

Activity: Comparison

Study Table 4 and record the major similarities and differences between the administration of Nubia and Syria–Palestine. (You might like to show this as a Venn diagram.)

Activity: Extended response

Plan and write an answer to the following: **ANALYSE** Egypt's administration of its empire in Nubia and Syria–Palestine in this period.

Hint:

- identify the key features of administration in Nubia and Syria–Palestine, explaining how and why they differed
- explain the implications of the differences
- use relevant evidence to support your analysis
- refer to relevant historiographical issues.

The nature of Egyptian imperialism

Any discussion of Egyptian imperialism must recognise that 'imperialism' is a modern concept. Nevertheless, we can try to understand Egyptian foreign policy by comparing it to a model with which we are familiar. First, it would be useful to consider a definition of the term imperialism: 'the policy of extending the rule or authority of an empire or nation over foreign countries, or of acquiring and holding colonies and dependencies.'⁴¹

This definition applies to the British Empire of the 19th century, which you will remember from your study of junior history. The main features of British imperialism included:

- permanent military occupation of conquered territories, usually referred to as 'colonies'
- control and administration by British governors
- economic exploitation of the resources of the colonies for the benefit of Britain
- imposition of British culture on the subject populations.

You will notice that this model is most appropriate to describe the relationship between Egypt and Nubia. It does not satisfactorily describe the relationship between Egypt and her northern neighbours. Here, the nature of Egypt's control was much less clear. The fact that Thutmose III campaigned almost annually during the first twenty years of his reign—often suppressing rebellious towns—indicates that Egyptian control was limited. This was especially the case with the towns of Syria, such as Kadesh. Perhaps the term 'sphere of influence' would better describe Egypt's relationship with Syria. Here Egypt relied on oaths of allegiance and the taking of hostages, rather than military occupation, to ensure the payment of tribute.

There is considerable debate among scholars about the situation in Palestine, which was closer to Egypt. One view holds that Palestine was a virtual colony established in the aftermath of the Hyksos expulsion. Another view, based on archaeological evidence, refutes this theory. The physical evidence, including artefacts and other remains, from eastern Egyptian sites is distinctly different from that found in the nearest Palestinian towns across the Sinai desert.⁴² If Egypt did colonise Palestine, one would expect some substantial evidence of cultural interaction.

The ideology and language of imperialism

You will have recognised Egyptian xenophobia (the fear or hatred of foreigners) from your reading of the accounts of Egyptian military campaigns. It is clear that the Egyptians considered themselves superior to non-Egyptians. For example, many inscriptions refer to Nubia as 'the vile Kush' or 'the wretched Kush'. The Nubians are also sometimes called 'troglodytes' (primitive, barbaric cave dwellers). The following excerpt from the Tombos Stela of Thutmose I is a good example of such language:

*The Nubian Troglodytes fall by the sword, and are thrust aside in their lands; their foulness, it floods their valleys; the [—] of their mouths is like a violent flood ...*⁴³

⁴¹ The *Macquarie Dictionary*, rev. edn, 1985, p. 875

⁴² Shaw, 'Egypt and the Outside World', in Shaw (ed.), *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, p. 326

⁴³ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, p. 30

The same kind of language was used to describe the peoples of Syria–Palestine who were frequently referred to as ‘miserable Asiatics’. It is interesting to observe though, how the language of aggressive imperialism (‘that foe of Naharin’), evident in the inscriptions of Thutmose III, changed to the more neutral language of diplomacy (‘the Asiatics’) when the peace treaty between Egypt and the Mitanni was being negotiated.

The negative stereotyped portrayals of Egypt’s neighbours moreover, were not always consistent with reality. Ian Shaw points out first, that the population of many Egyptian towns consisted of both Nubians and Asiatics living in apparent harmony with native Egyptians. Second, the policy of Egyptianisation of Nubians and Asiatics through hostage taking and education of youth is hardly consistent with an attitude of fear and hatred.⁴⁴

Imperialism or divine kingship?

One scholar has suggested another reason why it would be misleading to see an explicit policy of Egyptian imperialism in royal inscriptions and reliefs of the New Kingdom. Barry Kemp suggests in Source 20 that such material provides evidence for an understanding of the nature of divine kingship rather than foreign policy.

SOURCE 20

From the New Kingdom, a considerable body of inscriptions and scenes has survived related to the theme of conquest and subjection of the outside world to the rule of the king of Egypt. Some of them, in alluding to specific instances of triumph, are termed ‘historical’ by modern scholars, but from their language, and very often from their context within a temple, one can judge them to be more truly theological documents and sources for our understanding of divine kingship. Within them the divine king is

depicted fulfilling a specific role with historical actuality entirely subordinated to a predetermined format. Presented as a form of cultic drama the conquest theme is one element in the broader and fundamental role of divine kingship: that of reducing chaos to order ... It is also likely that the great scenes of victory and the listing of conquered places which frequently occur on temple walls, particularly on the towers of pylon entrances, were regarded as magically efficacious in protecting Egypt from foreign hostility.

Kemp, ‘Imperialism and Empire in New Kingdom Egypt’, in Garnsey & Whittaker (eds), *Imperialism in the Ancient World*, p. 8

Economic and socio-political aspects of Egyptian imperialism

To reach a better understanding of the nature of Egyptian imperialism, it would be more useful to examine both the nature of Egyptian activities in Nubia and Syria–Palestine and the importance of the military in Egyptian society during this period. As we have already seen in the previous section on the imperial administration of these regions, one of the main interests in conquest was economic. This was based on a desire to protect and increase Egypt’s trading activities and to exploit mineral and other resources. The importance of Nubian gold, especially, may help to explain why the policy of colonisation was so thoroughly developed in this region. In Syria–Palestine, there can be little doubt that the booty gained from conquest and the regular collection of tribute from these conquered towns was a primary interest of Thutmose III and his successors.

Imperial policy also had an important political dimension, for a successful foreign policy reflected and reinforced the power of the pharaoh and guaranteed the security of Egypt’s borders. It was also enthusiastically supported and sustained by important sections of New Kingdom society and especially by the military, which enjoyed increasing prestige and influence in Egyptian society. The careers of prominent soldiers are well documented and indicate how successful military careers guaranteed not only fame and glory—important for their own sake—but also provided an avenue for advancement in the civil and imperial administration. For example, Usersatet, who began his career as a member of the elite chariot corps, became viceroy of Nubia during the reign of Amenhotep II. The military became so influential in Egyptian society that, by the end of the 18th Dynasty, Horemheb, who had been general of the army under Tutankhamun, became pharaoh.

⁴⁴ Shaw, ‘Egypt and the Outside World’, p. 326

SOURCE 21

The overall image of Egyptian 'imperialism' ... is **multifaceted**, the economic and political **pragmatism** of the pharaohs often being cloaked in the **hyperbole** of royal **rhetoric** and piety. The debate concerning ideology versus economics is difficult to resolve because we rely primarily on a combination of royal religious and funerary texts for our reconstruction of Egyptian behaviour in the outside world, yet the real story probably lies in the more **prosaic** archival material that has so rarely survived.

Shaw, 'Egypt and the Outside World', pp. 326–7

Understanding and using the sources

Sources 20 and 21

- Explain in your own words the Egyptian concept of divine kingship.
- Kemp suggests in Source 20 that inscriptions and scenes of conquest should be seen as theological (that is, religious) rather than imperial statements. What evidence does he use to support his argument? How does this relate to your understanding of the role of the king as upholder of *maat*?
- Check your understanding of the words in bold in Source 21. Rewrite this source in your own words.
- According to this source, why is it difficult to reach a firm conclusion about the nature of Egyptian imperialism?
- How does Source 21 support the argument presented by Barry Kemp in Source 20?

For discussion

- Use the British Empire model of imperialism and the summary Table 4 of Egyptian administration of Nubia and Syria–Palestine to compare Egyptian imperial policy in these two regions. Which features of the British model can or cannot be applied to Egyptian policy in (a) Nubia and (b) Syria–Palestine?
- Describe some of the negative stereotypes of Nubians and Asiatics used by the Egyptians.
- Suggest reasons why these stereotypes are unreliable evidence for Egyptian imperialism.
- What are the key historiographical issues arising from your study of Egyptian imperialism?

Activity: Extended response

- 1 Use the following headings: Political; Ideological; Economic; Social. Working in groups summarise your knowledge of this section. Share your summaries with other groups to construct a class diagram of Egyptian imperialism.
- 2 Using the diagram you have completed and other relevant information, plan and write an answer to the following: EXPLAIN the nature of Egyptian imperialism.

Hint:

- identify the key aspects of Egyptian imperialism
- explain the features of these aspects and the relationship between them
- use relevant evidence to support your explanation
- refer to relevant historiographical issues.

Activity: Revision

Now that you have completed your study of the early New Kingdom, it is important that you review and consolidate your knowledge and understanding of the major developments and issues that shaped this historical period. The following activities are recommended.

- 1 Read the introduction to this chapter again; it will be more meaningful to you now that you have studied the period.
- 2 Allocate each of the Focus questions at the beginning of the chapter to a group for discussion and review. (Focus question 3 on the role of significant individuals and groups could be divided into three: (i) the role of pharaohs, (ii) role of queens (iii) role of key groups/officials.) Each group could report to the class by:
 - a presenting their findings in the form of a diagram
 - b designing some appropriate essay questions for each of the Focus questions and/or syllabus topics for this historical period
 - c brainstorming essay structures, including suggestions for relevant evidence and historiographical issues.