Map I. The Double Kingdom and its environs.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Long before [the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty,] the New-Kingdom pharaohs of Egypt found it impossible to rule both Egypt and Kush in person all the way from the Mediterranean coast well over 2,000 miles (well over 3,200 km) to Napata and the 4th cataract of the Nile. The 25th Dynasty had exactly the same problem, albeit technically in reverse . . . [I]t took up to 3 weeks to sail from Memphis to Thebes alone, and surely up to 3 months to go from Memphis to Napata—or, 6 months (half a year!) to send up and have a reply!

Kenneth A. Kitchen

The huge extent of the Kushite state—excluding Egypt—embraced Nubian Nile valley and Sudanese savanna, separated by tracts of desert. How was it possible for one king to control all of that territory? . . . How did the Kushite monarchy function?

Robert G. Morkot

The establishment of Kushite rule over Egypt during the eighth and seventh centuries BC resulted in a political state of extraordinary geographic dimensions and ecological diversity. From their dynastic homeland within Africa’s tropical belt, the rulers of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty exerted differential forms of political control southward into the savannah, latitudinally across the Sahel, and northward over 3,000 km through the Nile corridor and desert oases to the Mediterranean marshes of the Egyptian Delta. Famously termed the “Double Kingdom” by Egyptologist Gaston Maspero, this state also fused Kushite and Egyptian realms that had once been represented as culturally and politically distinct in Egyptian royal propaganda and literary topos. The dimensions and diversity of the resulting political system raise a number of questions as to how such a state would have been structured and administered. Yet the means by which the Double Kingdom was actually governed during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty have never constituted the focus of a monographic study.

The book that follows will address precisely this issue: how was it possible for one king to control all of that territory? Enfolded within this problem are several longstanding enigmas that have dogged study of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty: to what extent were the Kushite pharaohs’ strategies of governance influenced by the circumstances and traditions of their homeland versus the precedents of Egyptian and later Libyan rule in Egypt? Was the basis of Kushite power primarily military or religious? Did the kings of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty appoint a deputy to help them manage the 3,200 km expanse of the Double Kingdom? Would such a position have been most likely filled by a coregent, by the God’s Wife of Amun, or by the Queen Mother? And how did the policies of the Kushite dynasts differ from those of their Saite successors? Pursuit of these questions has driven the present inquiry beyond certain methodological, geographic, and chronological boundaries which have demarcated earlier published scholarship on the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.

1 Kitchen, “Strengths and Weaknesses of Egyptian Chronology,” 293.
3 As Edwards observes, Sudan is located immediately to the south of the Tropic of Cancer and is thus “entirely within the tropics”—hence Connah’s characterization of polities in the region as “the earliest known cities and states of tropical Africa”: Edwards, “A New Look at the History of Ancient Egypt,” 140; Connah, “Birth on the Nile,” 18. For discussion of the homeland of the el-Kurru dynasty, see Ch. I.I-I.II below. Palaeo-climatological evidence also suggests that isohyets in Kush during the first millennium BC reached well to the north of their modern locations, placing the Bayuda region within a slightly less arid climate than that of today: Ahmed, “Economy and Environment in the Empire of Kush,” 294-95; Chaix and Grant, “Palaeoenvironment and economy at Kerma,” 27; Gowlett, “Human Adaptation and Long-term Climatic Change in Northeast Africa”; Mawson and Williams, “Wetter Climate in the Eastern Sudan 2,000 Years Ago?”; Bradley, “Variation from the City of Meroe,” 167-169. For the Third Cataract region and its gradual desertification across the first millennium BC, see Macklin et al., “Reach-scale river dynamics.”
4 Maspero, History of Egypt, Chaldea, Syria, Babylonia, and Assyria VIII, 138.
5 Loprieno, Topoi und Mimesis; Smith, Wretched Kush, 24-27.
The dominant methodological approach to the Double Kingdom has been László Török’s sustained treatment of Kushite political theology.6 Drawing inspiration from the work of the political philosopher Ernst Cassirer,7 Török has described the “symbolic forms” which constituted the Kushite “myth of the state”—e.g., divine sonship, “ambulatory kingship,” and principles of legitimate succession. To the extent that the state is represented in administrative form within this kingship ideology, it is primarily as a collection of centralized institutions staffed by royal appointees.8 The present work aims to extend this analysis beyond royal propaganda to give equal attention to regional aristocracies and lesser officeholders, as reflected in a series of local negotiations and private documents. In this manner, the Kushite “myth of the state” is confronted with the evidence for its highly variable implementation across the realm.

The existing literature on the Double Kingdom of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty has also been characterized by a geographic bifurcation into separate Nubian and Egyptian studies. While the works of Török, Zibelius-Chen, Priese, and others have analyzed the “indigenous [Kushite] foundations” of the state as they were represented in temples and inscriptions south of the Third Cataract,9 studies by Leclant, Kitchen, Vittmann, and Redford, inter alios, have focused instead upon evidence from the state’s Egyptian half—with particular attention given to Thebes, where administrative documents are most abundant.10 As a result of the persistent separation between studies of Egypt and those of Upper Nubia, several problematic assumptions about the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty have escaped scrutiny. One such assumption would view the Double Kingdom as an attempt to reconstitute the traditional Egyptian state tout court—replete with “a state-controlled economy modeled along Egyptian lines” and identical to the structure of New Kingdom Egyptian imperialism.11 As a result, deviations from Egyptian precedent have been attributed either to the “personal temperament” of the Kushite kings,12 their “failure to grasp the reality of the exercise of power within Egypt,”13 or “the impact of the Libyan presence on the administration.”14 Equally vulnerable to critique is the belief that Kushite rule instead conformed to “other yet unknown Nubian prototypes” of governance—particularly to traditions derived from the Butana Steppe, beyond the reach of earlier Egyptian colonial influence.15 The extent to which such assessments may be justified can only be accurately gauged by comparison of Kuschitenherrschaft in both Egypt and Kush, a perspective all but precluded by the disciplinary division of Twenty-Fifth Dynasty scholarship into separate Egyptian and Nubian studies.

Finally, chronological limitations have focused analysis of Kuschitenherrschaft principally upon either the inaugural phases of the Double Kingdom—the “Kurru chieftains” and the fragmented regimes of Pi(ankh)jy, Shabaqo, and Shebitqo16—or upon the Double Kingdom’s successor states in Kush during the Napatan and Meroitic eras.17 Within these periods, the evidence for state structure and governmental strategy is either especially thin (for the inaugural and Napatan eras) or recorded in a language still resistant to continuous translation (for the Meroitic era),18 thereby necessitating a greater proportion of theorization
in general and political-anthropological modeling in particular (e.g., Libyan “polyarchy”/“anarchy,” the “Kurru chiefdom,” the “Sudanic model,” and the “segmentary state”). By contrast, the pinnacle of the Double Kingdom—the reign of Taharqo\(^1\) (c. 690-664 BC), occupying nearly half of its history—has received little attention in the analysis of Kuschitenherrschaft, despite a relative profusion of documentary and archaeological evidence. Indeed, the difficulty of giving coherence to such varied and abundant testimony may actually have contributed to the surprising marginalization of Taharqo’s reign: in 1994, Török would lament that “a monographic discussion of his reign is an unfulfilled desideratum of Egyptology as well as Nubian studies.”\(^{20}\) However, with the recent publication of Klaus Dallibor’s highly-serviceable catalogue raisonné of the reign of Taharqo, this obstacle has been largely removed, opening the way for discussion of several historical issues which lie beyond the scope of Dallibor’s own study.\(^{21}\) Foremost among such issues is the question of Taharqo’s joint governance of Kush and Egypt.

The chapters that follow will analyze the structure and operation of the Double Kingdom during the period of its greatest stability and most abundant evidence: the reign of Taharqo. They will not endeavor to provide another comprehensive catalogue of archaeological and philological evidence from this period but will instead essay an extended historical discussion,\(^{22}\) focusing upon the connections between categories of evidence in proportion to their relevance to a single, overarching theme: Kuschitenherrschaft. Indeed, one of the most daunting challenges faced by the historian of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty is the uneven geographic and chronological distribution of the available evidence.\(^{23}\) In the present work, the principle invoked repeatedly is that an absence of evidence does not constitute definitive evidence of absence according to the standards of formal logic, but that absence can speak directly to the question of probability: historical reconstructions that rest upon slender evidence must therefore be regarded with caution and duly balanced by consideration of affirmative evidence for alternative explanations (see esp. Chs. II.2.2, II.3.2, III.2.1-2.3, IV.1-4, V.2.2-2.3, and VII below).\(^{24}\) Equally central to the present work is an effort to balance the short-term perspectives of l’histoire événementielle with attention to the enduring influences of landscape and tradition (see esp. Chs. II.2, III.2, VII.3, and VIII.3 below). The historian is tasked not to choose between these temporal rhythms, but rather to acknowledge their simultaneous operation.\(^{25}\)

It is hoped that this book may lay some groundwork for future analyses of the Double Kingdom by bridging some of the methodological gap between political theorization and the cataloguing of empirical evidence. Accordingly, attention will be given not only to Kushite kingship dogma as represented in royal propaganda, but equally to the state as a series of local histories organized region-by-region, each of which may then be utilized to assess the Kushite “myth of the state” and its ideology of centralization. Domestically, the “Double Kingdom” appears, in fact, to have comprised six regions of differing political character, and it is these which form the units of the present study.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{19}\) For pronunciation of the name as Taharqo, rather than Taharqa, see first Macadam, Temples of Kawa I, 74.

\(^{20}\) FHN I, 131 §19.

\(^{21}\) Dallibor, Taharqo: Pharao aus Kusch.

\(^{22}\) For discussion of the problem of history-writing in Egyptology, see: Eyre, “Weni’s Career and Old Kingdom Historiography,” 107; Redford, “Writing of the History of Ancient Egypt,” I; and Schneider, “Journal of Egyptian History: Preface.”

\(^{23}\) Morkot and Quirke, “Inventing the 25th Dynasty,” 349.

\(^{24}\) Fischer, Historians’ Fallacies, 47-48; Pope, review of Amun Temples in Nubia.

\(^{25}\) Sewell, Jr., Logics of History; see also discussion in Pope, “Beyond the Broken Reed.”

\(^{26}\) Pace Morkot, “Egypt and Nubia,” 250, who argues that “the empire fell into four major regions”: (1) Lower Nubia, (2) the region between the Third and Fourth Cataracts, (3) “the central Sudan as far as present-day Khartoum,” and (4) “Egypt, which was reasonably homogenous.” The quantity and quality of evidence examined below differs markedly between three regional clusters—Upper Egypt, Middle Egypt, and Lower Egypt—so comparison of Kushite governance across these three Egyptian regions is best deferred until after analysis of each. Cf. esp. Chs. V.1.1 and VIII.1 below.