

The Double Kingdom under Taharqo. Studies in the History of Kush and Egypt, c.690-664 BC.

By Jeremy Pope

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The 'Double Kingdom' established by Kushite rulers in Egypt in the eighth and seventh centuries BC has long generated much interest, not least in challenging many conventional perceptions of Pharaonic Egypt and its place in or out of Africa. Extending Kushite over more than 3000km of the Nile valley, huge uncertainties remain concerning both its origins as well as the political and administrative structures around which it was constructed. With a still relatively indistinct archaeological footprint, many basic aspects of its social and economic character remain uncertain. Many of the historical narratives have, to date, also lacked adequate integration of the 'Egyptian' and 'Nubian' facies of this remarkable political phenomenon, if remaining dominated by a more Egyptological lens. All too commonly such studies have remained overly introspective, while failing to attempt to address many fundamental historical questions likely to be of interest to wider audiences, not excluding the readership of this journal.

Bringing to bear an impressive mastery of the sources and refreshingly open to more anthropological and comparative approaches, this study is very welcome in providing a close and careful analysis of varied sources, historical and archaeological. Working towards a more coherent history of the 'Double Kingdom', explicitly embracing the varied and complex realities of its different

regions, from the central Sudan to Lower Egypt, and with a primary focus on the region of Taharqo (if ranging much more widely), this represents a considerable achievement. In each region, a range of key issues are raised, primary sources are interrogated and some often pervasive misunderstandings challenged, helpfully unpacking much intellectual baggage which has accumulated within an overly introspective field of study over a century or more. Each component study provides new perspectives on some key feature of the Double Kingdom. With an eye to the future of the Kushite state, in Chapter II, the place of Meroë in Twenty-Fifth Dynasty history is explored, whether as an ancestral seat or indeed annexed at its inception; concluding that the Kushite state may only have asserted its control over this region late in the seventh century BC. Allowing for more dynamic and complex histories of territorial expansion and incorporation would certainly fit well with cultural histories of this period and indeed the later Meroitic state, which was clearly deeply rooted in these more southerly regions.

Chapter III explores the core territory of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty kings (the Dongola-Napata Reach of today's Sudan), burial place of royal ancestors, but also demonstrably the home of a range of hereditary elites, if also a lack of clear pyramidal hierarchy articulating them. As the same region had formed the core of the Kerma 'kingdom' of the second millennium BC, once a significant challenge to the Egyptian state, Pope's discussion should hopefully dispel any lingering misapprehensions that Kushite kingship must look for Egyptian inspiration. That more complex understandings of its political organization, embedded in local idioms of power must be sought, is also clear. A further particularly valuable contribution in this chapter is the detailed presentation of what was once one of the longest of Kushite royal inscriptions, the 'Sanam

Historical Inscription' of Taharqo, summarily published in 1922, but since largely overlooked. Notwithstanding its fragmentary nature it still contains a wealth of new information amongst its record of subject peoples and temple offerings. Amongst the latter the prominence of what Pope identifies as porridges/porridge-beers underscores yet one more distinctively un-Egyptian form of Kushite practice.

Turning towards the north and the route to Egypt through Middle and Lower Nubia (between the First and Third Nile cataracts) Pope makes clear the paucity of evidence for any significant Twenty-Fifth administrative presence. Potential administrative links with Thebes are also shown to be illusory. That in fact Taharqo's presence in this lengthy stretch of the Nile is restricted to perhaps no more than four sites (Semna, Buhen, Qasr Ibrim, and Philae) is certainly consistent with the results of successive archaeological surveys of Nubia. Here in fact the archaeological evidence should leave little doubt on the very sparse regional population levels in the Nubian corridor from the later second millennium BC. As a series of three graffiti on a 'cattle road' dating to Taharqo's 19th year in the Kalabsha area may suggest the Nubian corridor was, by this time, a region to be traversed, rather than colonised and administered.

The second part of the volume draws out the considerable diversity in Kushite accommodations with varied existing local elites in Egypt. In Upper Egypt intermarriage with Theban elites seem to have been one key strategy. In Middle Egypt, Kushite royal monuments are notably absent, while perhaps tolerating royal pretensions amongst local rulers in Lower Egypt. In the final chapter, some alternative perspectives on the political organisation of the 'Double Kingdom' are explored. The inadequacy of most current

conceptualizations of Egyptian (or as Pope stresses, more properly Egyptological) models of a tightly centralised bureaucratic state is made clear, and indeed the unhelpfulness of the overly Egyptocentric lens which has coloured so much past research. The potential of loosely-framed segmentary state models – already suggested for the later Meroitic kingdom – is further examined. That such models may be able to accommodate a number of potentially conflicting understandings of the Kushite state is also highlighted. For this reviewer, future work in this vein clearly has much potential now that so much essential groundwork has been established in this impressive study. Its full and wide-ranging bibliography and three indices will also provide valuable support for readers attempting to navigate a number of very different bodies of scholarship. It must be hoped that the high cost of this volume will not overly restrict the readership of what is an important contribution to Kushite and African historical studies in this important early episode of state formation.

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