

been a debated question whether Plato's account is altogether mythical or not. I incline, with Grote, and against Jowett, to think it had a foundation in some recorded facts, though there is little to favour the contention of an American writer that the ancients had a regular communication with Mexico and Peru by galleys which rendezvoused near Ceylon and proceeded to the west coast of both North and South America.

Saint Augustine, in his great work *De Civitate Dei*,^{*} refers to a letter written by Alexander the Great to his mother Olympias. After the conquest of Persia, Alexander turned his arms to Egypt, which had for a short time been most unwillingly subject to the Shah. He was received rather as a protector and liberator than as an enemy, and as he professed respect for their great past, for their monuments and their religion, he was favoured by the priests, who were the depositories of historical and scientific lore. One of these supplied him with information from the sacred books to the effect that even the Assyrian kingdom was 5,000 years old, though the Greek histories, which began it with the same king, Belus, assigned to it only 3,500 years. He gave as the duration of the Persian and the Macedonian empires more than 8,000 years, though the Greeks allowed but 580 for the growth of Macedon, and but 233 for the Persian rule. Yet, said he, these high numbers must be trebly multiplied to reach the antiquity of Egypt! St. Augustine died in A.D. 430, when authentic copies of Alexander's letter may have been still extant. In an endeavour to minimize the length of time, he says the Egyptian year had been one of four months only, but Diodorus expressly states that it consisted of three hundred and sixty-five days six hours, and he gives to Egypt an antiquity of more than 20,000 years. Callisthenes, who was in Alexander's retinue, informed Aristotle that the Babylonians reckoned their city to be at least 1,903 years old when Alexander entered it. And Manetho, who was keeper of the Egyptian archives under Ptolemy Philadelphus, gave 5,300 years as the recorded length of the Egyptian dynasties.

We now have evidence from papyri, monuments and tablets to check these figures, for we have learned to read Egyptian and Assyrian almost as well as our own language, and have spaded up whole libraries of information. The Prisse d'Avennes papyrus is claimed to be the oldest writing in the world, and of the third dynasty 5,318 B.C. It is in a bold, clear, firmly set handwriting, which tells of a civilization old

* Book XII. chap. 10.