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NUBIA AS A PLACE OF REFUGE: NILE VALLEY RESISTANCE AGAINST FOREIGN INVASION¹

SOLANGE ASHBY AND TALAWA ADODO

In periods of foreign invasion and settler colonialism, Kemet's (e.k.a. ancient Egypt)² southern neighbours were regular allies against foreign groups such as the Hyksos, Persians, Greeks, and Romans.³ Yet, the relationship between Kemet and Nubia is often

¹ This paper does not derive from the talk that Solange Ashby delivered on 2/18/21 as part of the Badè Museum lecture series, which was titled "Sacred Dancers: Nubian Women as Priestesses of Hathor". That lecture is published as "Dancing for Hathor: Nubian Women in Egyptian Cultic Life" in *Dotawo: A Journal of Nubian Studies* 5 (2018): 63-90. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/883099sq>

² Kemet is used, instead of "ancient Egypt", because it is the indigenous term—Kmt (meaning "The Black country"). In turn, Kemetiu is used as the corresponding gentilic term. The acronym "e.k.a." stands for "Eurocentrically known as" and refers to the numerous terms used in English and other European languages for sites, religious practices, divine names, etc. that are derived from Greek-language interpretations of Kemetiu words. We reject the interpolation of a Greek interpretive lens; let us work instead from the source—Kemetiic terms, Kemetiic language, Kemetiic epistemologies.

³ Egyptologists will immediately state that the Hyksos are an exception to this grouping as Kerma Nubians chose to ally with the Hyksos against the indigenous Egyptians in Thebes of the Seventeenth Dynasty. Yet, there is also evidence of Nubian military participation on the side of the

characterized as one of political antagonism and/or a racial binary (i.e. ‘Wretched Kush’⁴, ‘Black Pharaohs’⁵, etc.) in both Egyptology and Nubian Studies. This study examines the circumstances of these alliances and challenges this antagonistic narrative within the context of the revolt in Thebes in which its leaders created a separate state (c. 206-186 BCE). In other words, this paper focuses on the political dynamics of Nubian involvement in the Thebaid Secession. Overall, this study argues that the co-operation between Kemet and Nubia in these alliances demonstrates a recognition of a shared Nile Valley civilization that influenced and supported the independence movement in Thebes.

After centuries of military conquest, acquisition of unimaginable wealth, and development of a highly sophisticated culture, in the seventh century BCE, Kemet began to experience an extended period of conquest and domination by non-African powers: Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. Each of these periods of invasion and political domination had to face resistance from the Kemetian population. This paper focuses on resistance movements in the Ptolemaic period, but more specifically discusses the Theban Secession (c. 206 to 186 BCE) as it is the best documented of the resistance movements in this period. The

rulers of Thebes as found at Deir el Ballas. Peter Lacovara ‘Deir el Ballas’, p. 288: “While the hostilities between the Thebans and Kerma Nubians must have been breaking out at this point, it could well be a mistake to think of all members of the Kerma culture as belonging to the same political entity.” Recognizing social, ethnic, and political complexity in Nubia helps to understand the multiple alliances that emerged in the struggles for power along the Nile Valley.

⁴ “Wretched” or “vile” (Egyptian: *ḥsy*) are translations frequently used in Egyptology. Beatty has offered a more nuanced understanding of this term. See Beatty, “*ḥsy* ‘Wretched’,” pp. 30-39. Egyptology’s uncontextualized reiteration of this term reinforces a European racialized concept of Nubian/Black/inferior that is a product of European modernity and not intrinsic to Nile Valley antiquity.

⁵ The theme “Black Pharaohs” appears frequently in popular media. See Keith Crawford’s critique, Crawford, ‘Critique of the ‘Black Pharaohs’ Theme, pp. 695-712, and Faraji’s paper in this volume for more information.

leaders of the secession state, commonly referred to as the “rebel pharaohs” in academic literature, were Horwennnefer, who ruled from c. 206 to 200 BCE, and Ankhwennefer, who ruled subsequently from 200 until 186 BCE when he was defeated by Ptolemy VI.⁶ Both rulers were allied with the Meroitic Nubians. This allegiance is critical to understanding the political context in which the revolt occurred, especially its motivational factors. When looked at within the larger socio-historical and cultural context of the Nile Valley, the cooperation between Kemetiu and Nubians shows the need for a nuanced approach to better understand the Theban Secession.

There are three parameters in terminology and focus in this study. First, we will use the generic term “Nubian” to refer to any of the multiple ethnicities that inhabited the region that stretches from the First to the Sixth Cataract. In fact, the term Nubian is expanded to include the kingdom of Kush: Twenty-Fifth Dynasty kings, Napatan, and Meroitic rulers. Because vague ethnonyms such as C-Group, Blemmye, and Noubadae reflect our incomplete understanding of what the people called themselves and seeks to impose an ethnic label on a society that organized itself along clan lineages, the imprecise term Nubian feels more reflective of our current state of knowledge. Secondly, the Ptolemaic era in Kemet is not one governed by an indigenous royal dynasty, it is a settler colonial state (defined below). This concept explains the power-dynamics that existed in this period between the Kemetiu and the Macedonian Greek colonizers. Furthermore, the Theban rulers are best understood as legitimate pharaohs, as opposed to “rebel pharaohs”, as they undertook a liberation movement that led to the creation of a separate state, hence the Theban Secession.

This study is comprised of two parts that cover two aspects of Nubian involvement in the Theban Secession: the political context and the cultural significance. The first part explains how Ptolemaic-controlled Kemet is a settler colony in which the Macedonian Ptolemies are the colonizers and Kemetiu are the victims of their colonization. Acknowledging the settler colonial

⁶ Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, p. 153.

context of the Ptolemaic regime allows for a nuanced political analysis of the Nubian involvement in the Theban Secession. The alliance between the Theban pharaohs and Nubians speaks to the cultural consciousness that informed the independence movement. The second part discusses the cultural commonalities between Nubia and Egypt. The cultural cohesions between the Kemetiu and the Nubians is often overlooked in Nubian Studies and Egyptology, despite evidence that supports this perspective. These cultural commonalities help explain why Meroites assisted the Theban pharaohs and, moreover, it explains the general consistency of Nubian-Egyptian alliances against foreign invasion. Ultimately, we conclude that the Nubian presence in support of Kemetiu independence shows that the Theban Secession was an anti-colonial endeavor and, in turn, a fight for independence which makes it a cultural nationalist movement.

POLITICAL CONTEXT OF NUBIAN ALLIANCE

The historical and cultural context of the Nubian involvement with the Theban leaders clarifies the political context of the secession. It is often disputed whether the Theban uprising was a result of nationalist sentiment or the socio-economic marginalization of the Egyptian masses. We assert that the Theban uprising was an independence movement, specifically a struggle to restore cultural sovereignty. Subsequently, we contextualize the socio-political conditions of the Greek occupation of Kemet within the context of settler colonialism to explain the relationship between culture and power in Ptolemaic Egypt. Furthermore, the Nubian participation is a central factor in determining the nature of the political consciousness of the Theban leadership.

The settler colonial framework clarifies the relationship between political power and cultural agency in Ptolemaic Egypt. We use the following definition of settler colonialism:

The specific formation of colonialism in which people come to a *land inhabited by [an Indigenous] people* and declare it to be their new home. Settler colonialism is about the pursuit of land, not just labor or resources. Settler colonialism is a *per-*

sistent societal structure, not just an historical event or origin story for a nation state.⁷

As such, the Ptolemaic regime qualifies as an invasive settler group. The Greeks imposed their authority in Kemet and enforced a societal structure that worked to their benefit, rather than leaving the Kemetiu to their own devices after Alexander's defeat of the Persians. In fact, there was a centuries-long process of resettlement of foreign, primarily Greek people, in Kemet as has recently been demonstrated.⁸

Moreover, the cultural dimension of colonialism is imperative to note when contextualizing Ptolemaic Egypt, as Amílcar Cabral explains:

History teaches us that, in certain circumstances, it is quite easy for a stranger to impose his rule on a people. But history equally teaches us that, whatever the material aspects of that rule, it cannot be sustained except by the *permanent and organized repression* of the *cultural life* of the people in question.⁹

Consequently, the invasion of the Ptolemies was a cultural imposition into Egyptian life. As such, the systematic changes brought on by the Ptolemies were on Greek cultural terms, not the culture of the Kemetiu, which made them no more or less colonizers than the Persian invaders. All interactions, from administrative operations to the daily interactions, were informed and shaped by the conditions created and maintained by the settler-colonists.

The resistance to using colonialism, as a concept, to explain the Ptolemaic presence in Egypt has been expressed in academic scholarship on Ptolemaic-controlled Kemet. Joe Manning, for example, argues that the application of colonialism to Ptolemaic-controlled Kemet is based on “modern anxiety over issues of racism, imperialism, and colonialism”.¹⁰ Moreover, he contends

⁷ Rowe and Tuck, *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, p. 4. Emphasis added.

⁸ La'da, ‘Towards a History of Immigration to Hellenistic Egypt’, pp. 44-80.

⁹ Cabral, ‘National Liberation and Culture’, p. 12. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Manning, *The Last Pharaohs*, p. 33.

that there is no evidence of a power differential between Greeks and Kemetiu.¹¹ Manning's argument, however, ignores the oppressive nature of the Ptolemaic regime as they invaded another people's country in order to exploit the land and its people. A recent article that considers ethnic designations in documentary texts written in Greek and Demotic convincingly shows that almost 80 percent of immigration into Egypt during the centuries of Ptolemaic colonial rule was by ethnic Greeks.¹² The systematic settling of Greeks in Kemet is an act of settler colonialism. Anthony Löwstedt shows parallels between apartheid South Africa and Ptolemaic Egypt.¹³ Löwstedt defines an apartheid society as "a society where an oppressive, economically exploitative and ideologically racist, *de facto* invading, racial minority is in power, with or without the rule of law".¹⁴ Their definition of apartheid is clearly applicable to the Ptolemies as they invaded and exploited Kemet, and in doing so, oppressed the Kemetiu. Upon suppression of the Theban Secession, they established their exploitative control in Nubia as well (discussed below).¹⁵

Moreover, through comparative analysis, Brian McGing makes a critical observation on the issue of cultural nationalism and Ptolemaic Egypt:

Whatever nexus of local relationships and grievances existed in Egypt was played out in the context of Ptolemaic rule and could not be disconnected from the conditions of that foreign rule. This is scarcely what we mean by modern nationalism, but it is not unrelated.¹⁶

McGing also observes, in the context of ancient revolts, that "we scarcely have good reason to think it was substantially different in Ptolemaic Egypt."¹⁷ As such, an avoidance of applying concepts

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 49-54.

¹² La'da, 'Towards a History of Immigration to Hellenistic Egypt', p. 15.

¹³ Löwstedt, *Apartheid*, pp. 115-122.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 89.

¹⁵ Ashby, 'Philae', pp. 3-5.

¹⁶ McGing, 'Revolting Subjects: Empires and Insurrection, Ancient and Modern', p. 153. Emphasis added.

¹⁷ McGing, 'Revolting Subjects: Empires and Insurrection, Ancient and Modern', p. 153.

of colonialism to Ptolemaic rule risks sanitizing the oppressive circumstances that the Kemetiu endured under the Ptolemaic regime and, moreover, romanticizes Hellenic civilization.

Ian S. Moyer argues that there was a “Middle Ground” between the Kemetiu elites and the Ptolemaic court to address more nuanced phenomena as opposed to the dichotomies of political cooperation/opposition and cultural assimilation/persistence common in scholarship.¹⁸ From this, he conceptualizes a “Ptolemaic Middle Ground,” which is “one created between foreigners and indigenes in the overlapping social, cultural, and political worlds of the *native elite* and the *Ptolemaic state*.”¹⁹ Seeking a “Middle Ground,” however, is ineffective in light of the colonial context of Ptolemaic Egypt because the power dynamics of colonialism demand the compromising of the colonized people in a complex variety of situations.

First, a group of Kemetiu elites is always co-opted by colonial forces to serve their interests. Again, Cabral provides a critical explanation:

Experience of colonial domination shows that, in the attempt to perpetuate exploitation, the colonizer not only creates a whole system of repression of the cultural life of the people colonized, *but also arouses and develops the cultural alienation of a selection of the populace* either by the so-called assimilation of the indigenous people or by the creation of a *social abyss* between an indigenous elite and the popular masses.²⁰

Cabral’s statement on the role of a culturally alienated elite explains how officials and other individuals were used by the Ptolemies. The dominant administrative language, for example, was Greek which clearly works to the interests of the Greek settler-colonists, not the Kemetiu.²¹ While Demotic continued to be used as an administrative language, it was secondary in administrative importance to Greek and faded from existence over the course of Ptolemaic era and into the Roman colonial

¹⁸ Moyer, ‘Finding a Middle Ground’, p. 115.

¹⁹ Moyer, ‘Finding a Middle Ground’, p. 116.

²⁰ Cabral, ‘National Liberation and Culture’, p. 14. Emphasis added.

²¹ Monson, *Agriculture and Taxation in Early Ptolemaic Egypt*, pp. 5-10.

period.²² Thus, the systematic imposition of Greek language and the presence of hybrid cultural practices were caused by settler-colonialism and, ultimately, served to reinforce it.

Furthermore, the Middle Ground concept does not provide an adequate framework to address cultural suppression. Frantz Fanon explains that “every colonialist group is racist” in that the colonizer seeks ways to sustain domination over the culture it has colonized.²³ Fanon’s conceptualization of colonialism corresponds with Peter Green’s contextualization of Ptolemaic-controlled Kemet as “imperial racism.”²⁴ Also, a pre-existing culture of the colonized group does not have to be destroyed by the colonizer. Rather it exists in a contained and controlled, “mummified,” status. To speak of the colonizer “respecting” the culture of native populations is inaccurate because their culture is being marginalized and, in turn, depoliticized.²⁵ Consequently, all Greek engagement with Kemetiu culture (and vice versa) must be understood within a context of mummification, as Greek rulers reinforced their colonial authority through tokenism. The spectrum of assimilation and resistance is an accurate approach to the colonial dynamics that informed and shaped all interactions between Greeks and Kemetiu, in varying degrees. Ultimately, the presence of the Ptolemaic regime created and maintained colonial conditions in which Greek culture dictated the terms of interaction between Greeks and Kemetiu, which led to the promotion of aspects of Kemetic traditions that were

²² Under the Ptolemies, Kemet had two parallel legal systems, one used Greek law while the other depended on traditional Egyptian law and was conducted in Egyptian Demotic. “The *chrêmastistai* (Greek courts established by Ptolemy II) completely took over the role of the *dikastêria* (courts in which Greek documents were used) as courts for the Greek population and later even diminished the importance of the *laokritai* (Egyptian courts in which Demotic documents were used) because even Egyptians chose to bring their cases before them instead of their native courts.” Lippert, ‘Law Courts’, p. 9. “The use of Demotic as an independent language of legal texts was in decline by the late Ptolemaic period...” Manning, ‘Demotic Law’, p. 819.

²³ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, p. 40.

²⁴ Green, *From Alexander to Actium*, pp. 312-17.

²⁵ Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* p. 34.

deemed non-threatening to Greek authority. An example would be the collaboration of the priests in Memphis with the Ptolemaic regime, who exemplify Cabral's observation of colonial co-opting of indigenous elites. In this example, the High Priests of Ptah at Memphis collaborated with colonial rule in Egypt by performing the traditional coronation rites for Ptolemaic rulers to ascend the throne.²⁶ Similarly, the Rosetta Stone is an encomium for Ptolemy V by a group of priests at Memphis that confers honors on the Ptolemaic king for his financial gifts to temples. While the Ptolemaic rulers "honored" the traditions of Kemet, it was clearly an expedient means of controlling the local population by presenting themselves with the trappings of a legitimate indigenous ruler. The notion of a middle ground is untenable because such a phenomenon cannot exist between the colonizer and colonized.

The Nubian presence is a clear reaffirmation of the demand for cultural sovereignty asserted through the Theban Secession. Firstly, Nubian involvement in Nile Valley resistance occurs frequently in the history of Kemet (see discussion in next section). The Ptolemies imposed Greek culture into Kemetiu life and made token gestures to Kemetiu people such as cloaking their rule in Egyptian royal iconography when it was politically convenient. In contrast, the Nubians are culturally related to Kemetiu. The common veneration of Ausar (e.k.a. Osiris) and Auset (e.k.a. Isis) made the Nubians fitting allies for the Theban rulers (see the next section for further discussion). In fact, after the end of the Theban Secession, priests that were allied to the Theban pharaohs took refuge in Nubia.²⁷ This demonstrates, contrary to Moyer's contention,²⁸ that there was a clear sense of cultural consciousness among the Kemetiu involved in the Theban uprising. Consequently, the presence of Nubians cannot be reduced to political opportunism, but rather reflects the urge toward cultural sovereignty and the desire to engage in traditional practices

²⁶ Thompson, *Memphis Under the Ptolemies*, pp. 138-46.

²⁷ McGing, 'Revolting Subjects: Empires and Insurrection, Ancient and Modern', p. 146.

²⁸ Moyer, 'Finding a Middle Ground', p. 124.

(shared by many societies in the Nile Valley) that informed the politics of the Theban resistance.

CULTURE AND RESISTANCE IN THE NILE VALLEY

The Late Period saw Kemetiu pharaohs fleeing before the onslaught of foreign troops stationed as an occupying force in Kemet. Many of those deposed rulers chose to seek refuge in Nubia. For Tanutamani of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty in Kemet, it made sense to flee to his homeland in Nubia. Yet the Thirtieth Dynasty ruler, Nectanebo II, also sought refuge in Nubia when the Persians invaded Egypt in 343 BCE. During the secession, indigenous leader Ankhwennefer sought assistance from the King of Meroe and finally took refuge in Nubia when defeated. Similarly, Nile Nubians fled south into the Nuba Mountains as a result of the demands for slaves from Christian Nubia by the Arabs of Arab-controlled Kemet beginning in the seventh century CE. Political and military collaboration reflects a strong sense of cultural cohesions in the shared traditions of these two Nile Valley civilizations in the face of an outside aggressor.

The common religious systems in the Nile Valley between Kemetiu and Nubians demonstrate a clear cultural connection between these two African cultures. For example, recognition of shared religious values can be seen in the military attacks on nascent Christian communities in Roman-colonized Kemet. Two examples illustrate Nubian support for traditional temple religion:

1. In the fourth and fifth centuries CE, Blemmye attacks on Christian churches and monasteries have often been portrayed as simple brigandage by the “savage” desert fighters from Nubia, but Eugene Cruz-Urbe has proposed that we understand these attacks on Christian communities and places of worship as a military defense of the Kemetiu religion in the face of Christian incursion into the sacred space of Philae. In Cruz’s words, “[A]n expedition was made to protect traditional Nubian

religious interests in the area.”²⁹ These religious interests date back centuries and extend to the end of Kemetiu religious practice.³⁰ The last hieroglyphic graffito was inscribed at Philae next to an image of the Nubian god Mandulis in a structure (the Gate of Hadrian) that had long been a focus of Nubian piety at Philae.³¹ Whether or not, the priest in whose name the prayer inscription was engraved was Nubian, his reverence for Mandulis (and Osiris) shows a recognition of the intertwined religious practices of Late Period Philae.

2. In the second and third centuries CE, Meroitic rulers financially supported temples of Lower Nubia, including Philae, by sending gold, priests, and political envoys. While most Kemetiu temples fell out of use in the second and third centuries when Roman colonizers ended the pharaonic tradition of funding temples, Philae remained in use until the early sixth century due to the sustained involvement of Nubian worshippers and the financial (and military) support of rulers from the south.³²

The cultural dimension suggests that those who fled to Nubia saw their southern neighbors as cultural cousins, fellow adherents of a common Nile Valley traditional religion, and potential military support against foreign invasion. If you will, viewing Nubia as “a place of refuge” demonstrated a recognition of a shared Nile Valley civilization.

Kushite rule in Kemet under the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty is often described as the beginning of the end of Kemetiu self-rule and an ignominious defeat of Kemetiu by upstart Nubians. This characterization ignores the fact that the Kushite dynasty is associated with a return to classical Kemetiu styles in art, religion, and literature. Piankhy led a cultural restoration campaign around 726 BCE into Kemet whose southern domain was under

²⁹ Cruz-Uribe, ‘The Death of Demotic at Philae’, p. 169.

³⁰ Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, passim.

³¹ Török, ‘Philae. Hieroglyphic and Demotic Graffito of Esmêtakhom. AD 394’, p. 1122; Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, 128, 130, ‘Mandulis’, 325.

³² Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, pp. 117-206.

the control of his predecessor Kashta. Piankhy presents his military action as a purification of Kemet, in which he re-establishes Maat by ridding the land of foreign Libyan chiefs, and above all rededicates the land to the god Amun, chief god of both Upper Egypt and Kushite royalty. On his triumphal stela found before the temple of Amun in Napata, Piankhy announces that he has dedicated a portion of the treasury and granary of each conquered Kemetiu town to the temple of Amun of Karnak, which Piankhy made a point of visiting before beginning the conquest of Kemet. He tells his soldiers,

When you arrive within Thebes before Karnak, you should enter into the water. Purify yourselves in the river! Clothe yourselves in the best linen!³³

These ritual actions were undertaken in order to purify themselves to fight in service of Amun. To seek the blessing of the god, Piankhy orders his soldiers to,

...sprinkle yourselves with the water of his altars. You should kiss the ground before him and you should say to him: "Give us passage, that we might fight in the shadow of your strong arm!"³⁴

The distinction between the righteous, purifying Kushites and their impure enemies, the Libyan chieftains, is accentuated in the way the speech of each ruler is rendered on the stela. While Pianky's speech is in the classical language of Kemet (e.k.a. Middle Egyptian), his nemesis Tefnakht speaks in the colloquial speech of Late Egyptian.³⁵ By granting the Kushite king the classical language of Kemet and relegating the outsider, Libyan dynast to the lower status colloquial speech, Piankhy claims the mantle of legitimate ruler of Kemet for himself and reifies an historically attested practice of Nubian archaism through the preservation of

³³ Ritner, 'The Victory Stela of Piye', p. 371.

³⁴ Ritner, 'The Victory Stela of Piye', p. 371.

³⁵ Ritner, 'The Victory Stela of Piye', p. 382, n. 12.

pharaonic religion, art and architectural forms, and place names.³⁶

Once in control of Kemet, members of the Kushite royal family were installed in religious offices associated with the cult of Amun, who was not a foreign deity to them, rather he was worshipped in the Kushite capital city as the indigenous, ram-headed, Amun of Napata. Installation of Kushite royal sisters in the position of God's Wife of Amun in Kemet mirrored a Kushite tradition of dedicating royal sisters as sistrum players in the four major temples of Amun in Kush: Napata, Sanam, Kawa, and Pnubs. Blocks excavated at Philae, as well as a granite barque stand still found in the temple, depict Taharqa worshipping before Amun of Takomposo,³⁷ indicating that the worship of Amun at Philae predates that of Isis, introduced during the Saite Twenty-Sixth Dynasty.

A similar defense of traditional religion can be seen in the Meroitic support for the Theban Secession which challenged Ptolemaic rule during the reigns of Ptolemy IV and Ptolemy V. Török suggests that the secession was fueled in part by a resentment of the exclusion of Kemetiu from high offices under Ptolemy IV and was sustained by the open support of the Amun priesthood of Thebes.³⁸ The two native Egyptian pharaohs—Horwennefer and Ankhwennefer—who challenged the right of Greeks to rule Kemet both used throne names that asserted the re-establishment of the theology of Ausar. Their inclusion of the epithet Wennefer refers to Ausar's immortality. Such a choice suggests that there was,

...evidence of an anti-Greek character in the great revolt and the messianic, Osirian character of Horwennefer and Ankhwennefer's titles does favour the idea that the great

³⁶ Meroitic rulers continued the practice of traditional Nile Valley religious traditions in Nubia while Kemet adopted Christianity. Retention of traditional Kemetiu place names can be seen in Meroitic language inscriptions at Philae: the older name for Biga Island—i3.t w'b.t ("sacred mound" in the language of Kemet), is preserved in the Meroitic place name *Tebawe*. Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions*, pp. 49-51.

³⁷ Farag, 'Inscribed Blocks', pp. 282-89.

³⁸ Török, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 391-92.

revolt presented itself as an Egyptian uprising against foreign occupiers.³⁹

However, as discussed previously, the term ‘anti-Greek’ is incomplete without explicit reference to the colonialist nature of the Ptolemaic regime. The Thebaid secession was more than an uprising against a foreign group, rather it was an independence movement.

In 199 BCE, Ankhwennefer was driven out of Thebes and fled to Nubia. Military support from the Meroitic king was requested and Meroe captured and held Thebes for seven years. Often presented as the “sacking of Thebes”, this characterization of enmity and aggression from the Meroitic forces is refuted by the care with which the Meroitic kings Arqamani II and his successor, Adikhalamani, built and expanded temples in Lower Nubia.⁴⁰ The Temple of Dakka, as it stands today, has as its core a shrine constructed for Arqamani II. Dedicated to the Nubian god Thoth of Pnubs, the temple walls of the sanctuary at Dakka show Arqamani making offerings to Amun-Re of the Abaton, the sacred island of Biga next to Philae.⁴¹ Arqamani II also financed the expansion of the Temple of Arensnuphis on the forecourt of Philae, which stands in close proximity to the shrine of Thoth of Pnubs and directly in alignment with the burial of Ausar on nearby Biga Island. Arqamani’s titulary indicates that he, like Piankhy, understood his actions in Lower Nubia to serve as a religious purification. His throne name preserved at Kalabsha “...the God’s hand in the temple, whose arm is [raised]...chosen of Amun to purify the lands,” makes clear the king’s religious intention.⁴²

Adikhalamani built a shrine at Dabod to Amun once again emphasizing the close association of Kushite royalty with the god Amun to whom the king presents Maat.⁴³ This Meroitic king’s

³⁹ O’Neil, ‘The Native Revolt’, p. 148.

⁴⁰ Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, p. 40-2.

⁴¹ Roeder, *Dakke*, pl. 84: North wall of the sanctuary.

⁴² Dietze, ‘Philae und die Dodekaschoinos’, p. 104 n. 111; Török, ‘Arqamani (Ergamenes II). Titles’, pp. 586-8.

⁴³ Török, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 395.

stela was discovered among filling blocks in the foundations of the island beside the eastern entrance to the hypostyle hall of the Main Temple.⁴⁴ On it, Adikhalamani is depicted before the gods of the First Cataract region on the left: Khnum-Re, Hwt-Ḥr (e.k.a. Hathor), and a criocephalic (ram-headed) mummiform god identified as “The-one-of-the-Pure-Island (Biga Island/Abaton), the noble god who is in front of the holy place, great of awe, beloved of Maat”.⁴⁵ On the right side of the stela, the king stands before Ausar, Auset, and a hieracocephalic (hawk-headed) mummiform god called The-one-of-the-Pure-Island, noble god, first of *dw q3*, hidden of name in the “place of silence”.⁴⁶ In the lunette of the stela, the ram-headed and hawk-headed gods stand back-to-back in the center, seemingly representing Kushite and Kemetiu deities respectively, who are presented as two faces of the same god who was resident in Biga.

This history of religious cooperation and collaboration highlight the perception in Upper Kemet and Kush of a shared Nile Valley religious tradition. In this tradition, Amun was paramount, Ausar and Auset had a central role in funerary beliefs, and the Myth of the Sun’s Eye bound Nubia and Kemet together as joint realms under the influence of the goddess Hwt-Ḥr.

Similarly, the involvement of Meroitic rulers in the religious affairs of Philae endured long after the native rebellion against Ptolemaic rule was crushed. In the late first century BCE, Meroitic rulers king Teriteqas and queen Amanirenas had their cartouche engraved on the pylon at Dakka; their heir, Akinidad, likewise had his cartouche engraved on the same structure.⁴⁷ While Meroitic royal involvement in Lower Nubia decreased in the second half of the first century and first half of the second century, local Nubians continued to arrive at Philae and Dakka to make

⁴⁴ Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, p. 41; Farid, ‘The Stela of Adikhalamani’, p. 53.

⁴⁵ ‘The Stela of Adikhalamani’, p. 56.

⁴⁶ ‘The Stela of Adikhalamani’, p. 54.

⁴⁷ Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, p. 80; Török, ‘Teriteqas. Evidence for Reign’, ‘Dakka. Meroitic Inscription of Teriteqas, Amanirenas, and Akinidad’, and ‘Prince Akinidad. Evidence for Career’, pp. 715-17, 725-28.

offerings and practice their religion in the sacred precincts.⁴⁸ In the third century CE when Roman colonial authority in Kemet was weakened, Meroitic rulers sent political envoys and priests to Philae and Dakka to undertake political negotiations with Roman authorities and, also, to deliver large quantities of gold to be fashioned into cultic implements and to support the continuation of traditional religious practices long after many Kemetiu temples had fallen out of use. Lower Nubian priests in the service of the Meroitic rulers arrived annually to conduct rites at Philae and carry the goddess Isis in procession to temples in Nubia. These Nubian priests were fully literate in hieroglyphic and Demotic writing, trained in astronomy, and fully conversant in the traditional religious practices. They did not arrive at Philae as pilgrims, but rather as priests who both financially supported and personally conducted religious services at the temple.

Kushite rulers (Twenty-Fifth Dynasty and Meroitic) attested in Kemetiu temples are often said to portray themselves as Kemetiu pharaohs in order to gain legitimacy for their rule. We reject this interpretation of the Kushite presence in Kemet. Kushite rulers presented themselves as rightful participants in a shared Nile Valley culture who came down into Kemet in order to restore Maat, purify the worship of Amun (and later Ausar and Auset), and return a chaotic Kemet overrun and polluted by foreigners to its rightful native rule.

Instead of seeing Nubian rulers as usurpers, we should ask ourselves, “Why is it that when Upper and Lower Kemet are unified under one king, this impetus consistently comes from Upper Kemet?” Christopher Ehret gives a compelling answer to this question, based on an historical analysis of the continent of Africa as a whole:

Because of the dominant Western idea of Egyptian exceptionalism, historians have long identified Egypt as an early locus of this transition in the African continent (evidence of new political and ritual complexity). What they have generally failed to recognize is that the formative area of ancient Egyptian culture, southern Upper Egypt, was the

⁴⁸ Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, p. 53-91.

northern outlier of a wider African nexus of emerging political complexity. The heartland of this influential new zone of cultural interchange between African civilizations lay in the northern Middle Nile Basin among peoples of the Sudanic civilization...⁴⁹

In other words, as opposed to the reductionist non-African/African dichotomization, i.e. “Black Pharaohs” nomenclature, that is all too frequent both in Egyptology and Nubian Studies, Kemet and Nubia are Nile Valley cultures that are both unique in their own right *and* culturally interconnected within an African historical and cultural matrix. Consequently, the cooperation between the Meroitic Nubians and the Theban pharaohs cannot be understood outside of the cultural realm. This cultural connection is consistent with Kemetiu revolts against foreign rulers from outside the Nile Valley, such as the Ptolemaic regime. Thus, the Theban alliance with Nubia shows a clear cultural consciousness among these two African groups in the Nile Valley.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has shown that the “outsider” status of the Ptolemies was problematic for those Kemetiu connected to bases of power in Thebes from the beginning due to the colonial context of their presence. A major problem with the proponents of the socio-economic marginalization analysis of Kemetiu revolts during the

⁴⁹ Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, p. 91. The quote continues, “Strikingly, the earliest evidence of new political and ritual complexity in the early and middle centuries of the fifth millennium BCE appeared not along the Nile itself but in the then steppe country of the Sahara, west of the northern Nubian stretches of the Nile and southwest of Upper Egypt. More than 200 kilometers from the river, the inhabitants of Nabta Playa erected the earliest extensive megaliths laid out in astronomical arrays. The astronomical aspects of the megaliths and the burials associated with these sites, of both cattle and people, reveal a socially stratified pastoral society, wealthy in cattle, with a complex ritual basis, *in existence centuries before similar features turned up in Upper Egypt*. The archaeological remains of this society place it firmly in the orbit of the Middle Nile cultural area and indicate that its makers would have spoken an Eastern Sahelian language and have been a northern outlier of Sudanic civilization.”

Ptolemaic period is that its supporters ignore the significance of Kemetiu cultural and political consciousness. An analysis of Kemetiu attitudes towards foreign rule shows that Kemetiu were not complacent about their colonized circumstances as there were elements of the indigenous population that took every opportunity to revolt. Resistance was a constant reality for the Ptolemies since they were a colonial regime. In its entirety, Nubian participation reaffirms the cultural sovereignty mindset when one considers the historical and cultural relationship between Kemetiu and the Nubians. The independence movement can be clearly identified as the main motivation for revolt because of the settler-colonial context of the Ptolemaic regime in Egypt. The Kemetiu wanted to restore their cultural system which would restore Maat and end the Isfet of the Ptolemaic regime; that is, their colonial rule. Unfortunately for the revolutionaries, they could not defeat the Ptolemies. However, this setback did not quell the spirit of resistance among the Kemetiu against the Ptolemaic regime. The Theban Secession, although unsuccessful, was far from the last attempt to expel colonial rule from Kemet as the struggle for liberation continued through the Ptolemaic period and into the era of Roman colonialism.⁵⁰

A STATEMENT ON ÉTUDES NUBIENNES 2018

This work was originally submitted for publication within the Proceeding for the 2018 Nubian Studies Conference (Paris, 2018). The paper was accepted, and corrections were made at the request of the editors, yet the paper was rejected a year after submission. When the authors inquired as to the reasoning behind the rejection, no clear answer was provided by the editors. We, however, feel fairly certain that our assessment of Ptolemaic-controlled Kemet as a settler-colonial state prompted the volume's editors to reject our paper. This rejection shows that anti-colonial scholarship was not valued by the volume's editors which, unfortunately, illustrates the prevalence of colonialist biases in the field of Nubian Studies.

⁵⁰ Hölbl, p. 211; O'Neil, p. 139.

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