Donald Redford’s chapter “The Egyptian Empire in Kush” in *From Slave to Pharaoh: The Black Experience of Ancient Egypt*, differed from the other articles this week by offering a narrative overview of the period preceding the rise of Napata from an Egyptian perspective. The chapter begins by examining the role of New Kingdom Kings in Nubia. Redford cites the annihilation of Kerma (38) as a starting point and traces increased pharaonic presence in Nubia. By Thutmose III’s reign, evidence of taxation suggests that the Nubian chiefs were under the control of Egypt. Additionally, Egyptian settlements are known during the period from as far south as Napata.

Next, Redford transitions into discussing the Nubian administration during this period. Titles such as “magistrate, administrator,” “commandant of Buhen,” and “king’s-son” are found to refer to leaders in the Kushite Regime during the Egyptian 18th Dynasty. For over five centuries, this office remained under pharaonic control. By the reign of Amenhotep III, this position, what Redford refers to as ‘Viceroy of Kush’, reached its height. The viceroy was responsible for the land from Hierakonpolis to Karoy. Redford suggests that the model for this Kushite administration is modeled after the Egyptian administration itself.

During the reign of Thutmose II and Hatshepsut, a military garrison was built at Napata for permanent military presence in Nubia. Redford notes that even though this fort was originally meant to subdue the Nubians, by the 19th century it “had become a lawless and unpredictable force” (43). Afterwards, Redford discusses the question of Nubian acculturation to Egyptian ideals. I thought this was one of the more poignant parts of the chapter and I will discuss it further below in my critique of Redford’s work.

Next, Redford turns to the “economy” of Nubia during this period of Egyptian control, or more specifically temples and the effect on Egypt of Nubian Gold. I was satisfied by the author’s caution in using such terminology as finance and policy, as scholars often posit modern assumptions and concepts while often overlooking much of the primary evidence of the time period. Redford suggests that temples in Nubia during this period were mainly utilized for the worship of pharaohs. However, beyond this examination it is difficult to suggest their precise economic function. When looking at an Egyptian “policy” in Nubia, Redford argues essentially for Egyptian imperialism by looking at the naming of towns. He rejects the hypothesis that the distribution of Egyptian or egyptianizing artifacts in the periphery reflects conscious “policy” by the central administration. Redford also argues against the notion that newfound Nubian mineral wealth either underpinned or influences Egyptian control.

Finally, Redford explains the collapse of the Egyptian empire in Kush. Redford provides four sources as integral in understanding the collapse:

1. Sometime early in Ramesses XI’s reign, for unknown reasons, civil war erupted in Egypt and lasted nearly one year. It was attended by looting and murder
2. Into the Theabaid came the viceroy Paynehsi with Nubian troops, and Amenophis the high priest was suppressed and temporarily relieved of power.
3. Shortly thereafter and by unknown means, Amenophis was restored to office, but he died soon after; his immediate successor remains unknown.
4. Paynehsi continued to exercise control over the Thebaid until year 12 and perhaps beyond: he is still in the royal administration in year 17. (56).

One of the things that made me the most frustrated while reading Redford was his broad and sweeping statements, which were not supported by evidence and argumentation (other than referencing footnotes). Certainly, some of this is due to the nature of the publication and intended audience. However, I did think that Redford posed some interesting questions that are in concert with some of the issues we have been trying to tackle in class. Like many authors we have read, Redford tries to tackle identity by asking, “to what extent did the native population undergo acculturation, and what percentage of he inhabitants at the height of the empire were colonists?” (44). Unfortunately, I found his answer and examination of the issue as a whole a little lacking. I agree with his finding that there was most likely a powerful Egyptian presence that might have had an “egyptianizing” influence on certain aspects of culture, but the leap to say that “native nubians had, as a class, been reduced to a servile status” seems too far, as they are based on the few instances of representational evidence presented (45).

While reading through the chapter, I felt as I was being asked to blindly accept the narrative I was being presented and I found it difficult to parse out facts and evidence from his interpretation. In rereading the piece I found it helpful to ask myself some questions of audience an aim. Redford is explicitly tackling this time period from the lense of the Egyptians and I think this is an important fact to remember. It seems that Egyptian evidence and an analysis that favors the Egyptians is favored. Additionally, this work straddles the unmarked line between popular and scholarly. Some of his arguments are novel but the reader is often unable to identify these because of the popular writing style, including an inability to expand on arguments and fully present evidence. In summation, I actually thought that Redford’s chapter provided a refreshingly different view of many of the other articles this week and situated itself in the gap between the Kingdom of Kush and the Napatan Kingdom.