Map 5. Upper Egypt.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE CITY AS STATE: THEBES AND THE DOUBLE KINGDOM

V.1. Thebes as Model?

Upper Egypt and Regional versus National Kuschitenherrschaft

Upper Egypt remains the most thoroughly documented and most extensively studied region in all of the Double Kingdom. Entire volumes have been devoted to cataloguing the era’s monuments and prosopography just in Thebes alone. The city’s cultic preeminence, the florescence of personal piety there during the first millennium BC, and the development of Abnormal Hieratic bookkeeping across the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty specifically have combined to yield a relative profusion of both documentary and archaeological evidence. Moreover, a considerable proportion of this evidence speaks directly to the question of governance through an array of civil and ecclesiastical titles often explicitly correlated with regions, towns, and lines of hereditary succession. For the historian, it might therefore seem an attractive strategy to reconstruct the policies and organization of the Double Kingdom from the abundant dossiers of Theban officials.

Yet such an approach has the potential to be dangerously misleading. Despite the copious evidence for Theban officialdom, only a few such Upper Egyptians can be shown to have held high administrative office in Middle or Lower Egypt during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty (see Ch. VI.3 and Ch. VII.2-VII.3 below), and none at all would appear to have done so in Lower Nubia, Upper Nubia, or the Butana Steppe. As the preceding chapter has argued at length (Ch. IV.2.2), even the powerful Montuemhat explicitly defined his own sphere of authority between Elephantine and Hermopolis, and attempts to connect him with distant Semna now seem to have been unjustified. It would therefore be a mistake to envision the government of the Double Kingdom as synonymous with that of Upper Egypt, as if Theban elites had been posted across the 3,000-km stretch from Meroë to Tanis, like so many Oxbridge men sent to administer the provinces.

Instead, one finds a highly variable governmental landscape across that stretch: in the Butana Steppe, a small concentration of apparent Kushite loyalists at Meroë (Ch. II.3.1-II.3.2); in Upper Nubia, a coterie of anonymous officials, likely of Kushite parentage, whose existence must largely be extrapolated from Napatan-era documentation (Ch. III.1 and III.4); in Lower Nubia, the Batn el-Hagar, and the Abri-Delgo Reach, a pervasive absence of relevant data (Ch. IV.1-IV.3); in Middle Egypt, a similar, if less absolute, dearth of testimony (Ch. VI.1); and in Lower Egypt, a patchwork of semi-autonomous bailiwicks overseen by Libyan grandees (Ch. VII). Consequently, the evidence for Taharqo’s national regime defies the tidy categorization into civil, ecclesiastical, and military prosopographies that has proven so effective in studies

1 Leclant, Monuments thébains; id., Montouemhat; id., Enquêtes sur les sacerdoces; Vittmann, Priester und Beamte; Naunton, Priests and Officials at Thebes During the Twenty-fifth Dynasty in Egypt. See also: Pressl, Beamte und Soldaten; Kitchen, TIP; Graefe, Gottesgemahlin des Amun; Bierbrier, review of Priester und Beamte; id., Late New Kingdom in Egypt, 115; Keos, Die Hohenpriester des Amun von Karnak. I thank Christopher Naunton for generously granting me access to his manuscript. Naunton’s DPhil thesis on the same subject was defended at Swansea University in June 2009.


3 Most notable would be the Harbor Master Pediese, son of Ankhseshonq, in Middle Egypt and the Vizier Harsi (R) in Lower Egypt. For the identity of Pediese’s father as a “Priest of Amunresonter” (in Thebes), see papyrus IX, col. 5/II 16-17, in: Vittmann, Papyri Rylands 9, 21-22, 130-131; Griffith, Papyri in the John Rylands Library, pl. XXVII. For the possibility that Harsi (R) hailed from Upper Egypt, see his titles as given upon Philadelphia E. 16025 in De Meulenaere, “La statue d’un vizier thébain.” For reservations about this identification, see Bierbrier, “More Light on the Family of Montuemhat”; id., review of Priester und Beamte.

4 Left side of throne on statue Berlin AMP 17271 in Leclant, Montouemhat, 64, pl. XV.

5 For an early articulation of the view that Theban émigrés precipitated the rise of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, see Breasted, History of Egypt, 538. For a more recent argument for the same view, see: Kendall, “Origin of the Napatan State,” 5, 55-58.