

Ancient Egypt provides an early example of imperial expansion and domination, a facet of Egyptian civilization that a number of scholars have explored. Although one must be cautious in adopting modern terminology for ancient phenomena, Egypt’s northward and southward conquests and occupation meet modern definitions of imperialism, settler colonialism, and even a similar post-colonial dynamic, particularly in Nubia, although of course there are points of comparison and contrast. Ellen Morris’s work on ancient Egyptian imperialism is important in recognizing the complex dynamics of ancient imperialism while providing a useful set of comparisons and contrasts with examples from various times and places. Through a happy accident, I was sent both her older book, published through Brill, and the more recent volume from Blackwell. I begin with a short consideration of her earlier *The Architecture of Imperialism*, before returning to a more extended review of her recent new book, *Ancient Egyptian Imperialism*.

Although published some time ago, *The Architecture of Imperialism* remains an impressive tour de force review of military installations during the New Kingdom, ancient Egypt’s most expansive period. Although new discoveries need to be considered since the volume was published in 2005, it remains a valuable resource and starting point for any study of the mechanics of Egypt’s New Kingdom empire. An adaptation of her dissertation, the volume is organized into sections covering the Early, Mid, and Late Eighteenth Dynasty, and the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties. Each section presents a historical summary of ancient Egypt’s expansion into Syria-Palestine and Nubia, with the Libyan Desert added for the later dynasties. Each regional section summarizes the textual and archaeological evidence for Egyptian military/imperial installations. Each chronological part concludes with a cross-frontier comparison and contrast of the larger implications of this patterning for imperial policy. Both this study and the newer volume are remarkable for the balance between north and south—typically research on Egyptian imperialism focuses on one or the other region. As a result, it also represents a massive effort in compiling information about Egyptian imperial installations, making it an essential starting point for anyone studying the subject. Although heavy on the particular, Morris nevertheless provides a number of important insights into the organization of empire north and south (again, the combination of both is both highly unusual and valuable). However, because of the volume’s massive size and level of detail, it remains more of a reference for the specialist interested in the New Kingdom empire than a resource for general reading about this important aspect of ancient Egyptian civilization.

Morris’s new book, *Ancient Egyptian Imperialism*, covers similar ground but in a more accessible and synthetic way that will appeal to a broad audience crossing disciplinary boundaries, as well as the interested public. She also increases the time frame, which now runs from the emergence of the Egyptian state, where she sees an imperial dynamic playing an important role, through the New Kingdom. This study is more analytical and theoretically informed, and provides updates from more recent archaeological work, especially in Sudanese Nubia. Instead of being organized by period and region, this new volume explores various overlapping themes within a broadly chronological and regional organization. She begins by drawing comparisons between later empire and the initial consolidation and expansion of the Egyptian state, centered around the acquisition of exotica in a political economy that expressed and enhanced elite power. This discussion provides a welcome focus on the exploitative and extractive nature of Egyptian imperialism—a feature of empires worldwide.

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Chapter 2 focuses on settler colonialism in the oases and Lower Nubia during the Old Kingdom, a theme that continues in Chapter 3 (and 4), where she traces the shift from military occupation to settler colonialism in Lower Nubia through the Middle Kingdom, noting the increasing entanglements between Egyptian colonists and the local population over the course of imperial shifts from garrisons to militarized communities. Based on archaeological and textual evidence, I would place that transition slightly earlier in the late Twelfth Dynasty and the later shift to Kushite control somewhat later at the very end of the Thirteenth Dynasty, but these are minor points.

The discussion of the oases in Chapter 2 is fascinating and highlights the critical role that the western desert played in diplomacy and trade, often neglected in Egyptology. Dakhla in particular was an important link in the desert roads exploited by Harkhuf and other trade and diplomatic expedition leaders, with a surprising degree of continuity across the First Intermediate Period and on into the Middle Kingdom (and likely beyond). I was happy to see that Morris correctly locates Yam to the west. Contrasting with its usual placement by Egyptologists along the Nile at Kerma, this new interpretation is consistent with the recently discovered Middle Kingdom graffito at Uweinat in northwestern Sudan that mentions a meeting between emissaries of Yam and Montuhotep II. The route extending from Dakhla to Abu Ballas through the Gilf Kebir and Uweinat makes little sense if Kerma was the goal, but would make perfect sense if the destination lay to the southwest, either Chad’s Ennedi or Darfur in far western Sudan. As Morris points out, Yam was likely in close contact with both Kerma and Egypt, part of a network of northeast African polities that engaged in long distance exchange across what is too often seen as impassible desert, but was navigable via donkey caravan by experienced expedition leaders like Harkhuf with the help of the kind of desert infrastructure and residual settlement revealed in older and more recent deep Saharan surveys. Her focus on the desert serves to highlight the importance of the oases in Egypt’s larger imperial policy and serves as a reminder of their importance throughout Egyptian history as well as ancient Egypt’s extensive interconnections with other parts of Africa.

Chapter 4 explores intercultural interactions in Nubia through the lens of transculturation—the combination of cultural features in the context of empire and intercultural interaction. Identity became more entangled over time with the shifts from Egyptian to Kushite and back to Egyptian control from the Middle through New Kingdom, especially with the emergence of bicultural families in the colonial centers. This perspective goes against older ideas of Egyptian withdrawal, native “squatters,” and reconquest and “Egyptianization,” instead providing a welcome focus on how strategies by settlers and indigenous communities and everyday decisions shaped the course of intercultural interaction. However, I would argue that the spread of Egyptian material culture from the Second Intermediate Period into the New Kingdom, while dramatic, was not quite as complete as she suggests. Nubian handmade ceramic and other material culture traditions and practices were muted, but never disappeared, even at the colonial centers. Having said that, Morris rightly points out that the presence of an Egyptian ceramic industry and cultural features like supine, coffined burials reflects a major shift towards Egyptian practices, even though the continuing presence of flexed burial and other Nubian traditions produced complex and highly variable outcomes both regionally and individually, something she emphasizes throughout the book.

Chapters 5 and 6 pivot to Egypt’s expansion into Syria-Palestine at the beginning of the New Kingdom, focusing on the intersection of military power, colonial infrastructure, and diplomatic influence that incentivized collaboration but led to an inherently unstable imperial strategy. Her description of the thin line walked by Levantine rulers, negotiating their way between local and imperial interests is compelling and I appreciate the focus it brings to the role of imperial subjects in the empire. For example, rather than seeing the Amarna Letters as a sign of imperial weakness, Morris provides insights into what they reflect about the interplay between imperial power, local resistance, and manipulation for advantage among competing vassals.

Chapters 7 and 8 round out the volume, shifting to the Ramesside Period with a focus on Syria-Palestine and Nubia, respectively. She begins in the north by looking at the interplay of rulers, populace, and imperial interests in Syria-Palestine. A heavier profile of empire in the Levant produced a stronger archaeological signature with evidence for Egyptian outposts with transplanted ceramic industries, foodways, and religious institutions. This expansion was followed by contraction in the later Twentieth Dynasty, with Egypt’s sphere of influence waning and foreign mercenaries replacing Egyptian garrisons in areas still under imperial control. In contrast, Egypt’s heavier imperial footprint in Nubia was renewed and expanded dramatically during the New Kingdom. Morris explores how the shift in strategy from fortresses to temple towns served to encourage an Egyptian pattern of life as settler colonialism and a temple dominated economy mirroring Egypt’s expanded upstream

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past the second cataract. She also argues that these new lightly fortified settlements transformed a Nubian pastoral society into an agrarian one, but the Kerma-based Kushite state was already characterized by settled life, having relied heavily on agriculture since the formative pre-Kerma phase. At the same time, she is right about the continuing value and symbolic importance of cattle, which as she notes looms large in imperial accounts.

In a shift from her earlier book, Morris rightly pushes back against the notion of decline and depopulation in Nubia during the Ramesside Period, in contrast to the pattern in the Levant, which was wrecked by the collapse of the Mediterranean Bronze Age. She rightly notes the problems in archaeoseological visibility, including an early bias against settlement archaeology, poor coverage in Upper Nubia, and the simplification in burial practices that tend to make Ramesside tombs more difficult to identify chronologically. I would add that excavation has sometimes simply failed to reach the right strata or locations to identify New Kingdom settlements associated with large temple complexes, including Kawa and Tabo in Upper Nubia. The recent identification of settlement areas at other sites, especially at Napat-a, have the potential to change this picture as new work proceeds. As she notes, recent excavation at colonial sites that were once thought to be abandoned in the late New Kingdom, including Amara West and Sesebi, have now identified continuity across the end of the empire. Ongoing excavations at Tombos document an occupation across the New Kingdom into the Napatan period. Through Strontium Isotope Analysis, we have also documented a continuing flow of colonists arriving from Egypt as late as the Ramesside Period, along with the continued construction of monumental tombs in the cemetery. In contrast to the Levant, the contraction of the New Kingdom’s southern empire was not a withdrawal of Egyptian resources and personal from Nubia, as she notes at one point, but rather a Nubian withdrawal from Egyptian control. Morris generally acknowledges this distinction in an in-depth discussion of the career of Panehesy, the last Viceroy of Kush, and his struggle for power and potential contribution to the end of the New Kingdom.

Chapter 8 ends with an exploration of how the deeper engagement between Egypt and Nubia in the New Kingdom led to a truly post-colonial era with important implications for the rise of the Kushite (Twenty-fifth) Dynasty. The usual model of reversion to older practices and fragmentation into a series of competing “chiefdoms,” reforming into a powerful “Egyptianized” state with renewed Egyptian influence, has been increasingly rejected in Nubian Studies, although the notion still has traction. Morris notes that local leaders, whether ultimately of Egyptian, Nubian, or mixed ancestry, had increasingly taken responsibility for managing the colony. Although she briefly alludes to a withdrawal of resources and personnel, this idea seems unlikely given how embedded members of colonial communities had become in local social, economic, and power structures. As she discusses, Panehesy himself retreated south after his failed attempt at seizing the throne and survived to be buried in grand style at Aniba, the colonial capital. Thus, the colonial infrastructure, temple economies, and other extractive industries that had profited Egypt under the empire did not cease, but could continue, managed for Nubian rather than Egyptian interests. Morris astutely observes that Panehesy’s interest in Thebes and conflict with the Theban high priest of Amun foreshadows Piankhi’s later preoccupation with a “restoration” of the proper cult of the god, who by this time had been syncretized with a Kushite deity associated with rams, lending Amun his later ram manifestation.

Along with the discussion in Chapter 4, this section deftly explores the complexities of identity in the context of empire, with a vibrant and diverse interweaving of different cultural features as the former colony moved into a truly post-colonial era. Rather than seeing this phenomenon as an “Egyptianization” followed by Nubian revival or the creation of a generalized hybrid blending the two, she rightly argues for variability between sites and even among individuals, who interwove Nubian and Egyptian cultural features in ways that became naturalized. The fusion of Kushite ram symbolism connected with the cult of Amun and the theological importance of the mountain of Gebel Barkal as Amun’s birthplace provides a good example of this kind of internalization, as well as a dynamic of mutual influence. In this case, one of Egypt’s most important gods was transformed and “Nubianized,” playing as central a role, if not more, in Kushite religion as he did in Egypt. Morris perceptively notes that this may have helped pave the way for the later Kushite assumption of Egyptian kingship during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, giving Kushite kings considerable appeal as rulers in Egypt, especially at Thebes. Here I see a lost opportunity to consider the Kushite kings not so much as foreign or “Egyptianized” invaders, but rather through a post-colonial lens as forging a new double kingdom with its own imperial dynamic, including a struggle over the southern Levant with the rising power of Assyria. It is important to recognize that Piankhi’s famous campaign in c. 727 BCE was not an invasion, but rather the suppression of a northern revolt against the authority of the Kushite Dynasty.

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5 Elisabeth Anne Hildebrand and Timothy M. Schilling, “Storage amidst early agriculture along the Nile: Perspectives from Sai Island, Sudan,” Quaternary International 412 (2000), 81–95.
would argue that this political expansion was facilitated decades before by their close ties with Thebes rather than military conquest, consistent with Morris’s observations on the post-colonial dynamic surrounding the cult of Amun-Re.

In an epilogue, she deconstructs representations of the Presentation of Inu ceremony as a clever metaphor about the goals and limitations of empire and colonial power. She begins by emphasizing the event’s outward emphasis on foreign luxuries for the prestige economy as well as the mobilization of staple goods, an outward show of how the empire benefited Egyptians, collaborators among conquered peoples, and fueled international diplomacy. She then moves on to a perceptive analysis of the subtext of the Presentation Ceremonies, reinforcing royal ideological, economic, and political power. In line with anthropological studies of similar events, this kind of political theater reflects a more fragile hold on power than the picture the carefully choreographed events conveyed. Appealing to Said’s idea of “discrepant experience,” she disagrees with my conclusion that Nubian princes like Hekanefer of Miam, shown in the Viceroy Amenhotep Huy’s tomb in full Nubian regalia, might have been annoyed at having to present themselves as the pacified “other.” In contrast, she argues for a variable experience, including the possibility that they wore these costumes in “defiant pride,” as some scholars have argued. While I do not disagree with Edward Said’s notion of the “massively knotted and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences” that characterize empires, I note that he also points out that the concept is not intended to circumvent the imperial dynamics of ideology and power. Defiance would be expressed by throwing off the trappings of alterity that reinforced what Antonio Loprieno has characterized as the ausländer topos. This is exactly what the Maharaja Sayaji Rao did in the context of the 1911 British Imperial Durbar, an event that provides some interesting comparisons and contrasts with the presentation ceremony. During this coronation ceremony installing the British monarch as Emperor of India, he departed from the carefully arranged script when he threw off his “native” and imperial regalia and casually approached the British King/Emperor, giving only a perfunctory obeisance, walking stick in hand. As one of the most important Indian rulers, his act disordered the carefully constructed picture of imperial self and Indian other that legitimated British royal authority, as well as blurring carefully drawn cultural lines with the adoption of a walking stick, a marker of elite English society. The Nubian princes may have appreciated the benefits that collaboration conveyed and like the other Maharajas have complied with the humiliating subordination to imperial rule—a central theme and one of the strengths in Morris’s book, but Rao’s comment “it would have been all right if we had not to act in it like animals in a circus” seems like a more likely reaction from the princes than feelings of ethnic pride that are completely absent from self-representation in their tombs, where, as Morris acknowledges, they appear as Egyptian officials. I would argue that real defiance resided in individual choices like the women at Tombos (and the families who buried them), who were positioned in Kushite style in a way that would have dramatically signaled their alterity in a context where conformity would have been expected, as opposed to the Prince’s celebrating an alterity that they did not otherwise express in a context where it was demanded. As with the colonial Durbars, there would be little room for expression outside of the carefully choreographed presentation, James Scott points out any departure from events like these that would undermine the ideological message would provoke a strong reaction. This was the case with Sayaji Rao, whose position was threatened by official and public outrage in the aftermath of his defiance. Morris takes a similar position elsewhere, pointing out that grand displays mask insecurity, and I would add that any acts that might crack the façade of royal ideology would be seen as a direct threat to royal authority.

In sum, the two studies by Morris complement one another and provide essential reading for those interested in ancient Egyptian imperialism as well as empires worldwide. The Architecture of Imperialism presents a rich data set describing Egypt’s imperial footprint that is still useful for the specialist and is remarkable for its in-depth discussion of both the northern and southern empires. Ancient Egyptian Imperialism moves forward from this foundation in a greater engagement with theory and cross-cultural comparison that gives it considerable appeal to general Egyptology and a more popular audience, updating and probing how different groups and individuals within conquered societies negotiated their way in the context of colonialism, which is refreshing given the tendency to homogenize empires and focus on the metropole. Both volumes are remarkable in adopting a multi-scalar approach with a strong focus on the variable strategies taken in Egypt’s western, northern, and southern empires. Her integration of comparative examples from more recent imperial episodes provides insights that might otherwise be missed, including perceptive allusions to Machiavelli and classic analyses of other empires like Luttwak on Roman imperial strategy, Wells on the complexities of intercultural interaction in the similar

Roman contexts, and other imperial ventures and occupations worldwide, including China, Spain in the New World, and more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. This emphasis on individual agency and how it helps drive imperial outcomes aligns this study with the latest approaches to ancient imperialism. Her interpretations are situated solidly within anthropological and archaeological theory relating to empires, making the volume stronger as a result and broadening the volume's impact within and outside the field. All too often, Egyptology focuses on the particular without a consideration of broader context, among other ancient societies and especially issues relevant to modern life. Morris's work is exemplary in framing issues surrounding within a larger scholarly and theoretical context with the result that her scholarship makes an important contribution to the archaeology and history of ancient Egyptian imperialism as well as empires more generally.

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