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The Late Period (664–332 BC)

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Egyptologists have generally been dismissive of the Late Period, regarding it all too often as the last gasp of a once great culture. Such views seriously devalue the historical achievement of these centuries as well as the remarkable vitality that pharaonic civilization continued to display. The student of this age has also a unique advantage. In earlier periods we have to rely largely or exclusively on Egyptian evidence, with all its inherent distortions, but the historian of the Late Period disposes of a much broader range of written evidence, which offers unparalleled potential for cross-reference and thereby provides insights into the workings of Egyptian political and military institutions stripped of the propagandist veneer invariably applied to historical narrative by native Egyptian scribes.

The centuries under discussion break down into four clearly defined phases: the Saite Dynasty (664–525 BC); the First Persian Occupation (525–404 BC); a period of independence (404–343 BC); and the Second Persian Occupation (343–332 BC).

The Saite Dynasty: The Resurgence of Egypt's Power

The Saite reunification of Egypt in the mid-650s BC reversed a long-running trend in the country's history in that all recent precedents pointed imperiously to continued fragmentation punctuated by bouts of foreign domination. The years following the end of the 20th Dynasty had brought the disintegration of the kingdom under a variety of pressures: the weakness of the last Ramesside rulers provoked the collapse of centralized government; the development of the power of

the priesthood of Amun-Ra at Thebes created a formidable rival to royal authority; and the infiltration of the country by Libyans rapidly led to their ascendancy in the social and political hierarchy. Not surprisingly, vigorous Libyan princelings had experienced little difficulty in getting their hands on the royal office, thus creating a sequence of dynasties of varying efficiency. Later, the tangled web of the 25th Dynasty—characterized by intermittent Nubian domination—covered the best part of 100 years. Although the 25th Dynasty started well, it ended with the country suffering severely from the Assyrian invasions of 671 and 663 BC.

The founder of the 26th Dynasty, heir to this legacy, was, therefore, confronted by several problems: the ancient ideal of Egypt as a unified kingdom had been severely eroded by the rivalry of opposing power blocks in the form of the priesthood of Thebes and Libyan dynasts; this diffusion of power generated economic weakness and was, at the same time, aggravated by it; finally, the ambitions of Asiatic enemies and Nubian kings to regain control of Egypt posed a recurrent external threat. Any attempt to recreate a powerful and united Egyptian state was dependent on the eradication, or at least neutralization, of these factors. In this the 26th Dynasty achieved spectacular success, which was to be crowned with nothing less than the resurgence of Egypt as a major international power.

The credit for reunifying Egypt falls to Psamtek I (664–610 BC), whose father Nekau I (672–664 BC) had previously ruled at Sais under Assyrian protection and had been killed for his pains by the Nubian King Tanutamani (664–656 BC) in 664 BC. Psamtek succeeded to his father's position with Assyrian support, initially controlling about half the Delta with his main centres of power at Sais, Memphis, and Athribis, as well as close religious links with Buto. The Assyrians evidently saw this development as a continuation of the old system of rule through local princes, but the sands were swiftly running out for such power as Nineveh had in Egypt. Given their pressing commitments elsewhere in the Empire, the Assyrians simply did not have the military strength to maintain their position indefinitely so far west. With typical Saite strategic acumen, it did not take Psamtek long to exploit this situation, so that relations with Assyria quickly took a very different turn, and in about 658 BC we find him receiving support from Gyges of Lydia in emancipating himself from Assyrian control, an episode that may well be linked with Herodotus' tradition that Psamtek employed Carian and Ionian mercenaries in his efforts to strengthen and extend his authority. In addition to military power, our sources

highlight a further dimension to his strategy: strengthening his economic base by developing trade links with Greeks and Phoenicians. It was evidently firmly grasped by this formidable ruler that all power must be based on a sound exchequer.

By 660 BC Psamtek had control of the entire Delta, and from this potent military base he was able to gain mastery of the rest of the country by 656 BC, mainly, it would seem, by diplomatic means, although the wheels of diplomacy were certainly oiled by the obvious availability of a substantial well-equipped military force of none-too-scrupulous foreign mercenaries. He also benefited substantially from the well-honed pliability of local princes such as the Shipmasters of Herakleopolis Magna and Mentuemhat of Thebes, who quickly saw the advantages of coming to an accommodation. At least equally pressing was the problem of gaining control of the powerful priesthood of Amun-Ra at Thebes, which had been a significant factor in weakening royal authority since the late New Kingdom. Here a major step in resolving the difficulty was taken when Psamtek arranged for his daughter Nitigret to be appointed as heiress to the 'god's wife of Amun', thereby initiating a process intended to place the major southern repository of ecclesiastical power firmly in the hands of the dynasty.

Power gained is one thing; power maintained is quite another, but the process of consolidation was carried out with triumphant success. A major contribution was made by the mercenaries who had played such a significant role in the conquest of the country. Our documentation lays much emphasis on those of Greek and Carian extraction, but we also hear of Jews, Phoenicians, and possibly Shasu Bedouin. These troops had two functions. In the first place, they were intended to guarantee Egypt's security from external attack in the face of a series of enemies, initially Assyrians and subsequently Chaldaeans (Babylonians) and Persians. However, they also undoubtedly provided a counterweight within the country to the power of the *machimoi*, the native Egyptian warrior class, who were, in origin, Libyans and posed a significant potential internal threat to royal authority.

Herodotus informs us that *stratopeda* ('camps') were established between Bubastis and the sea on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile. He claims that these camps were occupied without a break for over a century until the mercenaries were moved to Memphis at the beginning of the reign of Ahmose II (570–526 BC), but the archaeological evidence presents a rather more complex picture. At Tell Defenna (Greek Daphnae) the earliest king exemplified is certainly Psamtek I, but the vast majority of the material dates to the time of Ahmose II—

that is, the distribution contradicts the Herodotean tradition. We also know of another camp 20 km. from Daphnae, a little to the south of Pelusium, where sixth-century Greek pottery has been found in quantity. The most plausible explanation for the contradiction between our literary and archaeological evidence is that the troops were pulled out of the camps at the beginning of Ahmose's reign as the result of an anti-Greek backlash (see below), but reintroduced at a later stage to counter the growing menace of Persia. As for their integration into the Egyptian army, the famous Greek inscription on the leg of one of the colossi at Abu Simbel, as well as later practice, indicates that the mercenaries, under Egyptian command, formed one of the two corps in the army whose supreme commander was also Egyptian. It has to be said that these troops were not consistently reliable, and we do have evidence of a revolt of mercenaries at Elephantine during the reign of Apries (589–570 BC).

Petrie's work at Tell Defenna has provided a vivid and probably typical picture of the character of the permanent bases of such troops in the Saite period. The site is located on a large plain covered with pottery and dominated by the remains of a mud-brick platform constructed on the standard honeycomb principle consisting of casemates many of which were filled with sand. Its original height was estimated by Petrie to have been about 30 feet (c.10 m.), and he believed that it had been surmounted by a fort. This structure, which was certainly built by Psamtek I, seems to have functioned as a keep within an enclosure demarcated by a massive oblong mud-brick wall, but this had been eroded to ground level by Petrie's time. Outside the wall lay the civilian settlement, mainly to the east. Excavation yielded a substantial quantity of Greek infantry equipment, but the site was also a naval base from which Greek-style war galleys could operate, a situation reflecting the important role played by the mercenaries in the Egyptian navy.

Not surprisingly, the preference shown to these foreign troops was far from welcome to the *machimoi*. According to Herodotus, a group of them mutinied and withdrew from Egypt to a site that may well have lain somewhere in the vicinity of the Blue Nile and Gezira area near Omdurman, if we can trust his topographical data. By the time of Apries, things had got far worse and eventually reached a disastrous level when we find the king being swept from the throne by a *machimoi* backlash against the privileged position of Greeks and Carians in the military establishment. The spark that lit this powder keg was a disastrous defeat sustained by a force of *machimoi* sent against the Greek city of Cyrene, which provided the opportunity for Ahmose to use

these troops to defeat Apries' mercenaries at Momemphis in 570 BC and usurp the throne of Egypt.

The economy was an equally important focus of Saite policy in reconstructing Egypt. The foundation of a sound economy in the country was, and always has been, sound agriculture, and by Ahmose's time this had been raised to a spectacular level of success. Herodotus (2. 177. 1) comments, 'It is said that it was during the reign of Ahmose II that Egypt attained its highest level of prosperity both in respect of what the river gave the land and in respect of what the land yielded to men and that the number of inhabited cities at that time reached in total 20,000.'

Trade was also greatly encouraged. In our textual sources, Greek relations play a major role, although it would be as well to remember that most of the sources are themselves Greek. Within Egypt itself we hear of trading stations such as 'The Wall of the Milesians' and 'Islands' bearing such names as Ephesus, Chios, Lesbos, Cyprus, and Samos, but their precise relationship to the Crown or other Greek centres in the country is quite unclear for the earliest period. However, by far the best-documented trading centre is Naukratis, established on the Canopic branch of the Nile not far from the capital, Sais, and with excellent communications for internal and external trade. Although the city was founded by Milesians in the mid- or late seventh century BC, members of other East Greek cities were also firmly established there, as well as traders from the island state of Aegina in the Saronic Gulf south of Athens. Excavation has revealed a series of sacred enclosures dedicated to Greek cults, a scarab factory producing material for export, and a typical Late Period honeycomb platform comparable to that at Tell Defenna, which may have been military in purpose but could equally well have had civilian, administrative functions.

It is difficult to determine to what extent trade was regulated in the early years of the foundation. It may be that from the very beginning the model of Mirgissa in Nubia during the Middle Kingdom applied. This system is summarily described in the stele of the eighth year of the reign of Senusret III as follows:

The southern frontier made in regnal year 8 under the majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Khakaure (may he live for ever and ever) in order to prevent it being passed by any Nubian journeying north by land or in a *kai*-boat as well as any livestock belonging to Nubians, with the exception of a Nubian who shall come to traffic at Mirgissa or on an embassy, or on any matter which may lawfully be done with them; but it shall be forbidden for any *kai*-boat of the Nubians to pass northwards beyond Semna for ever.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that Naukratis became the channel through which *all* Greek trade was required by law to flow from c.570 BC. However, there is evidence of even more strenuous efforts to promote trade; we know that Nekau II (610–595 BC) at the very least began to construct a canal running from the Nile to the Red Sea, an activity that must indicate a revival of economic activity in the Red Sea area, which had been a major focus of commercial concern in earlier dynasties. It is also reasonable to regard the existence of the implausible Herodotean narrative of a circumnavigation of Africa instigated by Nekau II as a further reflection of interest in this quarter.

Impressive and even spectacular though these measures may have been, we must never lose sight of the simple fact that big battalions and a full exchequer can never be a sufficient basis for lasting power. There must always be an ideological underpinning that is acceptable to the subject people. In Egypt the basis for this had always been the concept of divine kingship that gave the pharaoh a clearly defined and universally accepted role, not only in the governance of the kingdom but in the very maintenance of the cosmos itself. This agenda had to be accepted and rigorously observed; to *be* a legitimate pharaoh it was essential to *act* legitimately. I have summarized this pharaonic ideal elsewhere as follows:

The basic elements are: pharaoh ascends the throne as Horus, champion of cosmic order (*maat*) and vanquishes the forces of darkness; in continuation of this role he then ensures the well-being of Egypt in economic terms by organizing the irrigation system and in military terms by maintaining its military forces and defeating its external foes; the *pax deorum* is ensured by supplying temples with all their requirements and by constructing monuments both for the gods and for himself (statues and mortuary installations); expeditions will be sent to Punt, Sinai and other canonical sources of raw materials and in the course of these operations the gods will indicate their approval of the king by *biayt*, 'marvels', which may consist both of the conspicuous success of the enterprise and of any signs or omens which the gods may choose to provide. The result of all this will be long life for the king and the realization of the will of the gods in the establishment of the cosmic order on earth. (*Herodotus Book II. Commentary 2. 16–17*)

Psamtek I was well placed here, but, at the same time, burdened with a heavy responsibility. He was undertaking one of the most critical roles of kingship, donning the mantle of Menes and Mentuhotep II: he was unifying the country and restoring the proper order of things, the state of being that the Egyptians called *maat*. This emerges with crystal clarity at the beginning of the preserved section of the Nitiqret Adoption Stele, the longest surviving royal inscription of his reign:

I [Psamtek] have acted for him as should be done for my father. (2) I am his first-born son, one made prosperous by the father of the gods, one who carries out the rituals of the gods; he begat him for himself so as to satisfy his heart. To be 'god's wife' have I given him my daughter, and I have endowed her more generously than those who were before her. Surely he will be satisfied with her adoration and protect the land of (3) him who gave her to him . . . I will not do that very thing which ought not to be done and drive out an heir from his seat inasmuch as I am a king who loves (4) truth—my special abomination is lying—the son and protector of his father, taking the inheritance of Geb, and uniting the two portions while still a youth. (ll. 1–4)

This devotion to the gods could not be confined to statements of intent. Both Psamtek and his successors engaged in architectural work on sacred installations to express their devotion and maintain the goodwill and support of the gods. Saite buildings are poorly preserved in the archaeological record, to a considerable extent because they were constructed in the Delta, where conditions for survival are much less favourable than in Upper Egypt. Nevertheless, enough information is preserved in Herodotus, inscriptions, and the building fragments to demonstrate that the Saite rulers did everything they could to fulfil this part of the agenda of kingship. It is claimed that Psamtek I constructed the south pylon of the temple of Ptah at Memphis and also built on behalf of the Apis bull in the same shrine; his successor Nekau II is known to have been responsible for monuments in honour of Apis in the same city, and there is inscriptional evidence of his endeavours in the limestone quarries in the Mokattam Hills, where Psamtek II (595–589 BC) has also left signs of quarrying work. Ahmose II was also extremely active in Sais, the home of the dynasty, where he erected a pylon for the temple of Neith, set up colossal statues, and manufactured human-headed sphinxes for a processional way. Indeed, the evidence leaves us with a powerful impression of the ecclesiastical splendours of this city in the Late Period that must have owed much to the work of these Saite kings. The chief focus was the sacred enclosure of Neith, which contained the main cult centre (the 'Mansion of Neith') and provision for a host of associated gods (Osiris, Horus, Sobek, Atum, Amun, Bastet, Isis, Nekhbet, Wadjet, and Hathor). There was, in particular, a burial place of Osiris and a sacred lake on which the rituals of the Festival of the Resurrection of Osiris were celebrated, and the site was richly embellished with features such as obelisks of which the sad ruins of Sais give little hint today.

The city of Sais was, however, just one recipient of 26th Dynasty largesse. We also hear, for instance, of Ahmose setting up colossi at Memphis (two of granite), building a temple of Isis in the same city,

and working at Philae, Elephantine, Nebesha, Abydos, and the oases, while he also made contributions to earlier structures on many other sites, including Karnak, Mendes, the Tanta area, Tell el-Maskhuta, Benha, Sohag, el-Mansha, and Edfu. This intense building activity is in turn reflected in quarry inscriptions at Tura and Elephantine.

The ideology of kingship not only encompasses the world of the living but also gives the king a critical function beyond the grave: the living king is the embodiment of Horus and rules the living; the deceased king is Osiris, king of the dead, but, at the same time, since Osiris in this context was assimilated to Ra, the king expected to participate in the cycle of cosmic action. In order to propel the king into his life beyond the grave and maintain him there, an elaborate programme of ritual was devised, the most spectacular surviving illustrations of which are the pyramids of the Old and Middle kingdoms and the New Kingdom tombs in the Valley of the Kings with their attendant cult temples. The rulers of the 26th Dynasty built no funerary monuments as spectacular as these but operated firmly within Late Period tradition. From the end of the New Kingdom, kings had been buried in chapel tombs in temple courtyards, partly, no doubt, for security reasons, but also possibly as a reflection of a sense of dependence on and devotion to the deities in question. Following this practice, the kings of the 26th Dynasty were interred in chapel tombs in the courtyard of the temple of Neith at Sais. None of these structures has survived, but there is no difficulty in reconstructing them from the description of Herodotus and obvious earlier parallels at Medinet Habu and Tanis. They consisted of two elements: above ground a mortuary chapel was constructed that was entered by way of a double door from a columned portico. The walls of this structure were probably decorated with painted relief sculpture relating to the mortuary cult of the deceased king that was celebrated in the chapel. Beneath was the burial vault containing the royal sarcophagus, and this too was probably decorated. Grave goods, to judge from Tanite precedents, would have been relatively restricted, but certainly included the traditional royal *shabtis* and canopic jars.

To date in this chapter we have concentrated largely on Saite policies and actions within Egypt, but, given the grim history of recurrent invasion in the 25th Dynasty, we cannot be far wrong in assuming that the major issue for the rulers of this period was the task of keeping the frontiers of Egypt free from foreign invaders. The most critical area was Asia, where initially the problem was the defence of Egypt's border against a possible renewal of Assyrian attempts to gain control of

Egypt, but difficulties much closer to their homeland made this impossible for the Assyrians to achieve. While evidence of Egyptian military activity in Asia at this stage is far from plentiful, Psamtek's operations clearly met with considerable success, despite the setback of a horde invasion of the Near East by Cimmerian barbarians in c.630 BC, which he countered with the eminently sensible expedient of buying them off. We hear of a successful, if protracted, siege of Ashdod (probably c.655–630 BC), and late in his reign we encounter Egyptian forces operating in Asia even further afield than in the heady days of the 18th-Dynasty rulers Thutmose I and III. This startling phenomenon was the consequence of the double threat to Assyria's very existence posed, on the one hand, by the rise of the Chaldaeans in southern Iraq and, on the other, by the growing menace of Media to the east in Iran. This speedily led to an abrupt Assyrian volte-face in relation to Egypt, in the form of an alliance between the two nations as a result of which we find Egyptian forces operating against the Chaldaeans inside Iraq itself in 616 BC. Henceforth, until the last decades of the 26th Dynasty, it was the Chaldaeans who were the major enemy of Egypt.

Psamtek's successor, Nekaou II, continued his father's policy in the north. Initially things went well, and again we are confronted with the spectacle of Egyptian forces campaigning east of the Euphrates against the Chaldaeans, defeating *en passant* Josiah of Judah in 609 BC. The result was that the Egyptians were able to establish themselves on the Euphrates for a short while, but this position was soon lost in 605 BC as a result of their catastrophic reverse at Carchemish, which was followed by a brusque retreat to the eastern frontier of Egypt. The Egyptians kept the Chaldaeans at bay, and on this occasion the border was not breached. A small recovery seems to have been made in the reign of Psamtek II, who was certainly able to mount some sort of expedition into Palestine during the fourth year of his reign. In addition, his diplomacy helped foment a general Levantine revolt against the Babylonians that involved, amongst others, Zedekiah of Judah. Herodotus makes it clear that the Near Eastern operations of these rulers were by no means entirely land orientated, indicating that Nekaou constructed a fleet of ramming war galleys that may have been an early type of trireme and some of which were used in the Mediterranean and others in the Red Sea. Indeed, it may be that the abortive Red Sea canal was intended, in part, to facilitate the transfer of naval forces from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean as circumstances required.

Apries addressed himself vigorously to the Chaldaean problem. Initially he undertook large-scale operations against the Chaldaeans in

conjunction with Phoenician cities and Zedekiah of Judah. These activities led to disaster and possibly invasion of Egypt in the late 580s BC. Subsequently a strategically well-conceived series of campaigns was directed against Cyprus and Phoenicia (c.574–570 BC) in which good use was made of the fleet. Ahmose II, who succeeded Apries, was nothing if not lucky. He was able to defeat a Chaldaean invasion of Egypt in the fourth year of his reign, and after that the Chaldaeans had sufficient problems within the empire to keep them fully occupied for the early part of his reign. In due course, however, he was faced with a much more dangerous enemy created by the rise of Persia under Cyrus the Great, who ascended the throne in 559 BC. To deal with this menace a grand alliance of threatened nations was created, which consisted of Egypt, Croesus of Lydia, Sparta, and the Chaldaeans. With consummate strategic skill Cyrus knocked out the link between the scattered allies by destroying Lydia in 546 BC. He then turned on the Chaldaeans and took their capital Babylon in 538 BC, leaving Ahmose with no major Near Eastern allies. Ahmose reacted by developing a policy of cultivating close relations with Greek states to strengthen his hand against the impending onslaught, and again he was lucky. He died in 526 BC before the storm broke, leaving his son Psamtek III (526–525 BC) to face the Achaemenid assault.

The south was not such an acute threat as the north, but the Nubians could not be ignored, not least because they had certainly not given up their ambitions to rule Egypt. There is no firm evidence of military action against them in the reign of Psamtek I—indeed, the introduction to the Nitiqret Adoption Stele suggests that he was prepared to forget his differences with the Nubians, which included the death of his father in battle against them, and that he adopted a conciliatory policy. This stance may well have persisted to the end of his reign, but we should be wary of assuming too much, given the highly defective nature of our evidence. The situation was certainly different in the reign of Nekau, who at some undefinable date was forced to turn his attention to what a fragmentary text indicates was a rebellion in Nubia; but the best-known Saite military commitment by far is that of Psamtek II, who dispatched a great expedition in the third year of his reign. This operation, which was designed to forestall a Nubian assault on Egypt, seems to have taken the Egyptian army at least to the fourth Nile cataract. It appears to have been successful, and we hear nothing more in the dynasty of major military operations to the south, although a demotic papyrus of the reign of Ahmose II describes the king as sending into Nubia a small expedition, the character of

which is quite unclear, and there is archaeological evidence of an Egyptian garrison at Dorginarti in Lower Nubia during the Saite and Persian periods.

Relations with the Libyans were not consistently good during the Saite Dynasty. The Saqqara Stele of the eleventh year of the reign of Psamtek I, despite its damaged state, provides evidence of problems with Libyan tribes to the west. These he seems to have defeated, and they do not appear to have been a problem subsequently—quite the contrary! About 571 BC we find the Libyans asking for Egyptian assistance in dealing with the expansionist policy of Cyrene, a Greek colony that had been founded in their territory about 630 BC. At the end of the reign of Apries this city embarked on a programme of expansion that brought them into collision with Egyptian interests, and in the ensuing war Egypt was catastrophically defeated. Ahmose II adopted a totally different approach to the Cyrene problem. As early as 567 BC we find him forming an alliance with them against the Chaldaeans, and this diplomatic link was cemented by marriage to a Cyrenean woman who was alleged by some of Herodotus' sources, with considerable plausibility, to have been a princess. This alliance stood the test of time surprisingly well and was still in place at the time of the Persian invasion in 525 BC.

The First Persian Period

Egypt's confrontation with Persia came to a head with the invasion of Egypt in 525 BC, which led to the defeat and capture of Psamtek III by Cambyses (525–522 BC) at the Battle of Pelusium. Cambyses' activities in Egypt present a totally contradictory image in our sources, the comments in classical authors being extremely unfavourable, whereas the Egyptian evidence depicts a ruler anxious to avoid offending Egyptian susceptibilities and presenting himself as an Egyptian king in all respects. This aspect comes through particularly strongly in the inscriptions on the statue of Udjahorresnet, where at least three major points emerge: in the first place, Cambyses had assumed at least the forms of Egyptian kingship; secondly, he was perfectly prepared to work with and promote native Egyptians to assist in government; and, thirdly, he showed a deep respect for native Egyptian religion. This latter point also emerges in his burial of an Apis bull with all the ancient rituals.

None of this prevented the outbreak of a revolt in Egypt when Cambyses died in 522 BC, but the independence gained was short lived,

since Darius (522–486 BC) was able to regain complete control of the country in 519/18 BC. With this reign, Egypt settled into a pattern the beginnings of which are already clearly visible in the reign of Cambyses. The head of the government was the Great King whose position was legitimized for Egyptian purposes by the only means possible—that is, by defining him as pharaoh on the same terms as a native Egyptian ruler. Cambyses' policy of massaging Egyptian ideological susceptibilities also continued under Darius both in religious matters and administration: the building or restoration of temples was a prominent feature—the medical school at Sais was restored, the building (or rebuilding) of the temple of Amun of Hibis in the Kharga Oasis was begun, and work was carried out at Busiris and the Serapeum at Saqqara, and possibly also at Elkab. Darius is also credited with a programme of law reform.

However, not all Persian kings showed the same delicate touch, and Xerxes (486–465 BC) received a particularly bad press for his impious disregard of temple privilege. As for administration, the Persians, like the Ptolemies after them, had the good sense to realize that the Egyptian system for running the country was the best that could be devised, and maintained it with only the minimum of Persian administrative overlay needed to integrate the province into the Achaemenid imperial organization. This primarily amounted to the insertion of a satrap at the top. The satrap, who was effectively a viceroy, was drawn from the cream of the Persian aristocracy, but his activities were none the less carefully monitored by the imperial network of inspectors or informers holding titles such as 'king's eye' or 'listeners'. He ran the central administration through a chancellery that was controlled by a chancellor assisted by a 'scribe'. The language used in the chancellery was Aramaic, a situation that required the employment of a staff of Egyptian translators. Below this level, the Persians showed a marked disinclination to innovate. The legal system remained Egyptian, and we can identify a series of Egyptians occupying positions of importance, if not power, throughout the period.

At the same time, we can see an uncompromising determination to keep firm control of the province, a policy that did not stop short of inserting non-Egyptians into Egypt and Egyptian institutions, as and when the Persians thought fit. They also ensured a substantial military presence for the maintenance of external and internal security, and Egypt was also expected to play its full part as a satrapy of the Persian empire. Between *c.* 510 and 497 BC Darius completed the construction of a canal begun under Nekau II running from the Pelusiac branch of

the Nile through the Wadi Tumilat to the Bitter Lakes and the Red Sea, a project that was clearly part of a policy of locking Egypt into the imperial network of communication. Not only were Egyptian craftsmen used for building operations as far afield as Persia, but also the military resources of the country were exploited to the full to advance Persian imperial expansion—Egyptians were involved in the naval assault on Miletus that brought the Ionian Revolt to an end in 494 BC, and Egyptian military and naval resources played a major role in the great assaults of Darius and Xerxes on Greece in 490 and 480 BC. The Egyptians supplied ropes for Xerxes' bridge of boats across the Hellespont and assisted in its construction, while the fleet of Xerxes used against the mainland Greek states in 480/79 BC contained 200 Egyptian triremes under the command of Achaemenes, the brother of Xerxes himself, as against the 300 supplied by the Phoenicians, indicating that Egypt was no mean naval power at this period. This contingent performed particularly well at Artemisium, where it captured five Greek ships with their crews, although this record does not seem to have been maintained at Salamis. Finally, we should note that the fiscal obligations of a satrapy were also laid upon Egypt, but these were not unduly oppressive.

Overall, the impression created by such sources as we have is that the Persian regime in Egypt was far from oppressive, and more than a few Egyptians found it perfectly possible to come to terms with it. Indeed there is indisputable evidence of a slow Egyptianization of the conquerors themselves. Nevertheless, there are obvious areas where tensions might arise. While the Great King might be presented for ideological purposes as pharaoh, he was an absentee landlord based in Iran and could not fail to appear to many as a token pharaoh only. Secondly, the conquest by the Persians did not allay the ambitions of native dynasts to rule the country, and they would have watched carefully for any opportunity to assert Egyptian independence and realize their own ambitions. Furthermore, Egyptian xenophobia, highlighted by Herodotus in the fifth century BC, will hardly have promoted integration between Persians and Egyptians, and this could be aggravated by religious considerations, as illustrated by an episode in the reign of Darius II (424–405 BC) involving mercenaries settled at Elephantine and the local population. Here we find the priests of the ram-headed god Khnum locked in a conflict with Jewish mercenaries that ended in the destruction of the temple of Iao (Yahweh). Given such flashpoints, it is hardly surprising that the history of the First Persian Period is punctuated by revolts. However, all these efforts came ultimately to

nought until, c.404 BC, the younger Amyrtaios successfully raised the flag of insurrection to inaugurate the last extended period of independence under native rulers that pharaonic civilization was to enjoy.

Egyptian Independence (404–343 BC)

Most of the detailed evidence for the political and military history of this period derives from Greek sources, which inevitably means that they reflect the interests of classical observers and readers. They paint a convincing picture of a period dominated by two recurrent issues: instability at home and the ever-present spectre of aggressive Persian power abroad. The grizzly panorama of intra- and inter-familial strife between aspirants to the throne emerges with stark clarity in the case of the 29th and 30th Dynasties. In the murky history of these two families we are confronted with a situation that we can only suspect for earlier Egyptian history but that, we can be confident, was not infrequently lurking behind the ideological mirage projected by pharaonic inscriptional evidence. Classical commentators, writing from quite a different perspective, reveal without compunction the complex interaction of individual ambition untrammelled by loyalty or ideological factors whereby ambitious political figures seize any opportunity for advancement provided by the sectional interests of the native Egyptian warrior class, Greek mercenary captains, and, less obviously, the Egyptian priesthood. For the 29th Dynasty our evidence is far from full, but it demonstrates unequivocally that almost every ruler had a short reign and suggests that all of them, with the exception of Hakor (393–380 BC), may have been deposed, sometimes probably worse. The classical sources are particularly revealing for the succeeding dynasty. The founder, Nectanebo I (380–362 BC), a general and apparently a member of a military family, almost certainly came to the throne as the result of a military *coup*, and we are unlikely to be guessing badly if we suspect that this experience motivated him in establishing his successor Teos (362–360 BC) as co-regent before his own death in order to strengthen the chances of a smooth family succession. Ultimately, this availed him nothing, because Teos was deposed in circumstances of which we are graphically informed. Indeed, nothing could give us the flavour of the politics of this period better than Plutarch's version of these events:

Then, having joined Tachos [i.e. Teos], who was making preparations for his campaign [against Persia], he [Agesilaus] was not appointed commander of the entire force, as he was hoping, but only given command of the mercenaries, whilst Chabrias

the Athenian was put in charge of the fleet. Tachos himself was commander-in-chief. This was the first thing which vexed Agesilaus; then, whilst he found the prince's arrogance and empty pretensions hard to bear, he was compelled to put up with them. He even sailed with him against the Phoenicians, and, setting aside his sense of dignity and his natural instincts, he showed deference and subservience, until he found his opportunity. For Tachos' cousin Nectanabis [i.e. the future Nectanebo II], who commanded part of the forces, rebelled, and, having been proclaimed king by the Egyptians and having sent to Agesilaus begging him for help, he made the same appeal to Chabrias, offering both men great rewards. Tachos presently learned of this and begged them to stand by him, whereupon Chabrias tried by persuasion and exhortation to keep Agesilaus on good terms with Tachos. . . . The Spartans sent a secret dispatch to Agesilaus ordering him to see to it that he did what was in Sparta's best interests, so Agesilaus took his mercenaries and transferred his allegiance to Nectanabis. . . . Tachos, deserted by his mercenaries, took to flight, but meanwhile another pretender rose up against Nectanabis in the province of Mendes and was declared king. (Plutarch, *Life of Agesilaus* 36–9)

Egyptian evidence, though far from copious, provides intriguing insights into the self-perception of these last native rulers. If we consider the titularies of the rulers of the 29th Dynasty, we find that Nepherites I bears a Horus name borrowed from Psamtek I and a Golden Horus name taken from Ahmose II, while Hakor uses the Horus and *nebty* names of Psamtek I and the Golden Horus name of Ahmose II. These phenomena demonstrate unequivocally that both of these pharaohs were determined to associate themselves with the great rulers of the 26th Dynasty, the most recent 'golden age' in Egypt's history.

Service to the gods is also a recurrent feature: Nepherites I has left evidence of work at Mendes, Saqqara, Sohag, Akhmim, and Karnak (where his son Psammuthis was also active), and Hakor's building operations can be identified throughout the country. In the 30th Dynasty, efforts were particularly spectacular: Nectanebo I built at Damanhur, Sais, Philae, Karnak, Hermopolis (where he significantly set up a stele before a pylon of Ramesses II), and Edfu, and we have evidence of Nectanebo II's personal participation in the burial of an Apis at Saqqara, as also of his role in raising the status of the Buchis bull of Armant to that of the Apis bull of Memphis; there is also inscriptional evidence of acts of piety to Isis of Behbeit el-Hagar, for whom he began the construction of an enormous temple. The cynicism of modern scholars has frequently led them to argue that these activities were very much the result of a determination to keep the support of the priests, and there is probably some truth in this, but it would be a mistake to deny that there was also genuine religious

fervour. In the Hermopolis stele of Nectanebo I the traditional reciprocal relationship between gods and the king is asserted: the king makes offerings to Thoth and Nehmetawy in return for the support that he believes they gave him in gaining control of the kingdom; the king also makes the traditional claim that his work in the temple restored what he found in ruins—in other words, he is reaffirming the old doctrine of the ‘cosmicizing’ role of pharaoh. In the Naukratis stele of this same ruler we find him attributing his success to Neith, the great goddess of Sais (again an affinity with the 26th Dynasty), insisting that wealth is the gift of the goddess, and emphasizing that he is preserving what his ancestors had done. There is surely no reason to argue that these ancient concepts had lost any of their force to motivate a ruler or to deny the sincerity of the gratitude expressed by reciprocating the beneficence of the gods.

When we turn to foreign policy, the dominant consideration is Persia, for which the loss of Egypt was never—and could not be—an accomplished fact. Fortunately for these last native pharaohs, pressing Persian concerns nearer home meant that the recovery of Egypt made it difficult for the Great King to give such a distant province his undivided attention until 374/3 BC, when Artaxerxes II (405–359 BC) embarked on the first major attempt to recover the country. The Egyptian approach to the Achaemenid threat oscillated between using diplomatic means to keep the Persians at bay and having recourse to large-scale military operations. Since Egypt’s preferred role was generally that of paymaster, direct military intervention by units of the army or navy is infrequent and occurs only when prompted by necessity or invincible ambition. The ease with which this policy could be conducted is explained by the fact that it unfolded as part of a much greater game, since all this Egyptian activity took place against the backdrop of the struggle for independence of other western provinces of the Achaemenid empire and the long-standing rivalry between Sparta and Persia to define their respective spheres of influence in the Aegean, Asia Minor, and the eastern Mediterranean. This created a lethal interplay of move and counter-move in which Egypt never had any difficulty in finding enthusiastic support. Indeed, its prominence in these operations was such that, even if the Persians had been prepared to let sleeping dogs lie, they could not have done so, since an independent Egypt would always have been a threat to the strategic equilibrium of the western empire. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Artaxerxes III (343–338 BC) organized no fewer than three major assaults to recover this lost but highly dangerous province.

We are fortunate in knowing a great deal of the organization and character of the military operations of these sixty years of confrontation. At this time Egyptian military resources were made up of three main elements. In the first place, we frequently encounter Greek mercenaries, Egypt's rulers having, in the main, a keen perception of reality marked, amongst other things, by the firm conviction that Egypt's interests were best served by paying others to do its fighting for it. We therefore find Hakor putting together a large force of such troops in the 380s BC and Teos employing 10,000 picked mercenaries in 361/0 BC, while Nectanebo II is said to have had 20,000 when Artaxerxes III invaded the country in 343/2 BC. These troops showed a clear superiority over the native Egyptian *machimoi* (militia) in the civil war between Nectanebo II and Teos, but proved unreliable during the successful Persian invasion of Egypt in 343/2 BC. In addition to these troops we hear on a number of occasions of large forces of *machimoi*. Plutarch describes them at one point in somewhat disparaging terms as 'a rabble of artisans whose inexperience made them worthy of nothing but contempt', but they were certainly capable of effective military action: Diodorus comments on the effectiveness of their skirmishing tactics against the forces of Artaxerxes in 374/3 BC, while in the civil war of 360 BC they initially performed well against Agesilaus and Nectanebo II, even if they were ultimately both outgeneralled and outfought by their Greek opponents. On the negative side, that conflict also clearly demonstrates that they were of unpredictable loyalty and far from averse to playing the kingmaker, particularly if the promised rewards were right.

The third ingredient in Egyptian military resources was allied troops: the assets of the rebel Persian admiral Glo (in fact an Egyptian) brought a significant increment to the forces of Hakor in 380 BC; the Spartans were allies of Teos in 361/0 BC and sent 1,000 heavy infantry with Agesilaus to Egypt, though they subsequently switched their support to Nectanebo; the Phoenicians appear as allies of Nectanebo II in his struggle against Artaxerxes III; and Nectanebo availed himself of the services of c.20,000 Libyans in the same context. The troops featured in our Greek sources are generally infantry, but cavalry are also mentioned explicitly on one occasion. As we should expect, we have evidence of considerable Egyptian skill at military engineering in exploiting the defensive possibilities of the terrain. Nectanebo I is described as fortifying the coast and the north-east Delta very elaborately in 374/3 BC. All entrances were blocked off by land and sea: at each of the seven mouths there was a town with large towers and a

wooden bridge dominating the entrance; Pelusium had a ditch around it with fortified points of access by water that were blocked by moles, and all the land approaches were flooded, whilst the town at the Mendesian mouth had both a surrounding wall and a fort inside. The Egyptians' expertise in this area also emerges in their operations against Agesilaus and Nectanebo in 360 BC, and in the measures taken by Nectanebo II to counter the assault of Artaxerxes III in 343/2 BC. Too often, however, it was the high command of the Egyptian army that proved the Achilles' heel, jealousy between Egyptian and foreign generals easily becoming a flashpoint. Whilst Hakor hired the Athenian Chabrias as general c.385 BC without untoward results, Teos' undiplomatic arrangements in 360 BC were not so happy, in that Agesilaus was given command of the Greeks only whilst Teos controlled the Egyptian troops and also retained overall command of the army. Martial failings on the part of the pharaoh could also be critical and eventually lost Egypt its freedom, for our sources make it clear that the major factor here was the ineptitude and cowardice of Nectanebo II himself.

These military confrontations were not confined to operations by land. Naval activity features prominently, as indeed it was bound to do, since one of the classic strategic techniques used by the Persians was, where possible, to shadow the movements of their armies by fleet movements along their flank. The best-known example of this is the invasion of Greece by Xerxes in 480 BC, but any large-scale attack on Egypt would present a perfect opportunity for such two-pronged operations. The Egyptians, therefore, needed to be able to counter Persian fleet movements as well as those of forces coming south by land. However, even beyond this specific context it should be remembered that the possession of effective naval units greatly strengthened the strategic and tactical mobility of Egyptian forces in the east Mediterranean theatre. Fleets are, therefore, a frequent matter of comment in our sources: for example, in 400 BC we find a rebel Persian admiral called Tamos (certainly Egyptian!) taking refuge in Egypt with his fleet and promptly being murdered by an enigmatic Egyptian ruler (probably Amyrtaios) specifically to gain possession of his naval assets, and in 361/0 a substantial fleet is prepared alongside the army to participate in the general revolt of the western provinces of the Persian empire. The technical sophistication of these forces was evidently high. Whenever Egyptian warships are mentioned they are called triremes: ramming war galleys propelled by three superimposed banks of oars, the classic first-rate battleship of the Mediterranean world at this period. In 396 BC we find Nepherites sending Agesilaus of Sparta the

equipment for 100 triremes—clearly he had enough and to spare in his arsenals. We are told that the Cypriot rebel Evagoras acquired fifty triremes from Hakor in 381 BC; and in 361–360 BC we are told that Teos prepared a fleet of 200 such warships which were very well equipped. Although the Egyptian ships are always described as triremes, we should note that the Persian fleet collected for operations against Egypt in 374 BC consisted of 300 triremes and 200 triakontors (single-banked galleys with thirty oarsmen), and the Egyptian navy must also have contained such lighter units. That native Egyptian commanders could achieve the rank of admiral in the Persian fleet is a sufficient testimony to their quality, but the Egyptian navy at this time could recognize ability wherever it lay, and Teos had no hesitation in appointing the superb Athenian admiral Chabrias to command his naval units in 361 BC.

The re-establishment of Persian control in Egypt, which was completed no later than 341 BC, was attended by plundering of temples and a policy of consolidation that took the form of demolishing the defences of major cities and setting up once more a Persian provincial administration staffed in part by local Egyptian officials such as *Somutefnakht*. Evidently the intention was a return to the arrangements of the previous occupation, but the outcome was a regime of recurrent viciousness and incompetence that soon raised the level of disaffection to the point of armed rebellion. It is surely here, perhaps about 339/8 BC, that the uprising of the much-discussed *Khababash* must be placed, a rebellion so successful that it gave him at least partial control of the country and a claim to the pharaonic office. In 333 BC there is an equally signal example of disaffection in the enthusiasm with which the appearance of the Macedonian rebel *Amyntas* was welcomed in the country. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that, when Alexander the Great invaded the country late in 332 BC, he had no difficulty in quickly terminating the hated rule of Persia.

Culture in Continuum

Up to this point our discussion has been dominated by the political, military, and economic vicissitudes of Egypt from the beginning of the Saite period to the Macedonian conquest. Although it is impossible to deny the vigour and skill with which the Egyptians met these challenges, our survey might easily create the impression of a nation subjected for generations to considerable discontinuity. When, however, we turn to cultural phenomena, a very different picture emerges. The

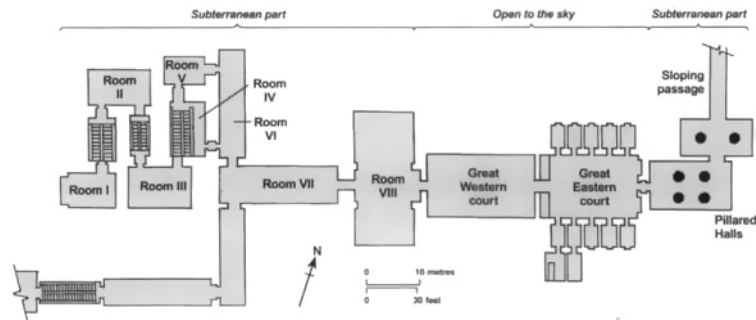
visual arts are paradigmatic. While, on the one hand, they show a determination to draw on the traditions of the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, as well as the Kushite Period, they display anything but the arid archaism of which they are still too often accused. On the contrary, the assertion of continuity with older tradition is combined with the exercise of considerable invention and originality both in materials and iconography, producing some of the most remarkable sculpture in the entire pharaonic corpus. For other spheres of cultural activity there is sometimes an unnerving lacuna in extant material—there are, for example, no literary texts securely dated to this period. For all that, close analysis of such evidence as we do possess confirms that Egyptian society and civilization as a whole were characterized by the same traits as the visual arts. We routinely encounter features with which the student of earlier periods will be completely familiar.

Mortuary contexts continue to reveal the intense importance of family ties, sometimes in a spectacular form: the tomb of the vizier Bakenrenef at Saqqara of the reign of Psamtek I appears to have been used for the burial of members of the family for the best part of 300 years, and the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel contained burials of five generations of his family running from the 30th Dynasty into the Ptolemaic Period. Non-mortuary epigraphy points in the same direction: the Wadi Hammamat inscription of Khnumibra shows a comparable awareness of family lineage in the 27th Dynasty, purporting to record his genealogy for over twenty generations as far back as the 19th Dynasty, though we must be cautious about the historical precision of this document. Such material also demonstrates the continued importance of continuity of office within the family: Petosiris' family occupied the office of High Priest of Thoth at Hermopolis over five generations, whilst Khnumibra's ancestors are alleged to have had something approaching a stranglehold over the offices of vizier and overseer of works for centuries.

Local loyalties are, if anything, even stronger than of old: Udjahorresnet insisted at the beginning of the 27th Dynasty on the sterling service that he had done for his native city, while the fourth-century inscription of Somtutefnakht, set up in the temple of Harsaphes in his home town of Herakleopolis Magna, indicates that such service was transmuted into devotion to the local god, an easy and natural formulation that was commonplace at this time. Such devotion to local gods is easily paralleled earlier, but its prominence in the Late Period is very marked, originating, no doubt, in the political fragmentation that was endemic after the collapse of the New Kingdom. A

corollary of this situation is the marked tendency for the main focus of personal devotion to become the main city deity, who thus acquires the omnipotence and omniscience of the traditional great gods of the pantheon. This phenomenon generated, in turn, an intense sense of the imminence of the divine presence, which is probably a major factor in the development of animal cults, one of the distinctive religious features of the Late Period. Devotion to this immediately present deity was naturally accompanied by a powerful conviction of the dependence of man on divine favour, which is frequently expressed in sculpture through statues of individuals supporting and offering images of their local god.

Biographical inscriptions further reveal that the factors leading to success in life were perceived in essentially traditional terms: royal favour was still regarded as a prerequisite of success; it was also considered essential to lead one's life on the basis of *maat*, the order of the universe, both physical and moral, which came into existence at the creation of the world and is definitive—that is, incapable of improvement. Living in accordance with *maat* is described in the tomb of Petosiris as 'The Way of Life', and a frequently mentioned stimulus to follow this path is divine influence operating on the heart of the individual—that is, on the source of his moral being. Once again, this concept is not difficult to parallel earlier (for example, the old concept of the *netjer imy.k*, 'the god who is in you'), but it is much more systematically developed in the texts of the Late Period. To follow 'The Way of Life' under the guidance of god brought success in this world and also beyond the grave, where yet another sanction lay in wait. The day of judgement in the Hall of the Two Truths was set for all, and no distinction was made between rich and poor. However, this strong conviction that justice would ultimately be done did not prevent the expression of a *carpe diem* philosophy, revealing that the Egyptians had lost little of their love of life, and it is not surprising to find the appearance of the occasional protest at the unfairness of an early death that has prevented the enjoyment of all that life has to offer. Here again, however, we are not confronted with a complete novelty; for the fragility of Egyptian certainties about life after death is eloquently expressed in such earlier texts as the *Song of the Blind Harper* and chapter 175 of the *Book of the Dead*. As for the principles of the mortuary cult, they remained the same in the Late Period, if less elaborately developed in practice, and old convictions such as the benefits to be gained by the recitation of formulas and the performance of funerary rituals retained much of their strength.



Plan of the tomb of Mentuemhat. It shows the arrangement of the structures below ground-level, which are entered by a descending passage to the east. This gives access via two columned halls to a great sun-court excavated in the rock but open to the sky which is flanked by chapels to north and south. This leads to another open court giving on to the subterranean part of the tomb which ends with the sarcophagus chamber at the extreme west of the installation. The walls were richly decorated with relief which shows a mixture of traditional elements, from such sites as the tombs of Menna and Rekhmira and the Deir el-Bahri complex, as well as contemporary features

The concept of the prerequisites of the afterlife presented a somewhat contradictory picture, but again it was a question of working with and developing older ideas. Much effort was again spent by those who could afford it on the production of tombs, some of which are spectacular instances of conspicuous display. The mortuary complex of Mentuemhat at Thebes is the most impressive non-royal site in that or any area, and many a New Kingdom vizier would have envied the tomb constructed for Bakenrenef looking out over the valley from the east escarpment at Saqqara.

In the Saite Period, particular ingenuity was expended on building unrobbable tombs that were filled solid with sand after interment, and had precisely the desired effect, but grave goods were no longer as plentiful or as rich as they had been in the New Kingdom, even though gold or gilt-silver masks and jewellery could still be buried with the deceased. This paucity of grave goods means that vaults are small—often little larger than the sarcophagi themselves. As far as low-status burials are concerned, we are better informed for this period than most others, particularly at Saqqara, where excavations have revealed bodies with little or no mummification interred in the poorest of coffins, frequently no more elaborate than palm-leaf mats, and deposited in a

pit in the sand distinguished above ground, if at all, by nothing more than a simple marker to guide the poor attentions of a relative anxious to perform whatever minimal service could be afforded for the deceased. All this chimes well enough with indications from earlier periods to prove that at this level too the Late Period was continuing the ancient ways.

Biographical inscriptions reveal yet another shift of emphasis in the clear narrowing of the gap between the pharaoh and his subjects, and this is echoed by the ease with which non-royal persons were able to requisition ancient royal funerary literature: in several Saite tombs at Saqqara (including those of the vizier Bakenrenef, the commander of the royal fleet Tjanenhebu and the physician Psamtek), the *Pyramid Texts* were employed, and fourth-century coffins also exemplified this development. The tomb of Petosiris shows a parallel phenomenon in that Petosiris himself claims at one point in his biographical inscription to have performed the old royal foundation ritual of stretching the cord. In all this, however, we are again not confronted with something totally new, given that the 12th Dynasty, for example, already provides ample demonstration of a willingness to concede the humanity of the supposed god-king. It is all too easy to ignore the fact that in every period of Egyptian history the relationship between the ideology of kingship and the practicalities of life was ultimately defined by historical experience, and the narrowing of the gap in these late sources reflects nothing less than the realities of the distribution of power in Late Period Egypt.

To conclude: the three centuries preceding the invasion of Egypt by Alexander the Great (332–323 BC) were centuries of no mean achievement. Although the country was twice subjected to Persian domination, it still succeeded in maintaining its independence for long periods against powerful enemies, and made a major impact on the course of the interminable Near Eastern power struggle as well as reasserting its interests on the Upper Nile. In the Saite Period several factors interacted to create the basis for success. In the first place, a family of rulers appeared who were both ideologically acceptable, politically streetwise, and militarily highly astute.

However, the Saites were also lucky in that for most of the dynasty the dynamics of imperialism in the Near East ran very much in their favour. Empires expand as long as their institutional structures and the will of their leaders can support such expansion. When the Assyrians and Chaldaeans attempted to incorporate Egypt into their empires, they were both operating at the outer limits of their capacity.

Even a slight deterioration within their territory inevitably meant a diminution of resources that could be brought to bear against Egypt, to the extent that effective action and control became quite impossible. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Assyrian rule was intermittent and very low key, whilst all the Chaldaeans could achieve was to threaten, invade, and withdraw.

The danger posed by the Persians was of a different order, since they possessed much greater assets in wealth and manpower, and initially a much more vigorous impetus to conquest derived ultimately from Cyrus. However able a pharaoh might be, if the Persians operated at the peak of their potential, the land of Egypt must fall. Yet the laws of grand strategy were the same for the Persians as their predecessors, and the marginal geographical position of Egypt in relation to the Achaemenid empire meant that it would inevitably be difficult to maintain permanent control and that the potential for successful revolt would always be there.

Against this background, the panorama presented by the fifth and fourth centuries BC of oscillation between rebellion, independence, and occupation becomes immediately intelligible. Yet none of this furious endeavour leads to any abatement in the vitality of Egyptian cultural life. Certainly we suffer badly from the severe loss of the art, architecture, and literary work of these years, but more than enough survives to reveal a society that was powerfully aware of its past while exploring new ways or, at least, insisting on finding its own points of cultural emphasis. Wherever we look, we are confronted by a powerful current of continuity united with a vital evolutionary dynamic that provides the obvious underpinning for and explanation of the very considerable achievements of the age of the Ptolemies that followed.