

**An Overview and a Study on the Agreement Between Greece and Egypt on
the Delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone – 2020
A Reminiscence of the Pre-Alexandrian Contacts Between Europe and
Africa**

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Introduction

Due to the consequences and effects of the recent COVID-19 pandemic that has threatened the global economy, several leading countries have taken precautions to avoid future economic hazards. Further, the contracts and agreements are proposed as favouring the benefits for each party involved. One of the most discussed recent contracts is the agreement between Greece and Egypt on the delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone in the East Mediterranean Sea. On 7th August 2020, Greece and Egypt signed a maritime deal in Cairo, the Capital of Egypt, which sets the sea boundaries between the two countries. The agreement specifically demarcates an exclusive drilling right for Greece for gas and oil, two primary energy resources in the Mediterranean Sea. Both gas and oil are all-time essential energy resources for exportation and domestic usage all over the world. Discoveries of natural gas reserves in the Mediterranean Sea around Egypt made Egypt the most important gas exporter and gas hub in the region. Accordingly, the agreement on sharing the rights to these natural reserves renews the diplomatic tie between Greece and Egypt. This recent agreement is reminiscent of commercial, diplomatic and political contacts that prevailed between ancient Greece and Egypt.

The relations between Greece and Egypt can be traced back to the 2nd millennium BCE. A few pieces of archaeological evidence are unearthed supporting the contacts, specifically of trade contacts that prevailed between the two countries, which will be discussed in the paper. Naukratis¹, the Greek port in Egyptian territory at the mouth of the Nile, was a major trade port, indicating the constant trade relations between the two countries. The exact dates of the

¹ In the Nile River delta, on the Canopic (western) branch of the river.

founding Naukratis are uncertain. According to Herodotus, it was founded by Amasis II (570–526 BC)². Apart from Naukratis, there were other trading ports, such as Canopus³ and Heracleion⁴, which also functioned as significant ports in trade between ancient Greece and Egypt for a considerable period. Then, Plutarch (45 CE- 120 CE), in his biography on Pericles, records an instance where Egypt sends grain supply to Greece (*Pericles*, 37.4), specifically Athens, as a gift during the time of Pericles⁵. Philokhoros, the Greek historian and the Atthidographer, also refers to the same historical incident in his work which exists in fragments (Philokhoros F119)⁶.

The trade contacts between Greece and Egypt have continued up to modern times with trade alterations, foreign administration, and diplomatic relations between the two countries. The recent maritime agreement signed to share the energy resources in the Mediterranean Sea recalls the favourable terms, beneficiary rules, boundaries and limitations they agreed upon for each party in history.

Objective

The recent agreement signed by Greece and Egypt in 2020 will be considered in this study to reassess how the two countries had long-term relationships benefitting both parties from ancient times. The modern case will be studied as reminiscent of the ancient relations between Greece and Egypt. The paper will elaborate on the continuation and reformation of historical trade links between Greece and Egypt until modern times. The research aims to illustrate how Greece and Egypt maintained continuous diplomatic relations with each other with understanding since the earliest times of history as these relations set an example and a lesson for bilateral relations in modern times.

Methodology

The research followed a qualitative study based on historical records and empirical evidence. The 2020 maritime agreement between Greece and Egypt, which was signed on 7th August

² Herodotus, the Histories 2.178

³ An ancient Egyptian coastal town, located in the Nile Delta Its site is in the eastern outskirts of modern-day Alexandria.

⁴ An ancient Egyptian city located near the Canopic Mouth of the Nile, about 32 km (20 miles) northeast of Alexandria.

⁵ Pericles (495-429 BCE), a prominent Greek statesman and general of Democratic Athens.

⁶ All the Greek fragments have recently been translated by Philip Harding in "The story of Athens: the fragments of the local chronicles of Attika" (2008)

2020, will be considered a present case study along with three other trade contacts that prevailed between the two countries in ancient times, specifically before the conquest of Alexander the Great. The gift of grain offered by Egypt to Athens during a famine occurred in the 5th century BCE as recorded by Philokhoros and Plutarch, the significance of Naukratis as the first Greek port city (Emporion) in Egyptian territory and other two port cities, Canopus and Heracleion will be three case studies taken from history. Selected examples will be analysed to examine how each contact benefitted each party and how they functioned as two trading countries during ancient times and the present. Further, these ancient cases will be discussed in-depth to show the conditions, limitations, and boundaries apart from the beneficiary factors for each country. The study will also indicate one of the facts that the Greek historian Herodotus (484-425 BCE) brought to light that the contacts between West and East are continuously changing. Accordingly, the relationship between Greece and Egypt is a fine example to discuss the maintenance of diplomatic relations for the most prolonged period among two leading and ancient countries in the Western world and Africa.

Findings and Discussion

Any country maintains a foreign policy to manage healthy co-relations with other countries, equally enjoy common privileges accessible to each state, and prevent any future threats that would be harmful to the security and stability of a country. "As the main part of foreign policy, *Diplomacy* defines purposes and missions of the states, implements practical forms, methods, and tools to create and maintain regular and complex relationships in the international environment."⁷ In most cases, these agreements and alliances that are mutually beneficial for each country keep them in understanding and cooperation rather than force and war. The diplomatic contacts between Europe, Asia, and Africa are constantly changing. This can be seen in several instances when tracing the diplomatic relations of leading countries from the two continents: Europe and Africa. Since the earliest times, these changes have occurred, as revealed in surviving literary and archaeological sources. Thus, the changes in the nature of relations are not novel, and it can be assumed that the same will happen in the future. Diplomatic relations in the new millennium change continually due to the emergence and disappearance of states, borders, and governments. On the other hand, existing co-relations and diplomatic agreements come to a new light with alterations depending on present issues and needs and necessities.

⁷ Shabnam Mammadova, *The Key Aspects of Ancient Greek Diplomacy*

The Greece-Egypt Maritime Agreement 2020 and Its Implications

The maritime agreement signed between Greece and Egypt on 7th August 2020, on the delimitation of the sea boundary in the east Mediterranean benefits both parties in drilling gas and oil energy resources. This agreement was signed by Sameh Shoukry, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt and Nikos Dendias, a member of the Hellenic Parliament and the current Foreign Minister of Greece. 'The delimitation of sea zones "allows both countries to move forward in maximising the utilisation of the resources available in the exclusive economic zone, especially promising oil and gas reserves," Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said after signing the pact in a joint press conference with his Greek counterpart Nikos Dendias in Cairo.⁸ Irrespective of Turkey's objection to nullifying the agreement, legal representatives of both Greece and Egypt have pointed out the legality of the terms and conditions in the agreement. Accordingly, the trade contacts between Greece and Egypt have come onto the surface in a new light by heightening the diplomatic relations that prevailed between the two countries on the East-Mediterranean border.

The task of searching for potential energy resources began in the early 2000s, and the maritime boundaries of coastal line states of Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Turkey needed to be set. The first boundary setup was initiated by Cyprus and Egypt, whereas Greece and Egypt began discussing the matter in 2005. The present agreement has affected the neighbour Turkey who has tried to nullify the contract. "Shortly after the announcement, the Turkish foreign ministry issued a statement calling the deal "null and void," claiming the area "lies within the Turkish continental shelf" and also violates Libya's maritime rights."⁹ Turkey is situated in the delimited area as a third state. Nonetheless, after several agreements and disagreements, Greece and Egypt came to a final decision to sign the contract regardless of the opposition of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

These political and diplomatic agreements and disagreements again depict the presence of constant friendly alliances and antagonistic rivalries between the nations representing the West and East. The limitations and delimitations between the countries themselves are evidence of

⁸ Nektaria Stamouli, Politico.

Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/greece-signs-maritime-border-deal-with-egypt-amid-spat-with-turkey/>

⁹ Nektaria Stamouli, Politico.

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their rivalries regarding different terms and standards for sharing the resources accessible to all at the border. Accordingly, they have set regulations for a fair agreement. For instance, at the launch of the current agreement, 'there were two options for delimitation: a negotiated and amicably-agreed on the boundary and, if negotiations failed, recourse to third-party adjudication or arbitration.'¹⁰ Nevertheless, they have come to an understanding on better terms to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship as in ancient times. As the Greek Prime Minister mentions, "Today we have proven with Egypt that abiding by international law is the only path that leads to security, peace, stability and good neighbourly relations. We intend to follow this road with all our neighbours. We hope and expect they will do the same." Likewise, creating and strengthening diplomatic ties while maintaining beneficiary relations among the countries continue in modern times just like it happened in history. The political leaders take measures to continue these agreements to stabilise friendly alliances expecting privileges from each other, especially in times of need.

This agreement is released to the public, but it is written in Greek. Nevertheless, many online newspapers and blogs, such as EJIL: Talk! (Blog of the European Journal of International Law), Ekathimerini (An online daily morning newspaper published in Athens) and AP News (An American News Agency) have paid attention to the agreement's content. Analysts around the world also release many analyses and discussions. As reported in news items, the introductory paragraphs of the agreement or the preamble mainly focus on good terms between Greece and Egypt. The agreement was set up according to 'the relevance and applicability of the UN Charter¹¹ and UNCLOS^{12,13}. Thus, the main target of the agreement is the maintenance of understanding between the two countries and cooperation.

¹⁰ Constantinos Yiallourides, EJIL: TALK, Blog of the European Journal of International Law

¹¹ The Charter of the United Nations is the foundational treaty of the United Nations, an intergovernmental organization.

¹² The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, also called the Law of the Sea Convention or the Law of the Sea treaty, is an international agreement that resulted from the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, which took place between 1973 and 1982.

¹³ Constantinos Yiallourides, EJIL; Talk. Available at: <https://www.ejiltalk.org/18969-2/>



Figure 01: Countries that border the Mediterranean Sea¹⁴

First, the boundary clarifies the maritime areas appertaining to Greece's and Egypt's maritime jurisdiction and the applicable delimitation principles consistent with UNCLOS and customary international law. Second, it clarifies the exact limits of overlapping maritime claims with other States in the areas.¹⁵

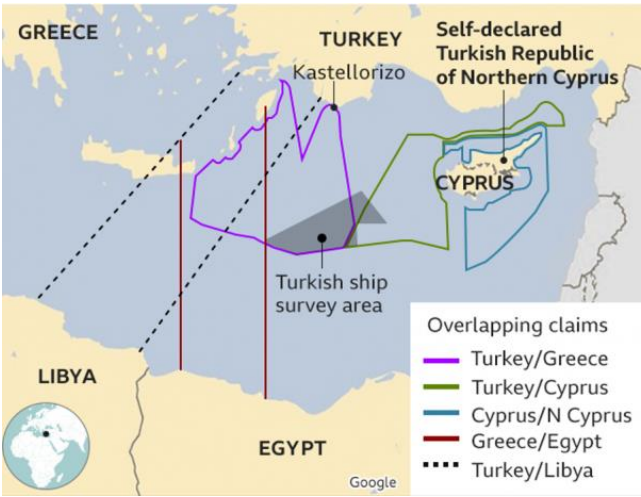


Figure 02: Overlapping maritime claims and the agreed limitations between Greece and Egypt¹⁶

As the map indicates, mainly the Greek islands (along Crete and Rhodes) are taken into consideration in the agreement. This also clarifies all the limits that overlap maritime claims with other states in the Mediterranean Sea. Further, as shown in the map, the boundary is not a direct median line, favouring Egypt by allocating a ratio of about 9:11 to each state. On the

¹⁴ Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228796050_Offshore_wind_energy_in_the_mediterranean_countries/figures?lo=1
¹⁵ Constantinos Yiallourides, EJIL; Talk. Available at: <https://www.ejiltalk.org/18969-2/>
¹⁶ Source: EJIL; Talk. Available at: <https://www.ejiltalk.org/18969-2/>

other hand, Greece has faced several limitations "while Athens succeeded in enshrining the islands' rights to a continental shelf of their own (by starting the delimitations of the maritime boundary from its two largest islands, Crete and Rhodes)."¹⁷ Nevertheless, both countries expect a mutual understanding and a share of gas and oil energy resources in the East Mediterranean Sea. In addition to these factors, Turkey also plays a vital role in the process. Economic growth in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea during the last two years has led Greece and Turkey to non-favourable terms towards each other while they came 'dangerously close to war three times in the past (August 1976, March 1987, and January 1996) over oil exploration rights and the other maritime rights in the Aegean. However, each time it was Greece that first opted for rapprochement and subsequently paved the way for a period of détente.'¹⁸

As mentioned earlier, a part of the study will focus on three ancient encounters/contacts of Greek and Egyptian relations. Continuous diplomatic relations benefitting both Greece and Egypt can be witnessed in these instances. Greek and Egyptian political figures have taken measures to extend the alliance between the two countries from the Minoan period (3000-1100 BCE) onwards. Based on the surviving archaeological evidence found at the two palaces at Tell el-Dabaa/ Avaris in the Nile delta of Minoan frescoes,¹⁹ it is evident that Minoans were in close contact with the Egyptians. The paintings represent depictions of bull-leaping, bull-grappling, griffins, and hunts which were common themes used in the frescoes in the Minoan palaces.



Figure 03: Reconstructed Minoan Fresco from Tell El-Dab'a, Egypt,
In Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Crete.

¹⁷ Ildir Lika, *The Greece-Egypt Maritime Agreement and Its Implications for the Greek-Turkish dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean*

¹⁸ Ildir Lika, *The Greece-Egypt Maritime Agreement and Its Implications for the Greek-Turkish dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean*

¹⁹ Stefan Pfeiffer, *Egypt and Greece before Alexander*

Most of the evidence can be traced back to the beginning of Egypt's 18th Dynasty²⁰. In addition, several scenes in the Theban tombs in Upper Egypt depicting 'Minoan legates²¹ from Keftiu (as Crete is called in Egyptian texts) bearing tribute²² are evidence that supports close diplomatic and political contacts between the two nations. These tombs are located on the West bank of the Nile river and are recognised as the tombs of the Nobles of the particular area. As Panagiotopoulos comments in his inquiry into the Theban tombs, "during the time of the 18th Dynasty, the representation of foreign embassies bringing valuable objects to the Egyptian king became a favourite theme in the pictorial programme of Theban private tombs."²³ Panagiotopoulos descriptively discusses the historical value of tomb paintings in his article. He sees the activity depicted on the frescoes as a 'diplomatic gift-giving that strengthened ongoing relations between the nations.

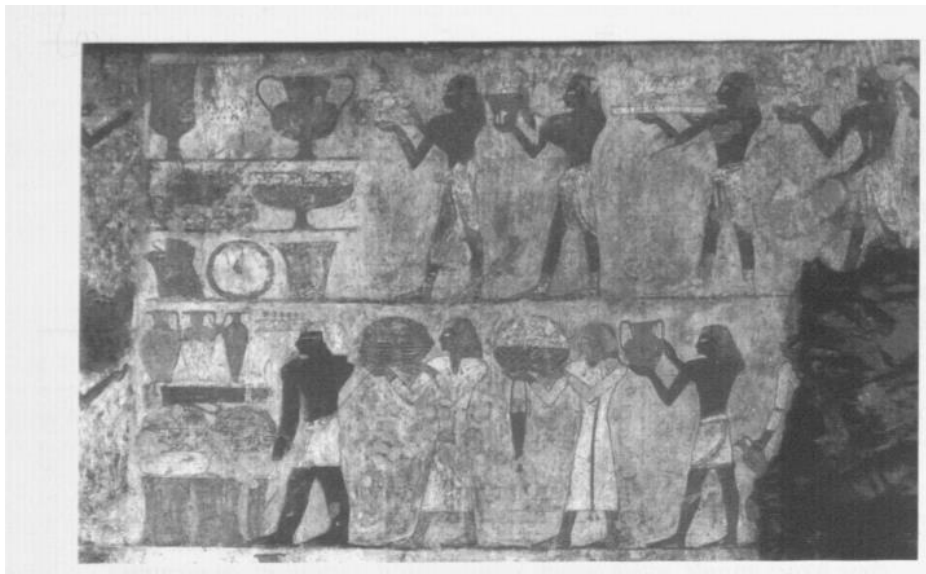


Figure 04: Tomb of Useramun²⁴. Detail from the representation of Aegean and Syro-Palestinian gift-bearers.

Following the Minoan period, few depictions of men dressed in a Mycenaean kilt in Theban tombs and many Mycenaean pottery shreds speak of the intense and continuous contacts between Mycenaean Greeks and the Egyptians. Apart from these earliest contacts of the pre-historic era, Egypt and Greece also sustained their trade, economic and political links with each

²⁰ The Eighteenth Dynasty spanned the period from 1550/1549 to 1292 BC

²¹ Usually provincial governors (official representatives).

²² Stefan Pfeiffer, *Egypt and Greece before Alexander*

²³ D. Panagiotopoulos, Keftiu in context: Theban-tomb paintings as a historical source, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 20, 2001, 263-283.

²⁴ Useramen was an ancient Egyptian vizier under pharaohs Hatshepsut and Thutmose III of the 18th Dynasty.

other during the historic period. The three examples selected in the study can be considered significant trade connections between Greece and Egypt during the pre-Alexandrian period of Greece (from the Archaic to the late Classical period). This further supports how these commercial contacts between the two countries have resumed and continued until the 21st century.

The Greek presence in Egyptian territory can be traced back to the period of Psammetichus I (664-610 BCE). Herodotus relates how Psammetichus I and later Amasis came into close contact with the Greeks during their reigns.

"To the Ionians and Carians who helped him to gain the throne, Psammetichus granted two pieces of land, opposite one another on each side of the Nile, which came to be known as the Camps and in addition to the grant of land kept all the other promises he had made them. He even went so far as to put some Egyptian boys into their charge to be taught Greek...the tracts of the land where the Ionians and Carians settled, and where they lived for many years, lie a little distance seaward from Bubastis, on the Pelusian mouth of the Nile...Amasis subsequently turned them out and brought them to Memphis to protect him from his own people. they were the first foreigners to live in Egypt, and after their original settlements there, the Greeks began regular intercourse with the Egyptians, so that we have accurate knowledge of Egyptian history from the time of Psammetichus onwards."

(Herodotus, *The Histories* 2.154-155)

First, these lands were given to the Greek mercenaries only as a military settlement for the armies to settle in the area. Later developed into trade ports contributing to the commerce in the Mediterranean Sea. After the permanent settlements, the initial activities of the particular area predominantly built up, focusing on extending trading links between Egypt and Greece²⁵. As Stefan Pfeiffer comments, "Greek trade with Egypt, indeed even as settled Greek presence in Egypt, began in an era when many local clan chiefs governed the country under the central government of the Assyrian King"²⁶. Further, as Pfeiffer relates, Psammetichus I was one of the earliest Egyptian rulers who recognised trade benefits with foreign countries to gain wealth and develop beneficiary relations. After 40 years of his rule, one of his successors, Amasis (570-526 BCE), came to power. Amasis identified the importance of maintaining strong trade relations with Greece, whereas he gifted Naukratis, the Egyptian city, to the Greeks for a

²⁵ Colburn, *Contact Points: Memphis, Naukratis and the Greek East*.

²⁶ Stefan Pfeiffer, *Naukratis, Heracleion-Thonis and Alexandria*

continuous trade policy. Thus, Naukratis is recognised as 'the first instance of organised Greek presence recorded in Egypt' and its significance in creating cultural crossroads between Egypt and Greece.

Naukratis, the first Greek port in Egypt

Naukratis, located on the Canopic branch of the Nile in the western Nile delta, is a Greek port that had consisted of a Greek community from the times of Psammetichus I onwards. Herodotus, one of the earliest and most important sources for Naukratis, records that Pharaoh Amasis gave the port city to the Greeks.

"Amasis favoured the Greeks and granted them a number of privileges, of which the chief was the gift of Naucratis as a commercial headquarters for any who wished to settle in the country. He also made grants of and upon which Greek traders who did not want to live permanently in Egypt might erect altars and temples."

Herodotus, the *Histories* 2.178

As evident in these recordings, the leaders have extended their boundaries to allocate areas to foreign traders encouraging economic interactions between the nations. According to Herodotus, Naukratis was the only Greek *emporion* in Egypt by the time and ventured into commercial activities with the Greek world. The Egyptians did not allow foreigners to settle in other areas. Thus, Naukratis held a significant position as Egypt's exclusive Greek trading post. As Astrid Moller comments, 'at Naukratis, the port-of-trade was administered by a group of poleis. Within a polis proper, an emporium is the place of external exchange, while the agora is the place of internal exchange.'²⁷ The Egyptian Pharaohs let the Greek community administer their emporion²⁸. This can be considered a political and diplomatic precaution as it led the Egyptians to engage in trade on a large scale with mainland Greece. As Moller further explains, Naukratis, as 'the port of trade', acted as 'an instrument of administrative trade, aiding the collection of toll charges, controlling the exchange of goods, and acting as a buffer between two differently organised economies'. Even during this time, Greece and Egypt maintained beneficial relations with boundaries and economically supported each other.

²⁷ Astrid Moller, Naukratis as port-of-trade revisited

²⁸ Refers to a trading port in classical antiquity.

According to prevailing archaeological evidence, Hellenion was a main sanctuary founded by Ionian, Dorian and Aeolian Greeks in Egyptian land²⁹. Erecting sanctuaries confirms the permanent settlement of a community in the area. Thus, the mutual understanding and the agreement aided in establishing sound relations between both parties. Further, this supports the fact that trade relations and agreements benefitting both parties are an ancient way of maintaining contact between countries. The exchanged goods, the terms and conditions may have varied. Nevertheless, this proves that Greece and Egypt have functioned as two major countries that benefitted from each other and have maintained cooperative diplomatic relations.

The Trading Ports Canopus and Heracleion

Apart from the main trading port, Naukratis, there were other trading ports that exported and imported goods between the two countries. As J. G. Milne points out, 'so far as the exports of Egypt are concerned, the list is brief: the only commodity which was shipped from Egypt to Greece in any quantity after the fall of the Mycenaean kingdom and before the establishment of that of Alexander was corn. In later times there were considerable exports of glass, linen, and papyrus.'³⁰ Equally, 'the return trade from Greece to Egypt was in all probability equally simple. It has been supposed that there was a considerable export of wine and oil from Greece to Egypt before the Greek conquest.'³¹ Likewise, several items were exchanged through trade between the two countries.



Figure 05: Naukratis, Canopus and Heracleion in Egyptian map³²

²⁹ Stefan Pfeiffer, *Naukratis, Heracleion-Thonis and Alexandria*

³⁰ J. G. Milne, *Trade Between Greece and Egypt Before Alexander the Great*.

³¹ J. G. Milne, *Trade Between Greece and Egypt Before Alexander the Great*.

³² Source: <https://britishmuseum.tumblr.com/post/140328319652/thonis-heracleion>

Canopus, an ancient coastal city in Nile Delta, functioned as the main port for trade activities with Greece before the establishment of Alexandria. The earliest records on Canopus and its relation to Greece can be seen in Solon's poems, where Solon refers to Greek settlements in Canopus shore near Nile Delta (Solon fr. 28 West). The ancient city Heracleion is also identified as an emporion. Likewise, irrespective of the time, both Greece and Egypt maintained trade and diplomatic contacts. These port cities functioned as centres for stabilisation and continuation of contacts. Maritime commerce and trade links played a significant role in the economic life of both Greek and Egyptian communities in their respective areas.

Egypt sending grain to Greece during the famine in the 5th century BCE

The Greek historians and authors record one of the significant exchanges that happened between Greece and Egypt. Plutarch, the Greek biographer in *Life of Pericles*, mentions the King of Egypt sending grain supplies to Athens during a famine.

"Many years before, when Pericles was at the peak of his political career and had legitimate sons with his wife, he put forward a law that only people who had two Athenian parents would count as Athenian citizens. So when the King of Egypt sent 40,000 measures of grain as a present to the Athenian people and it had to be divided up among the citizens, there were lots of prosecutions against people who were now illegitimate because of Pericles' law; until then no one had noticed or questioned them, but many were also falsely accused."

(Plutarch, *Pericles* 37)

As the above quote records, this relates to Pericles' citizenship law that was introduced during the 5th century BCE. The shares of grain sent by Egypt were given to the Athenians, who were eligible to be citizens under Pericles' new regulations. This reference can be seen in another Greek historian and an attidographer, Philochorus (300 BCE), whose work survives in fragments supports the same reference by Plutarch (49-116 CE). According to Plutarch, Egypt sent 40,000 medimnoi³³, but as Philochorus records, the amount was 30,000 medimnoi. Either way, the incident supports the fact that both Greece and Egypt were on favourable terms since ancient times. Further, in ancient times Egypt was the leading grain exporter in the

³³ A medimnos was an Ancient Greek unit of volume, which was generally used to measure dry food grain.

Mediterranean Sea. These historical instances indicate that Greece and Egypt have kept direct and extensive contact with each other since earliest times.

Conclusion

As evident in the selected present case and the instances taken from history, maritime commerce has played an important role in maintaining diplomatic relations between Greece and Egypt. Both countries held mutually significant roles as trade partners from the Minoan period onwards until modern times. In conclusion, the maritime agreement signed on 7th August 2020 at Cairo by Greece and Egypt on the delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone or the sea boundaries on the energy resources can be regarded as an extension of the mutual diplomatic relations that prevailed between the two countries from early times. Several differences between the ancient relations, and the modern maritime treaty can be witnessed. As the ancient instances indicate, the early contact was in maritime trade, but the modern treaty is on sharing maritime resources, gas and oil, which are highly resourceful energies in the modern context. In his opening lines of the *Histories*, even Herodotus records how these nations from West and East made 'long trading voyages' and had conflicts and agreements from time to time. Further, both countries were on beneficial terms in each period. Egypt created a favourable environment for the other party, which agreed with them. Gradually they relinquished their self-sufficient economic system yet continued to maintain trade relations with neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean Sea, especially with Greece. These relations and agreements changed with time but continued under favourable terms and boundaries in different periods. The present Maritime Agreement on the Exclusive Economic Zone in the Mediterranean Sea is one such instance that depicts the continuation of diplomatic relations between two ancient countries in the 21st century. Thus, history has evolved in a different facet to 2020 and will continue to be so in the future. The present maritime agreement is pertinent evidence for that.

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