

## **Reflections on the Roots of Plato's Republic And the Emergence of the Just State**

### **Abstract**

In 399 B.C., Plato, at the age of 28, left Athens after the death of his mentor Socrates and traveled to Egypt. There is no historical data as to where he went in Egypt, who he met, or what he learned. This article traces Plato's footsteps in Egypt suggesting that he studied for an unknown period of time at the Greek Oracle of Siwa, North Africa, which served as a famous center of Egyptian mythology. The Oracle which still exists was continually frequented by famous Greek philosophers and was mentioned by Herodotus at least 28 times in volume II alone of the History of Herodotus.

This article further presents a unique symmetry between the 3000 year old tribal form of government that still exists in the oasis and is supported by a series of *urf* (traditional) laws numerous of which were echoed in *The Republic* soon after Plato returned from Egypt. The unnoticed symmetry existed in at least seven normative and juristical areas: a tri-tier social stratification model; justice and communitarianism; the philosopher king ideal; disregard of democracy; the idea of the *Polis*; the treatment of women; and the ideal of the good.

The reader should be reminded that this article does in no manner imply that Plato plagiarized what he had heard and seen in Siwa. Far from being the truth. This article suggests that Plato's learning in Siwa strongly reinforced his original thoughts and convinced him that *The Republic* was not only workable but coincides with his ultimate theory of governance.

The before mentioned information was discovered during a field study by the author in 2000 as a part of a Faculty Development Leave. The purpose of the previous study was to examine crime and justice in the remote locations in North Africa, one which Herodotus mentioned numerous times as documented in Rawlinson (1885) *The Histories of Herodotus*.



## Overview

There is ample historical literature on Plato's life and achievements most of which is related to his older years, his close relationship with Socrates, his dialogues, and, of course, *The Republic*. It is well known that he was born in Athens in 428 B.C. in one of the noblest families of Athens shortly after Pericles' death. Among his closest relatives were Critia and Charmides, renowned for their infamous participation in the government of the Thirty Tyrants. Beyond this, little is known of his career, especially since he only talked about himself in his dialogues only twice; the *Apology* and the *Phaedo*, and in both cases in connection with the trial and death of Socrates and his growing disillusionment with the acts of tyranny by Athenian politicians—a few of whom were his own relatives (Bernard, 1996).

Numerous historical sources, however, indicate that—at the age of 28—Plato was distraught over the death of his mentor Socrates and traveled to Egypt, Cyrene, and possibly Sicily (Denise et al., 1992; Stone, 125, Souryal, 2001). These sources suggested that he left Athens "to extend his education," "in search of enlightenment," "looking for new methods of government," and "in pursuit of a deeper change" (Stone: 125). Ober (1996) also suggested that Plato was motivated by discovering a unified theory of government, one that could put an end to tyranny, organically unite society, provide for civic education, govern the distribution of material goods and is "generally regarded by members of society as a just state" (Ober, 1996:175). Yet from the year 399 B.C. when he left Athens until he returned in 388 B.C. and produced the *Republic* around 385 B.C. Plato's history was totally shrouded in mystery.

## Four Caveats

This article is not a biography of Plato. No article can accomplish that although a plethora of authors tried. Prominent among these authors were Ober (1996, 2006, 2007, Monson (2000),

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Kurat (1997), Annas (1981, Reeve (1988), Strauss (1964) and Stone (1989). The purpose of this article is to investigate the critical time gap in Plato's life which seemed vital to unraveling the way Plato saw the boundaries of governance and might have strongly inspired the functional-structural foundation of his views in *The Republic*.

Neither is this article another commentary on Plato's dialogues although numerous of them were more realistic than others. For example, in *Gorgias*, he seemed disillusioned with the idea of justice, while in *The Republic* he intensely advocated it as the core value in his vision of the ideal society (Annas, 1981, p.2). Also, while his *technes* were basically the same throughout the dialogues—at least in terms of rhetoric and philosophy—in *The Republic* he presented justice as “the only way he sees all these questions hanging together” (Annas, 1981: 1).

Neither does this article dismiss the influences of other Greek and non-Greek cultures on Plato's thinking—especially Sparta whom Plato criticized in Book VIII of the *Republic*. Even before Plato, the Athenians were aware of the importance of unwritten laws, of music, of moderation, of education, and of the lower status of women in society. Yet, while Socrates and Aristotle (in *Politics*) demeaned women, Plato in the *Republic* praised them and honored them (Jowett, *The Republic*, Book V, pp.170-176). The point here reinforces the thought that his travels in Egypt and North Africa might have had a transformational influence on Plato's perception of the arts of governance and might have reinforced many of his own untested beliefs.

More significantly, this article should not be seen an attempt to diminish Plato's grand philosophic stature and intellectual prowess since at the time he travelled to Egypt, he was only 28, a rather young and obscure Greek aspiring philosopher. This article only shows that—in the natural inclination of learned and curious scholars—the capacity to create new ideas may not be simply innate, but a function of one's own experiences as well as one's ability to distill such experiences in a manner that may reinforce or weaken one's views of the world. And if such an inclination is plausible, then Plato's Siwan experience must be unraveled and its intellectual impact on Plato's growing philosophic insights as depicted in *The Republic* recognized especially since—as in the tradition of Greek philosophers—many such aspiring philosophers kept their own sources to themselves (Bloom, 1991).

## Purpose

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: *first*, to investigate the Plato-Siwa connection, one that was never before brought to light and consequently, perhaps, motivate some future archeologists to scan the walls of the Siwan Oracle's for physical evidence that might confirm Plato's presence over 2000 year ago. *Second*, to examine the intellectual and cultural connections between Athens at the time and the Egyptian empire, especially members of its high priesthood. This can be important to historians, political scientists, educators, and commentators especially since many famous Greek philosophers including Solon of Athens, Kleobolus of Lindos, and Pythagorus of Samon, customarily boasted about their visits to the Siwan Oracle as a matter of intellectual pride (Wilcken, 1930: 57). This close association between Greek philosophers and Egyptian priests might further explain the exchange of ideas between the emerging Athenian political thought and the Egyptian kingdom at its zenith.

## The Critical Factor

Ironically, the Siwan Oracle was not the most striking feature observed during the 2000 field study in the oasis; it was the unique form of Siwan tribal government that lasted for 3000 years. Based on an observational examination of the Siwan method of governance and the ten books of *The Republic*, a close contextual symmetry seemed to suggest that: (1) Plato *must* have visited the oasis and studied under the Oracle's Egyptian priests whom the Greek philosophers thought so highly of them. (2) As a peripatetic philosopher, Plato was inspired by the unique form of communitarianism that, in many ways, seemed to fit his views of the ideal state, one "dedicated to a social ideal, identified with a social role, [and] in a way denies the importance and interest of the individual" (Annas, P.2). And, (3) it was more likely to infer that Plato incorporated some of "what he had seen and learned" in Siwa in *The Republic* after he returned to Athens. As will be explained later, a striking symmetry was verified between the Siwan form of government and Plato's ideal form of government as described in *The Republic*. This symmetry was most prominent in at least seven areas: (1) the three-tier social stratification; (2) justice and communitarianism; (3) the philosopher king ideal; (4) disregard of democracy; (5) the ideal of the *polis*; (6) the treatment of women; and (7) the

ideal of the good.

### **The Greeks' Obsession with Siwa**

Herodotus (485-425 B.C.) confirms that the Greeks of his time were enamored by the "golden" Egyptian civilization and were keen on borrowing numerous cultural and mythical ideas from the Egyptians (Rawlinson, 1885). For example, he pointed out that the Greek art of divination was borrowed by Melampus (Amytheon's son); the dietary habits of priests by Pythagoras; and intercalation by Endoxus (Rawlinson, 1885). More importantly, perhaps, Herodotus suggested that almost all the names of Greek gods, as well as Greek "religious assemblies, processions, and litanies" were copied from Egyptian sources (Rawlinson, 1885: 240). Wilcken (1930: 57) adds that "a great number of famous Greeks who may have laid the foundations of their civilization were proud to mention to their pupils that they had learned [such knowledge] from the Egyptian priests." Khun (1925) pointed out that Siwa was especially famous for being on the trading routes by which merchandise was moved from Nubia (an ancient nation south of Egypt until the Aswan Dam was built in 1969 covering it with water) on board Phoenician and Greek vessels. Fakhry (1973: 93) notes that the Siwan Oracle of Ammun was so famous that Roman Emperor Hadrian paid it a special visit in 130 A.D. Hadrian's visit is still evidenced by a stele with his name on the wall inside the Oracle.

The subsequent history of the Oracle is sketchy. Although it is thought to have been closed on the orders of Emperor Justinian in the 6th century, worship may have continued until the Moslems took over North Africa in 709 A.D. (Fakhry, p. 94). Unlike Alexander the Great, who also left a stele on the eastern wall of the Oracle and a few Greek names carved on the walls, no physical evidence of Plato was found. This can be explained in light of his relative youth and obscurity at the time, especially when seen through the eyes of the Egyptian priests who, as expected, were more inclined to seeing things in Pharaonic dimensions.

### **Method**

The 2000 field study project (Souryal, 2001) has shown that the Siwa oasis has not changed geographically, demographical, culturally or governmentally in any significant way

for the last 3000 years *even* after the Islamization of its pagan inhabitants in the seventh century. And, since there is no evidence of any Siwans visiting Athens, and a plethora of evidence that show many Greek philosophers visiting Egypt, it should be fairly plausible to believe that young Plato might have been equally inspired by what he had learned in that remote oasis.

This article will pursue two types of inquiry: *first*, a geographical one that can show that Plato (or anyone else) could *not* have visited Egypt at the time without first stopping at Siwa, the closest oasis, and the only one with a famous Greek Oracle (see the attached map). *Second*, a content analysis that can reveal an extraordinary symmetry between Plato's views in *The Republic* and the Siwan form of government as validated by the 2000 field research project. To illuminate both of these inquiries, it might be proper to first explain the Greek obsession with Siwa and the main features of the 2000 field study project (Souryal, 2001).

### **The 2000 Field Study Project**

The 2000 field study research project (Souryal, 2001) lasted for eight weeks (December 15, 1999-February 15, 2000) at the oasis site. It encompassed the selection of 38 informed subjects who were carefully interviewed and their testimonies duly documented. These included tribal leaders, public officials, teachers, merchants, laborers, and recommended story tellers. To maximize reliability, the subjects were vetted by four-tier criteria: (1) knowledge of the social control procedures and justice traditions in the oasis; (2) maturity by being at least 40 years old with ample functional experience; (3) good character, by having been endorsed by at least two other qualified subjects; and (4) the capacity to reason intelligently and logically.

The field study findings revealed that for almost three thousand years, Siwa, a community of about 18,000 people was never colonized nor invaded until the Arabs in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. As observed during the study, the Siwan community was strikingly modest yet proud, conservative yet enlightened, temperate yet fair, and determined yet stoical. For instance, when issues of criminal behavior were raised during the interviews, the Siwan crime record (which could not be considered rates by Western criminologists) was minimal and social

justice maximal. No serious violent crimes occurred in the last 50 years and, in the last century (1900-2000), only eight non-violent crimes were reported to the ceremonial Egyptian police in the oasis. The most serious among them was an accidental killing by an animal-pulled cart. While most criminologists (especially Western criminologists) would most likely dismiss such figures as sentimental exaggerations, these rates were corroborated by all of the interviewees as well as by the ministry of Public Security in Cairo. Thus, in the absence of a Western-style record-keeping method, these figures were accepted as valid.

The 2000 field study also revealed that the Siwan community was governed in a manner uncannily similar to that envisioned by Plato in *The Republic*. First, the presence of a tri-level stratification; the *agwad* (guardians); the *Zaggalah* (working class characterized by their rapping as they collected palm dates); and the *Bedouins* (slaves). *Second*, a well-balanced interplay between the formal and the informal methods of social control in tribal and communal matters. *Third*, the widely practiced doctrine of communitarianism as evidenced by the ancient prohibition on private ownership of land while allowing the inhabitants to own the plants themselves (mostly palm trees). *Fourth*, the Siwan community has historically consisted of 11 *qabilas* (plural of qabila, or tribe), each was headed by a selected *Sheik* (an enlightened male elder) selected on the basis of a trilogy of cultural traditionalism, rational conservatism, and social communitarianism. These *sheiks* used intellectual ability, social craftsmanship, and native leadership to administer a *nomos* of customary law, social formalism, and entrepreneurial communitarianism. Precisely, they were chosen “for their capacity to reason and valued the pleasure of learning and knowing the truth about things” (Reeve, 1988: 44). These *sheiks* were selected by acclamation to govern for life. *Fifth*, disregard of democracy at all levels since it was considered ruling by the uninformed; one that threatened the smooth sustenance of the tribal traditions. *Six*, the development of educated and harmonious citizenry, one that would support the communal integrity of the oasis in the tradition of the *polis* idea. *Seven*, a disproportionately high regard for women and their uncontested freedom to manage the household in a manner never before observed in any Moslem society. *Eight*, the ideal of the good—the practice of inculcating the collective obligations of fidelity, self-control, and obeying the “guiding star of the soul” (Reeve, 1988: 44).

Another key element in the 2000 field study was an examination of a 120-year-old manuscript written in Arabic by a famous Siwan historian Sheik Sidi Altaib Abu-Musallim in which he chronicled Siwa's *urf* law (i.e., norms, customs, and sanctions). Knowledge gained from this manuscript was essential to understanding the uniqueness of the Siwan model where leadership and social obligations were united in a fashion conducive to bolstering a just form of governance, one that is highly conducive to maximizing social harmony and equal welfare. The manuscript, which will be discussed later, emphasized the obligation of all Siwans to preserve the oasis' natural resources by means of an equitable plan of communal land and a well regulated system of land irrigation.

The ~~2000~~ field study project found no evidence to support the view that Siwan socio-political history has changed for any external or internal reason. Siwan history appeared to continue uninterrupted except, in addition to the advent of Islam, ~~the~~ occupation by the Africa Corps under Field Marshall Rommel during the second World War. The later observation was rather intriguing, yet consistent with the Siwan psyche. The field Marshall reportedly left a huge impression on the interviewed storytellers who thought he was the "leader of leaders." According to their reports, Rommel was admired because he was "strong, "gallant," "honest" and treated Siwans with respect; he listened to them and distributed food rations to the inhabitants when harvesting crops was interrupted by warfare.

### **Siwa's Socio-political Heritage**

Siwa was first settled around 1200 B.C. by a Berber tribe from North Africa called *Zanith* (Fakhry, 1973). Over the years, the settlers intermarried with settlers from African tribes—most likely from Egypt and Nubia. In subsequent periods, Siwa became an important trade post for African caravans and a market for slave trade. Traditionally, all Siwans are moderate Moslems. Their moderation is evidenced by the existence of only one mosque in the oasis which always appeared sparsely occupied. Furthermore, while Moslem doctrine forbids drinking alcohol, Siwans can publicly invite visitors for a homemade brew of fermented dates. Furthermore, they do not condemn the practice of homosexuality, an old practice they might have learned from interacting with Greek visitors (Fakhry, 1973). In their social commentaries,

they seem tolerant of all religions, ethnic groups, and nationalities. They generally display a friendly attitude toward tourists who, regardless of gender, race or color of skin are welcomed in their shops and restaurants as long as they respect local custom.

From a cultural standpoint, Siwans display deep reverence for tradition and an almost automatic submission to its bidding. By examining criminal behavior in Siwa and watching the people's routine activities in the streets and marketplaces, one can clearly recognize their tendency to avoid violence, form a unified community, and feel duty bound to assist one another regardless of class or tribe. In a unique manner, they seem to share a frontier mentality that makes any definite machinery for the exertion of authority superfluous. Aside from the ceremonial role of the Egyptian police posted in the oasis, no other authority symbols exist; no governor, no national guard, no legislative assembly, no court of law, no penal code, and no jailhouse.

In their simple yet stoic culture, it is not too difficult for a foreigner to be invited to a Siwan home, especially if the visit is arranged by one of the tribal elders. However, since segregation by gender is strictly enforced, no male visitors (other than family members) can socialize with Siwan women. As in other Moslem communities, Siwan women cover themselves with a *millaih* (a body wrap) whenever they are in public view. Yet, unlike most other Moslem communities (i.e., Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Oman, or Afghanistan), Siwan men show extraordinary deference to women who subtly but confidently control the household, the children, small businesses, and, indirectly, their men. Because of this unspoken deference, perhaps, any public gesture, word, or act against a woman is taken as a serious offense against her family, her tribe, and against the oasis' communal values. Subsequently, Siwan women, especially middle-aged ones, proudly walk the streets or ride a cart with a modest head cover, work in hospitals and schools, and run errands for their household. Yet they do not work in businesses where they have to serve male customers.

Siwa's system of government is both simple and effective, most likely because it is far from being a democracy. Siwans, in general, resented the idea of democracy because of its perceived permissiveness, secularism, tendency to corrupt citizens, and, as such, its propinquity to cause social disorganization. As evidence of that, their tribal *sheik* assumes a

multi-faceted role; a father figure, a teacher, a preacher, a jurist, a magistrate, a political advocate, a peacemaker, and a chief executive officer of the tribe. In all of these roles, he earnestly conducts the tribe's affairs as long as he maintains the confidence of his tribe's men, especially the *agwad* (the prominent class). On the other hand, Siwans favored a state of "common temperance;" one that is embedded in sustained lineal authority in accordance with *urf* law (law if custom). For that reason alone, perhaps, they prefer that the sheik's politically-groomed sons should succeed him instead of entertaining any untested outsiders.

The Siwans' critical view of democracy may further explain their unspoken resentment toward the budding tourist industry. While most of the subjects interviewed in the 2000 field project appreciated the economic value of tourism, they considered it potentially harmful to the unity of the community. When the interviewees were pressed for an explanation, they pointed out the dangers of drugs, guns, crazy music, and immoral acts. When asked what specifically constituted immoral acts, they pointed out the decline in traditional values (especially, respect for the elders), ignoring religious obligations, and disturbing communal cohesion. The capitalistic impact of tourism, they argued, infects the innocence of the youths, encourages commercial greed, and undermines Siwa's basic sense of temperance.

### ~~The Framework of Governance~~ Siwan Urf Law

During the 2000 field study project I had the opportunity to review the 120-year-old *Siwan Manuscript* written in Arabic by Sidi Al-Taib Abu Musalim, chronicling Siwa's ancient *Urf* (customary) law. Musalim's work (about 195 pages) detailed the cultural and economic roots of the Siwan tribes since they settled Siwa,, but more importantly, documented the full range of *urf* laws which Plato might have learned while in Siwa.

The Siwan *urf* rules were meant to be universal throughout Siwa regardless of tribe, class, or gender. The ultimate purpose of the oasis state was to ensure a wholesome and noble community; one that is based on an enlightened system of social control and a progressive sense of communal peacemaking. Emphasizing these goals, the Siwan Manuscript stated three overriding sociological maxims: (1) maintaining tribal integrity by promoting

communitarianism; (2) promoting social order by ensuring justice; and (3) preserving Siwan economy by protecting its natural resources.

*Maintaining Tribal Integrity:* The *Manuscript* upholds the tribal spirit as essential for societal cohesion and peaceful relations. It requires "instinctive submission" by every Siwan to observe customary laws, be content in his status, and comply with the authority of the tribal elders. This, the *Manuscript* stated, was essential to maintaining order and allowing natural justice to prevail. The *Manuscript* also addressed familial and civic issues. Familial issues required specific norms of behavior. For instance, each tribe is to be content with its status in the community (i.e., the *agwad*, the *Zaggalah*, and the *Bedouin*); families are to be held responsible for the behavior of their members; individuals pay a modest annual fee to support tribal welfare in the event of weddings, fires, or funerals; women rear the children and unlike the common Islamic tradition, male babies are circumcised during the first week of birth and the circumcision of girls is prohibited. Marriages are also free from dowries, are kept within the tribe and first offered to the cousins; and a boy's first education is memorizing the Quran. Civic issues, on the other hand, require that neighbors respect the privacy of one another (i.e., once one knocks on a neighbor's door, one must retreat several paces and wait until an invitation to enter is offered); and when women ride donkeys, they keep both of their legs to one side of the animal. Interestingly, this last practice is still used by female heads of states in some European countries.

*Promoting Social Order:* The *Manuscript* addresses general procedures applicable to crime and punishment. Justice required good faith by all those involved in the justice situation. If a tribal elder acts in bad faith, he should be fined twice as severely and removed from office. When the *awaqqel* (elders) reach a verdict in a criminal case, it must be unanimous. Capital punishment is prohibited because it diminishes the spirit of community by stimulating revenge. Neighbors are to be held accountable if a personal item is discovered missing. If a neighbor is found guilty of stealing, he is to be fined twice as much as a stranger. If a person is fined for inappropriate behavior, but is unable to pay, his family must pay on his behalf. If a person is fined for inappropriate behavior recidivates, his next fine is doubled.

Not to be forgotten as well, in all criminal cases, tribal elders must seriously promote an accommodation that is conducive to forgiveness.

*Preserving Natural Resources:* The *Manuscript* states that all Siwan land is owned by the Siwan people while its use is assigned only to those who plant it and attend to its progress. All other economic conditions are rejected because they can threaten the natural state of harmony within the tribe as well as between the tribes. The *Manuscript* sets rules for the allocation of land, water, and seeds. For instance, since date palms are the most important crop, the *Manuscript* determines the quantity, source, and the timetable for irrigation. It specifies a schedule for land irrigation as well as the number of *wagbhas* (plural of *wagbha*) an irrigation cycle that lasts between sunrise and sunset. Of particular interest, however, was the observation that the *Manuscript* does not assign any criminal penalties for violating these rules. When the subjects interviewed during the 2000 field project were asked to clarify this observation, they were genuinely surprised since the practice was regarded as a vital communal obligation that just "cannot be disobeyed." The sound and tenor of this response was reminiscent of what the Platonists considered a matter of "natural interest."

### **Reticulating Plato's Journey to Siwa**

While the 2000 study has not found any physical evidence that prove Plato's presence in the oasis, there seems to be powerful circumstantial evidence that justifies this view. It would be rather illogical for Plato—distracted after the death of Socrates and the poor communication between Athens and Northern African colonies—to arrange a journey to Egypt rather than to numerous Greek cities. Yet it must have been more rational to him to select a destination that was well known to Greek philosophers before him where he could live and communicate comfortably with the Egyptian priests who most likely spoke Greek as well. Having said that, it is more likely that Plato landed at the ancient Egyptian fishing village across the Mediterranean (known as *Mersa Matruh*) and hitched a camel ride to the oasis of Siwa (180 miles inland).

Strategically, Plato might have chosen Siwa for three reasons: *First*, it was in the most-northern part of Egypt and had a world-famous center for the study of Egyptian philosophy and mysticism. The next famous Egyptian learning center would have been Thebes (450 miles south of Siwa), a destination that would have required at least two months of land and river journey. *Second*, Plato, who also intended to visit Cyrene, could not have been so imprudent to bypass Siwa and turning West toward Cyrene (about 270 miles west of Siwa). *Third*, Plato's intense desire to examine other forms of governments and sociological configurations in order to create his own ideal state must have motivated him to first learn at the Ammunian Oracle in Siwa.

Plato's journeys in North Africa lasted between ten and twelve years. Nearing 40, he returned to Athens around 388 B.C., after a brief sojourn in Syracuse where the Tyrant of Syracuse took him hostage and later freed him (Levine, 1984, Jowett, 1980: *Chronology*). Also, while *The Republic's* publication date is not exactly clear—as is generally the case with ancient texts—it is believed to have been published between 385-383 B.C. and that *The Republic* was noted to have been completed "more or less without interruption" (www.gradesaver.com, last posted 12/28/2004).

### **Young Plato's Search for a Deeper Knowledge**

If Ober, Annas, and Monoson (among others) are accurate, then Plato's philosophical search for answers can be seen in three lights. *First*, he must have been profoundly troubled by the injustice of the condemnation and execution of his mentor, Socrates. His first aspiration at the time must have been to "actively care for the well-being of the Athenians," "to not

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\*As evidence of the fame of the Siwan Oracle, King Philip of Macedonia, upon consulting the Oracle of Delphi regarding a personal matter related to his wife, was reportedly commanded by Apollo to sacrifice to Siwa's Oracle and to pay homage to its god (Fakhry, 1973: 86, Wilcken, 1928). This tale and others may have motivated Alexander (Philip's son) to make his historic march to the oasis in 331 BC where the Ammunian priests crowned him Pharaoh. Alexander's visit was commemorated by a stele still visible on the Oracle's southern gate. The Siwan Oracle was also well known to Lysander, the Spartan General who, in 405 BC, defeated Greece making Sparta the leading country in the world. According to legend, Lysander had consulted the Oracles of Delphi, Dodona, and Ammun as to the outcome of a forthcoming battle. Only the Ammun priests ordered him to attack, guaranteeing his victory (Fakhry, 1973: 84). Pindar, generally regarded as a great Greek poet, was reportedly "a great admirer" of the Ammun Oracle as well. He sent as a present to the god a Ammun hymn of praise which was carved on a three-sided stele. This stele was still standing half-buried in the Oracle's court when Pausanias visited Siwa 600 years later in 160 A.D. (Fakhry, 1973: 83; Parthey, 1836: 161).

attempt to modify citizens' passions but to make them more effective in their pursuit of their desires," and to "dismiss the view that politicians are at a greater risk of being the target of some action than anyone else" (Monoson, 2000: 118-119). *Second*, Plato might then have believed that mankind's fate was hopeless unless there was a deep change in the nature of politics, especially in the education of those intending to become statesmen (Bernard, 1966). In this context, Plato strongly believed that "before justice can be found in the individual, it must be sought in the state" (Jowett, 1980: *Chronology*). *Third*, given the aristocratic lineage of Plato, he seemed to disdain the common uninformed man. Unlike Aristotle, he had little confidence that a widely held opinion is likely to have merit more than a minority view or even a view held by one persons alone. He also seemed to hold fast to the notion that "there is a body and a set of technical skills the possession of which enables an individual to think intelligently, indeed correctly about political matters" (Monoson, 2000, p. 122).

Having said that, what followed seemed to be a natural progression of events. After Socrates' death, Plato sought to pursue his search for a "deep change" by traveling to Egypt, Cyrene, and possibly Sicily. Jowett suggested that through these three journey's Plato might have been able to construct a complete theory of governance. In light of this, a visit to Siwa, would have been most logical since the Golden Empire of Egypt was only across the Mediterranean sea and the Ammunian Oracle could provide him with a hospitable intellectual environment.

Although it is hard to pinpoint when Plato finally returned to Athens, two well-documented events may help illuminate this question. *First*, upon his return Plato "gathered around him a group of intelligent students and, choosing a gymnasium as the scene of his classes, he founded the Academy as Athens' premiere center for the study of philosophy" (Jowett, 1980, *Chronology*). *Second*, upon his return, Plato wrote *The Republic* which was chronicled as "his memories of what he had seen and heard" (Denise & Peterfreund, 1992: 9-11). In it he advocated what later became known as a seemingly unified theory of governance, justice, education, civic leadership, and laws. For nearly two millennia, these two events (the Academy and the *Republic*) have more accurately dated Plato's return to Athens and substantially enriched world civilization (Rouse, 1956).

## Attempts at Verification

The following discussion presents seven areas which may shed persuasive evidence of the symmetry between the Republican model of government observed in Siwa and Plato's thoughts in *The Republic*: (1) a tri-tier social stratification; (2) communitarianism and justice; (3) the philosopher king ideal; (4) disregard to democracy; (5) the Polis ideal; (6) the treatment of women; and (7) the ideal of the good. All of these elements will be now presented in a manner consistent with traditional Greek literature of comedy and tragedy.

### The Players: A Tri-tier Social Stratification

In Book II of *The Republic*, Plato discusses the origins and composition of the ideal city-state. He suggests that the nature of justice is more easily discovered in the macrocosm of the state, than in the microcosm of the individual. He then proposes three powerful premises: (1) the natural desire of people to associate with one another for mutual support; (2) the involvement of different men with different abilities which, as such, should be so categorically organized; and (3) the belief that societies flourish when each person is devoted to the task he is best fitted for and not dispersing his energies in other tasks he is not fitted for and which he will therefore perform indifferently. These three conditions mark the people's personal enlightenment and their devotion to the *polis*. As a result, societies will enjoy wholesome simplicity, and cities will have little disease and few lawsuits (Warmington & Rouse, 1984).

Plato identifies three orders of people in the ideal state: the *guardians*, the *auxiliaries* (soldiers), and the *producers*. He argues that any meddling between these three orders "can do great harm to the city and would most correctly be called wickedness" (Solomon & Murphy, 2000: 32). Plato compares these three orders to those of gold, silver, and lead and describes them as follows:

First, the "golden" order (the guardians) are the noblest of society. They must be courageous and philosophical, brave and wise, noble and contemplative to be members of this ruling class. They are philosophers in the strict sense and possess the thinking element that provides them with the light of wisdom. They also possess a state of character, a cultivated set

of dispositions, attitudes and good habits (Solomon & Murphy, 2000). They are usually the best of the older men; ones who are selected for their devotion to the state and who are carefully groomed for the office (Warmington & Rouse, 1984).

Second, the "silver" order are auxiliaries--laborers and soldiers. By virtue of their spirit, they possess courage and devotion to preserve the state from the twin dangers of war and sedition. Consequently, they do not live the life of princes, but the simple life of soldiers, and to maintain this capacity, they are freed from the distractions of wealth and luxury (Jowett, *Book III*, n.d.).

Third, the "lead" order are slaves who were to be "endured as long as the purity of the system is maintained." They were to be fed, allowed to work, and treated well (Jowett, *Book IV*, n.d.: 140-149).

Surprisingly, when compared to the communal hierarchy of Siwa, one would be struck by the parallel between the tri-tier society that—according to the 2000 field study project—reportedly existed for almost 2500 years and the tripartite system of social order as envisioned by Plato in his ideal-state. While these two societies differ geographically, historically, and culturally, their pattern of social stratification seemed almost identical. The three-tier Siwan stratification order is as follows:

First, the *agwad* (literally, the guardian class) are the descendents of the original Berbers who emigrated from Morocco, Siwa's founding fathers, so to speak. They are members of the aristocracy; while they own most of the olive and date trees (but not the land), they act with a great sense of stoicism and modesty. They exercise temperance, prudence, and exhibit a high level of wholesome enlightenment (a few of the recent *agwad* are graduates of Alexandria University, one of the best Egyptian universities). They are known for their love of philosophy and their devotion to the welfare of society. As such, they are members of the tribal council, and constitute the majority of the tribal sheiks. Given their leadership status, it is not surprising that they intellectually and socially dominate the fields of business, education, public service, and urban planning. This gives them the effective power to oversee all matters related to the oasis' development and its social welfare.

Second, the *zaggalah* (the working class; literally, the singers) are the laborers who sustain the city-state economy. Their identification as singers should not be misleading since the main industry in Siwa is raising date palms and the date harvesters are known for the folk songs they sing as they collect each kind of dates. The *zaggalah* serve as general overseers in the service of the *agwad*; they are assigned to palm plantations and can only marry women within the *zaggalah* class. This restriction, not unlike the ancient Greek culture, may have contributed to what is known as the *zaggalah* morality; a kind of behavior characterized by hedonism, drinking, dancing, and homosexual behavior (Fakhry, 1973). Also, and not unlike Plato's class of *auxiliaries* (military), the *zaggalah* double as members of the militia and often serve as night guardsmen. In olden times, they stood guard at the gates of *Shali* (the capital of Siwa) to keep intruders from infiltrating Siwan territory and fought against aggression by foreign tribes. Yet, as their numbers grew, they became a more viable political interest group and acquired the right to have their voice heard in tribal councils. From a political standpoint, they now seem to have achieved a new status; the loyal opposition to their elders, the *agwad*.

Third, the *Bedouins* (desert dwellers) are the foreign workers and slaves. They were initially attracted to the oasis by its prime location, bountiful water, and agricultural abundance. They migrated from the Nile Valley in the east, Libya in the west, and Nubia and the Sudan in the south. Most of the Bedouins were first kept as slaves, a tradition only recently abolished. The Bedouins, by definition, had no *asul* (roots), they were assigned to work the land, attend the fields, dig wells, and build homes and waterways. The Bedouins live freely in Siwa except for a few communal restrictions including intermarrying with non-Bedouins and owning palm trees. As a result, they remain rather isolated without a political base. Indeed, when the 2000 field project interviewees were asked how they perceived the role of Bedouins, they almost unanimously appreciated their contribution to the community and devotion to communal welfare.

### **The Neighborhood: Communitarianism and Justice**

In *The Republic*, Plato seemed to ignore the significance of crime as if—in the true Greek tradition—it is either irrelevant or an unpatriotic act. To achieve social balance, Plato

equated the need for law and order with the obligation of social communitarianism. The first pillar involves the "distribution and sharing" of property and the second, the "deserving and fairness" of people. For example, in *Book IV*, Plato defines communitarianism as a philosophy that binds together three main principles: an equal number of shares; an equal size of each share, and the recognition of merit differences within the classes. These principles were poised to motivate everyone to strive to be the best in his or her class (Warmington & Rouse, 1984: 120). In a criminological sense (if one wishes to look at it this way), Plato might have labeled crimes against property as *non-communitarian* crimes and crimes against persons as *acts of injustice*. To form his perfect city, he had to seamlessly blend these two doctrines in a state of *eudaemonia*, or collective social well-being.

All of these intellectual configurations, however, had to wait until Plato returned to Athens and formulated his final design for the perfect state. Curiously, Plato must have struggled with the issues of justice and communitarianism before Socrates died in 399 B.C. In a "post-modern" manner of thinking, the reader might note that in *Book I*, Thrasymachus challenged Socrates (who, throughout *The Republic* was speaking Plato's views) by declaring that "justice is nothing but the advantage of the stronger; the interest of the stronger, the rulers, and since the rulers do not obey the principles they impose on the citizens, they are in those terms the unjust" (Warmington & Rouse, 1984). In response, Plato's answer to Thrasymachus' question (actually to his own intellectual challenge) had to come 15 years later in the words of *The Republic*. Intriguingly, however, and as the 2000 research study showed, the configuration of communitarianism and justice continues to be the hallmark of the Siwan model of government; a condition that fostered the almost non-existence of crime in the Siwan society (Souryal, 2001). For instance, Siwans forbid any exclusive claim to land—they allow owning trees, but only as long as their owners actively attend to their growth.

Also while most Siwans may have not heard the term restorative justice, they appear to have been practicing it all along. The justice process in Siwa seemed natural; it is participatory, negotiatory, and restorative (Braithwaite & Pettit, 1990; Cohen, 1986; Van Ness & Strong, 1997). Everyone in the community, whether victim, offender, or witness, is by virtue of social role, involved in the justice equation (Pepinsky & Quinney, 1991; Rawls,

benefits Siwans receive, they recognize their community as caring, complete, and blessed. They are proud to share communal welfare and spiritual satisfaction (Bazemore & Day, 1996; Bazemore & Umbreit, 2007; Braithwaite, 1989). While as citizens they may disagree over business or agricultural issues, as a cohesive community, they stand united for equal welfare—the kind that naturally flows without being directed and is received without being solicited. It is not surprising, therefore, that *urf* rule requires that all Siwan males volunteer their services when a calamity occurs. For instance, they slaughter a sheep and offer its meat when there is a death in a family; form a bucket brigade when a fire erupts at someone's home; and take care of the children who are orphaned. Such activities are carried out in an almost Kantian manner; not only out of duty, but, in reverence of duty.



### **The ~~English~~ Assumption: Democracy**

*The Republic* was not written as a constitution, but rather as a “Federalist Paper” aimed at promoting an indigenous alternative to Athenian democracy. Plato disapproved of military regimes (i.e., Sparta and Crete) because he thought they were intoxicated with ambition and the love of glory. He disapproved of timocratic rule because he thought that in the soul of every timocrat, economic gain precedes reason and goodness. Above all, he disapproved of democracy because he believed it to be a degenerate system of government and ranked it as one step above tyranny. What Plato seemed to resent most in democracy, however, was social disorganization through government by the un-informed. Specifically, he condemned any free-for-all freedom where “people are set free to do as they wish, and even go to the devil in their own way” (Jowett, *Book VIII*, n.d.). Plato believed that the forgiving spirit of democracy would inevitably produce disregard for the “fine principles laid down at the foundation of the city and degrade a justice system that offers equality to equals and unequals alike” (Jowett, *Book VIII*: 312).

The tribal system in Siwa is clearly not a democracy. Indeed, Siwans consider democracy alien to culture and dangerous to communal stability. They fear democracy specifically because of its alleged secularism, permissiveness, corruption, and conduciveness to social disorganization. In its place, they have always favored temperate government, one

that is embedded in religious authority and reinforced by *urf* law. Rulership, above anything else, is the domain of the wise and the able. For that reason alone, perhaps, they have traditionally allowed tribal elders to serve for life, to make the hard decisions on complex issues, to negotiate peaceful relations among the tribes, to call for unity against outsiders, and to represent the city-state when neighboring dignitaries stop by. Also, when they were asked why they disfavored democracy, most of them suggested that democracy "accomplishes nothing" other than corrupting the order of society, degrading religious beliefs, and contaminating the minds of the young.

### **The Intellectual Mask: The *Polis* Ideal**

Plato lived during a period of moral degeneration and political turmoil. His birth coincided with the death of Pericles and the beginning of the Peloponnesian war. Plato blamed the confusion that ensued on two fundamental respects: lack of communal morality and the political dysfunction of democracy. Not unlike the ancient *agwad* of Siwa, he envisioned *The Republic* to be a vital community characterized by "harmonious citizens" at the bottom, "enlightened rulers" at the top, and a highly-conducive body of "godly order" in between. When these components are organically harmonized, an integrated *Polis* emerges (Warmington & Rouse, *Book IV*, 1984).

Plato also described the polis as a partnership where the people and their governors are endowed with temperance and a sense of collective destiny (Jowett, *Book IV*, n.d.). Temperate citizens are thought to be better able to control their passions and promote a virtuous environment. They are "not less angry yet quite gentle, if for no other reason, they are always willing to come to terms" (Jowett *Book VI*, n.d.: 239). As a result, Plato insisted that the "perfect city" must be designed to endure as long as the purity of the system is maintained (Rouse, 1984 :120). Inferentially, it is the state's obligation to educate its citizens in the arts of social control, civics, decency, and morality. Plato expected communal life to be "nurtured, both formally and informally, to ensure a suitable moral tone, to manifest the role of the gods in virtuous light, and to control passion with reason" (Jowett, *Book IX*, n.d.). In this context, the reader may appreciate the Siwan concern for raising "benevolent" children: a breed that is

trained in religious traditions, natural justice, and communal services. This concern, Plato thought, was essential to the perpetuation of a temperate community. The fact that crime and delinquency are nearly non-existent in Siwa may lend credence to the continuation of this value.

Consistent with *urf* law practices in Siwa, Shali (the capital) and each of its surrounding villages operates as a little *polis* where what counts is “not with the happiness of the parts but with [the] one harmonious whole, the happy community” (Warmington & Rouse, *Book IV*, 1984:120). Of more significance in both the Siwan and the Platonic models is Plato’s avocation of “wholesome simplicity,” an ideal whereby “all relationships are subordinated to the preservation of the state and [that] private life, as well as private property, are rejected” (Jowett, *Book V*, n.d.: 121). In this context, the reader should be reminded that Siwans also reject the private ownership of land and they treat land and water strictly as community properties.

### **The Sad Paliacho: The Treatment of Women**

During Plato's time, the Greek attitude toward women was degrading. Women were ascribed an inferior status because of their degeneration from human perfection. The common view was "it is only males who are created directly by the gods and are given souls. Those who live rightly return to the stars, but those who are cowards [lead unrighteous lives] may with reason be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation" (Whitbeck, 1976: 41-49). Aristotle, supposedly the brightest among Plato's pupils, advocated that women are "defective by nature," therefore, men rightly take charge over women because they command superior intelligence. Aristotle's view is based on the fundamental principle that "form" is superior to "matter," and therefore, in the function of reproduction, the male is superior because he provides the form while the woman provides the matter.

By contrast, Plato was a pioneer in advocating the equality of women, although his reason for that rested on the benefits to society rather than women’s rights. His attitude toward women, while ambivalent at times, offered a much fairer deal. He wrote that women, like men, have the natural capacities which will fit some for the ruler class, some for the

warrior class, and some for the producer class. He required that the chattel of women be abolished, that they no longer be owned by their husbands, and that they must receive equal education to men (Lavine, 1984: 60). Plato argued that the possibility of women doing the same work as men can be shown by a simple analogy. Humans are animals, and the difference between male and female humans is like the difference between males and females of other animal species. Plato insisted that “no one is so mad as to say that the mare is unsuited to carrying a rider or pulling a wagon., or that a bitch is unsuited to guarding the sheep. Therefore, the difference between male and female humans does not disqualify the females from the work that the males have done.” (Moor, 2007: 76). Plato underscored that the good of society is ultimately the well being of its members. So it must be the aim of a well governed state to enable as many of its members as possible (obviously including women) to reach their full potential (Moor, p.78). At this point, the reader might wonder whether the sharp ideological difference over the status of women between these two giant thinkers (Plato and Aristotle) would have occurred had Plato not traveled to Egypt and learned that Egyptian pharaohs included at least one female and several slave pharaohs.

In *Book V of The Republic*, Polemarchos interrupted Plato by inquiring into the nature of social injustice. After a preliminary skirmish, Plato (who was of course assuming Socrates' view) explained that women are the weaker sex but there are no occupations for which they are unfitted merely because they are women (Rouse, 1956). Plato makes this arguments regarding the value of women on the basis of three principles: *first*, they are necessary for the unity of the community; without them communities cannot exist. *second*, they receive "equal shares" as long as they perform their functions with equal devotion. For example, he suggests that no difference exists between she-dogs and he-dogs as long as they guard equally well. Here, Plato reiterates the value of absolute merit regardless of birth or gender (Rouse, 1956). *Third*, Plato points out that equality between the sexes can, and must, be safeguarded by the state's educational system—when there is no educational equality, there can't the equality.

Also as alluded to earlier, the 2000 field project revealed that the role of women in Siwa has been radically different from that in any other Moslem country (Souryal, 1988). To a great measure, Siwan women are in full charge of their household, discipline of the children, and are openly involved in business enterprises (e.g., Siwan women now serve as physicians,

nurses, teachers, and social workers). Above all, they are treated with a true sense of respect unmatched in any other Moslem country. When they appear in public (as they always do), they only wear a light *abaya* to cover their bodies, a private donkey-drawn cart to ride, and are always given the right of way pedestrians as a sign of respect even when they legally didn't have it.

This cultural environment of reverence for women seems to be strictly shared by their husbands. This was evidenced by at least one clear observation: never during the eight-weeks long field study (2000) did this author once hear any derogatory comment or even a joke that demeaned the "hallowed" image of women—even when the men were attending a fun party or drinking heavily.

### **The God of Gods: The Ideal of the Good**

Plato pointed out that even a perfect city-state could not survive without a tradition of goodness; the concept through which he unites the principle of teleology and the theory of Forms and Ethics (Denise & Peterfreund, 1992 :11). Although he often referred to justice as a *form* or an *ideal*, in this context he emphasized that the administration of justice cannot work without the ideal of the good. He defined good as "the guiding star of the soul," "the world of the mind," and the "end of the philosopher's study" (Rouse, 1956:122). In *The Republic*, he requires a social environment that can serve as the "medium of the good." This medium is the balancing point between the mathematical measure of things which depend on given postulates and the eternal verities that can be comprehended only by dialectic rationality.

Plato's idea of the "medium" parallels, to a large measure, the medium that one sees, hears, and feels walking in the narrow streets of *Shali* (Siwa's capital<sup>1</sup>), a feeling that reflects a strong whiff of stoicism, peacefulness, and a vibrant sense of communal consciousness. As

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<sup>1</sup> The reader may appreciate other similarities between Siwan and Platonic views as they relate to the treatment of women. For instance, as Moslems, the Siwans strictly segregate the sexes, yet not unlike Platonism, they recognize they must be treated with respect, nearly reverence. Siwan women are free to preside over household affairs, attend school, pay no dowry when they marry, and divorce their husbands if they justifiably wish. Another similarity, perhaps, is the subject of homosexuality. In light of the traditional segregation between the sexes, Siwans have been much more (and publicly so) tolerant than in other Moslem countries. Yet, while the practice of homosexuality was more popular in the past, being "gay" in modern day Siwa is not necessarily considered a badge of dishonor. more (and publicly so) tolerant than in other Moslem countries. Yet, while the practice of homosexuality was more popular in the past, being "gay" in modern day Siwa is not necessarily considered a badge of dishonor.

shown by the 2000 field project, one is struck by the long lines of boys and girls (accompanied by their teachers) walking to school in the early morning and returning in the early afternoon. This is especially noticeable when the voice of the *muazin*—who calls for prayer five times a day yet rarely heeded in Siwa—as well as the childish chatter that goes on when young boys and girls play together in the streets in the evening time.

More importantly, Plato's ideal of the Good seems to legitimize the Siwan notion of "substantial justice," the idea that justice is a higher value than the law and, at times, it should be offered as a matter of virtue, especially when all other *urf* justifications are lacking. This notion, while confirming Plato's view that justice "ought not on all occasions be done" (i.e., speaking the truth or paying one's debts), neatly illustrates the primacy of the ideal of the good among Siwans. For them, doing justice is not only a "substantial necessity," it is a communal virtue.

### A Final Controversy

Consistent with the principle of the absence of evidence is not an evidence of absence, and to better explain why no physical evidence has yet been found that could prove Plato studied at the Siwan Oracle, the next five reasons can explain::

*First*, at the time of Plato's hiatus from Greece, he was only 28 years old, another unknown Athenian of no particular fame or significance. Despite his great inquisitive mind, he probably failed to impress the Egyptian priests who were accustomed to seeing things in grand Pharaonic dimensions<sup>2</sup>.

*Second*, Plato's republican beliefs seemed to coincide with those of the Ammunian priests. As such, he would have had no reason to argue against their views. By not doing so, he, most likely, had lost his most powerful weapon—the power of dialoguing. Yet, being the stoic he was, he, most likely, watched while the priests' taught at the Oracle, yet peripatetically embarked on examining the unique features of the Siwan community in the

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note the similarities between Athens during Plato's time and Siwa as it is today. Athens was described as a "small town where everybody knew everybody else, but they had no printed book and newspapers, or broadcasting to satisfy an insatiable curiosity; when they wanted news they walked about and gossiped, and the central fountain of gossip was the marketplace. The streets were narrow, the suburban road were wide, and the scenes may be imagined" (Warmington & Rouse, 1984: 294). Siwa, as witnessed during the 2000 field research project shared most of these features with the exception of suburban roads.

manner of his late mentor Socrates.

*Third*, Plato's standoffish nature (characteristic of his aristocratic personality especially before it was tempered by age) may not have particularly endeared himself to the priests at the oracle. Proud of his Athenian origin and intellectual superiority, he might have spent more of his time assessing the suitability of what he is seeing and hearing to the Athenian reality and wondering what to embrace and what to disregard.

*Fourth*, it is more likely Plato had the Siwan community in mind when, in Book 2 of *The Republic*, he elaborated on his theory of utopias. Other than Socrates' Callipolis which Plato thought was impossible because it was realistically too perfect city to exist, Plato referred to the other four as "mere utopias" (Ferrari, 2007: 232). These he cited as: (1) the "first city," (2) the colony of *Magnesia*; (3) the cities of *Timaeus/Critias*; and (4) Atlantis (Bloom, 1991, Ferrari, 2007, MaKeen, 2004). Clearly in this case, while he identified three of the four utopias by name, he kept the name of the first city for himself referring to it only as the "first city." Given this intellectual puzzle, one might legitimately reason that the unnamed city might have been Shali (the main community in Siwa where he most likely resided and where Greek Oracle exists). Plato described that "first city" as "too primitive," "the community is true and healthy," "the people are self-sufficient," "the city is a mutual benefit society" "the city functions smoothly," "the people do jobs better when they specialize and [their] wants do not go beyond their needs," and that "the people act justly because they perceive it to be in their best interest" (Ferrari, 2007 pp.253). Ferrari seemed to suggest that Plato intentionally kept his intellectual admiration of Shali as a truly ideal city, rather than exposing its primitiveness, and its non-Hellenic origin.

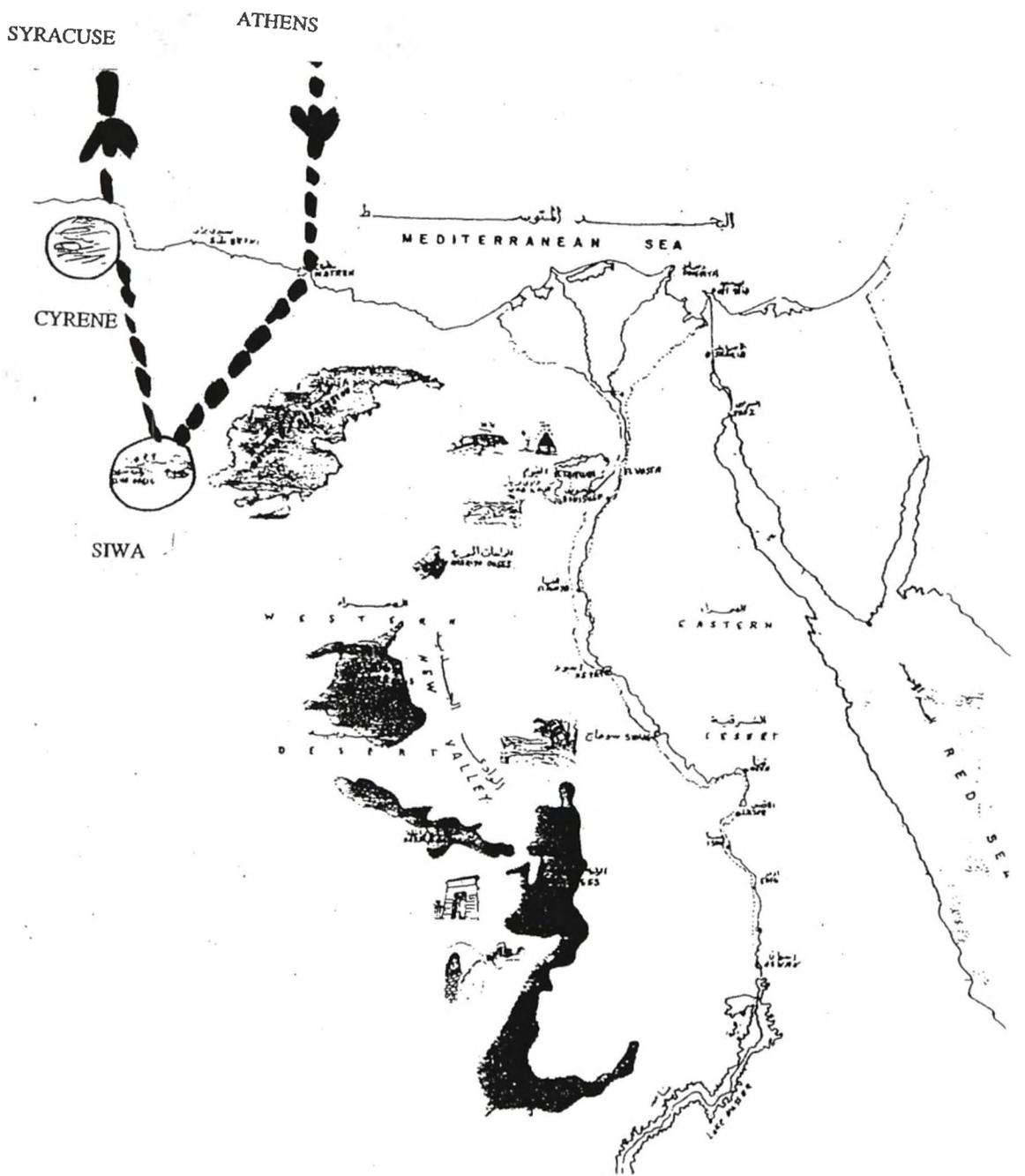
*Fifth*, there seems to have been a linguistic failure in the literature about Plato. Several of the story tellers who were interviewed during the 2000 field survey project were faintly aware of a young Greek philosopher by the name of *Aflatoon*. This name was indeed (and continues to be) the name widely used by Moslem and Arab scholars (as well as by most Mediterranean populations) when they refer to Plato.

## Conclusions

This article is not meant to demystify Plato or his climactic work. It is designed to better understand him, befriend him, and appreciate his legacy, all in the name of intellectual circumspection. There is no better way to accomplish that than by humanizing the great master and reconstructing the historical context in which he lived and by which his mind was shaped.

The origins of this article evolved in a 2000 project to study the phenomenon of “natural justice” in the North African oasis of Siwa. The findings revealed a peculiar form of government unlike any other in the Moslem Middle East. There existed a tripartite social structure, a guardian leadership, and an unusually temperate social environment. The oasis reflected a greater harmony between the individual and the state. As with Plato's ideal of utopias, there existed what looked like a higher state, in which "no man calls anything his own" (Jowet, no date: 4). Indeed the oasis observed in 2000 continues to have no authority symbols; no governor, no legislative assembly, no courthouse, no penal code, no formal judge, no jailhouse, and almost no crime.

Of greater significance, perhaps, was the intellectual role of the Ammunian Oracle, a temple that was chronicled profusely by Herodotus in Book II of *Histories*. In Plato's time, the Oracle was Egypt's northernmost center for philosophic learning; one that was occasionally visited by Greek philosophers seeking a better appreciation of ancient Egyptian mysticism. And since it is well documented that Plato visited Egypt in 399 B.C., the most logical destination had to be Siwa and its famous Oracle. And since *The Republic* (which was completed so soon after Plato returned to Athens) embodied an extraordinary symmetry with the Siwan form of government at the time (and still does), it is highly probable that Plato must have studied at the Oracle or his inner thoughts had been inspired by what he had “seen and heard” in Herodotus' beloved oasis.



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