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Piankh and Herihor: Art, Ostraca, and Accession in Perspective

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Abstract

Due to the lack of firm evidence from which a precise historical narrative for the Late New Kingdom Period may be satisfactorily reconstructed many events within this period continue to attract some degree of controversy in modern scholarly discussion, not least of these the matter of the succession of the senior Theban officials, Piankh and Herihor, each of whom held office as the first servant of Amun under the last of the Ramesside rulers, Ramesses XI. In recent years proposals have veered from the more usual argument as to whether Piankh followed Herihor or *vice-versa*, and a further possibility has been suggested: that the role of first servant of Amun was held by Piankh during the period of Herihor's kingship. However, it seems that, in making such claims, there has been a tendency to either dismiss or undervalue the nature of the extant evidence relating to the protagonists in question. This short study will therefore offer some alternative interpretation of the pertinent material.

Introduction

Chronological uncertainty has clouded present understanding of historical narrative relating to the Theban rulers, Piankh and Herihor, due largely to a lack of evidence from which the precise sequence of events during the reign of the last Ramesside king, Ramesses XI, may be ascertained. Nonetheless, based on the identification of Piankh as Herihor's son in a procession of Herihor's family depicted in Khonsu Temple,¹ the assertion that Herihor preceded Piankh as *hm-ntr tpy n'Imn*, first servant of Amun, at Thebes dominated accounts of the period for much of the Twentieth Century. Once it was recognised that the identification of Piankh in the scene in question had been erroneous – a situation existing at least from Wente's 1979 publication² – the Herihor-Piankh sequence became less secure and, in 1992, Jansen-Winkel presented a convincing argument that it should be reversed.³ Subsequently,

¹ Epigraphic Survey 1979: pl. 26.

² Wente (1979: x-xi), in the preface to the publication of the epigraphic survey of the forecourt of Khonsu Temple carried out by the University of Chicago Oriental Institute, emphasized that the 'sole basis' for the assertion that Piankh was a son of Herihor had been reliant upon the earlier Lepsius publication of the procession of princes in Khonsu Temple.

³ Jansen-Winkel 1992: 22-37.

the relative position of these two protagonists has given rise to some controversy, and the matter is yet to be satisfactorily resolved.

One of the more recent interpretations of the period has been presented by James and Morkot and follows the basic idea of a Herihor-Piankh succession but introduces a new twist to the argument.⁴ In brief, they place Piankh's reign within the floruit of Herihor rather than either before or after. James and Morkot propose that Herihor came to power around Year 1 *whm mswt* – the 'repeating of births' or renaissance period introduced during the reign of Ramesses XI – and advanced from the office of *hm-ntr tpy n 'Imn* to that of king around Year 7 *whm mswt*. At this point, Herihor appointed Piankh to the office of *hm-ntr tpy n 'Imn* to effectively serve as his deputy, albeit for a relatively short period due to Piankh's apparent demise around Year 10 *whm mswt*. James and Morkot do recognize some obstacles to their proposal: firstly, two ostraca interpreted by other scholars as supporting the Piankh-Herihor succession; and secondly the Oracle of Nesamun in which Piankh acknowledges Ramesses XI, not Herihor, as his king in Year 7 *whm mswt*. In dismissing these difficulties James and Morkot offer explanations which might demand further scrutiny, particularly in relation to other texts and images informing the interpretation of the period. These matters will form the focus of the present discussion.

There seems little need to discuss here much of the chronological and genealogical evidence presented in the arguments in question as, for the most part, this has been done adequately and often comprehensively in earlier scholarship albeit, as these scholars appear to accept, without any totally convincing conclusions.⁵ While many interpretations offer possibilities which allow for most of the circumstances, and occasionally all of the known events, to be covered from both chronological and genealogical aspects of enquiry, the evidence is such that no secure conclusions are presently possible. This being the case, much relating to these aspects may properly be left outside the scope of this brief paper. Suffice to say that in recent years the argument presented by Jansen-Winkeln has gradually gained support;⁶ yet, despite this, the Herihor-Piankh variant has been defended by some, and perhaps most resolutely by Kitchen.

Kitchen asserted that the interpretation of events placing Herihor's rise to power in Thebes during the early years of the *whm mswt* is '**beyond refutation**'.⁷ Kitchen also maintains that by Year 7 *whm mswt* 'Herihor was dead' and that Piankh had assumed his offices.⁸ However, he does offer another possible solution to the argument regarding the Herihor-Piankh succession by proposing that after holding office from Years 1-6 *whm mswt*, Herihor passed military, administrative, and religious control to Piankh while himself assuming the ceremonial position of king so as to act as some sort of figurehead – a leader of festival processions such as the Opet – and it was at this time that Herihor concentrated on the construction of the forecourt of Khonsu Temple at Karnak.⁹ This proposal does appear somewhat contrary to Kitchen's earlier insistence that fallacy should be discarded, dogma eschewed, and that: 'Only hard evidence can count'.¹⁰ Perhaps on that ground alone Kitchen's proposal – a notion considered by Broekman to be 'rather artificial and far-fetched'¹¹ – could be dismissed. Yet moreover, the idea of Herihor being primarily involved in the creation of the forecourt while acting as a nominal leader with no real power seems

⁴ James and Morkot 2010: 231.

⁵ For example: Niwinski 1979: 49-54; Jansen-Winkeln 1992: 22-37; Taylor 1998: 1145-55; Broekman 2012: 195-209; and in this volume, Palmer (forthcoming).

⁶ Egberts 1998: 97; Thijs 2005: 75; Taylor 1998: 1145; Hornung 2006: 226; and Haring 2012: 146.

⁷ Kitchen 2009: 194-200; text emboldened in the original.

⁸ Kitchen 2009: 194; underscore used in the original.

⁹ Kitchen 2009: 200.

¹⁰ Kitchen 2009: 192.

¹¹ Broekman 2012: 201.

inconsistent with the function of the ritual landscape which was itself fundamental in establishing the legitimacy and royal authority of its author, as will be argued further below.

The correlation between the onset of the *whm mswt* and the rise to power of Herihor, circumstances also preferred by James and Morkot who place Herihor perhaps in Year 1, certainly Year 2,¹² also seems somewhat arbitrary and unjustified. Only three dates are known for Herihor: Year 5 in the Report of Wenamun and Year 6 on the coffin lids of Seti I and Ramesses II. However, none of these dates make any reference to *whm mswt*; in fact they cannot be placed with certainty in any reign.¹³ The certain dating evidence which has some bearing on the chronology of the Piankh-Herihor succession is scant, and may be simply stated.

Of particular note is the correlation between Year 19 of Ramesses XI and Year 1 *whm mswt*; this seems reasonably secure.¹⁴ Further, it is certain that, as *hm-ntr tpy n Imn*, Herihor was contemporary to Ramesses XI as demonstrated by the texts and images of the hypostyle hall of Khonsu Temple,¹⁵ and that Piankh was in the office of *hm-ntr tpy n Imn* in Year 7 *whm mswt* as confirmed by the Oracle of Nesamun.¹⁶ From this relatively sparse chronological information the sequence of events in relation to Herihor and Piankh must be deduced by reference to other extant records, none of which serve to place Herihor in relation to either relative or absolute chronology of the period in question with certainty. However, it is generally agreed that Piankh was in office as first servant of Amun and general in a Year 10 – widely accepted as being a year of the *whm mswt*, as indicated by the corpus of correspondence known as the Late Ramesside Letters.¹⁷ Thus two dates appear to establish a minimum span for Piankh of Year 7 to Year 10 *whm mswt* and it is the proposal of James and Morkot that this period fell within the time of Herihor's kingship in Thebes.

The question of the ostraca texts

It seems remarkable, should it be allowed that James and Morkot's proposal is correct, that none of the Late Ramesside Letters make any reference to Herihor.¹⁸ However, Herihor does appear in an inscription on one of two ostraca of the period found during excavations in the Valley of the Kings. These ostraca have been deemed significant in that they are draft letters composed by the scribes mentioned in many of the Late Ramesside Letters, the father and son Dhutmose and Butehamun.¹⁹ That of Dhutmose is addressed to Piankh while the letter to Herihor was composed by Butehamun. While not absolutely certain, the father-son relationship between the two scribes allows, as suggested by Egberts,²⁰ that the elder scribe would have written to the earlier ruler; a correlation indicating a Piankh-Herihor sequence.²¹

¹² James and Morkot 2010: 255 and Fig. 4.

¹³ Egberts 1998: 95-6; Thijs 2005: 79; Palmer (forthcoming).

¹⁴ This correlation has been made by examination of dates and identification of historical figures in a series of events relating to tomb robberies in the Late Ramesside Period as recounted in Papyrus Abbott, Papyrus Mayer A, and Papyrus British Museum 10052, and with reference to the limestone ostrakon Cairo Museum J. 52543 (Černý 1929: 194-5).

¹⁵ Epigraphic Survey 1981: 1-72.

¹⁶ Nims 1948: pl. VIII.

¹⁷ For example: Wente 1990: 190-2; Thijs 1999: 191; Hornung 2006: 217; Kitchen 2009: 199; James and Morkot 2010: 233.

¹⁸ Taylor 1998: 1145; Haring 2012: 145-51.

¹⁹ For further details of the family of scribes which included Dhutmose and Butehamun, see Černý (1973: 339-83).

²⁰ Egberts 1997: 25.

²¹ The ostraca are in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, catalogue numbers CG 25744 and CG 25745. The scribes may be identified by their writing style and it is therefore apparent that the former was written by Butehamun

As outlined in the introductory paragraphs, James and Morkot dismiss such evidence as being ‘very weak’.²² They make the point that Dhutmose and Butehamun could have been ‘on equal footing’ as scribes; and further, offer a sound reason for the absence of Dhutmose in the draft letter from Butehamun to Herihor in that, during the period in which the Late Ramesside Letters were being composed, Dhutmose was himself often with Piankh on campaign.²³ Here there is a clear implication that, at a point in time, Butehamun drafted the text of the ostrakon to Herihor while Dhutmose and Piankh were campaigning to the south. If such is the intent, this assertion does not appear to take account of the titles expressed in the correspondence.

The addressee of the ostrakon attributed to Butehamun (25744) was:

the Fan-bearer to the Right of the King, King’s Scribe, Overseer of the Town, Vizier, General, High Priest of Amonrasonter, King’s [Son] of Kush, Overseer of the Southern Deserts, Overseer of the Double Granary [of Pharaoh l. p. h.], the Leader Herihor who is at the head of the troops of entire Egypt.²⁴

This ostrakon cannot, therefore, relate to Years 7-10 *whm mswt* as, in the account proposed by James and Morkot, Herihor was then king; and whatever the status of Butehamun in relation to Dhutmose, it cannot be supposed that he, Butehamun, would address his king in such a manner. After Year 10 *whm mswt* the proposed chronology suggests that Piankh has disappeared from the historical record. It is also the case that, if someone was leading the armies of Pharaoh on campaign in the southern lands, prior to Year 7 *whm mswt* it might reasonably be expected that, with the titles shown in ostrakon 25744, it would be Herihor; although it could be argued that he sent Piankh, in some junior capacity – along with the more senior of the scribes. However, there is no evidence to support such interpretation.

All known evidence relating to the southern campaigns involving Dhutmose and Piankh appears to refer to Piankh as ‘general of Pharaoh’ as, for example, in letter nos. 18, 19, 29, 21, 30, and 35.²⁵ That this appellation does in fact refer to Piankh is seemingly confirmed by letter no. 28 in which the addressee is given as:

The fan-bearer on the king’s right, royal scribe, general, high priest of Amon-Re, [King of the Gods], vice[roy] of Kush, overseer of southern foreign lands, granary overseer of Pharaoh’s granaries, and [leader] of Pharaoh’s troops, [Pi]ankh.²⁶

The letter ends with the shortened appellation ‘general of Pharaoh’, a circumstance from which it may be inferred that such a shortened designation may, in all cases, be understood as an abbreviation for Piankh’s full titulary as expressed at the opening of letter no. 28. None of this correspondence appears to relate to a period during which Piankh and Dhutmose were engaged in a campaign while, at the same time, Herihor was in office holding a similar range of titles to those in the letters to Piankh. Moreover, it seems unlikely that, at any time, both Herihor and Piankh would hold a similar range of titles; particularly that of viceroy, or king’s son of Kush.

A further point regarding the correspondence, apparently overlooked by James and Morkot yet emphasized by Broekman,²⁷ is that in some letters written during Dhutmose’s

for Herihor; the latter by Dhutmose for Piankh (Egberts 1997: 23-4). This evidence has subsequently been assessed by Lull (2006: 336) within the context of the Late Ramesside Letters and, like Egberts, he finds the ostraca to be indicative of a Piankh-Herihor succession.

²² James and Morkot 2010: 242.

²³ James and Morkot 2010: 242. As indicated by Egberts (1997: 24-5) the idea that Butehamun, rather than the elder Dhutmose, should compose a letter to Herihor has otherwise been seen as a case of ‘youthful presumption on the part of Butehamun’ by those favouring the more traditional Herihor-Piankh succession.

²⁴ Haring 2009: 185.

²⁵ Wentz 1967: 9-12; 1990: 182-95.

²⁶ Wentz 1990: 194.

²⁷ Broekman 2012: 200.

absence from Thebes Butehamun appears as being subordinate to the two foremen of the necropolis whereas, in the letter to Herihor (ostraca CG 25744), Butehamun appears to have seniority,²⁸ a circumstance implying a later date for this letter. To speculate further may prove fruitless, however it rather seems that on the strength of the known evidence the explanation offered by Egberts regarding the chronology of the ostraca in question is the most logical and more acceptable solution.

The Oracle of Nesamun

The second point recognised by James and Morkot as being problematic in respect of their hypothesis is the Oracle of Nesamun which, as outlined above, gives a clear date of Year 7 *wḥm mswt* and is one of the principle dating criteria for the period and events in question. The Oracle, inscribed on the outer, east-facing wall of the main north-south axis between the ninth and tenth pylons of the Amun Temple at Karnak, shows Piankh – again described as the fan-bearer on the right hand of the king, viceroy of Kush, first servant of Amun-Re king of the gods, general, and leader²⁹ – and includes a reference to the reigning king, Ramesses XI, but makes no reference to Herihor. Broekman draws the reasonable conclusion that this is a clear indication that, in Year 7 *wḥm mswt*, Herihor was neither first servant of Amun nor king.³⁰ However, James and Morkot propose that Herihor had become king around this time and appointed Piankh to the office of *ḥm-ntr tpy n Imn*. They explain that Herihor's absence from the Nesamun text was due to 'subtleties of protocol' which required that, although Ramesses XI had by this time accepted Herihor as king in Thebes, the 'novelty' of Herihor's elevation in status may have prompted prudence in acknowledging the seniority of the Tanite king.³¹ This explanation was found by Broekman to be 'rather artificial',³² and in apparent contradiction to their earlier claim that in Year 5 *wḥm mswt*, the date of the Report of Wenamun, the power of Ramesses XI had been such that the 'legal pharaoh' had not even been worthy of mention.³³ The idea expressed by James and Morkot seems equally unconvincing on other grounds, not least being that one may consider the extent to which 'subtleties of protocol' might be observed at a time of political unrest – if not open rebellion against the northern rule. It is further of note that, in dismissing the problem of the Oracle, little attention has been given to the implications of the nature of either its text or imagery, nor to the position of the scene in relation to the chronology of decoration within the Karnak temple complex relative to the period in question.

The oracle scene shows the festival barque of Amun-Re carried in procession by porters and accompanied by two senior officials dressed in leopard-skin robes. Three men stand before, and facing, the barque and are depicted in two registers. In the upper register, the first servant of Amun, general, and leader, Piankh appears. Below, indicating their lesser rank, is the second servant of Amun, Nesamun-re, and the *w3b*-scribe of the store house, Nesamun. The text outlines the event depicted as that in which Piankh halts the procession to ask Amun-Re to select an official for appointment to the office of 'Scribe of the storehouse of the Estate'. When the god indicates Nesamun, Piankh asks for confirmation of the appointment of Nesamun, at which 'the great god nodded vigorously'.³⁴ Here, Piankh is

²⁸ Egberts 1997: 24.

²⁹ Nims 1948: 157, pl. 8.

³⁰ Broekman 2012: 200.

³¹ James and Morkot 2010: 251-2.

³² Broekman 2012: 196, 202.

³³ James and Morkot 2010: 235.

³⁴ Nims 1948: 157-9 and pl. VIII.

clearly acting as the spokesman of Amun-Re, thus assuming the prerogative of the king. The logical conclusion is that Piankh is acting as the king's deputy, and the king in question is given in the text as Ramesses XI. Here one may think that both protocol and rationalism would dictate that if Piankh was, as suggested by James and Morkot,³⁵ at this time deputy to the recently crowned Herihor he would acknowledge that fact in the Nesamun oracle text rather than show deference to a remote, and most likely ineffective, northern ruler.

Chronology as suggested by the decorative programme

In relation to the chronology of decoration at Karnak it is notable that, following the reign of Ramesses IV, the relatively small amount of decoration which was carried out prior to the work of Herihor in Khonsu Temple seems to have taken place along the north-south axis, and there mostly on the east-facing outer wall overlooking the area of the sacred lake. Both the north-south temple axis and the sacred lake were the focus of festivals and ritual activity and would likely be visible to a large audience including the nobility and senior officials of Thebes. It is also probable that the area to the south of the sacred lake was used as a service area for the temple complex and therefore likely to be frequented by temple staff on a regular basis.³⁶ Furthermore, it is significant in the present discussion that this east wall of the north-south axis was earlier used as a place for the depiction of a first servant of Amun, Roma-Roy, in a previous period of political disunity between Thebes and the North which occurred towards the end of the Nineteenth Dynasty.

Roma-Roy was appointed by Ramesses II, remained in office throughout the reign of Merenptah, and was still in office at the time of Seti II. Roma-Roy is depicted in a scene on the east face of the eighth pylon³⁷ where the names erased from cartouches were probably those of the Theban rival to Seti II, Amenmesse. Seti II's own cartouches also appear beneath Roma-Roy's inscriptions which address both Amun and, confirming their access to the text, the temple staff.³⁸ During a further period of political difficulty following the death of Ramesses III the first servant of Amun, Ramessesnakht, in office at least to Year 7 of the reign of Ramesses VI, added to the inscriptions on the east face of the eighth pylon where he is shown offering flowers and a libation to the Theban triad of Amun, Mut, and Khonsu.³⁹ Ramessesnakht was succeeded in the office of first servant of Amun by his sons, Esamun and Amenhotep; the former seems to have had only a short period in office,⁴⁰ the latter serving under Ramesses IX as confirmed in scenes located on the east-facing wall between the seventh and eighth pylons⁴¹ in which Amenhotep is depicted receiving rewards before a statue of Ramesses IX.⁴² Amenhotep is again depicted in a scene in the doorway into the court to the north of the eighth pylon where he offers a bouquet to Ramesses IX.⁴³ Herihor only appears in two extant graffiti on the north-south axis, these being further to the south on

³⁵ James and Morkot 2010: 255

³⁶ Frood 2007: 55.

³⁷ Porter and Moss 1972: 177 §527.

³⁸ Frood 2007: 54-5.

³⁹ Wente 1966: 82; Porter and Moss 1972: 177 §527; Dijk 2000: 307.

⁴⁰ Wente 1966: 82.

⁴¹ Porter and Moss 1972: 172 §505.

⁴² For some discussion on the generally held misconception that the scene of Amenhotep and Ramesses IX would have been secluded from public view see Bács (2011: 11) who interprets the scene as having cultic significance in relation to Amenhotep's tomb in Dra Abu el-Naga, the Karnak scene integrating the cult for Amenhotep into the much more prominent rituals of Karnak.

⁴³ Porter and Moss 1972: 172 §506.

the east wall, outer face, between the eighth and ninth pylons.⁴⁴ Herihor's activities at Karnak concentrate on the much grander project of the construction and decoration of Khonsu Temple.

From the inscriptions of the north-south axis it is tempting to see a tradition developing in the later Ramesside Period, particularly during times of some degree of political tension, in which, while recognizing the hegemony of the northern rulers, the king's deputy in Thebes, in the office of the first servant of Amun, was himself portrayed on the north-south temple axis exercising a degree of royal authority. Such scenes represent statements to the local population as to where the *de facto* power lay in Upper Egypt.

The scenes of the first servant of Amun, Roma-Roy appear relatively insignificant in comparison with much of the royal iconography at Karnak. Those of Ramessesnakht however show their author as active in the presence of the gods, a position which may suggest that Ramessesnakht was exercising royal prerogative; and those of Amenhotep, between the seventh and eighth pylons, present their author as one of perhaps greater significance than his father in respect of the hierarchy of power in Egypt. The scenes, as shown here in fig. 1, are



Figure 1: The central panel has a double image of the first servant of Amun, Amenhotep, wearing a leopard-skin and standing before a pillar; scenes to the left and right each show Amenhotep before a statue of Ramesses IX. East-facing exterior wall, north-south axis between the seventh and eighth pylons, Temple of Amun-Re, Karnak. Photograph courtesy of Kevin Birtles.

⁴⁴ Porter and Moss 1972: 178 §531.



Figure 2: Seti I shown in the form of a statue standing on a plinth in a scene inscribed for Ramesses II. South wall, east half, hypostyle hall, Temple of Amun, Karnak. Photograph courtesy of The Karnak Great Hypostyle Hall Project, University of Memphis: www.memphis.edu/hypostyle.

on a scale comparative to many of the depictions for Ramesside kings in the hypostyle hall of the main Amun temple. Particularly informative is that Ramesses IX is depicted in the form of a statue, a form perhaps more suited to the depiction of a deceased king as in a nearby scene in the south-east corner of the main hypostyle hall representing Ramesses II making offerings to the deceased Seti I who, as shown in fig. 2, is also depicted as a statue.⁴⁵ It is also pertinent that while Ramesses IX is clearly the senior figure, hierarchy of scale presents Amenhotep as being close in status, and he is clearly the more active agent in the scene. Such circumstances suggest that while perhaps not deceased, Ramesses IX is to be seen as inactive or ineffective in relation to Amenhotep and likely absent and, to some degree, inaccessible.⁴⁶

The Oracle of Nesamun, while not as impressive graphically as the scenes for Amenhotep, shows Piankh appearing before Amun as the interpreter of oracles and therefore, as an intermediary between cosmic and earthly affairs, as one having yet more kingly authority than his predecessor. Piankh's king is given even lesser prominence, appearing only by name in the accompanying texts. Here the impression that Ramesses XI was of relatively little significance is perhaps given some support by the remarks made by 'the general', who as outlined above may be presumed to be Piankh, in the Late Ramesside Letter no. 21 saying of the king: 'how will he ever reach this land', and 'as for pharaoh, l.p.h., whose superior is he after all?'⁴⁷ Presuming Piankh to be somewhere in or *en route* to Kush, from where there

⁴⁵ Epigraphic Survey 1981: pl. 72.

⁴⁶ Cf. Wente 1966: 86.

⁴⁷ Wente 1990: 183.

was regular correspondence to and from Thebes as demonstrated by the letters themselves, the comments seem to imply that the pharaoh in question was rather further away than Thebes, where one might reasonably expect Herihor to have been if he were the subject of such remarks.

With Herihor there was a change in the style of presentation. Herihor was sufficiently confident to commence a much more complex programme of decoration, firstly in the hypostyle hall of Khonsu Temple recognizing Ramesses XI as king, but subsequently in the forecourt in proclamation of his own kingship.⁴⁸ Depictions in the hypostyle hall show both



Figure 3: Herihor as *ḥm-ntr tpy n Imn* offering incense and pouring a libation before the barque of Amun-Re. North wall, west half of the hypostyle hall, Temple of Khonsu, Karnak. Photograph by the author.

Herihor and Ramesses XI performing a range of royal rituals and, while Herihor acknowledges in accompanying texts that he is deputising for his king, visually he appears in the role of pharaoh by, for example, offering incense and pouring a libation to the barques of the gods of the Theban Triad (fig. 3),⁴⁹ giving flowers to Amun-Re-Kamutef in the presence of Amunet,⁵⁰ giving flowers to Amun-Re in the presence of Mut,⁵¹ giving flowers to ithyphallic Amun in the presence of Khonsu,⁵² offering a broad collar to Khonsu,⁵³ and offering wine to Amun in the presence of Khonsu.⁵⁴ In the latter two examples, while the cartouches of Ramesses XI appear in subsidiary texts it is somewhat ambiguous in the main exchange between Herihor and the god as to whom benefactions are being given. Nonetheless, while some sharing of royal authority may be inferred, Herihor, as first servant

⁴⁸ Gregory 2006: 19-32.

⁴⁹ Epigraphic Survey 1981: pl. 166, 185.

⁵⁰ Epigraphic Survey 1981: pl. 178A.

⁵¹ Epigraphic Survey 1981: pl. 199A.

⁵² Epigraphic Survey 1981: pl. 199B.

⁵³ Epigraphic Survey 1981: pl. 188A.

⁵⁴ Epigraphic Survey 1981: pl. 198A.

of Amun, lacks the crowns and uraeus which might give visual confirmation of royal status. The scenes for Herihor in the forecourt are different again as here Herihor adopts the full range of iconographic markers signifying pharaonic kingship.⁵⁵

Thus there appears to be a sequence of scenes along the north-south axis in which the first servants of Amun exhibit increasing use of royal power, or at least have themselves portrayed as such, and this sequence culminates with Piankh. With the advent of Herihor the first servant of Amun continues to exercise royal prerogative and expresses his status in the manner of his predecessors at Thebes, but within a temple not on exterior walls, and in a manner suggesting that he is king in all but name. At some point in his career Herihor takes the progression yet further, his earthly power being such that he is able to build monuments for himself and the gods in the role of king. This sequence of events certainly favours a Piankh-Herihor succession.

Art as a factor of royal authority

It also seems pertinent to the present discussion that the Oracle of Nesamun, which depicts the festival of *ipt-ḥmt-s*,⁵⁶ does suggest that the monthly festivals continued to take place at Thebes during the reign of Ramesses XI, although one might wonder if, during the Late Ramesside Period, the principal festivals of kingship – the Opet and Valley Festivals – had been continued on any regular basis, particularly during periods of political unrest. It may therefore be apposite to consider that, in constructing and decorating the forecourt of Khonsu Temple, and with the provision of a new barque for Amun-Re – as attested by the Report of Wenamun and confirmed in the texts and images on the west wall of the forecourt⁵⁷ – Herihor expended considerable resources in both labour and materials in the enhancement and rejuvenation of the Theban ritual landscape; a circumstance likely indicating both the extent of his authority in the region and the return of the spectacle and majesty of kingship to Thebes.

In the forecourt, Herihor focused on the Opet Festival as the dominant theme of his decorative repertoire. The Opet Festival establishes the legitimacy of the mortal ruler as the son of Amun and the related texts and images do not merely record Herihor's kingship, they serve to fashion it. The artistic motifs decorating the ritual landscape create the reality of the mythology informing the ideology of the state. They give form to the metaphysical concepts derived from the ancient understanding of the natural forces of the universe, notions which establish the legitimate authority of the mortal ruler as one effective in the non-corporeal realm of the *ntrw*. The king became the living manifestation of the Horus *k3*, the abstract ideal of kingship passed from king to king since the beginning of time and an aspect of the demiurge itself brought into being at the moment of creation with the responsibility for maintaining *ma'at*: the ordered state of the universe at the moment of creation. In this way the imagery reifies the abstract ideal of traditional pharaonic kingship and serves as a template for the earthly ritual performances enhancing and supporting that ideology.⁵⁸ The social and political import of Herihor's works in Khonsu Temple, the most extensive display of royal authority in the Theban landscape since the rule of Ramesses III, cannot therefore be dismissed as the activities of a mere ceremonial figurehead, as suggested by Kitchen.⁵⁹ The works in question rather confirm Herihor's active role as sole ruler and intermediary between

⁵⁵ Epigraphic Survey 1979.

⁵⁶ Nims 1948: 159.

⁵⁷ Gardiner 1932: 61ff; Epigraphic Survey 1979: 8 and pl. 21.

⁵⁸ Gregory 2013: 29-30.

⁵⁹ Kitchen 2009: 192, 199-200.

the physical and metaphysical worlds of the ancient Egyptian perception: a role essential to sustain traditional pharaonic hierarchy in Thebes at a time when – as such circumstances imply – the region had become politically independent from Tanite rule.⁶⁰

In conclusion

From the circumstances outlined above, it is clear that while the ostraca with the draft letters to Piankh and Herihor are perhaps not strong evidence for a Piankh-Herihor succession, they offer no support for a reversal of that sequence. Moreover the possibility that Herihor, while in the process of creating the reality of his royal status within Khonsu Temple, permitted his deputy to present himself as the interpreter of oracles in the nearby, and relatively public, area on the east wall of the north-south axis in a scene authorized by reference to a northern king seems slight. Thus the obstacle of the Oracle of Nesamun appears too great to be overcome by the invention of some otherwise unattested ‘protocol’ as suggested by James and Morkot. Consequently, on this ground, little credence can be given to the possibility that Piankh’s period of office as General and First Servant of Amun came during the early years of Herihor’s kingship.

It seems more likely that by the time of Herihor’s rise to kingship Ramesses XI, and perhaps also Piankh, was either dead or of little political consequence in the Thebaid. It may be the case, as seems to be indicated by the text of the Dibabieh Stela, that Smendes ruled in Upper Egypt for a brief period between the reigns of Ramesses XI and Herihor.⁶¹ Nevertheless, regardless of the lack of evidence from which may be determined the precise sequence of events relating to the absolute or relative chronology required for an accurate historical narrative, the elements forming the focus of the present discussion – the ostraca and Oracle of Nesamun – appear to support a Piankh-Herihor succession in the role of *ḥm-ntr tpy n Imn*. This order of events is given further support by the sequence implied in the scenes inscribed for holders of the office of *ḥm-ntr tpy n Imn* along the north-south axis at Karnak. The decoration of the forecourt of Khonsu Temple tends to indicate that with his accession to royal authority Herihor established political autonomy in Thebes, his rule – sanctioned by iconographic representation in the ritual landscape in the tradition of pharaonic kingship – bringing some respite from the political uncertainties in the region during the Late Ramesside Period.

⁶⁰ Gregory 2006: 131-2.

⁶¹ The Dibabieh Stela was carved in a quarry near Gebelein to commemorate repairs made by Smendes to Luxor Temple following flood damage. The cartouches indicate that Smendes was by this time king, and such evidence has been seen to indicate that, following the death of Ramesses XI, Smendes was the ruler of all Egypt (Kitchen 1996: §213, §214). However, on the available evidence there seems no reason to discount the possibility that Smendes’ rule preceded that of Herihor (cf. Thijs 2005: 79-80). This interpretation was earlier suggested by Daressy (1888: 138) who, in a commentary on the text of the Dibabieh Stela, suggested that Ramesses was succeeded by Smendes as the sole king in Egypt and ‘ce n'est que plus tard que Herihor aurait rejeté l'autorité du nouveau Pharaoh’ [It was only later that Herihor had rejected the authority of the new Pharaoh].

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