CHAPTER SEVEN

KERMA DOMINATION IN LOWER NUBIA IN THE SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD (1650–1550 BC)

[The official Ka] says: “I was a valiant servant of the ruler (ḥq) of Kush. I washed my feet in the waters of Kush in the following of the ruler Nedjeh. I returned safe and sound (and) my family (too)”\(^1\).

The c. 120 years of the Thirteenth Dynasty (1173-after 1650 BC) saw the fragmentation of rule in Egypt.\(^2\) Kemp classifies thus the some 175 reigns occurring in the Turin king-list\(^3\) between the end of the Twelfth and the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty:\(^4\)

(1) kings following the Twelfth Dynasty whose authority was, for political reasons which may at times have been quite complex, recognized in Upper Egypt and who continued for the most part, but not necessarily in every case, to rule from and be buried near Memphis, and who may have also exercised a general overlordship, if not total rule, over parts or all of northern Egypt;

(2) a line of kings ruling Upper Egypt in succession to them, but now centred at Thebes, and buried there;

(3) six ‘foreign kings’, i.e., Hyksos, who replaced group (1) in the north and who ruled at the same time as group (2);

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\(^4\) Kemp 1983 153 ff.
(4) an uncertain number of client kings, presumably of city states, mostly
in the north of Egypt and including some with the title ‘foreign king’,
distributed uncertainly in time vis-à-vis the other groups.\(^5\)

Still quoting Barry Kemp,

the Second Intermediate Period emerges as one of great significance in
the history of Egypt’s relationships with her neighbours. A time of inter-
nal governmental weakness coincided with a period of prosperity and
political growth in Palestine and Nubia so that, for once, the Egyptians
found themselves the victims of both the political initiative and cultural
momentum of others.\(^6\)

During the Twelfth Dynasty immigrants from Syria-Palestine settled
in great numbers in the eastern Delta. By the middle of the seven-
teenth century BC the Delta and Lower Egypt was ruled by kings of
a dynasty of Canaanite origin known as Hyksos\(^7\) (Fifteenth Dynasty,
1650–1550 BC). They presented themselves as legitimate pharaohs just
like the Theban kings who ruled over Middle and Upper Egypt (Six-
teenth Dynasty, 1650–1580 BC; Seventeenth Dynasty, 1580–1550 BC).
The frontier between the Hyksos and the Theban kingdom ran at Cusae about 40 km south of Hermopolis, modern el-Ashmunein. The
southern frontier of the Theban kingdom was at Elephantine. The
area south of Elephantine also changed masters. In the advanced Thir-
teenth Dynasty Egypt withdrew from Lower Nubia. The withdrawal
was determined partly by the decline of the centralized rule in Egypt
and partly by the northern advance of the Kerman kingdom which suc-
ceeded apparently without much armed conflict.\(^8\) Archaeological evi-
dence from the neighbouring cemeteries shows that Kerman garrisons
were now stationed in the forts of Buhen and Mirgissa.\(^9\) The situation


\(^6\) Kemp 1983 172 f.

\(^7\) Hyksos is the Greek rendering of ḫrws ḫswt, “rulers of the foreign [lit. mountain-

\(^8\) For a history of the Second Intermediate Period, see Bourriau 2000.