

The image of the ‘warrior pharaoh’

The mighty ‘warrior pharaoh’ is one of the most enduring images of ancient Egypt and dates to the beginnings of Egyptian civilisation around 3000 BC. It was both a political and a religious statement and emphasised the king’s role as the divine upholder of *maat*, the Egyptian concept of order. The king is shown triumphing over the forces of chaos, represented by foreign enemies and bound captives. In earlier times, the king, a distant and mysterious being, was held in godlike awe by his subjects. However, by New Kingdom times he was a more earthly, vulnerable figure who fought alongside his troops in battle. The militarism of the New Kingdom gave birth to a new heroic age. To the traditional elements of the warrior pharaoh image was added the chariot, one of the most important innovations of this period. The essential features of the New Kingdom ‘warrior pharaoh’ image include the pharaoh:

- leading his soldiers into battle and returning in victory
- attacking the enemy while riding in his chariot
- wearing war regalia, for example, the blue war crown or other pharaonic headdress
- depicted larger than life-size, holding one or more of the enemy with one hand, while he clubs their brains out with a mace (also known as ‘smiting the enemy’)
- in the guise of a sphinx, trampling his enemies underfoot
- offering the spoils of war to the god Amun, the inspiration for his victory.



FIGURE 21
Thutmose III
smiting the enemy

Another aspect of the warrior pharaoh image that developed over time was the pharaoh as elite athlete and sportsman, a perfect physical specimen. Both Thutmose I and Thutmose III took time out while on campaign to indulge their taste for big game hunting which included lions, elephants and, on rarer occasions, the rhinoceros. Thutmose IV recorded his hunting expedition in the desert around Giza on his Dream Stela. Thutmose III and Amenhotep II both had themselves depicted in stelae and reliefs driving their chariots at breakneck speed while firing arrows through copper targets. Amenhotep II, the most enthusiastic sportsmen of them all, added running and rowing to this list of royal athletic accomplishments.

The Armant Stela of Thutmose III was set up as a record of the mighty deeds of the king in which both his military and his sporting achievements might be preserved. The first two lines of the text in Source 18 make the king’s intention very clear.

SOURCE 18

Armant Stela of Thutmose III

Compilation of the deeds of valor and might which this perfect god performed ... Every successful act of physical prowess ...

He shot at a copper target, all the wooden ones having shattered as though [they had been] papyrus; and His Majesty put one such example in the temple of Amun. It was a target of hammered copper, several fingers thick, transfixed by his arrow which protruded three palms [length] out the back ...

If ever he spent a moment of relaxation, hunting in a foreign country, the size of his catch would be greater than the bag of his entire army. He slew seven lions by shooting in the space of a moment, and he brought off a herd of 12 bulls in one hour, and by the time breakfast came, the tails thereof were on his own rump. He cut down 120 elephants in the land of Niya [Syria] on his return from Naharin, when he had crossed the Euphrates, destroyed the towns on both its banks, consumed with fire for ever, and set up his triumph stela upon its bank. He got a rhinoceros by shooting, in the southland in Nubia ... He set up his stela there, as he had done at the ends of Asia.

Redford, *The Wars in Syria and Palestine of Thutmose III*, pp. 154–5

Understanding and using the sources

Figures 21 and 22

Describe the weapons used by the pharaoh, the pharaonic headdress, the depiction of pharaoh in relation to those around him and the depiction of the enemy.

Activity: Written response

Using Figures 21 and 22 and Source 18, write a paragraph explaining the importance of the 'warrior pharaoh' image in this period.

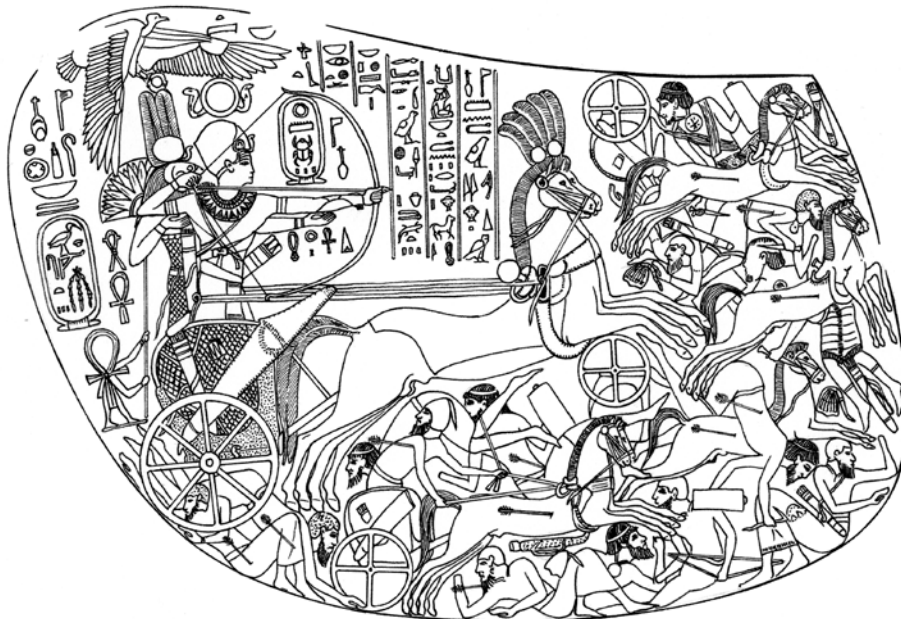


FIGURE 22

Thutmose IV in his chariot

Administration of the empire: Nubia and Syria–Palestine

Egypt's aims in creating an empire in Nubia and Syria–Palestine were both political and economic. Having secured her southern and northern borders, the next imperative was to exploit the resources and opportunities for trade offered by these regions. The era of military conquest had fostered a demand for the exotic goods of the north and the south. It had also stimulated the growth of new social elites in the military, the religious and the imperial administration.

While there were a number of similarities between Egyptian aims and methods of administration of the empire in Nubia and Syria–Palestine, there were also some important differences. The most important were:

- Nubia was regarded as a region suitable for colonisation while Syria–Palestine was not
- Egypt already had a long history of relations with Nubia based on conquest during the Middle Kingdom—Egypt's earlier relations with Syria–Palestine were based on trade, not conquest
- Egyptian administrative structures could be more easily imposed in Nubia; Syria–Palestine, however, had a more complex political organisation of independent city–states whose relations were characterised by treaties and power blocs.

Nubia

We have already seen that in addition to regular military campaigns, the Egyptians employed a number of other methods of control:

- strengthening of existing forts
- establishment of Egyptian colonies clustered around temple-towns
- creation of imperial administration headed by the viceroy of Nubia.

Evidence of Egypt's more direct and permanent control of Nubia can be seen in the changing pattern of building works. Under the early New Kingdom conquerors such as Ahmose and Amenhotep I, building focused on fortification works. By the reign of Thutmose II, fortification became less important and temple building was undertaken on an increasingly grandiose scale. The temples of Semna and Kumna constructed by Thutmose II and III are among the most complete surviving examples of 18th Dynasty architecture anywhere.³⁶ No such program of building was undertaken in Syria–Palestine.

It is interesting to note that the section of the *Annals* of Thutmose III that records the annual collections of revenue from each, makes a clear distinction between the taxes of Nubia³⁷ and the tribute received from princes of Palestine and Syria. This would suggest that Egypt regarded Nubia as a colonial possession and an extension of its own economic system, whereas the chiefs of Syria–Palestine, as vassals, were regarded as exercising authority over their own towns.

There is debate among modern scholars about the nature and development of Nubian political and social structures and the relationship between Nubia and Egypt during the New Kingdom.³⁸ For example, the Egyptian colonisation of Nubia, according to the scholar David O'Connor, was not as oppressive as has usually been represented.

Syria–Palestine

The first steps in the development of an administrative system in Syria–Palestine were taken by Thutmose III in the aftermath of his military conquests. One of our problems of evidence is that the majority of sources for Egyptian administration of the region come from the Amarna age, a hundred years later, when the system was more fully developed. According to Redford, 'Only in Ramesside times did a full-fledged provincial system, with "governors", commercial agents and military personnel become the norm'.³⁹

Redford has identified four key features that characterised the administration initiated by Thutmose III and maintained by his immediate successors.⁴⁰

- *Demolition and deportation*: This was done to maintain Palestine as a buffer zone to protect Egypt from invasion from the north. This was accomplished by demolishing fortified centres that had resisted Egypt—or might do so in the future—and deporting their populations.
- *Confiscation*: The wheat-producing plains of northern Palestine were taken over by the crown and the estate of Amun; but elsewhere towns and cities retained possession of their own lands and property. The harbours on the coast of Phoenicia were provided with storehouses and perhaps a shrine (for the use of Egyptian traders and officials).
- *Political arrangements*: Securing the loyalty and cooperation of vassals by
 - administration of an oath of loyalty
 - taking as hostages sons and daughters of vassal rulers and powerful local families.

³⁶ Adams, *Nubia*, p. 220

³⁷ Breasted translates this as 'impost' (an archaic form of the word, tax)

³⁸ See for example, Morkot, 'Nubia in the New Kingdom & O'Connor, 'Early States Along the Nubian Nile' in W.V. Davies (ed.), *Egypt and Africa*

³⁹ Redford, *The Wars in Syria and Palestine of Thutmose III*, p. 255

⁴⁰ The following is adapted from Redford, *The Wars in Syria and Palestine of Thutmose III*, pp. 256–7; see also Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times*, pp. 192–21

SOURCE 19

... if the Nubians—as distinct from Egyptians settled in Nubia—had been specifically singled out for exploitation, taxed excessively, stripped of their lands, and treated virtually as slaves, the Nubian experience would have been much more negative. However, this does not appear to be the case ... Nubian rulers enjoyed high status and may eventually have merged with the Egyptian administrative elite as a whole. Moreover, Nubian society—at least in Wawat in the 18th Dynasty—was not an undifferentiated mass of economically depressed people, but instead complex and stratified, with some members wealthy, and many comfortably off.

O'Connor, *Ancient Nubia*, p. 62