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On Labyrinths, Lies and Libraries

Maria Rosaria Falivene

A couple of years ago, a colleague who had only recently come to teach Ancient Greek History in my university asked for my opinion about a book that appeared almost twenty years ago. This was *Herodotus' Autopsy of the Fayoum: Lake Moeris and the Labyrinth of Egypt*, published in Amsterdam in 1985: its author, O. Kimball Armayor, is certainly to be reckoned amongst the most extreme representatives of the current of scholarly thought that counts Plutarch among its earliest adherents, and declares Herodotus a liar. An especially attractive touchstone, when once again pondering this problem, is provided by the Labyrinth, as famously described by Herodotus in the second book of his *Histories* (II 147-148), in the mid-fifth century B.C.

Armayor bluntly denied the reality of Herodotus' autopsy, while reducing his description of the Labyrinth to an exercise in re-phrasing (and mistakenly taking seriously) the ironic fiction of his predecessor Hecataeus of Miletus who in turn, on this hypothesis, should have made up an Egyptian Labyrinth by extrapolating a genuinely Greek (and indeed, Mycenaean Greek) concept, and transporting it to Egypt, in order to tease the Pythagoreans and their «orientalist» claim to Egyptian origins for their way of life. Later writers on the Labyrinth included Hecataeus of Abdera (who wrote Αἴγυπτιακά for Ptolemy Soter), Strabo, Diodorus (passing on information from the otherwise lost work of Hecataeus of Abdera), Pliny the Elder (drawing on an otherwise unknown Demoteles, and on Lykeas of Naucratis), Pomponius Mela. These cannot very well be made to agree with each other: still, in Armayor's opinion, they would all have connived with, or else be caught in this web of illusions – either because they, too, never visited the Labyrinth or because they (just like some modern archaeologists) went to Egypt looking for what their Herodotus wrote would be there – and, of course, rather promptly found something suitable: a monument (or remnants of it) which might just fit their guide's description of a Labyrinth as a huge and wonderfully complex annexe to a pyramid, near the entrance to the Fayyum.

Even Schliemann thought the site worth a visit in 1888¹, when Petrie announced that the ancient Labyrinth was found, adjacent to the pyramid of Hawara, near the entrance to the Fayyum. For the British archaeologist this was the first season of excavations there (another would follow, in 1911), but he was in fact following others, foremost among them Richard Lepsius, who was on the site already in 1843². Since then, archaeological finds repeatedly revealed the name of the Pharaoh who had the pyramid built. This was Amenemhet III: Ni-maatre on the day of his enthronement (*N(y)-m3'.t-R'*); Μάρρης, Μάρρος, Λάμαρις or Λαχάρης or *Lampares* in the Greek literary sources³; Πορρεμανρης (in various alternative Greek transliterations, including Φραμαρης) on the day of his divinisation as «Pharaoh Manres», when he was apparently seen «navigating above the desert mountains, with axle and sail», as Isidoros wrote in one of the Greek poems inscribed on a pylon at the entrance of the temple of the cobra-goddess Renenutet-Hermouthis⁴, in the area of modern Medinet Madi, ancient Narmouthis⁵. His presence haunts the Fayyum on East and West - as much as that of the local animal-god, Sobek-Suchos the Crocodile, whose life in the area was probably at the same time sanctified, and made more difficult by the extensive bonification works promoted by this Pharaoh of the glorious Twelfth Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom (1976-1794/3 B.C.)⁶. The alleged site of the Labyrinth could appear disappointing to somebody who

¹ Margaret S. Drower, *Flinders Petrie. A Life in Archaeology*, London 1985, p.137 f.

² Claude Obsomer, *Hérodote, Strabon et le «mystère» du Labyrinthe d'Égypte*, in C. Obsomer – Ann-Laure Oosthoek (edd.), *Amosiadès. Mélanges offerts au Professeur Claude Vandersleyen par ses anciens étudiants*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1992, p.252.

³ Respectively in: (Ps.)-Eratosthenes *ap.* Manetho, ed. Waddell, p.224 (Μάρρης); Elian. de nat. animal. VI 7 (Μάρρης); Diod. I 61, 1 (Μάρρος); Manetho, ed. Waddell, p. 70: Λάμαρις; p.68: Λαχάρης (just a false reading, plus itacism, in the manuscript tradition?); p.72 *Lampares*: in the Armenian version; see J. Vergote, *Le Roi Moiris-Mares*, ZÄS 87, 1962, p.72.

⁴ SB V 8141, 36; cf. É. Bernard, *Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine*, Paris 1969, pp.631-652.

⁵ The site was first located by Achille Vogliano: cf. A. Vogliano, *Primo rapporto degli scavi condotti dalla Missione archeologica d'Egitto della R. Università di Milano nella zona di Medinet Madi (campagna inverno e primavera 1935)*, Milano 1936. Cf. E. Bresciani, "Medinet Madi", LÄ ; Walter Ferri, *Rilievo topografico generale di Medinet Madi*, EVO 12, 1989, pp.3-19. Excavating on the site goes on under the direction of Edda Bresciani.

⁶ Dates according to J. von Beckerath, *Chronologie des pharaonischen Ägypten. Die Zeitbestimmung der ägyptischen Geschichte von der Vorzeit bis 332 v. Chr.*, Mainz 1985.

was used to much more rewarding finds: on the other hand it would, from Schliemann's visual angle, reinforce his point – that the ancient authors of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as well as Herodotus, were well worth taking on their word.

Schliemann himself could certainly be located at the opposite extreme from Armayor's, where I had started from: the Labyrinth really began to intrigue me – even more so when I read, in the thirty-sixth book of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* (36, 84), that the Egyptian Labyrinth was in the Herakleopolite nome and, a little further on (36, 86), that the Herakleopolitans had nourished a special hatred against it, and ravaged it in an extraordinary manner, though they still did not succeed in doing away with it. From this Herakleopolitan point of view, the Labyrinth became a possible clue in retracing the somewhat hazy northern limit of the Herakleopolite *island* (as Pliny himself elsewhere describes it: *N.H.* 5, 50), and the nearby border area between the Herakleopolite and the Arsinoite nomes – again a rather ill-defined zone, probably coinciding with the ἔξω τόποι, at the entrance and on the eastern border of the Fayum⁷. A place called Ἰερόν Νῆσος must have been somewhere in this area – and I began to play with the idea that this may have been a religiously intensely marked zone: a maze of religious establishments, as aptly signalled in Greek by a toponym meaning “sacred island”. Still from a Herakleopolitan point of view, the ensuing reference (36, 87) to forty *aediculae*, containing numerous miniature pyramids⁸, which were apparently put there by Nemesis herself, points to more links between the Labyrinth and the Herakleopolite district, where the cult of Nemesis is well attested in connection with that of Herakles/Arsaphes⁹.

This was all quite suggestive – but before I could go on speculating about it, I needed to be sure that the Labyrinth actually was there. Because I like to call myself a papyrologist, I of course resorted to papyri – Greek documentary ones; I was looking for a Greek (conceptual) object, and a Greek word: for once, it made sense to start with Greek texts, quite apart

⁷ Katja Mueller, *Mastering Matrices and Clusters. Locating Graeco-Roman Settlements in the Meris of Herakleides (Fayum/Egypt) by Monte-Carlo-Simulation*, APF 49 (2003), p.243 (also p.248, for a problem with the location of Alabanthis in the ἔξω τόποι).

⁸ Pliny gives measurements for these pyramids: height 71 m (40 *cubita*); the basis would occupy an area of 6 *arourae* (16536 m²: 128.6 m on each side): one wonders, however, how one of these could possibly fit in an *aedicula*.

⁹ BGU XIV 2375, 6 adn.

from my ignorance of ancient Egyptian. There are thirteen published Greek papyri (some of them very well known texts) that refer to the Labyrinth; they are listed in the following *Table*:

Date	Papyrus	Provenance	Subject
259/8 B.C.	P.Lille I 1	Ghoran (cartonnage)	Cluster: Φυλακή, Τούφεις, Σύρων κάμη, Πτολεμαίς, Λαβυρίνθος
III B.C.	P.Lille I 9	Ghoran (cartonnage)	oil production ἐν τῷ Λαβυρίνθῳ
252 B.C.	P.Petrie II 20, col.IV	Gurob (cartonnage)	meeting with an οἰκονομος ἐπὶ τοῦ Λαβυρίνθου about the requisition of a boat at Πτολεμαίς to transport hay for the elephants in Memphis
257 B.C.	P.Cairo Zen. 59815	Zenon archive	πανηγυρίς ἐπὶ τοῦ Λαβυρίνθου
III B.C. (27-12-235?)	SB XVIII 13314 (P:Carlsberg 51)	Hawara embalmers' archive(s)	φελωχικόν fee τοῦ ἀναβαθμοῦ τῆς ... οἰκίας ἐν τῷ Λαβυρίνθῳ λιθέας
143 B.C.	P.Tebt. III 736	Tebtynis (cartonnage; crocodile mummies)	manoeuvres in the Labyrinth area; Ἄραβες ἐκ Πτολεμαίδος Ἄραβων camping ἐπὶ τοῦ Λαβυρίνθου
bet. 173 and 130 B.C. ¹⁰	P.Tebt. III 891	Tebtynis (cartonnage; crocodile mummies)	Account of incomes and expenses, including 100 drachmae to Tothoes who went to the Labyrinth
5-3-112 B.C.	P.Tebt. I 33	Tebtynis (cartonnage; crocodile mummies)	preparations for the visit of a Roman senator, Lucius Memmius, to the Labyrinth (τὰ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ Λαβυρίνθου θεάν)
107/6 B.C.	P.Ashm. Dem. 22 (P.Ashm. Gr. 49 + P.Brussels E 7155, 7156 A,B)	Hawara embalmers' archive(s)	division of inherited property, including a house ἐπὶ τοῦ Λαβυρίνθου (l.15). Greek version of the Demotic original of a deed of sale: l.12, συγγραφὰς Αἰγυπτίας)
16-11-108? or: 7-11-72 B.C.?	PSI III 857	Hawara embalmers' archive(s)	θεραπεία of a corpse
30-11-83 B.C.	P.Ryl. IV 577	Hawara embalmers' archive(s)	claim to property: petition to the strategos from an embalmer τῶν ἐκ τοῦ Λαβυρίνθου
10-12-101? or 2-12-68 B.C.?	SB I 5216	Hawara embalmers' archive(s)	delivery of a corpse to be sent to the στολισταὶ ἀπ' Ἀλεξανδρείας by the στολισταὶ ἐν τῷ Λαβυρίνθῳ; letter from the ἀρχίατρος to the latter, and to their ἱερεῖς
117-138 A.D.	SB VIII 9642 (P.Mich. inv. 5579)	Tebtynis	Κηδεία of a dead, to be buried(?) ἐν τοῖς περὶ Λαβύρι ινθον τόποις

¹⁰ Cf. T. Reekmans, «The Ptolemaic Copper Inflation», in: *Ptolemaica (Studia Hellenistica 7, 1951)*, pp.92 and 115; R. Bogaert, «Banques et banquiers dans l'Arsinoïte à l'époque ptolémaïque. II. Les banques dans les villages du nome», *ZPE 69 (1987)*, pp.107-141.

Is a papyrologist therefore entitled to claim, in her turn, that the Egyptian Labyrinth is finally found? After all, Greek papyrological sources may not escape what we shall call Armayor's objection: any Greek settler in the Fayyum, at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period, could have been under the same possible delusion as his contemporary Hecataeus of Abdera – all following their Herodotus just like modern travellers and archaeologists would do in a very distant future.

This (quite apart from wilful ignorance) must be the reason why archaeologists and historians have been so reluctant in making use of the evidence provided by papyri, as remarked by E. A. E. Reymond in 1973: «References to the Labyrinth in the papyri are infrequent and not as a rule very explicit. Nevertheless Greek documentary sources seem to have been somewhat neglected in studies devoted to the problem of the nature and purpose of this architectural wonder of the ancient world»¹¹. Reymond was especially referring to two articles that had recently appeared on the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, in 1968 and in 1970, by Kazimierz Michalowski¹² and Alan B. Lloyd¹³, respectively, both of whom were completely silent about papyri.

In 1992 Claude Obsomer did some excellent work in deconstructing Petrie's archaeology of the Labyrinth and, literally, retracing it onto Lepsius' fundamentally more accurate engraved map of the Hawara site¹⁴; he also listed and evaluated the Greek papyri bearing reference to the Labyrinth (twelve of them: he omits P. Carlsberg 51): nevertheless, he again came to dismiss, or at least limit the value of this kind of evidence, on a par with the literary sources later than Herodotus: in his opinion, Herodotus' Labyrinth was an entirely different place (in the event, to be identified with Kahun, the workers' village grown at the time of the building of the al-Lahun pyramid)

¹¹ *Catalogue of the Demotic Papyri in the Ashmolean Museum. Volume I. Embalmers' Archives from Hawara. Including Greek Documents and Subscriptions* by J. W. B. Barns, Oxford 1973, p.146 (*P.Ashm.Dem.* 22,15 adn.).

¹² *The Labyrinth Enigma: Archaeological Suggestions*, JEA 54 (1968), pp.219-222.

¹³ *The Egyptian Labyrinth*, JEA 56 (1970), pp.81-100. A. B. Lloyd then basically restated his conclusions in his commentary to Herodotus' second book (*Herodotus, book II*, Leiden 1975-1988).

¹⁴ Claude Obsomer, *Hérodote, Strabon et le «mystère» du Labyrinthe d'Égypte*, in C. Obsomer – Ann-Laure Oosthoek (edd.), *Amosiadès. Mélanges offerts au Professeur Claude Vandersleyen par ses anciens étudiants*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1992; see his *Planches VII and VIII*.

from the one that was called by the same name in the Graeco-Roman period, and actually located at Hawara. Obsomer's opinion obviously amounts to another way of saying that the Greeks who came to Egypt after Herodotus may have called «Labyrinth» a place, or monument, which was not what Herodotus had (said to have) seen – and that by following them we risk incurring the same misapprehension. The only difference is that, on this hypothesis, there would be no liars: just the same name applied, in good faith, by different Greek speakers, at different times, to two different objects. Still, the lack of a univocal reference for the place-name Λαβύρινθος would nevertheless reveal - on the part of the Greeks (and Romans) who happened to mention it - a fundamental ignorance, not just about the location, but also about the «nature and purpose» (Reymond) of the marvellous building - a conspicuous one, though, therefore presumably not so easily confused with others. Furthermore, a Greek oral tradition concerning a place called (in Greek) «the Labyrinth» may well have pre-dated Herodotus; it may, for instance, have been current with the Hellenomemphitae of Egypt, among whom Herodotus may have found some of his informants: connections to Memphis and the Memphite nome come up in two of the thirteen papyri appearing in the *Table*, above (namely, P.Lille I 1 and P.Petrie II 20, col.IV).

Faced with the problem of naming a place in Egypt, a Greek could:

- (1) transliterate its Egyptian name into the Greek alphabet;
- (2) translate it into the Greek language;
- (3) re-name it altogether in Greek¹⁵.

The meaning of the ancient name *Hw.t-wr.t*, «Great Mansion» (from which the modern Arabic name Hawara descends in direct line), suggests the existence of a building complex in the area, a huge annexe to the Pyramid. The place apparently had two Greek names: one was Λαβύρινθος (first attested by Herodotus), a re-naming based on a knowledge of the building that gave the place its special identity - with perhaps a special reference to its

¹⁵ Pernigotti, S., *Stratificazioni toponomastiche nel Fayyum*, in: M. Capasso – S. Pernigotti (a cura di), *Studium atque Urbanitas. Miscellanea in onore di Sergio Daris*, Lecce 2001, pp.335-348; see also: Falivene, M.R., *The Map of an Armchair Traveller*, in: *Atti del XXII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia (Firenze, 23-29 agosto 1998)*, Firenze 2001, vol. I, p.424.

underground level¹⁶, not found by Petrie, but whose original existence might explain, according to Dieter Arnold, «the reason why the pavement of the Labyrinth was laid on top of a five-metre high sand casting, which may have originally accommodated the underground crypts»¹⁷. The second Greek name of the place was Αὔηρις - no more than a transliteration of the Egyptian name into the Greek alphabet, with an eye perhaps to the human settlement rather than the monument, insofar as they could be distinguished from each other: this is first attested, as is rather obvious, in the papyri.

But the one possible touchstone for the reality of the Labyrinth could only be the proven fact that the Greek word Λαβύρινθος was acknowledged by speakers of the Egyptian language as an adequate translation, or equivalent for the name of a place situated just where the Greek sources (literary and papyrological) say that the Labyrinth was, or should be. That this was the case is shown by P.Ashm.Dem. 22, explicitly the Greek version of the Demotic original (the συγγραφαὶ Αἴγυπτίαι of l.12) of a deed of sale recording the division of inherited property among three brothers¹⁸ - but also by SB I 5216¹⁹. This second document illustrates a case of conflict of

¹⁶ If the connection with λάυρα (a «narrow passage», a «lane» or «alley») and Λαύρειον (silver «mines», i.e. an intrigue of galleries, near Athens) is accepted, as I think it should: cf. Adriana Quattordio Moreschini, *Le formazioni nominali greche in -nth-*, Roma 1984, pp.60-67. I would add the further consideration that the final element -vθ- may connote something thick and intricate, deep and even viscous, difficult to access and, once entered, equally difficult to get out of (rather like certain Cretan caves); these shades of meaning may, it seems to me, be detected in most, if not all the terms examined by Quattordio Moreschini: see the single entries, and the *Tabella riassuntiva* at the end of the volume, pp.99-100.

¹⁷ *Das Labyrinth und seine Vorbilder*, MDAIK 35, 1979, p.8 («warum die Pflasterplatten des Labyrinths auf einer 5 m hohen Sandschüttung über dem Felsboden lagen. In diese Sandschüttung dürften die Krypten eingebaut gewesen sein»): «mais cela reste à prouver» (Obsomer, p.278).

¹⁸ Cf. Reymond, *Catalogue of the Demotic Papyri in the Ashmolean Museum* (see n.11), pp.141-147.

¹⁹ *Editio princeps* by Gustave Lefebvre, Bulletin de la Société Archéologique d'Alexandrie 14 (1912), pp.194-196, who offers important information about the circumstances in which this papyrus was found: «Haouâra (nécropole de la métropole du nome), 1911. Ce papyrus et le suivant (p.196, perdu) ont été trouvées dans le sebakh, cette année, en même temps que quelques papyrus démotiques (déposés au Musée du Caire), non loin de la pyramide d'Amenhemaït, dans les environs de la chapelle funéraire connue sous le nom de "Labyrinthe"». 1911 was the year of Petrie's second season of excavations at Hawara.

jurisdictions between the στολισταί of Alexandria and those of the Labyrinth, apparently competing about the «processing» of the corpse of Herakleides, who happened to die on the Labyrinth premises (ἐπὶ τῶν τόπων), being an employee of Athenagoras. Athenagoras must be writing from Alexandria, in his quality of ἀρχίατρος, which perhaps made him especially competent (on the Greek side) over places like the Labyrinth, and what was done there. It seems clear from these two documents that Egyptians and Greeks were in agreement about where *the* (one) Labyrinth was, and about the nature and purpose of the place. It also is apparent that what could be done in the Labyrinth was also done somewhere in Alexandria (and elsewhere)²⁰: this is confirmed by Strabo, in a passage from his description of Alexandria (17, 1, 10): «Now outside the canal there is still left only a small part of the city; and then one comes to the suburb Necropolis, in which are many gardens and graves and halting-places (κῆποι, ταφαί, καταγωγαί) fitted up for the embalming (πρὸς τὰς ταριχεΐας) of corpses» (transl. Horace Leonard Jones).

As shown in the *Table*, the thirteen Greek papyri referring to the Labyrinth have different provenances - all in the Fayum, and each of them leading into a different papyrological labyrinth. From the necropolis of Ghoran (in the south-western part of the Fayum) come two of our thirteen papyri: P.Lille I 1 and 9 were obtained from the cartonnage of the mummy no.9, one of the about hundred that were excavated by Pierre Jouguet and Gustave Lefebvre in 1901 and 1902. Mummy-case no.9, from which part of Menander's *Sikyonios* (P.Sorb. 72) was recovered, also "included": P.Lille I 2, 5, and 20, while another part of the *Sikyonios* (P.Sorb. 2272) was retrieved from mummy 24, along with substantial fragments of Euripides' *Erechtheus* (P.Sorb. 2328), and several documentary papyri (P.Sorb. I 42, 44, 48, 49, 55). The Ghoran maze has recently been surveyed by Suzanne Héral²¹, with special regard to the nomarchs' archives.

From the necropolis of Gurob (in the south-eastern part of the Fayum: less than ten km to the south of the Labyrinth site) comes P.Petrie II 20, also from cartonnage; the necropolis was discovered by Petrie in 1889: the ensuing papyrological maze, again including texts from archives and at least

²⁰ See Willy Clarysse's contribution in the present *Proceedings*.

²¹ See Suzanne Héral, *Archives bilingues de nomarques dans les papyrus de Ghôran*, in: Janet H. Johnson (ed.), *Life in a Multi-cultural Society. Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and beyond*, Chicago 1992, pp.149-157.

one library, is in the care of Willy Clarysse²². Finding one's way through «the labyrinth of the Petrie papyri» (as van't Dack once defined it²³) is perhaps the most difficult task of all: the archives and library (or libraries) these originally belonged to were dismembered in antiquity, when all of these papers were thrown away and destined to the Labyrinth for recycling as mummy-cartonnage. I shall offer here but one example of the perplexities one may incur when attempting to retrace a "Gurob book"²⁴: Ms.Gr.class. f.1 (P), in the Bodleian Library, is a Greek papyrus measuring about 12 x 10 cm., with perhaps a hint of red taint on the back, which also bears some writing. It dates from the late third, or early second century B.C.; on the front side it contains a choliambic poem. According to the librarians' hand-lists in the Bodleian, it was given by the Rev. Archibald Sayce in 1888²⁵: in that year Sayce visited Petrie on the Hawara site, as he tells us in his *Reminiscences*²⁶: does this papyrus come from there? Does it therefore connect to other comparable texts pertaining to the Petrie papyri Labyrinth? Or did Sayce pick it up somewhere else, while leading a good *dahabiya* life on the Nile? The world of papyrological research at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries was a small one, despite its labyrinthine appearance: indeed, the thought of how many labyrinths can be produced in a short time, by a limited number of people, is a sobering one.

From the Zenon archive comes P.Cairo Zen. 59815: since the publication of the *Guide to the Zenon Archive*²⁷ this is of course no longer a papyrological labyrinth, but each of us can find her or his way through any given labyrinth, and I was easily intrigued by the reference to a temple of Poremanres (Πορεμανρ[ῆτος] ἱερόν) and its enclosing wall (τρύφακτος), at the bottom of P.Mich.Zen.84, complete of a diagram (διαγραφή) showing where a semicircular palisade (χώραξ) should be built along the canal

²² Willy Clarysse, Petrie's Excavations in Gurob, in: W. Clarysse – H. Verreth (eds.), *Papyrus Collections World Wide (Brussels-Leuven 9-10 March 2000)*, Brussels 2000, pp.93-94.

²³ Cf. E. van 't Dack, *On a Re-edition of the Petrie Papyri*, *Ancient Society* 3 (1972), pp.135-147 (see p.142: «the labyrinth of the Petrie Papyri»).

²⁴ A literary papyrus may of course have never been part of a proper book-roll, not being originally destined for study or (strictly speaking) reading, at all.

²⁵ As I was told by Mr. B. C. Barker-Benfield on the occasion of a visit to the Bodleian Library in June 2004.

²⁶ A. H. Sayce, *Reminiscences*, London 1923, p.264.

²⁷ P.W. Pestman (ed.), *A Guide to the Zenon Archive*, Leiden 1981.

flanked (on the diagram) at one end by the house of Artemidoros²⁸, at Philadelphia, and at the opposite end by the temple of Poremanres, preceded by a Ἐρμούιον. Assuming a (roughly) North-South orientation of the diagram, this could be the canal following a similar course to that of the modern Bahr Saila (built at the time of the sultan Barkouk, 1382-1399, and in fact running across the site of the Labyrinth²⁹): would then the τρύφακτος referred to in this document be the enclosing wall of the Labyrinth which is so often referred to both in the literary and in the papyrological sources – bordering, as it were, on Apollonios' δωρεά? It would then not be surprising if the πανηγυρίς referred to in P.Cairo Zen. 59815 (the one also mentioning the Labyrinth) were a festival for Poremanres' ascension, maybe the very occasion when he was seen «navigating above the desert mountains, with axle and sail»³⁰ - nor that all the men on the estate should have gone to see it: the distance between Philadelphia and the Labyrinth measures less than 30 km.

For the second century B.C., we have three documents from cartonnage cases of crocodile mummies from Tebtynis, again in the south-western part of the Fayum (a little less than 20 km east of the Ghoran necropolis): Arthur Verhoogt³¹ has done much to introduce us to this labyrinth.

The majority (five) of the thirteen relevant Greek papyri are from (one of) the Hawara embalmers' archives: hardly a coincidence, especially if one considers the fact that these archives consist mainly of Demotic documents (83 published until now, as opposed to 12 Greek already published - and of course the chances for a Greek text to be published have been much higher than for a Demotic one). The scholar to show us the way around this labyrinth is Inge Uytterhoeven: after presenting *An Introduction to the Hawara Archives* in year 2000³², she recently discussed her doctoral thesis, in three volumes, on *Hawara in the Graeco-Roman period. Life and death in*

²⁸ P.Mich.Zen. 84,18 adn.: «Artemidoros was the physician of Apollonios, and his house at Philadelphia is again mentioned in P.Cairo Zen. 59251».

²⁹ Cf. Obsomer, *Hérodote, Strabon et le «mystère» du Labyrinthe*, p.252.

³⁰ See above, n.4.

³¹ A. Verhoogt, *Menches, Komogrammateus of Kerkeosiris. The Doings and Dealings of a Village Scribe in the Late Ptolemaic Period (120-110 B.C.)*, Leiden 1998.

³² In: W. Clarysse – H. Verreth (eds.), *Papyrus Collections World Wide*, pp.109-115

a *Fayum village*³³, as part of the team work of the KUL Fayum Project³⁴. The one third-century B.C. Greek document from Hawara referring to the Labyrinth is P.Carlsberg 51: somebody owns a stone house in the Labyrinth, and has paid a tax called φελωχικόν. This is the document that is missing in Obsomer's list, so it is perhaps all the more important to note that there apparently were private houses within the Labyrinth precinct, and that they were made of stone as the Labirinth was, according to Herodotus and all other literary sources: the village at Kahun, on the other hand, was of course made of clay³⁵.

It had long not been possible for scholars to agree about the destination of this complex (a funerary temple? a palace? an administrative centre?). There is by now no doubt about how central the activities of the embalmers families were at Hawara during the Ptolemaic period: within the terms of ancient Egyptian culture, the Labyrinth was a major manufacturing centre, whose production met needs that were deeply engrained in the attitude Egyptians took towards death (and not just human death) consistently over the centuries, as may well be expected from any culture over such a basic fact of life: this certainly goes a long way towards accounting for what may be somewhat paradoxically termed the vitality of the place, i.e. its extraordinary continuity from the time of Amenemhet III (first quarter of the second millennium B.C.) down to the Ptolemaic, and into the Roman period. The latest Greek document mentioning the Labyrinth is not much later than Pliny: it speaks of κηδεία rather than θεραπεία, and refers to the area «around» (περί), rather than «in» (ἐν) or «at» (ἐπί) the Labyrinth – all possible indications of changes in the funerary practice, and in the physical conditions of the establishment, consistent with Pliny's words about the state of disrepair of the nevertheless still majestic place. Over the centuries, the Labyrinth industry obviously generated a large number of *nekropoleis* (both for men and for crocodiles) including, I think, those at Ghoran, Gurob, Tebtynis: a few of the documents obtained from the cartonnage of mummies found in one or other of these cemeteries bear written testimony – circularly,

³³ 3 vols. Unpublished PhD Thesis KU Leuven, 2003. See also I. Uytterhoeven, *Hawara (Fayum): Tombs and Houses on the Surface. A Preliminary Report of the K.U. Leuven Site Survey*, in: *Ricerche di Egittologia e di Antichità copte* 3 (2001), pp.45-83.

³⁴ <http://fayum.arts.kuleuven.ac.be>

³⁵ Obsomer himself is aware of this possible objection to his identification of the Labyrinth with the Kahun settlement, and also observes that the Kahun plan does not quite fit Herodotus' description.

as it were – to the existence of the Labyrinth, while the very mummy-cases, as well as the famous Roman funerary masks found by Petrie at Hawara must have been among the products of the Labyrinth work-chain. The processing of corpses, the manufacturing of mummy-cases, the ensuing and lasting funerary service ministered to the dead, in different ways and measures depending on their social standing³⁶, persistently generated a lot of varied economic activities, which made the place increasingly intricate, and thriving with all sorts of businesses, while the caste of the funerary priests took care to keep all property and privileges within the same “inner circle”, from one generation to the next. The kind of property that was specific to this caste, in that it was inherent to their core business, was the *s'nh*, or «‘endowment’ (usually a share part) of the embalmer granted by the stipends for the funerary service in the necropolis»³⁷.

The question «was Herodotus a liar?», has more recently turned into the seemingly politically correct one: «did he *misunderstand* what he saw?»: did his informants, and he, did those Greeks and Romans who came after him – *do we* actually see different things, while all the time staring at the same objects? On the whole, I find the answer that comes from papyri reassuring: there is indeed the possibility of a common reference, or sense, to be shared by cultures despite their *difference*³⁸.

³⁶ Cf. P. Jouguet,

³⁷ Reymonds, p.9.

³⁸ I wish to thank Professor Pietro Vannicelli for directing my attention to the Labyrinth.