Book Reviews


Reviewed by Robert Chadwick.

Despite the vast selection of books currently available for Egyptophiles, few are devoted to the thousand year period which spans the first millennium BC known as the Third Intermediate Period. Normally, ancient Egypt brings to mind the Old Kingdom and the pyramids, or the New Kingdom with its empire building pharaohs and religious upheavals. Fewer people are familiar with the period between the repulsion of the Sea Peoples and the arrival of Alexander the Great and the exploits of Cleopatra. In the Third Intermediate Period there were no great pyramids, only small ones, and no religious upheavals but still the constant undermining of royal powers by the religious establishment. *The Twilight of Ancient Egypt* goes a long way to stimulate the reader’s interest in this period by providing an excellent synthesis and overview of an otherwise somewhat neglected period of Egyptian history. The book is carefully conceived and crafted, and thanks to an excellent translation by Egyptologist David Lorton, is very readable in excellent English. To set the stage for the last thousand years of its history, the author begins with a brief discussion of the dualistic nature of Egyptian thought and its manifestations in the geography, religion and iconography of the Two Lands.

The story of the Third Intermediate Period is one of decline and foreign conquest. Underlying this decline is the competition for power between priests and kings that ultimately weakened the Two Lands making it easy prey for powerful and unified neighbours such as the Assyrians and the Kushites. Myśliwiec uses the story of Wenamun to illustrate this decline and considers it “an authentic witness to the collapse of the state into two independent entities already in the reign of the last Ramesses” (p. 22). Chapter Two concentrates on Dynasties XXI to XXIV. Starting in Dynasty 21, there were two Egyptian capitals, one at traditional the city of Thebes, the other in Lower Egypt at Tanis (ancient Djanet). While explaining the demise of Egypt Myśliwiec weaves into the story the many archaeological discoveries, such as the famous mummy caches at Deir el Bahri, and the UNESCO salvage operations of the 1960s.

Next, follows a chapter on the Kushites (Nubians) of the XXVth Dynasty from extreme Upper Egypt. This family of black Africans ruled most of the Two Lands for a century, and were a valuable stabilising force in a time of division and uncertainty. Under earlier Egyptian hegemony, the Kushites had taken up the worship of Amun, and adopted the written and spoken forms of the Egyptian language. As Egypt weakened, Kush, the former colony, extended its power north over the rest of the Nile River Valley. Archaeological research includes recent explorations at Gebel Barkal and the inscription left there by Pharaoh Taharqa commemorating his victory over the Libyans and Asiatics. Poor Taharqa, the Kushite who did so much to reunify Egypt, and yet was chased out of Lower
Egypt by the Assyrians.
Much of the history and polemics of Third Intermediate period revolved around the position of the high priestess of Amun at Thebes, and this problem was particularly acute during the XXI to XXIV\textsuperscript{th} Dynasties when Egypt was divided between northern and southern kingdoms. With the XXVI\textsuperscript{th} or Saite Dynasty and King Psammetichus I, Egypt was once again reunited for a short time.

Throughout the last half of the First Millennium BC, during Persian and Greek domination, Egyptian culture continued to flourish, and numerous examples show the Persians incorporating Egyptian motifs into their art. Examples can be seen at the Hibis temple whose wall reliefs show the Persian king wearing the traditional sidelock of a boy while being nursed by the goddess Mut. This clearly shows the power Egyptian culture had over the conquering Persians. The same was true during the three centuries of Ptolemaic rule. Repeatedly we see examples of respect and admiration for Egyptian art and religion such at Luxor, the temple of Isis at Philae, and the Chapel of Hathor at Dendera. In addition, during the Ptolemaic period financial support and donations of land were made to the priesthood, and in official decrees, including the Rosetta Stone, and the Canopus Decree, were written in three languages, two of them dialects of Egyptian. Even in defeat the conquerors emulated and maintained the cultural legacy of the Two Lands when the Nile dwellers themselves were incapable of protecting Egypt from invaders.

The final chapter is dedicated to “Polish Archaeology on the Nile”, and gives the reader a welcome opportunity to learn about the valuable contributions made by Poland in the field of Egyptology. This book is very readable and contains a number of good photographs. Combined with Professor Myśliwiec's vast knowledge of this period, this book is one of the classics of the Third Intermediate Period, and will remain so, for years to come.

Notes
1. Barbara Mertz, the author of the ever popular \textit{Temples, Tombs and Hieroglyphs}, (1964, Dodd, Mead, New York) referred to some of the ruling families of the first millennium BC as “Miscellaneous Dynasties” (p. 300), hardly worth mentioning.


Reviewed by Thomas D. Gilroy.

This volume is similar to Dr. Hawass’s (bilingual – Arabic and English) \textit{The Secrets of the Sphinx} (1998). It is portable, concise, and easily readable, and is an ideal companion for the visitor to Ramses II’s Abu Simbel temples, particularly one with little or no Egyptological background.

A forthcoming large-format picture-book on the temples will be published by AUC Press, but the many illustrations (colour photographs and reproductions of David Roberts lithographs) in Hawass’s present work are themselves impressive for a book of this format.

Hawass first examines Nubia’s history in relation to Egypt, then discusses the Aswan
High Dam project and the UNESCO campaign to save the temples from being flooded, by dismantling them and moving them to higher ground; this is followed by a list of the small Nubian temples donated by the Egyptian government to other nations in return for their financial and technical support during the project. Hawass then describes the current nocturnal audio-visual show at the Abu Simbel temples. The next segment is an overview of the reign of Ramses II, and is followed by a room-by-room description of his temple, with explanations of the significance of certain scenes and texts; the smaller temple of Queen Nofretetiri is treated in the same manner. Hawass concludes his book with brief descriptions of other Nubian temples built by Ramses.

Along with the correction of a few minor typos, a second edition of this book would benefit from the addition of a map of Western Asia; good maps of the Nile Valley and a more detailed one of Nubia are included, but those unfamiliar with ancient Near Eastern geography would be aided immensely by the presence of a West Asian map when reading the section dealing with Ramses’s foreign affairs.

Hawass’s book contains that rarest of commodities in Egyptological volumes aimed at a general audience: a bibliography of scholarly works, comprising two pages. However, the significance of some of these works, and their relation to topics discussed in the text, will not be readily apparent to the average reader; direct references to them within the text would rectify this problem, and would facilitate further research by any interested individuals.


Reviewed by Thomas D. Gilroy.

This volume is aimed at a general audience, and Dr. Dodson stresses that he does not intend it to be viewed as a detailed history of Pharaonic Egypt. It is concisely written, and focuses, in biographical style, on the lives of a broad selection of individual kings. Dodson wisely mentions in his Preface that, for the sake of brevity and readability, in most cases it is his own interpretation of evidence alone that is presented, and he does not digress into historical or archaeological controversies. This book is a revision of the first edition, incorporating the results of recent research; the line-drawings of the first edition have largely been replaced by black-and-white photographs, and a number of different illustrations have been selected.

After brief introductory chapters – one dealing with the geography and social organization of ancient Egypt, and another with the institution of the Egyptian monarchy – Dodson proceeds in chronological order to examine the lives of a number of rulers from each period of Pharaonic history, up to the time of the Persian conquest. These chapters are followed by a useful king list and chronology, which is in turn followed by a table of royal cemeteries, with lists of the kings buried therein. Maps of Egypt, Nubia, the Near East, Thebes, and Abydos are also included. The Guide to further reading is organized by chapter, and the significance and value of the works cited are discussed. The index is nicely arranged and quite comprehensive.
One criticism of the book is Dodson’s use of the Greek transcriptions of royal names (mentioned on p. 8), which is liable to confuse the general reader. Dodson is conscientious enough to render “Montjuhotpe” (the “-hotpe,” rather than “-hotep” based, of course, on the Akkadian vocalization of *Imn-htp*) in one instance, but he uses “Amenophis” in another. A consistent use of the “Egyptian” forms, combined with his initial explanation for writings such as “Amenophis” and “Tuthmosis” – so often encountered in other, particularly older, works – would better serve those readers with no Egyptological background.

This book, used in combination with a “social” history, such as Barry Kemp’s *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization*, would be a suitable text for the Ancient Egypt segment of a Near Eastern History survey course (Dodson’s annotated bibliography helps a great deal in this regard).