

T. Eide, T. Hägg, R. Holton Pierce, L. Török (edd.): *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum: Textual Sources for the history of the Middle Nile Region between the Eighth Century BC and the Sixth Century AD. Vol. I. From the Eighth to the Mid-fifth Century BC*. Pp. 343. Bergen: University of Bergen, Department of Classics, 1995. Paper. NOK 180. ISBN: 82 991411 6 8.

This volume contains the relevant textual sources (66 entries) for almost three centuries of the history of the region immediately to the south of Egypt. It is the first in a series which will eventually collect all such material from the period of the region's dramatic emergence as a power in Egypt to the end of Byzantine rule in Egypt, after which the region once more lapses into obscurity. The texts for these periods are disparate in both language and genre. Since many of the epigraphic texts relating to Nubia are fairly inaccessible or in old editions, this project is very welcome. The texts in this particular volume are mainly epigraphic, though excerpts from Herodotus are also included. They are clearly presented, translated and have an extensive historical and linguistic commentary. The provenances and the location of the epigraphic texts on particular monuments are described, though a map would be of benefit to those unfamiliar with the geography of Nubia. Photographs of the texts *in situ* would also be helpful, particularly in the case of those texts which formed only one part, and perhaps only a minor one, of far larger monuments. Nevertheless, the clear intention of the editors is to make the texts themselves easily accessible and in this they have succeeded admirably. It is to be hoped that the next three volumes follow quickly, especially since the necessary indices are planned for the fourth volume.

Interest in Nubia has been increasing over recent years. The flooding of much of the region caused by the construction of the Aswan dams led to extensive archaeological exploration of the region, though much of the resultant material remains unfortunately unpublished. Recent museum exhibitions have focused on the region and some syntheses

of the archaeological record (to which this collection is a valuable supplement) have been published. Classicists also are becoming increasingly interested in the peripheral states of the Classical worlds. Nubia, certainly for the Roman and Byzantine periods, offers a valuable example of just such a peripheral zone and will hopefully attract more interest in the future. For Egyptologists, the issue of Nubian interaction with Egypt is of abiding interest and has been made much more of an issue by the controversy surrounding cultural links between Central and East Africa and Egypt itself.

The period covered by this volume is of particular importance since in the latter half of the eighth century BC, the kings of Napata (the main centre of the period), possibly commencing with Kashta, engaged in military expeditions into Egypt and Piye (better known as Piankhy) conquered Nubia's northern neighbour to found the short-lived XXVth dynasty. After approximately a century, the Assyrians crushed the dynasty and Napata and its rulers returned to comparative obscurity. The sudden rise to power of the dynasty, remarkable given the obscurity and assumed weakness of the region in most periods, has not been adequately explained.

The cultural influences on Napatian civilization and the possible influences of that civilization on Egypt are, of course, at the heart of the controversy. Traditionally, it has been assumed that Egypt imposed its culture on the less powerful states of the Middle Nile, that the cultural traffic along the Nile headed up only. Certainly the texts here, especially the long and fascinating accounts of events in Egypt of Piye, Taharqo and Tanutamani, show the very heavy influence of traditional Egyptian culture. The Napatian kings depicted themselves as Pharaohs and had their achievements described in a traditional Egyptian manner. Yet, this is perhaps what one would expect in a period when Nubian-Egyptian interaction was so prominent. The Pharaohs were, however, buried in Napata, as kings of Napata continued to be until the fourth century BC, and the majority of our information concerning the XXVth dynasty comes not from the North but from stelai erected in the heartland of their empire. Napata was the centre, not the periphery, of

their power. The archaeology of the region is not as heavily Egyptianized as the texts. Depictions of gods display Egyptian influence but there were clearly other influences at work, as yet unknown. The smaller finds contain elements one does not immediately associate with Egyptian culture. The archaeology warns us against an overly Egyptocentric view of Nubia and reminds us that we know too little about what was happening in regions further up the Nile, worlds for which Egypt was peripheral.

It seems likely that the many problems posed by this fascinating region will be investigated primarily through excavation. This welcome collection of texts will be a valuable resource in the further studies of Nubia and its role in the wider world which will undoubtedly follow the recent upsurge in popular interest in the region.

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