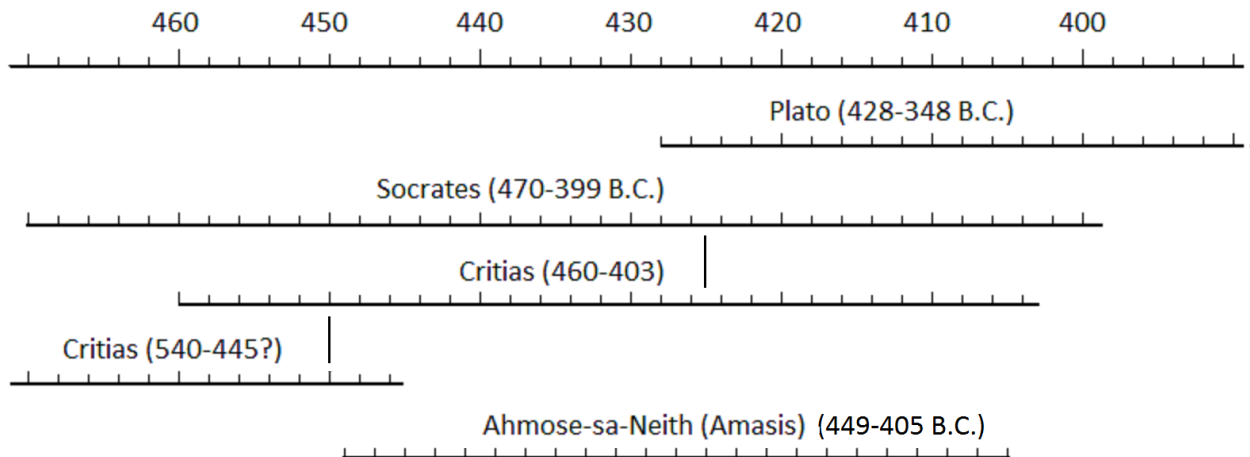
Although the speaker in this section of the dialogue is the tyrant Critias, he is, in this excerpt, quoting his grandfather, the elder Critias, who is speaking to a fellow tribesman named Amynder. The elder Critias is around 90 years of age, and listening attentively to his remarks is his 10 year old namesake grandson, soon to be known as the tyrant Critias. Those numbers, together with the reasonably assured dates of the tyrant Critias (460-403 B.C.), suggest that this conversation took place around the year 450 B.C., though considering Plato's utter disregard for historical accuracy, the date is not fixed in stone. The occasion, according to a footnote in the Harvard text, is the Apaturia, a feast held in October in honour of Dionysus on which children born during the year were registered.

From the highlighted section of the text it is clear that *around* the year 450 B.C. at least one Greek citizen is aware of the emergence in Egypt of a Saite dynasty king named Amasis. The elder Critias not only knows the Greek version of the name of the king, but appears to be aware of the king's full Egyptian birth name Ahmose-sa-Neith ("Ahmose son of [the goddess] Neith), or minimally, of the association of both Amasis and the goddess Neith with the city of Sais. And if one reads the text carefully, the elder Critias is not crediting Solon with this intimate knowledge. He is merely describing, for the sake of Amynder (and others listening in on the conversation), details concerning the city visited by Solon, whence came the knowledge about the conflict between Athena and Atlantis. Having completed this task he continues with a statement "And Solon said..." which introduces Solon into the story. Solon, for those unfamiliar with Greek history, was a 7th/6th century Athenian statesman and poet noted for many accomplishments and later numbered as one of the 7 sages of Greece. His dates, according to most sources, were 638-558 B.C., though some date him slightly earlier (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solon>).

According to the elder Critias in the highlighted passage, the city of Sais visited by Solon is the "home of" or "birthplace of" or "the city from whence came" king Amasis. We ask the obvious question. If not from Solon, then whence did the elder Critias glean his knowledge about the city of Sais and its association with king Amasis and the goddess Neith. And why did he, and later also his grandson, repeat these facts if they would not in some way edify the listeners. After all, if neither Amynder in 450 B.C nor Socrates in 425 B.C. had a clue who Amasis was,

the comments would cause more confusion than clarification. And we ask additionally, assuming the accuracy of the traditional history which dates the reign of Amasis in the years 570-526 B.C. – how is it that both the elder and the tyrant Critias and their audience (including Socrates) knew anything at all about an obscure Egyptian king, now deceased for over a century? Would the conversation not make more sense if we were to assume that everyone privy to it was familiar with the name of king Amasis, because Amasis was alive and well and presently governing in Egypt. In the revised history Amasis ruled Egypt in the time frame 449-405 B.C. The vertical lines in Figure 1 below indicate *roughly* when the Atlantis story was passed from the elder Critias to Amynder and his grandson, and thence, two to three decades later, to Socrates, at roughly the halfway mark in the reign of Amasis.

Figure 1: Timeline of the conversations in Plato’s Timaeus.



Considering that the comments concerning Egypt were transmitted to audiences *around* 450 B.C. and 425 B.C. respectively there is every reason why the references to Sais, king Amasis, and even the goddess Neith would have been comprehended by the respective audiences. In considerable detail the first book in the Displaced Dynasties series describes the chaotic power struggle in which the Persian backed interloper Amasis replaced the Saite king Apries (whose throne name was Amyrtaeus). That contest for power lasted from 454-449 B.C., with the Greek navy backing Apries, while Persia and the Egyptian army sided with Amasis. Details of the machinations of that civil war can be read in the 10th chapter of *Nebuchadnezzar & the Egyptian Exile* (pages 318-348), the 1st volume of the Displaced Dynasties series. That chapter, entitled “Amasis & the Greeks”, depends largely on the historical treaties of Thucydides, Ktesias, and (with an extreme degree of caution) Herodotus, aided by the Elephantine (Amasis) Stele, referred to by the Egyptologist Breasted as “perhaps the most important document of the Saite

period". Here we learn that although the Greeks first sided with Apries, their allegiance changed once Amasis was declared king in 449 B.C. Thereafter, and throughout the reign of Amasis, commerce between Greece and Egypt flourished, with the port city of Naucratis, not far from Sais, as the focal point. This commerce, encouraged in no small measure by the passage of the "Peace of Callias" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_of_Callias), also in 449 B.C., drastically changed the attitude of the Egyptians toward the Greeks. In the opinion of this author, the single sentence which follows the highlighted text initially quoted in this article, and which immediately precedes the introduction of Solon, reflects this changed attitude.

"These people [the Egyptians] profess to be great lovers of Athens and in a measure akin to our people here.

We cannot leave this matter without noting the one objection certain to be raised. There is a segment of the scholarly community that attributes the whole of the discussion vis-à-vis Egypt to Solon, essentially negating our argument. The reader will understand immediately why scholars might adopt that position. After all, there is to my knowledge not a single academic familiar with the traditional history of Egypt who does not accept the dates 570-526 B.C. for Amasis (with the single exception of those who have accepted the author's DD hypothesis). And since Solon is dated ca. 638-558 B.C. there was ample opportunity for him to add the words concerning Amasis and Sais to his discourse on the subject of Atlantis toward the end of his life, regardless of when he visited Egypt. In the final analysis it will be up to the reader to evaluate whether our thesis is convincingly argued, given the language of the text, the fortuitous timing of the discourses, and the fact that, apart from Herodotus, whose history with respect to Egypt is almost a complete fiction, Greece and Egypt are not known to have had any special affinity toward one another in the 6th century.

And speaking of Herodotus, we should mention one last possible objection. Twice in the book which bears his name, the text of Herodotus actually mentions Solon and Amasis in the same context, leaving no doubt that Amasis lived in the 6th century where he may well have been visited by the Athenian sage. How do we respond to these anachronisms?

The first such text is found in Book 2, section 177. We actually quoted this text in our Volume 1, p. 333, stopping short of the mention of Solon. We quoted it because we believe the text accurately describes Egypt in the time of Amasis, albeit an Egypt ruled by Amasis in the 5th century, not the 6th. We quote the passage again here, but this time in its entirety.

It is said that in the reign of Amasis Egypt attained to its greatest prosperity, in respect of what the river did for the land and the land for its people: and that the whole sum of inhabited cities in the country was twenty thousand. It was Amasis also who made the law that every Egyptian should yearly declare his means of livelihood to the ruler of his province, and, failing so to do or to prove that he had a just way of

life, be punished with death. *Solon the Athenian got this law from Egypt* and established it among his people; may they ever keep it! For it is a perfect law. (emphasis added)

According to this passage Herodotus dates Amasis' lawmaking activity in Egypt prior to that of Solon in Athens. But even in the context of the traditional history that is an impossibility. Solon lived from 638-558 B.C. and his political activity in Greece took place while he was middle aged, several decades before Amasis began to rule Egypt in 570 B.C. For that reason alone, the mention of Solon in this context is clearly a late addition to the text of Herodotus. But there is a more fundamental reason for disregarding this association of Amasis and Solon. In our first book we have already argued at length that the second book of Herodotus is a corrupt late addition to the existing work of the 5th century Herodotus. We attributed the work to a 4th or even a 3rd century imposter whom we labelled the "pseudo-Herodotus". The 2nd book of Herodotus has mistakenly telescoped two invasions of Egypt, one which took place shortly after the death of Amasis in 405 B.C., and one, led by Cambyses in 525 B.C. As a result the Egyptian 26th Saite dynasty has been unceremoniously wrenched from its 6th/5th century context and positioned in the 7th/6th centuries, prior to the arrival of Cambyses in 525 B.C. The interested reader can peruse the online copy of our Volume 1, where we devote two entire chapters to proving our case: chapter 6 (pp. 173-206) entitled "Cambyses in Egypt" and chapter 11 (pp. 348-372) entitled "A Second Cambyses". Herodotus chapter two is not totally bogus, but where it assumes the 26th dynasty lies in the time frame 664-525 B.C. it must be ignored.

The second corrupt reference to Solon and Amasis in the same context is found in Herodotus Book 1, sections 29 and 30. In a sense, if accepted as valid, this innocuous mention of Amasis in the 6th century would be more fatal to our thesis than the first. Here we have Solon actually visiting Amasis in Egypt, and this in a section of the *Histories of Herodotus* that was arguably composed by purported author.

In Book 1: 29-30 we read, concerning a visit of Solon to Croesus, the Lydian king ...

There came to the city [of Sardis] all the teachers from Hellas who then lived, in this or that manner; and among them came Solon of Athens: he, having made laws for the Athenians at their request, left his home for ten years and set out on a voyage to see the world, as he said. This he did, lest he should be compelled to repeal any of the laws he had made, since the Athenians themselves could not repeal them, for they were bound by solemn oaths to abide for ten years by such laws as Solon should make.

For this reason, and to see the world, Solon left Athens *and visited Amasis in Egypt* and Croesus at Sardis; and when he had come, Croesus entertained him ... (emphasis added)

And the text goes on, page after page concerning Croesus, ending only in 1:56. The entire discourse is concerned with Croesus, not Amasis. The lone mention of "Amasis in Egypt" in a context totally devoted to a discussion about Croesus in Lydia is arguably a gloss, added to the text in the 3rd or 4th century, when the pseudo-Herodotus composed and amplified the History

of Herodotus with the addition of the 2nd chapter and some third chapter material. The reference may well have been gleaned from the published work of Plato's Timaeus, wrongly interpreted. If that claim seems incredible to the reader, we must add the observation that even the Croesus material is clearly a fabrication, this by Herodotus himself. A simple reading of the text should suffice to convince the reader that the material is fictional. And we can easily dismiss it on historical grounds. Croesus did not begin to rule Lydia before 560 B.C. Solon died in 558 B.C. and his lawmaking in Greece took place around 600 B.C. Only a flight of fancy of the part of Herodotus can explain the content in 1:29-56. But lest we be accused of a biased opinion, we should quote from no less an authority than W.W. How and J. Wells in their classic 1929 *Commentary on Herodotus*, where the authors state on page 66:

The truth of his story as to Solon and Croesus was early doubted, and it is now universally given up, on chronological grounds.

And if a dozen pages of text regarding Croesus is to be abandoned, what alternative do we have but to trash the "and ... Amasis in Egypt" addition.

With that we close our argument. As always, LET THE READER DECIDE.