**Morkot, R. (2000) *The Black Pharaohs: Egypt’s Nubian Rulers* Chapter. 4 ‘The Elephant’ & Chapter 5 ‘The Kingdom of Kush’**

Timothy Sandiford

 Within these two chapters Morkot seeks to examine the development of the Kushite kingdom, which would eventually result in the conquest of Egypt by Kushite kings in the 8th century BCE. Chapter. 4 traces the development of the Nubian A-Group culture(s) from a loosely structured, non-stratified society, to “chiefdoms” or “kingdoms”. In his analysis of this development Morkot rightly emphasizes the relationships between Egypt and Nubia, but very early in the chapter he seeks to distance himself from looking at Egypt for Nubian kingship, “certainly during the late Bronze Age (c. 1500-1050 BCE) and Iron Age – the Egyptian Assyrian and Persian monarchies stood as models to be emulated by the rulers of western Asia.” (Pg.37) Thus, making the point that the Kushites do not just have to look to Egypt for models of kingship, refuting the narrative constructed for Nubia in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In terms of this class much of Chapter 4 is an exercise in ‘putting it together’ as Morkot covers much of the material we have been looking at over the last few weeks. I do not need to reprise this material; especially not the Williams Vs Adams Qustul argument. He makes the point that instead of decline to a ‘B-Group’[[1]](#footnote--1) the A-Group was most likely aggressively terminated by an expansionist Egyptian state looking to take direct control of resources. Interestingly, Morkot mentions Egyptian graffiti in the Wadi el-Allaqi, which would indicate that Egyptian explorations were widely spread, given that the gold seams in this area are a significant distance from the Nile, and almost equidistant to the Red Sea. The result of this Egyptian expansion was the de-population of the Nile valley, however, it would seem that worsening environmental conditions forced the later reoccupation of the Nile valley, as marginally habitable regions became desert. This lead to the formation of what Reisner called the ‘C-Group’. Nubian scholars have suggested that of the three C-Group cultures (Wawat, Irtjet, Satju, and the Yam) it was Yam that developed into the Kerma culture. However, O’Connor disputes this suggesting that it was the unification of the Wawat, Irtjet, and Satju which formed the foundation for the Kushite culture.

Morkot suggests that the re-assertion of local centers of power and the weakening of royal authority at the end of the Old Kingdom lead to sever disruptions in trade. I would say that was probably true in the short term, but could it not be suggested that localized elites competing with each other may have actually increased trade in the medium and long term? What is undoubtedly true is that during the First Intermediate Period Nubian mercenaries were serving in these local armies. On Page 52 we have an interesting discussion on ‘color symbolism’ in Egyptian reliefs in the late First Intermediate Period/early Middle Kingdom. Naville suggested that one of the royal ladies of Menthuhotep II, Kemsit, was of Nubian origin, based on her ‘color symbolism’.

During the 12th Dynasty kings undertook extensive campaigning in Nubia culminating in the militarization of the border region between Lower Nubia and Egypt, the process of the subjugation of Nubia was not completed till the reigns of Amennemhat I and Senusret I. However, Morkot suggests that once the Egyptians had secured control over Nubia they made little effort to integrate these ‘C-Group’ cultures into the Egyptian state (Pg 56), but rather their concern was to secure the southern trades routes by using the C-Group peoples as proxies. Throughout the Middle Kingdom it appears that Nubia to some extent becomes a place ‘where men win glory’ (to paraphrase Homer) , with repeated military ‘adventures’ by Middle Kingdom Pharaohs.

 Although, this all back fires on the Egyptians because having co-opted the power of the emerging Kushite polity to the south they then find this military power redirected back towards Egypt. Thus, we have the ‘Execration texts’ which name several Nubian rulers and places on these magical defenses. Yet, Morkot makes the point that again we have a relatively large amount of evidence for Nubia *in Egypt,* but we have relatively little archaeological evidence for the structure of society *from Nubia.* We do have the site of Kerma, which is situated on the Eastern bank of the Nile, south of the 3rd Cataract. Within the site are large quantities of objects which show a very culturally complex society (Pg 62). Kerma was the seat of the Kushite kings and has a royal place complex and also a royal necropolis. The precise boundaries of the Kushite state are unknown but “The Kings of Kush, with their capital at Kerma, were the principle rulers, but they also had their own vassals.” (Pg 62). By the 13th Dynasty we have a situation where the Kingdom of Kush is starting to expand and retake Lower Nubia, sacking and burning the Fortresses, when the forts are reoccupied they are by people using local Kerma-wares. By the Second Intermediate Period the Kings of Kush have extensive trade links with the Hyksos rulers in the Delta, via Eastern Desert links, as evidenced by mud seal impressions.

 In terms of situating Morkot’s analysis with the other readings from this week I would suggest that several themes emerge. The first being how we situate the Kingdom of Kush between the ‘dynamic polities’ of McIntosh and the ‘world systems’ approach favored by Hafsaas-Tsakos? The second theme that emerges is the relationship between Nubia and Egypt, which is touched on in Fischer, or as Morkot puts it;

“The rise of powerful states in Nubia was seen as dependant on Egypt’s phase of internal weakness and hence inability to interfere. So, it became customary to say that when Egypt was weak, Nubia *became* strong, Nubia’s strength has rarely if ever, been seen as a contributory factor in Egypt’s weakness” (Pg 63 Emphasis original).

 Also, as interesting topic of discussion could be the affect of colonial processes on polity formation in Africa as was discussed in McIntosh, and what about the problem of tainted ethnographies? How much of our understanding of the interplay between the Kushite and Egyptian Kingdoms is influenced by our colonial past, does it matter today in anyway past the understanding of the historiography?

P.s. The full line from Homer I quoted earlier is Sarpedon speaking to Glaukos;

‘Man, supposing you and I, escaping this battle, would be able to live on forever, ageless, immortal, so neither would I myself go on fighting in the foremost, nor would I urge you into the fighting where men win glory. But now, seeing that the spirits of death stand close about us in their thousands, no man can turn aside or escape them, let us go on and win glory for ourselves, or yield it to others.’

(Book 7, Line 322)

1. Does this mean that if the ‘decline’ of the A-Group had continued we would have reached a ‘NC-Group’, the ultimate student put-down ‘your mark was so bad you formed your own culture group’. [↑](#footnote-ref--1)