VI.1. Periodization and Administration

When compared with the Manethonian scheme of numbered dynasties, the division of ancient Egyptian history into larger “kingdoms” and intermediate periods must be regarded as a decidedly more etic chronology. This observation holds particularly true for the distinction between the Third Intermediate and Late Periods, the passage between which was not announced by retrospective lamentation of chaos on the part of the ancient Egyptians and has equally resisted a consensus definition among Egyptologists. A few prominent examples will suffice to illustrate the diversity of modern opinion: in Gay Robins’s standard overview of the history of Egyptian art, the reigns of Kashta and Pi(ankh)y are assigned to the Third Intermediate Period, while the Late Period proper commences under Shabaqo c. 712 BC. By contrast, Trigger et al.’s and Shaw et al.’s influential surveys of Egyptian history place the entirety of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty within the Third Intermediate Period, while in Kitchen’s seminal study, the Third Intermediate Period terminates even later—in 650 BC, well into the reign of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty pharaoh Psamtik I. Alternatively, in the English edition of Ägypten: Eine Sinngeschichte, Assmann maintains that “[t]he Late Period proper begins with the ascension of Psammetichus I to the throne in 663,” while nevertheless conceding that “the Kushite or Ethiopian reign…no longer qualifies as a ‘genuine’ intermediate period…[because, i]n many of its aspects the Kushite empire anticipates the Late Period.” The choice between these periodizations would seem to depend upon which type of change is given pride of place: cultural change corresponding to the florescence of archaism; geopolitical change emphasizing the reclamation of Egypt’s international profile in the Mediterranean and Near East; territorial change defined by the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt; or administrative change manifested in specific innovations of governance. As a result, the space between divergent periodizations offers more than an arena for chronological dispute: enfolded within it are questions of great interest for the cultural, political, and social history of the seventh century BC.

One such question was recently thrown into stark relief by the published proceedings of the 2007 Leiden conference, “The Libyan Period in Egypt.” In an essay detailing the importance of the God’s Wife of Amun, Mariam F. Ayad attributes to fellow conferee Robert Ritner a novel argument regarding administrative change: “Ritner suggested that suppression of lineage, particularly of tribal lineage, served to establish state authority. According to Ritner such suppression was part of a systematic policy of Egypt’s new Nubian rulers.” In Ayad’s analysis, the preference exhibited by Amenirdis I for titles of priestly succession rather than dynastic filiation in her Karnak chapel of Osiris ḥq-ḏ.t provides one instance of this larger Kushite attempt to replace tribal aristocracies with state institutions. For an exposition of this larger policy, Ayad

1 Pérez Die, Ehnasya el Medina: Excavaciones 1984-2004, 16.
5 Assmann, Mind of Egypt, 287-288.
6 For the latter, see: Martin, “Saite Demoticisation of Southern Egypt.”