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DOI: 10.35765/pk.2022.3702.04

Eighteenth-century Models of the Good and Bad Ruler on the Example of the Portrayals of Pharaohs Known from the Works of Ancient Authors

ABSTRACT

Already in ancient times the past was treated as a “provider” of human attitude of models that are worthy of imitation and those to be avoided. This attitude towards history can be seen in Poland especially in the eighteenth century textbooks written at the time of the National Education Commission. Their authors focused on a few selected figures of rulers, also Egyptian, in order to build an image of an ideal and adverse ruler of the state.

KEYWORDS: history, teaching, Egypt, Poland

STRESZCZENIE


Osiemnastowieczne wzorce dobrego i złego władcy na przykładach portretów faraonów znanych z dzieł autorów antycznych

Przeszość, już w głębokiej starożytności, traktowano jako „dostawcę” wzorów postaw ludzkich godnych do naśladowania i tych, których należało unikać. Taki stosunek do dziejów widoczny jest w Polsce zwłaszcza w osiemnastowiecznych podręcznikach powstałych w czasach działania Komisji Edukacji Narodowej. Ich autorzy skupiają się na kilku wybranych postaciach władców, także egipskich, by zbudować obraz idealnego i negatywnego rządcy państwa.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: historia, nauczanie, Egipt, Polska

People have always sought role models to imitate or to reject. It is no coincidence that towards the end of the Roman Republic, Cicero (106–43 BC) stated that history is the teacher of life (*Historia magistra vitae est*). Such a belief was also widespread in modern European culture, not only in Poland. This approach to the past has survived to the present. Even today,

Suggested citation: Kaczmarek, H. (2022). Eighteenth-century Models of the Good and Bad Ruler on the Example of the Portrayals of Pharaohs Known from the Works of Ancient Authors.

©  *Perspectives on Culture*, 2(37), pp. 31–48. DOI: 10.35765/pk.2022.3702.04.

Submitted: 02.08.2021

Accepted: 16.05.2022

some politicians still indicate that the content of history textbooks should be selected carefully so as to provide appropriate models of personal attitudes and social behaviours.

I have restricted my studies of the topic to Polish educational material from the end of the 18th and first half of the 19th century. Using books intended for school use was justified by the fact that their content allows a broad study of didactic concepts and the scope of knowledge to be conducted.

The desired models of attitudes and behaviours were drawn not only from the distant past, but also from contemporary times. The figures most often used for these purposes were rulers, heroes and later also saints. The ancient Egyptians also attempted to create a model of an ideal ruler. Examples include: the *Teaching for King Merikare II* (Helck, 1988), ruler of the 10th dynasty (ca. 2130–2040 BC) and the *Instruction of King Amenemhet I* (Helck, 1970), the first pharaoh of the 12th dynasty (1976–1947 BC). More importantly, an attempt to establish models of positive and negative attitudes for ordinary people makes an appearance in their literature (Shupak, 2009).

At the start of the 19th century, Paweł Kotowski (Kotowski, 1818, p. 18) justified the use of models from Ancient Egypt by the fact that the Ancient Egyptians were the first to establish a state, thus bringing contentment to all people.

In the Kingdom of Poland (Rzeczpospolita) a classic example that may be offered is a tutor's handbook by Dymitr Tadeusz Krajewski (Krajewski, 1777), which consistently treats history as a collection of edifying trivia. Nevertheless, this author cites *historia sacra*, as in his opinion it provides the most and the best personal models worthy of imitation.

Some of these models, established already in antiquity, have survived for centuries. Egypt's distant past was perfectly suited for such an application. One example is the depiction of Kheops as a tyrant, which makes appearances to this day (see Kaczmarek, 2018, pp. 29–49).

In the 18th century numerous textbooks drew on ancient authors. This is because at that time the histories of all ancient states then known came to be categorised as *historia profana*. Previously this “branch” of history had been reserved for the past of ancient and modern states. On the basis of the list of duties and prohibitions concerning the ruling pharaoh described by Diodorus Siculus I, 70–72, attempts were made in 18th and 19th century history textbooks to create an image of an ideal ruler.

When reading school textbooks from the period today, one may have the impression that the ancient Egyptians already had a hereditary constitutional monarchy. Paweł Kotowski (Kotowski, 1818, p. 19) comes to this conclusion based on the ancient texts mentioned above, which state that all the actions of a ruler were governed by detailed legal regulations.

The history textbooks that I have selected to demonstrate this postulate are from the end of the 18th and first half of the 19th century (see Kaczmarek, 2016, pp. 214–272). Textbooks for learning history, a subject that was perfectly suited for insinuating contemporary didactic content using certain historical events or figures, prove that this feature was readily taken advantage of.

After reading these textbooks, I have to agree with Andrzej Grabski (Grabski, 1976, p. 25), who stated that in the 18th century history was still treated, like in ancient and medieval times, as a kind of treasury of edifying “exemplars” and that the Latin saying *historia magistra vitae est* has never been taken more seriously and earnestly.

The leading educational reformers of the Enlightenment in Poland wrote of this openly. Grzegorz Piramowicz (Piramowicz, 1776, p. [8]) was one who did so. The excellent educator Kajetan Józef Skrzetuski (Skrzetuski, 1782, p. 19) voiced a similar opinion.

I also note that in constructing his world history textbook at the start of the 19th century, Karol Milewski (Milewski, 1827, pp. [7]–[8]) emphasised this role of history teaching in schools still more clearly.

History was also a very important point of reference for the political struggles and discussion ongoing in 18th-century Poland. According to the anonymous author of the verse *Definicje historii* (“Definitions of history”) of 1770, the past was a “great theatrum” in which the dead came to the living to advise them what was worthy of imitation, and what they should avoid in their lives (Grabski, 1976, p. 95).

Depending on the author’s intentions, the historical figures cited, often from the very distant past, became either the patrons of specific ideological concepts or warning signs for contemporary readers. It is no accident, then, that the genre that particularly flourished at that time was dialogues of the dead, in which deceased wise men – philosophers, poets and politicians – judged and commented on current events. Ancient history was referred to particularly often. The broad scope of information about antiquity in the second half of the 18th century suggests that, at least to some elementary extent, it was universally known. It may even be said that antiquity had become a kind of universal code that facilitated communication.

Textbooks from the first half of the 19th century still wrote about such a role of history teaching in the education of youth. This thought is confirmed in the introduction to Karol Milewski’s (Milewski, 1827, p. [4]) textbook. Elsewhere (Milewski, 1827, p. [1], [7]), he recommended appropriate, “careful selection” of different material for educating young men and women.

At the end of the 18th century general ancient history was, for the first time in Polish historiography, treated purely as “*historia profana*.” In

contrast to the previous approach, stemming from the interpretation of the biblical *Book of Daniel* (Dan 2, 36–45), wherein this “chapter” of history presented only events in four monarchies (Assyria, Babylonia, Persia and Greece) and Rome, the histories of all the ancient states then known were discussed.

These new trends in scholarship and education arriving from France in the 18th century were reflected in school history textbooks by Dominik Szybiński (see Kaczmarek, 2020, pp. 74–87) and Kajetan Skrzetuski (see Kaczmarek, 2020, pp. 65–73). This is evident in the selection of topics: the fragments of history selected were to provide models of conduct. Their authors were clearly influenced by the physiocratic school of thought that emerged in France in the second half of the 18th century.

This new economic theory was reflected in Szybiński’s (Szybiński, 1772, p. 31) textbook, where a seemingly strange marginalium appears next to a discussion of Egyptian pharaoh Athotis’ reign: *The trades were not an abomination*. This may quite certainly be viewed as a stand against the situation in Poland, where the *szlachta* (nobility) despised manual labour and the people whose occupation it was (Szybiński, 1790, p. 38). Textbooks from this period contain more such references to antiquity and comparisons with contemporary times.

Already ancient authors noted several pharaohs whose life and actions they believed merited imitation or condemnation, as the case may be. Among Egyptians, the former included Menes (for more see Kaczmarek, 2018, pp. 15–28), Sesostris (for more see Kaczmarek, 2018, pp. 50–67) and several later legislators, and the latter, Kheops (for more see Kaczmarek, 2018, pp. 29–49) and Cambyses II (for more see Kaczmarek, 2018, pp. 68–75). Less attention was paid to the remaining Egyptian rulers, though also other pharaohs appear on the pages of textbooks in both categories of models.

What did Kheops and Cambyses do to deserve the bad opinion of ancient and 18th-century authors?

Herodotus II 124–126 was one of the first Greek authors to describe the misfortunes afflicting the Egyptians under Kheops’ rule. According to him, all of Egypt’s population was employed for 20 years in building the great pyramid in Giza.

According to Herodotus 100,000 slaves were employed at a single time, for three months of the year to carry out this task. Diodorus (I 63) writes that Khembes employed even 360,000 people on this task. Neither number of persons employed in building the great pyramid of Giza seems reliable. It is far easier to assume that at a single time, 25,000 people worked on all the tasks connected with the construction, as many scholars today suggest. Kink (Kink, 2009, pp. 102–103)

has attempted to investigate how the number of 100,000 workers involved in the building of pyramid appeared in Herodotus, in my opinion – unconvincingly.

It was forced employment, according to Diodorus I 64, that caused Kheops, fearing the anger of his own people, to order his burial outside the pyramid in an unknown, secret location. Very interestingly, the above-mentioned piece of information from Diodorus was recently though probably unconsciously referenced by the “saviours of the world from ultimate destruction” of the Earth prophesied for 2012, allegedly already by the Mayans. Finding the pharaoh’s tomb was supposed to have provided instructions for saving the Earth from the final annihilation of life on the planet (Wójcikiewicz, 2009; Wójcikiewicz, 2011).

The very fact of the pyramid’s building provoked astonishment and antipathy towards its builders (Kheops, Khafre and Mykerinos) existed already in antiquity, as comments by Pliny the elder testify (Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* XXXVI, 75). Authors of Polish textbooks writing in this vein include Dominik Szybiński (Szybiński, 1769, p. 33, note b.).

Another evil that occurred during Kheops’ reign was the closure of gods’ temples in the whole country (Herodotus II, 124). Also Manetho fr. 14 believed that this ruler was characterised by disdain for the gods.

It seems that the bad state of temples, the earthly seats of the gods, was always a serious problem for all ancient peoples. The temple was a god’s “residence” and its physical state determined whether the god would be pleased and bestow his favour upon the city that he had chosen as his seat, or whether, displeased, he would leave it at times of danger or punish it in some other way. This is why conquerors despoiled subjugated cities of the statues of their gods.

The importance of caring for the seat of the god-protector is indicated for instance in Berlin papyrus no. 23071 vers., which comes from Dimeh (Gr. Soknopaiu Nesos) in Fayoum (Burkard, 1990, pp. 108–109) and which was dated, on the basis of the writing, to the 2nd century CE. It describes a decree by Neferkasokar, the seventh ruler of the second dynasty (due to a lack of artefacts we do not know anything about his reign. This pharaoh’s name appears on the king list in Saqqara (v. 9) and in the canon of rulers on the Turin Papyrus col. III v. 1).

The decree itself concerns the restoration of destroyed temples and the divine punishment for negligence in their upkeep: the seven-year lack of Nile flooding that meant crop failure and hunger.

I would like to note that the motif of a seven-year famine was very popular in the Middle East. In Egypt it appears in the Famine Stela from Sehel, carved in 187 BC during Ptolemy V Epiphanes’ reign and describing events that took place in the time of Djoser, and also in the biblical

Book of Genesis. An enduring famine of this kind in Mesopotamia is mentioned in the Gilgamesh epic and the myth of Atrahasis.

Still, in the opinion of Herodotus II 126, the greatest iniquity committed by the ruler was, next to the closing of temples all over the country, putting his own daughter in a brothel to fund the construction of his pyramid.

The depiction of Kheops as a tyrannical ruler was repeated over the centuries. At the same time his negative features were reinforced. All the attention actually focused on the hardships borne by the populace during the pyramid's building. The closure of the temples and employment of the populace in hard labour in quarries was indignantly underlined (Guyon, 1733, pp. 304–305).

Moreover, numerous publications contained fantastic numbers concerning the costs borne during the pyramid's construction. Already Herodotus II 125 and Diodorus I 64, and later also Pliny (*Hist. Nat.*, XXXXVI 17,3), gave the amount of 1600 talents as the cost that Kheops paid to build the pyramid.

Statements about Kheops by 18th-century educators emphasize his three main faults: 1 – building the monument to his pride that was the pyramid, 2 – closing the temples and 3 – forcing his daughter into prostitution.

The next Ancient Egyptian ruler to become a negative model, though of a different nature, was Cambyses II, the creator of the Achaemenid empire and conqueror of Egypt.

The year 525 BC was certainly a turning point in Egypt's history. Yet again in the 1st millennium BC, the country lost its independence and this was doubtless a great shock to its people and in particular to its elites (Bareš, 2007, p. 190). After the Nubians (ca. 720–663) and Assyrians (671–656), it was then taken by the Persians. The Persian conquest of Egypt encountered a mixed reception among the Egyptians. There were those among them, such as the former fleet commander and priest from Sais, Udjahorresnet, the royal treasurer Ptahhotep and the overseer Khenemibre, who supported the new rulers and became highly placed officials in their administration. There were also opponents, who transmitted the image of an evil and cruel conqueror.

It should also be noted that unlike the Assyrians, the Persians occupied all of Egypt and their military garrisons were stationed in several locations of the country's territory: in the delta (Daphnae, Migdal, Pelusium, Maskhuta), Memphis and Elephantine, Syena.

All the conquerors, apart from the Assyrians, as Heike Sternberg-el Hotabi (Sternberg-el Hotabi, 2017, p. 2) notes, became "Egyptianised," taking on the full titulary of the pharaohs, thus legitimising their position in the subjugated state.

Each of the previous conquerors of Egypt introduced their own administration and military, but starting from antiquity, only Cambyses II is seen in historiography as an exemplum of a barbarian. His successor, Darius I, was perceived positively by the Egyptians themselves. The codification of Egyptian law was one of the achievements ascribed to him.

Cambyses certainly came to be recognised as a legitimate ruler of Egypt. Namely, he counted the years of his reign from the death of Amasis, and thus he included therein the short period when Psamtik III sat on the throne (Depuydt, 1996, p. 182). Already Herodotus III, 1–2 describes an attempt taken to legitimise his rule over Egypt (see Otto, 1966, p. 251). Vittmann (Vittmann, 2003, pp. 121–122) believes that this was done upon the “initiative” of the Egyptian proponents of the new authorities.

The basis for the attempted “legalisation” of his power over the state on the Nile was a genealogical argument, cited by Herodotus: Cambyses was allegedly the son of Nitetis, daughter of Egypt’s last legal ruler Apries, and her husband Cyrus, and thus the last legitimate successor to his grandfather’s throne, unlike the usurpers Amasis and his son Psamtik III.

I would like to note that a similar situation is found in later times, when a justification for Alexander the Great’s assumption of the throne of the pharaohs was sought. A legend then emerged that the new pharaoh’s father was Nektanebo II, who appeared in Olimpias’ bedchamber in the guise of the god Amon.

How then did this Persian king ruling in the years 529–522 BC, whom Manetho (fr. 70, 71) believed to be the founder of the 27th dynasty ruling in Egypt in the years 525–401 BC, come to deserve such an opinion?

Herodotus III, 1–66 was the first in historiography to present the Persian conqueror of Egypt as a great barbarian and brute. He wrote (Herodotus III, 37) of the profanation of temples that Cambyses II allegedly committed, including the burning of statues in the temple of Hephaisstos (Ptah) in Memphis. Diodorus I, 46,3 also writes about the burning of temples.

Herodotus III 27 ascribed symptoms of madness to him, the most abhorrent one being the killing of his own brother Bardiya (Herodotus III, 29), his own sister-wife (Herodotus III, 31–33), and Apis, the sacred bull of the Egyptians (Herodotus III, 28). The ancients believed that Cambyses II’s symptoms of madness appeared after his return from an unsuccessful expedition in Nubia.

Another manifestation of his cruelty was, according to Herodotus III, 16, excavating the mummy of Amasis, the previous ruler of Egypt, from its tomb in Sais and burning it. This action violated the religious principles of both peoples, as the Persians held fire to be sacred while for an Egyptian burning a dead person deprived him of the chance for eternal life.

Cambyses allegedly also demonstrated the same behaviour in the conquered Memphis, where he ordered mummies to be removed from tombs. The sarcophagi of members of the royal family may have been destroyed then (Bolshakov, 2010, pp. 45–53).

The concept that burning the dead deprives them of an afterlife is likely very ancient. Zaki Y. Saad (Saad, 1969, p. 20, note 3), who conducted excavations in an Early Dynastic cemetery in Helwan in the years 1942–1945, observed that many of the tombs discovered there bore marks of fire. In his belief, part of them had been burnt intentionally to prevent the soul of the deceased from testifying against the robber in the afterlife.

To Herodotus' narrative Strabo XVII 1.27,46 added a description of devastation wreaked by the ruler in Heliopolis: destruction of historical texts recorded on papyri and stone and murder of priests, the custodians of knowledge, while Justin I, 9.2 broadened these operations to Apis' temple in Memphis and other gods' temples. Mentions of the barbaric destruction of Heliopolis also appear in the reminiscences of modern travellers who visited it (Tyszkiewicz, 1863, pp. 200–205).

It was Cambyses II's barbaric actions in Heliopolis described by Strabo that caused the veracity of Champollion's deciphering of hieroglyphs to be rejected by scholars of the first half of the 19th century. They were a crown argument in challenging the discovery's authenticity, because to decipher the hieroglyphs, he primarily used material from the Ptolemaic age.

According to his opponents, at that time, the Egyptians purportedly adopted a system of alphabetic (phonetic) characters under Greek influence and thus its reading could not be applied to earlier periods when their script had the nature of ideograms (Livšić, 1958, p. 155; Keiner, 2003).

In Poland, the claim that Cambyses II destroyed Old Egyptian culture and that it was reborn only under the Macedonian dynasty may be found on the pages of Chmielowski's compendium, popular in the country in the mid-18th century (Chmielowski, 1754, v. IV, pp. 635).

I note that Diodorus Siculus III, 4.1–3 had written that Egyptian hieroglyphs were symbolical unlike the demotic script far earlier. For Plotinus (ca. 204–269) *Enn.* V 8,6, who was born in Lycopolis on the Nile, hieroglyphics were no less than Platonic ideals expressed in visual form. Under Neoplatonic influence during the period of interest in Ancient Egypt that arose in the Renaissance, studies of hieroglyphs headed down the dead end of symbolism.

The depiction of Cambyses II as a great barbarian was reproduced in scholarship and literature for a long time. Emphasis on the changes occurring in Egypt in the period of Persian rule, including destruction of culture, has recently been placed by Heike Sternberg-el Hotabi (Sternberg-el Hotabi, 2016, p. 8).

This group of negative models of rulers should, according to the Ancients, also include Sesostris' son and successor Pheron (Herodotus II, 111, Diodorus I, 59). He was blinded in punishment for a godless act he committed.

The next evil ruler, Amasis (called Anysis in Herodotus II, 131), an oppressor of his own people and unfair judge, was removed from the Egyptian throne by an Ethiopian ruler named Actisanes, as Diodorus I, 60, 1–3 writes.

These figures should also be joined by Kheops' successor Khefren, who continued his father's policy towards temples, and Seto. In Herodotus' II, 141, telling the latter persecuted priests.

The figures of bad rulers were contrasted with pharaohs who cared for their country and its inhabitants. The model of an ideal ruler may be seen in ancient authors' depiction of Pharaoh Sesostris (see Kaczmarek, 2018, pp. 50–67). Menes is another example (Kaczmarek, 2018, pp. 15–28), but here the myth of the founder influenced the assessment of his actions.

Sesostris became the favourite “hero” of Polish historians of the 18th and first half of the 19th century. Much attention was paid to him in foreign literature of this period, as indicated by the work of French historian Charles Rollin (Rollin, 1769, v. I, pp. 128–136), where Sesostris' biography takes up eight pages, and François-Henri Turpin's (Turpin, 1772, pp. 146–162) book, where the narrative on Sesostris spans seventeen pages. Johann Christoph Röbling (1796–1798) devoted three volumes to this pharaoh.

Ancient authors give various versions of his name (Sesonchosis, Sesosis, Sesosis, Sostris, Vezosis, Vesozes, Vesosis). The form Sesonchosis was also in existence, appearing for the first time in the 4th century BC in Dicaearchus and Theopompus. Such a multitude of names for this ruler transmitted by ancient authors caused misunderstandings among modern authors, for whom they sometimes represented different people.

It seems that the “demand” for a model of a positive ruler was the reason why Sesostris also became the hero of many literary works already in antiquity. In the Greco-Roman period the “Sesostris Romance” also appeared. The Oxyrynchus papyrus (pap. Oxy 1826, 2466, 3319) dated to the 2nd century CE, describes the expeditions of Sesostris, not yet king, to Arabia. Also the fragmentarily preserved demotic papyri Carlsberg 411 and 412 provide information on the pharaoh's activity. Namely, the work tells of Sesostris (Senwosret), son of Amenemhet I.

The recently published ostrakon from Leipzig (o. Leipzig UB 2213) gives us further fragments of Sesostris' story.

Interest in this ruler was rekindled in the 18th century. A number of literary works devoted to him were written then. He appears for instance as the priest Sarastro in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Magic Flute* and as King

Sesostrix in Urszula Radziwiłłowa's play *Igrzysko Fortuny* ("The Game of Fate") written around 1750 (Zinkow, 2006, p. 88).

The basic source of knowledge about him was Herodotus (II 102–109). Additional information about his deeds (under the name of Sesosis) was also provided by Diodorus Siculus (I 53–58, 94), who for his story of this pharaoh's achievements drew on a lost work on Egypt (*Aigyptiaca*) by Hecataeus of Abdera (4th–3rd century BC), an author writing at Ptolemy I's (304–284 BC) court.

Ladynin (Ładynin, 2015, p. 136) believes that Hecataeus of Abdera's *Aigyptiaca* was written when Ptolemy was still satrap and not king of Egypt, and thus likely between 323 and 305 BC. It seems that when writing his story of Sesostris' life, Hecataeus used tales about the heroic deeds of Alexander of Macedonia (336–323 BC) to emphasise his achievements and merits.

Kurt Lange (Lange, 1954, p. 24) shows the numerous similarities between the deeds of Alexander the Great and Sesostris that appear in the works of ancient authors who wrote after the Macedonian's death. According to Anke Napp (Napp, 2017, p. 77) such a reference to the glorious past as a counterweight to contemporary failures is, however, earlier. In her opinion, it appeared in Egypt during the Persian conquest.

Longer and shorter mentions of this pharaoh may also be found in Pliny the Elder (*Hist. Nat.*), Strabo (*Geografikon*) and Lucan (*Bellum Civile* X 276–277). His popularity or maybe even veneration in the Hellenistic (Greco-Roman) period is also demonstrated in private inscriptions. One example is the graffiti with Sesostris' name placed by a man named Philocles in Isis' chapel in Abydos (Rutherford, 2003, p. 177).

In Polish ancient history textbooks from the 18th century, the chapters devoted to Sesostris are usually the most extensive. This is particularly visible in the second chapter of Dominik Aleksander Gabriel Szybiński's textbook (Szybiński, 1772, pp. 35–38). In it, the material was divided into paragraphs, emphasised in the margins by descriptions of the ruler's achievements: *Sesostris* (p. 35), *Sesostris' upbringing* (pp. 35–36), *Victories* (p. 36), *Patriarch Joseph gains fame during his reign* (p. 36), *Victories in Asia* (pp. 36–37), *Dangers in Europe* (p. 37), *Rebellion in his absence by Armais, his own brother* (p. 37), *Order instituted by him in Egypt* (pp. 37–38), *Sesostris' canals* (p. 38).

I would like to draw attention to the fact that Armaias (Hairmais), Sesostris' brother, was one of the "candidates" for the authorship of the greatest pyramid according to Diodorus (I, 64).

The depiction of Sesostris created by ancient authors was excellently suited to being used in the 18th century as an example of an ideal ruler, a ruler that strived for comprehensive development of his country. Already in ancient times, his reign was considered the pinnacle in Egypt's

development. After him, a slow decline in the country's importance was to occur, ending in its conquest by King Shabaka of Ethiopia (715/13-700/698 BC, ruler of the 25th dynasty originating from Nubia) and "fragmentation" of the country, only abolished by Psamtik II.

This point of view was adopted by Enlightenment and later scholars, as an article by Walery Piwnicki (Piwnicki, 1772) and textbooks by Skrzetuski (Skrzetuski, 1782) and Szybiński (Szybiński, 1772) indicate.

Historical textbooks and monographs written in the 18th and 19th centuries mentioned primarily those virtues and values that predisposed Sesostriś for rule, such as the knowledge transmitted to him by Hermes. Sesostriś' upbringing was also emphasised. Szybiński (Szybiński, 1772, p. 37) writes of 700 youths brought up together with Sesostriś, while Piwnicki (Piwnicki, 1772, pp. 154–156), following in the footsteps of his contemporary historians, cites the legend of Sesostriś' upbringing among peers, from whom he later selected his most trusted co-workers as a ruler. For Piwnicki, this was a particularly interesting example as it showed his contemporaries how great a role in shaping the future ruler's and the highest officials' personalities was played by his careful education.

In describing the rule of this Egyptian monarch, Szybiński (Szybiński, 1772) also particularly strongly underlined the role that skilfully selected and educated advisors and co-workers of the pharaoh played in the efficient and effective governance of the country. Mikołaj Wolski (Wolski, 1784, p. 35) too underlined that during the reign of this ruler, the royal court in Egypt was formed by experienced people who had rendered services to their country. Today this may be read as a fairly transparent allusion to those responsible for Poland in the time of the Wettiner dynasty (1697–1763) and Stanisław August Poniatowski (1763–1795).

In the opinion of Strabo (*Geographicon*, I, 2, 31) and Diodorus Siculus I, 94, Sesostriś was seen primarily as a great legislator, a model worthy of imitation, as he put in order civil legislation and tax regulations, and distributed arable land between the farmers. In this role, he gained the approval of Mikołaj Wolski (Wolski, 1784, p. 34) and Władysław Wężyk (Wężyk, 1842, v. I, p. 38). He was also considered a just ruler who cared equally for the rich and the poor.

Ancient authors believed that Ancient Egyptian society was divided into castes. The source of this piece of information was Herodotus II, 164, but he failed to provide the name of this law's author. However, Aristotle *Polit.*, VII 9,1 and VII, 9,4 (1329b) did do so, attributing the introduction of a caste division of society to Sesostriś. Information about the division of Egyptian society into castes appears in Polish textbooks. Józef Uldyński (Uldyński, 1819, p. 153), a contemporary of Joachim Lelewel, was among those writing about it.

The depiction of Sesostris as a good ruler was reflected in the assessment of his activity in other branches of the economy. According to Milewski (Milewski, 1827, p. 133), he granted freedom to slaves and provided the poor with tools to work. Not everybody shared this opinion, however. Władysław Wężyk (Wężyk, 1842, v. I, p. 38), like Cezar Cantu (Cantu, 1853, v. I, p. 397), emphasised the role that slaves purportedly played in construction in Ancient Egypt during his reign.

Among his state-building activities, his work on reforms in the administration was deemed important. He was also attributed with dividing the country into provinces, called nomes after the Greek. According to Diodorus' I, 54.3 information, there were 36 such provinces. Such a number of provinces also appears in Kotowski (Kotowski, 1818, p. 10) and Milewski (Milewski, 1827, p. 134).

The next area in which he was attributed numerous merits was construction. Textbooks regularly repeated after ancient authors that he built a hundred "churches" (temples), a defensive wall on the Eastern border and dug many canals all over Egypt. According to Diodorus I, 57.4, the wall erected on the country's Eastern border was 1500 stadia long.

The most far-reaching interpretation of Herodotus' II, 108 information on the digging of canals was offered in the 19th century by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Hegel, 1958, v. I, p. 306), who wrote that Sesostris (whom he identified with Ramesses the Great) ordered canals to be dug all over the country so that it became impossible to use cavalry in Egypt, the Egyptian army being previously famed for it. Kotowski (Kotowski, 1818, v. I, 9), meanwhile, ascribed the construction of the numerous canals to the need to dry marshlands and make penetration of the country by invaders more difficult.

The most famous of his building endeavours was purportedly a canal connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. Pliny (*Hist. Nat.* VI, 33, 165), wrote of these of Sesostris' plans. An echo of this thought was still found in the mid-19th century work of Kazimierz Błociszewski (Błociszewski 1850). One should also note the opinion of Władysław Wężyk (Wężyk, 1842, v. I, p. 38), who, most likely under the influence of studies carried out during Napoleon's expedition, concluded that Sesostris, like Napoleon, decided to abandon this task because a large difference between the levels of the two seas had been calculated (incorrectly, as a matter of fact). The source of information that Sesostris was the first builder of a canal in the world and abandoned its construction for the same reason that Napoleon later did, that is the supposed difference in the level of the Nile Valley and the Red Sea, was Strabo (*Geografikon* I. 2, 31; 17. I 25) or Pliny (*Hist. Nat.* VI, 33, 166). Before them, Aristotle (*Meteorolicorum* II, 14 [252b, 20–31]) also wrote about this.

However, Sesostris was not a wholly ideal figure: he also had a blemish. Namely, he harnessed defeated enemies to his chariot (Lucan, *Bellum civile* X, 277, Theophylact Simocatta *Historiae* VI, II, 10–18). The mythical Sesostris was therefore not a ruler deprived of human foibles, which Kotowski (Kotowski, 1818, p. 10) does not fail to note.

For many scholars of the period, this was clear proof that this ideal ruler had human weaknesses after all.

The narrative scheme in antique authors and in textbooks from the 18th and the first half of the 19th century concerning this pharaoh is interesting. In them, Sesostris was a great warrior in his youth and later turned to matters of the state. He reformed the political system and erected numerous buildings.

We should also mention the figure of Pharaoh Menes, who united the country. Here, however, a great role in the recognition of this ruler as ideal and worthy of imitation was, in my opinion, played by the fact that as the creator of the state he conducted many reforms – “civilising” his subjects.

Some ancient authors believe that after Menes’ ascension to the throne Egypt could be called a state, that is, an entity that has governance over the whole land and collects taxes. This is connected to the shaping and formation of a group of people who were responsible for the correct functioning of the country: officials. The need to educate them may have been the reason for forming special schools attached to the court.

Menes is depicted as builder by Herodotus II, 99 and Diodorus Siculus I, 50. This fact is also confirmed in later Egyptian sources. These include the stela Louvre 328, sarcophagus Berlin 34, and the 19th Dynasty Imen-wach-su scribal palette Berlin 6764.

Menes was also the ruler who inaugurated the worship of various gods (Herodotus II; Diodorus I, 45, 1; Aelian). According to Diodorus Siculus I, 89, 3 he also instigated animal cults.

In addition to founding a city, in ancient tradition such a hero also erected numerous sacred and secular buildings, reorganised legislation and religion, and “civilised” his people by introducing writing and good customs (as described in Diodorus I, 45, 1–2). He was also considered the “progenitor” of the nation. All these changes in the lives of Egyptians introduced in Menes’ time were recorded by ancient authors.

It is noteworthy that ancient authors believed rulers’ legislative activity to be important. They often underlined that the ruler established or codified laws or was a great builder. Such builders worth remembering were Moeris who dug the lake (Diodorus I, 51, 3), the founder of Memphis, Uchoreus (Diodorus I, 50, 3–6), and the eminent scholar and author of numerous books, pharaoh Athothis. These authors also observed, as may be seen in Sesostris’ “biography,” that the state would be governed well if

the ruler's direct co-workers were well educated and prepared for their roles as advisors.

The examples of good and bad rulers described above, which are still in play in literature today, show that the past had and still has an important part in the education of youth. It is still intended to teach patriotism, warn against repeating errors of the past and to provide models of appropriate conduct.

This is how some Polish politicians have perceived the role of history teaching in the education of youth. The endurance of certain stereotypes or "fossils" is puzzling. How can we explain the persistence, particularly in popular literature, of stereotypes about certain pharaohs formed on the basis of works by ancient authors, despite the constantly increasing body of knowledge on Ancient Egypt? It seems that the "disappearance" of the knowledge of Egyptian script (hieroglyphic, hieratic and demotic) for over a thousand years may be one of the explanations for this state of affairs. For many centuries, Europe drew information about the oldest civilisation in the Mediterranean basin from the tales of Herodotus, for whom Egypt's past before the arrival of the Greeks was a world of legends, interesting and simultaneously full of secrets.

Furthermore, access to Old Egyptian sources does not mean that depictions of the oldest civilisation based on descriptions by Greek and Latin authors will immediately stop appearing in school textbooks. This is especially true of the negative figures described above (particularly Kheops and Cambyzes). Neither does it seem that the depiction of the civilisation established on the Nile created by ancient authors will be rapidly replaced by the one that is being formed on the basis of Egyptological research. This is worth bearing in mind.

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