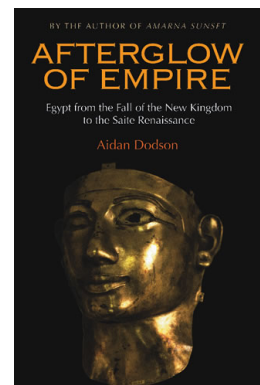


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Review by Steven R. W. Gregory

A. Dodson. *Afterglow of Empire: Egypt from the Fall of the New Kingdom to the Saite Renaissance*. The American University in Cairo Press: Cairo, New York. 2012. ISBN 9789774165313. Hardback £19.95. xxviii + 343 pages, 133 figures, 10 maps, and 5 appendices.



In the Preface [pp. ix-xi] the author sets out his intent to write an overview of the Late Ramesside and Third Intermediate Periods which is informed by current debate and tests “‘received wisdom’” on pertinent matters in the light of advances in scholarship since the earlier ‘seminal’ work of Kitchen on the subject. That the main body text of this work consists of some 180 pages – the remaining pages taken up with appendices, endnotes, extensive bibliography, and index – the printable area of which also incorporates 133 figures, suggests that little of the described intent may be achieved in any great depth. However, as the author states from the outset, only ‘a distillation of research and thinking’ in relation to the period in question is presented – and in some respects this aim is achieved. What does disappoint to some extent is the failure of the work to meet expectations generated by the title of the book: ‘The Afterglow of Empire’.

‘Afterglow’ may invoke some lingering impression of past glory or success and, in the context of the title, the past glory and success of the New Kingdom ‘empire’. ‘Empire’ conjures notions of a group of states under the political and commercial control of a single entity. Thus expectations may be that Egypt’s relations with its erstwhile vassals, with particular emphasis on economic and political status, would be central to the themes pursued. Rather, the reader is presented, for the most part, with a chronologically ordered study of the genealogy and prosopography of the highest echelons of the Egyptian ruling elite during the period in question, as far as that may be determined from inscriptions which, in the main, survive in the monumental and funerary records. Consequently one may wonder why the title was chosen: perhaps for dramatic effect; perhaps to target the wider ‘popular’ market; perhaps the choice was not entirely that of the author. Speculation aside, whatever the rationale it seems to have been poorly judged, as what the book does do it does extremely well, and this could have been better reflected in the title of what is clearly a polished academic work.

After a short introduction giving a brief outline of the rise of the New Kingdom and its progress into the Twentieth Dynasty, Chapter 1, entitled 'The Fall of the House of Rameses', concentrates on the history of the last three kings of the period. Here Dodson recognises the present difficulties encountered when attempting to fix the rather tricky chronological era known as the '*whm-mswt*' within absolute chronology [pp. 9-13] and, while accepting the somewhat tenuous nature of the proposition, suggests a sequence of events in which the reigns of Rameses IX/X should be seen as, at least in part, contemporary with that of Rameses XI. The author continues by offering a reassessment of evidence relating to principal characters of the era – and their immediate successors, including Piankh, Panehsy, Herihor, Smendes, and Pinedjem I – in that light. It must be accepted that Dodson's ideas relating to this period have a degree of plausibility, however this might be said of many other speculative theories relating to the period – a situation likely to persist in any attempt to present a narrative history on the strength of the evidence presently available.

What does become apparent in this opening chapter is the style of the work which is indeed, as promised, 'a distillation'. Only a brief summary of the evidence itself is presented. Yet there is clear indication as to where deeper considerations of that evidence may be found, as set out in the extensive endnotes. This style allows for a rapid assimilation of the pertinent aspects of each reign covered whilst outlining how further investigation of specific themes may be pursued, thus providing a clear overview for the general reader while at the same time providing a very useful guide for those engaged in deeper research of the period considered.

In Chapter 2, entitled 'Of Tanis and Thebes', Dodson presents an overview of the complex, and often uncertain, genealogies of the upper echelons of elite and royal personages of the Twenty-first Dynasty. Again, there are many tentative assertions as to how the surviving evidence relating to the interrelationships between the members of these ruling houses may be interpreted, but the speculative nature is made clear; the points made are well-considered and well-reasoned; and, it may be said, without some degree of interpretation a mere presentation of facts would be extremely dull. It is perhaps unfortunate, though not entirely unexpected in the light of much existing commentary regarding this period, that Dodson chooses to prolong the myth that Thebes, during the Twenty-first Dynasty, was largely under the control of a 'pontificate' (for example, pp. 56, 62, 64 and 68). The use of sacerdotal terminology in respect of the Theban ruling elite is a trend instigated and embedded in history by nineteenth and twentieth century scholars; a trend seemingly influenced by their own Christian ideology. The use of such terminology seems to imply that Thebes was under a system of government which was in some way different from that of regions more directly under the control of the Tanite kings – a notion not supported by extant archaeological or historical material. However such terminology, no matter how inaccurate, is unlikely to be easily eradicated.

Chapter 3, 'The House of Shoshenq' – following the same pattern as that of the previous chapters – concentrates on the elite successions during the larger part of the Twenty-second Dynasty, while Chapter 4, 'Disintegrations', covers the period following the death of Osorkon II as far as the advent of Kushite rule in Egypt, a time during which the once centralized state was increasingly fragmenting. Dodson here deftly, and perhaps wisely, avoids adding to controversies regarding the precise structure and memberships of the various royal houses – suggesting that engagement in such activities tends 'to create more heat than light' [p. 124]. It is however noteworthy that the existence of an autonomous Theban Dynasty during this period receives a greater degree of acceptance than has often hitherto been the case in some discussions of the Third Intermediate Period [pp. 114, 124].

In Chapter 5, 'Saviours from the South' – as in the following chapter – Dodson gives a little more historical narrative than in previous sections of the book. He returns to the end of the New Kingdom but shifts spatially to the south to trace the origins of the Kushite Dynasty before concentrating on the Twenty-fifth Dynasty from Alara through to Piye, with particular emphasis on

events as set out on Piye's Victory Stela [pp. 146-9]. The author then returns to his established formula and concentrates upon the interrelationships within the Kushite royal line. The chapter ends with further brief historical narrative outlining the Kushite struggle against the Assyrian campaigns conducted under Esarhaddon and Ashur-Banipal.

Chapter 6, the final episode, entitled 'From Humiliation to Renaissance', begins with a brief account of the reign of Tanutamun, and his ultimate defeat by the Assyrian king, Ashur-banipal. This is followed by a summary of the Kushite line ruling in Nubia into the Roman Period before returning to the end of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty and discussing the reunification of Egypt by Psamtik I. Consideration of the interrelationships of the leading figures of the Saite Dynasty follows, ending with Egypt's absorption into the Persian empire following the defeat in battle of the last Saite king, Psamtik III. A couple of paragraphs are added to give a somewhat superfluous summary of Egypt's political status during the period from 525 BC to 1952 AD.

Of the appendices, 1-3 are concerned with chronology. Appendix 1 contains a somewhat speculative discussion as to the merits, or otherwise, of the Assyrian king list [pp. 182-5] – a subject perfectly valid as a topic for study in itself, but its relevance in the context of the presently considered work is perhaps questionable, other than in that it does mirror the author's preference there for genealogical study. It seems that a simple acknowledgment, as on page 189, that 'the 1265 accession year for Rameses II and the 943 accession year for Shoshenq I have been adopted as the basis for the chronological structure proposed in this book and enshrined in the following two appendices' would have been adequate. Similarly, Appendix 4 contains a discussion of the titulary of kings and God's Wives which seems a little overworked within the overall context of the book [pp. 202-4]. That said, the list of the names of kings and God's Wives which follows is both appropriate and useful, as are the diagrammatic genealogies which are the subject of Appendix 5 and which – as do the comprehensive endnotes; bibliography; detailed and informative map; good quality supporting images, which are both well-chosen and appropriate to the text; and index – serve as a useful aid when considering some of the complex lines of succession discussed elsewhere.

The book does contain some errors, but who has not overlooked a few despite the most assiduous proof-reading. A particularly memorable example occurs early in the work when, a few pages after the claim 'that some degree of adjustment of dates—downward—is both necessary and desirable' [p. xi], the author states, under the head 'Abbreviations and Conventions', that 'The Egyptian year was divided into three seasons, in succession *3ht*, *pwt*, and *šmw*, each of which was split into thirty days' [p. xv]. If it were so it would have been a rather short year; thereby allowing the inference that the chronology may be reduced by some 74%, allowing for the 5 year-end feast days. As a degree of downward adjustment this seems rather excessive!

In discussion of an oracle text bearing the name of Ramesses XI and the date 'Year 7 *wḥm-mswt*' [p. 9] the end of sentence reference directs the reader to '(figs. 22-24)', however, the figures mentioned appear to have no direct bearing to the passage in question, which rather seems to discuss the text now generally recognised as The Oracle of Nesamun which is produced as 'Fig. 6' [p. 15]. That the Oracle of Nesamun is in fact the topic referred to is supported by the further reference given to endnote 61 [p. 9] which directs the reader to 'Porter and Moss 1972: 186 [276]'. In the revised 1991 edition of that work reference to the Nesamun text does appear on page 186, although here in section '(576)'. Elsewhere, on page 54, in discussion of the mummy of Masaharta the reader is directed to fig. 38, which is in fact an image of a gateway at Karnak; on page 102 the caption to 'Fig. 79' refers to a raised area on the left when it is in fact on the right; and on pages 145-6, a reference to 'Map 9' should, it seems, read 'Map 10'. Of course, in each case these are clearly unintentional circumstances which should not detract from the overall value of the book.

It is perhaps a matter of subjective opinion as to what degree, if at all, this work may replace Kitchen's 'The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt' as the primary source of information for

students of that era. However, Dodson has certainly provided a viable alternative, and one which does offer more up-to-date – and perhaps on occasion more realistic – interpretations of the evidence. From a purely material perspective, the book is made up of good quality materials and nicely finished. It's content does lack any in-depth consideration of what may be described as the more literary material from the considered period, but this can easily be found elsewhere, as in Ritner's 2009 study, 'The Libyan Anarchy: Inscriptions from Egypt's Third Intermediate Period'. The lasting impression is that 'Afterglow of Empire' is a mine of information regarding the intricacies of the royal families of the era which, in this respect, constitutes a useful reference work for both scholars and students of the Third Intermediate Period which is unlikely to be surpassed for some time.