Power Relations and the Adoption of Foreign Material Culture: A Different Perspective from First-Millennium BCE Nubia

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Abstract

Questions of power relations have long been central to archaeological study of culture contact, with colonial relationships exciting particular interest. However, current frameworks do not account for the adoption of foreign material culture by cultures that are politically stronger than those from which they adopt. The wide variety of Egyptian material culture forms on display at first millennium BCE royal sites in Nubia such as the cemeteries of el-Kurru and Nuri is one such example of non-colonial cultural interaction which is not adequately explained by the postcolonial theories currently popular. This paper argues that the Kushite royal adoption of Egyptian forms was not based in concerns of ethnic identity or subaltern resistance, but instead reflected native Kushite state structures and value systems. It argues that theories of state structure and economy, including prestige goods economies, are more useful for understanding the nature of culture contact in non-colonial situations.

Cultural encounter and group identity (especially ethnic identity) have been two of the most prominent areas of enquiry in anthropological archaeology over the last few decades. Material culture change has proved an especially fertile ground for explanations centered on the interaction between cultures, with scholars' interest particularly focused on colonial situations in the past, a concern that is heavily influenced by our own society's modern history with colonialism and inequalities of power between societies.[1]

If ancient Egyptian evidence has been somewhat lacking from these debates, such preoccupations have loomed large in the discussion and interpretation of its southern neighbor, Nubia. The rich history of interaction between Egypt and Nubia has sparked endless scholarly fascination on the nature of the relationship between the two cultures, and the resulting Egyptian-style material culture in Nubia. Discussion of Egyptian-Nubian interaction has tended to focus on the New Kingdom Egyptian colonial settlements in Nubia, but in this article I will be examining a different type of culture contact, from a different time period. Through the lens of Nubia in the mid-first millennium BCE, a time when

the normal power relations between Egypt and Nubia had been reversed, I will examine how theories of cultural encounter and group identity can help us better understand Nubian material. I also argue that first-millennium BCE Nubia offers an understudied yet rich dataset that illuminates aspects of the possible social and economic role of foreign material culture in indigenous societies that has been neglected in archaeology's overwhelming concentration on colonial situations. When unequal power relations are not a major factor in the adoption of foreign material culture, an analysis of the social functions of the imported material in its new cultural context is far more instructive about the reasons for its adoption.

Nubia describes the geographical area to the south of Egypt that lies between the first and sixth cataracts of the Nile. In the first millennium BCE, this land was occupied by a culture now generally known as the Kingdom of Kush. Nubia's location directly south of Egypt and the shared reliance of their peoples on the Nile encouraged rich interaction between the two cultures from the earliest periods; this relationship is now visible to archaeologists occasionally through Egyptian text, but mostly

through Nubian material culture. Despite their connection, the path followed by each culture was independent, with significant differences in language, economy, and material culture traditions between Nubia and Egypt. Interaction was valued by both sides for the trade opportunities that it offered, but the relationship was often fraught.[2] For most of their histories, Egypt was the militarily superior in the relationship, in no small part because of its larger population and the resources offered by its more centralized state. These factors, combined with an Egyptian love of aggrandizing artistic forms, means that most Egyptologists will be more familiar with Egyptian images of bound and subjugated Nubians than with Nubia's own material culture. However, Egypt's historical position of power over Nubia underwent a change in the Third Intermediate Period after a long period of decentralization, corresponding conversely with the rise of strong rulers and the development of a more centralized state in Nubia. In the mid-eighth century BCE, the Kushite king Kashta took on an Egyptian royal titulary (attested in a monument from Elephantine),[3] and with his successor Piankhy, Kushite rule was inaugurated over large parts Egypt for the next century.[4] Even after Egypt was removed from Kushite control by the Assyrian army in 664 BCE, strong rulers in Nubia persisted, eventually developing into the Meroitic State. Egyptians would never again exert political dominance over Nubia.

The period in Nubia from c. 750–580 BCE is especially interesting for studying culture contact from an archaeological point of view. We might expect from the example of other colonial situations that when the Kushites invaded Egypt, they would have taken significant aspects of their material culture with them, and that we might therefore see a large amount of Kushite material culture in the Egyptian archaeological record. Yet this is not the case (for the surprisingly small amount of Kushite material in first millennium BCE Egypt, see Budka 2014 and Howley 2017). Rather, the Kushite rulers moved in the space of only a few generations from leaving archaeological remains that are very "Nubian"—circular tumulus burial mounds containing no writing and no Egyptian objects—to overwhelmingly Egyptian material forms that include pyramidal superstructures full of typically Egyptian religious objects such as shabtis and canopic jars.[5] Even more striking is that after 664 BCE, once the Kushite rulers were no longer ruling over Egypt and were confined back to their indigenous homelands in Nubia, their adoption of this foreign material culture did not wane. There was no reversion to traditionally Nubian material culture types, but rather a continuing commitment to what look (to Egyptologists) like Egyptian objects, architectural forms and religious expression (most prominently at the royal cemetery of Nuri).[6] The unusually prevalent use of foreign material culture among the Nubian royal family seems counterintuitive when compared to other examples of archaeological culture contact in which invading cultures tend to take their culture with them, and begs the question of what exactly the Nubian rulers' relationship with Egypt was that would have caused such a widespread adoption of Egyptian cultural forms.

The issue of Egyptian material culture in Nubia has been prominent in Egyptology since long before the recent renaissance of interest in theories of culture contact in archaeology, in part no doubt because most scholars working on Nubian material were (and generally still are) Egyptologists. In the earlier twentieth century, scholars tended to replicate the Egyptocentric position of the ancient Egyptians themselves, a viewpoint that was conveniently supported by contemporaneous ideas of the relative superiority of races (with Egyptians seen as Caucasian, and the Kushites "negro") in early twentieth century Western society.[7] In his 1922 publication of the Napatan temple of Sanam, built under the Kushite king Taharqa in the mid-first millennium BCE in an Egyptian style, Griffith suggests that Egyptian forms were adopted by Kushites because "the pious and impressionable barbarian marveled at the antiquity, the massiveness, and the beauty of the Memphite monuments," but that once the Kushites were no longer in control of Egypt, "the arts of Napata quickly relapsed from the fine or skillful workmanship of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty into barbarism and imitation."[8] In other words, the Kushites were culturally inferior to the Egyptians, despite their military might, and therefore sought to copy their neighbors' wonderful achievements, an attempt whose success declined precipitously after they had left Egypt. Griffith's view on the use of Egyptian material culture by the Kushites reflects more general archaeological theories of cultural change in the early twentieth century, in which exposure to a "higher" culture supposedly triggered

in the "lower" culture an automatic desire to emulate the former's superior cultural achievements.[9] Adoption of foreign material culture was thus considered to be a natural, inevitable process, and scholars did not seek to address what the social functions of the imported objects might be in their new environment.[10] The idea that perceived differences between forms in the "original" and the receiving culture indicated that mistakes had been made through emulation was also widespread: the consumption of Greek object by the natives of Gaul has been analyzed in the past as an "incoherent aping of alien customs" that neatly parallels Griffiths' ideas of "barbarism and imitation."[11] Although in the first millennium BCE Egypt had not been in control of Nubia for several centuries, and in fact the Kushites were the invading power, scholars continued to approach Kushite-Egyptian relations almost as if they represented a colonial situation in which Egypt was the aggressor. The knowledge of earlier Egyptian history in which Nubia was colonized by Egypt, bolstered by early twentieth century attitudes to race, colored scholars' attitudes towards the question of Egyptian material culture in first millennium Nubia. It seemed to them as if the Nubians' natural cultural inferiority had led to their domination by the Egyptians during the New Kingdom, and thus their choice to use Egyptian material culture surely showed that even when ruling Egypt during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty they remained subordinate. The Kushites' adoption of Egyptian culture was inevitable, because of the natural superiority of civilization of the Egyptians.[12]

Such overt value judgments of cultures are thankfully no longer prevalent in scholarship, but the preoccupation with colonial situations in ancient culture contact remains in archaeology: this is the case both in the Old World with discussions of "Romanization"[13] and "Hellenization,"[14] and also in the New World.[15] The interest in colonial relationships has led to the development of many frameworks that archaeologists use to try and understand the mixed forms of material culture that result from cultural contact: these terms include acculturation, creolization, hybridity, and entanglement. The centrality of colonialism in such discussions means they are often rooted in considerations of power and ethnic difference: a colonized people, normally under some sort of duress, gives up (aspects of) their culture and adapts elements of a new one. The ongoing concern with

colonial forms of culture contact—in which one party has a clear power advantage over the other, and some degree of population movement has occurred—reflects of course our own culture's history and interest in such matters, and the liberal use in archaeology of cultural theory that discusses modern contexts in order to better understand ancient forms of culture contact further underlines the point.[16] Though there are potential problems with using models based on modern forms of exploitation, conflict and exchange for ancient contexts, most scholars agree that with care it can be done;[17] nevertheless, there were many other forms of culture contact that may have existed in the ancient world that would benefit from more scholarly attention.

An example from the Kushite royal cemetery of Nuri will serve to illustrate the problems that can arise when using standard archaeological models of culture contact, based on colonial situations, to examine mid-first millennium BCE Nubian material. The funerary figurine (*shabti* or *shawabti*) shown in Figure 1 was deposited in Queen Nasalsa's tomb at Nuri, and although the use of such figurines was an Egyptian cultural practice in origin, the shabti has previously been described as a "Nubian" type. Haynes and Leprohon write of such figurines that:

> The Kushite royal shawabtis are different from their Egyptian counterparts in rather specific ways … the distinguishable iconographic features are the headdress, the double uraeus, the bags, the implements, the royal attributes…[18]

Bovot similarly recognizes these apparent typological differences to Egyptian shabtis as "un mélange de tradition égyptienne et d'innovations locale."[19] Both Haynes and Leprohon and Bovot go further in ascribing the differences between Nubian and Egyptian shabtis to a desire by the Kushite kings to consciously mark their difference from Egyptians:

> If, on the one hand, their many borrowings from older Egyptian models seem to indicate admiration and perhaps envy, the vigor of the new features they introduced into Egypt shows the pride in their own achievements and the individuality that they brought into the country.[20]

Figure 1: Shabti of Queen Nasalsa. Faience. Sudan National Museum 1431. Photograph by the author.

Figure 2: God's Wife of Amun, possibly Amenirdis, wearing vulture headdress in relief from Karnak. Fitzwilliam Museum EGA.4542.1943. © Fitzwilliam Museum.

Cette combinaison éphémère a été suffisante pour qu'il soit permis de distinguer un <<style kouchite>>. Preuve de la détermination des souverains nubiens à vouloir rompre clairement avec l'art du pays qu'ils dominaient.[21]

Shabtis are therefore used as evidence to determine the reasons Egyptian material culture was adopted by Kushites: the perceived small, typological differences between shabtis found in Egypt and Kush are seen as a way for the Kushite kings to consciously mark their ethnic difference from the Egyptians, and assert a recognizably Kushite ethnic identity in the face of Egyptian culture (though the title of Bovot's article, "Un roi nubien qui admirait les pharaons," suggests that he did not reject emulation as a motivation for the

Kushite kings). In the case of the example in Figure 1, this difference is seen in the fact that the shabti wears a vulture headdress that is not found on shabtis in Egypt.

Can this difference really be a way to "clearly break" from Egyptian art, as Bovot would have it? In all other fundamentals the shabti has an Egyptian form, with an Osiride pose in which the arms are crossed over the chest, and the traditional Egyptian shabti spell, written in the Egyptian language, inscribed on the legs. In addition, although the vulture headdress does not occur on extant shabtis from Egypt, women were commonly shown wearing exactly this regalia in other media in Egypt, especially in relief (Fig. 2). Moreover, the shabti of the Egyptian queen Maatkare, depicted in her Twenty-first Dynasty funerary papyrus, is shown wearing a vulture headdress (Fig. 3).[22] The shabti,

FIGURE 3: Queen Maatkare, with shabti wearing vulture headdress behind her. Papyrus Maatkare (Naville 1912).

therefore, is an Egyptian object class, not used in Nubia outside of Egyptian settlements prior to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, and its costume is also Egyptian in origin. It is made of faience, a typically Egyptian material that was the most popular medium for Egyptian shabtis.[23] Despite the fact that one cannot find a shabti exactly like this one in Egypt, it is in fact overwhelmingly Egyptian in its qualities. It is unlikely that an ancient Egyptian looking at this object would have seen its appearance as particularly foreign. Conversely, a non-royal Kushite, for whom shabtis were not and had never been part of Kushite funerary culture, cannot have seen anything but an Egyptian object when looking at this. Using motifs of Egyptian origin on an Egyptian object type does not, on reflection, seem like the best way for the Kushite rulers to assert a Kushite ethnic identity. Moreover, focusing solely on typological features to determine "Egyptian-ness" or "Kushite-ness" does not in fact perform any analytical work to elucidate the nature of the cultural contact between Egypt and Nubia: it tells us very little about the social roles such Egyptian material would have played in Kushite society, or indeed why the Kushite royal family would have had any

interest in adopting Egyptian goods or practices.

In different ways, then, Griffith, Haynes and Leprohon and Bovot have all interpreted the presence of Egyptian material culture in the first millennium BCE Kushite context as a marker of Kushite ethnic identity. While Griffith saw the Kushite kings' use of Egyptian material as proof of emulation of a superior culture, as a kind of longing to be Egyptian, the more recent interpretations have argued that in fact Egyptian culture was a way for the Kushites to stress their non-Egyptian identity. The limitations of ethnic identity as an explanatory device for foreign material culture in Kushite royal contexts become clear, however, when discussing the material from the Nuri tombs of the Middle Napatan period, built in the generations after the Kushite kings lost control over Egypt (664 BCE–c. 580 BCE). These pyramids were constructed at the fourth cataract, deep into Nubia and far enough south that very few Egyptians would have been able to travel there (and indeed we have no archaeological evidence for Egyptian presence in Nubia between the end of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty and Psamtek II's punitive expedition in 592 BCE). The audience for this material is likely to have been more or less entirely Kushite, and it seems unlikely that non-royal Nubians (who did not themselves use shabtis) would have appreciated the subtle differences between Kushite and Egyptian examples, or seen an object such as Nasalsa's shabti as anything other than Egyptian. The features of the shabti that stand out to Egyptologists, scholars trained within strictly demarcated cultural boundaries, as markers of ethnic difference—i.e. we've never seen a vulture headdress on an Egyptian shabti, so it must have been designed to be "un-Egyptian"—are unlikely to have done so to a Nubian.

Moreover, while Nasalsa's shabti was likely to have been manufactured in Nubia (ceramic shabti molds for several styles of both kings' and queens' shabtis found at Nuri, as well as a manufactured shabti wearing a vulture headdress, were discovered at the nearby temple of Sanam),[24] several other types of shabti found in the Nuri tombs are highly likely to have been imported from Egypt. These include the serpentinite stone shabtis of Senkamanisken, which were not only made of a stone that occurs

only in Egypt, but two-thirds of which were inscribed on the base of their feet with hieroglyphic signs, a practice known from other Egyptian shabtis including the stone examples of the Twenty-fifth/Twenty-sixth Dynasty Theban official Montuemhat.[25] These appear to be workshop marks, a well-developed marking system that was commonly practiced by Egyptian craftsmen, but that did not exist in Nubia before the Twenty-fifth Dynasty.[26] Also likely to be Egyptian imports are several types of shabti from Nuri with highly unusual features that are otherwise only found on a few Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty examples from Theban workshops. These include the faience shabtis of Senkamanisken that carry only a single hoe rather than two (Fig. 4), the only other extant examples of this stylistic feature being those of the shabtis of the

FIGURE 4: Faience shabti of King Senkamanisken (tomb Nu. 3), carrying single hoe. Sudan National Museum 1631. Photograph by the author.

Twenty-sixth Dynasty Theban officials Padimahes, Padihorresnet and Ankhhor.[27] A further example of an imported shabti is that of Queen Madiken, whose shabtis are the only ones from Nuri to have text arranged on their backs (Fig. 5). Again, this unusual stylistic feature is only paralleled by a Twenty-sixth Dynasty Theban example, again that of Ankhhor. The occurrence of such unusual features on Nubian royal shabtis that can be linked specifically to Theban Twenty-sixth Dynasty workshops suggests that some shabtis were imported from Egypt. These examples of imported shabtis further demonstrate the problems with viewing Nubian shabtis as a form of ethnic identity expression: the figurines were in many cases not Egyptianizing, but actually Egyptian.

The question still remains, then, as to why Egyptian-style material culture was so prominent in a Kushite royal context in the mid-first millennium. Addressing this problem requires an acknowledgement that objects are not just reflections of culture, but active participants in it.[28] In order fully to appreciate the social processes that underlie the Kushite use of Egyptian forms, it is necessary to move beyond typological comparisons, and put the material back into its Nubian social context, viewing it from a Kushite rather than an Egyptian point of view.[29] For the rest of this article I will concentrate particularly on the use of shabtis in the royal tombs at Nuri as a plentiful object class that can demonstrate the way in which Egyptian material culture was used in Nubia to strengthen native Nubian social structures.

USE PRACTICE OF SHABTIS
Scholars have thus far mainly considered shabtis and other Egyptianizing material culture from Nubia in their physical form, i.e. as a collection of typological features that may then be compared to purported "originals" in Egypt. However, archaeological theory concerned with hybrid material culture has emphasized the importance of aspects other than typology when considering the respective influences of the originating and receiving cultures. The practices with which the foreign material culture is used in its new context have been shown to be especially significant to our understanding of intercultural dynamics when considering the transformations material culture undergoes in its move from one culture to another.[30] "Hybrid" objects are the product of social interactions between

FIGURE 5: Faience shabti of Queen Madiken (tomb Nu. 27), with text arranged in horizontal registers on reverse. Sudan National Museum 1513. Photograph by the author.

two different cultures, and take their place within the social fabric of one or the other culture to become an active player in the negotiation of intercultural relations. Thus, we cannot look only at the typological features of the object in order properly to understand the interplay of cultural forces between the originating and the receiving cultures, but must also investigate the social practices that surrounded its use. Although this information cannot be obtained for all archaeological objects, the large number of shabtis at Nuri and the high standard of recording of the excavations allow some of the social practices surrounding the particular shabti under discussion to be uncovered.[31] By analyzing aspects of Nasalsa's shabti beyond its appearance and considering the patterns of its use and consumption, it becomes clear that shabtis played very different roles in Kushite than in Egyptian society.

The find spots of the figurines are the first way in which the practices surrounding shabti use in first millennium BCE Kush can be accessed. In contemporaneous Egypt it was common for collections of shabti figurines to be contained within "shabti boxes" when they were deposited in the tomb.[32] In contrast, Reisner's excavation notebooks show that when shabtis were found in situ in the tombs at Nuri, they had been arranged to stand around the walls of the burial chamber, the second chamber and the interconnecting corridors. Figures 6 and 7 show rows of shabtis as discovered in the tomb of king Senkamanisken, some still standing neatly around the walls despite the flooding of the tomb.

The number of shabti figurines also separates the Kushite shabtis at Nuri from Egyptian examples: the Nubian kings especially are known for their excessive number of shabtis, with Senkamanisken owning at least 1,277. Despite the problems of preservation, it seems as though such large numbers were not uncommon, and the majority of tombs at Nuri for both kings and queens contained minimum numbers of several hundred examples.[33] Although large numbers of shabtis are very rarely found in burials in Egypt in the Third Intermediate Period, the number is usually far lower.[34]

Both the high number and the unusual placement of shabtis at Nuri suggest that use practices of shabtis were different in Nubia than in Egypt: one can imagine, for example, that the time-consuming task of arranging many hundreds of figurines standing up neatly against the walls of the tomb could have formed part of the Nubian funerary ceremony. These differing practices may also have corresponded to different beliefs in Nubia than in Egypt about the function of shabtis: Balanda theorizes that shabtis may have taken an explicitly protective role in the Nubian royal tombs, rather than functioning primarily as agricultural workers for the afterlife.[35] In other words, while the form of the shabtis may have travelled more or less wholesale from Egypt to Nubia as seen in the iconographical analysis above, a study of archaeological context as well as typology demonstrates that the use and meaning of the object underwent changes in its new cultural environment.

By examining the use of shabtis in the Nubian archaeological record more generally, it is possible to obtain a better understanding of the social use of shabtis in Nubian society. This is possible thanks to the extensive excavation of a reasonably large number of non-élite cemeteries that date to the same time period as the royal graves at Nuri. In focusing

FIGURE 6: Shabtis of Senkamanisken in situ around the walls of his burial chamber in Nu. 3 (Dunham 1955, pl. XII.A). Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

deposits and the presence of Egyptian writing itself, which appear only in royal contexts and not in non-royal burials. The use of particular Egyptian object classes thus appears to have been very much restricted by status in Nubia, with only royal family members able to have access to them. Some Egyptian features, such as writing, were restricted even further to those of the very highest royal status: kings and queen mothers.[39]

EGYPTIANIZATION?

It is clear that the use of Egyptian material culture in Nubia was (a) different in use and meaning than equivalent material culture in Egypt and (b) among certain object classes, restricted to the Kushite royal family. Why its use was so widespread among the Kushite royal family, however, is less obvious. Was the use of such Egyptian or Egyptianizing material culture in Nubia, as Griffith argues, a form of "Egyptianization", an attempt by the Nubian royal family to assert an Egyptian ethnic identity for political benefit in the same way that indigenous élites in the Roman provinces (for example) presented themselves in a Roman fashion to ensure their political and social success? This seems highly unlikely: Egypt was not at this time in a position of power over Nubia that would grant Nubia such benefits from acculturation. Texts such as the Piankhy Victory Stela and the Aspelta Election Stela[40] also make clear that, behind material forms, the Nubian royal family set themselves culturally apart from Egyptians, through both religious and cultural practices that were clearly and deliberately expressed in text. Although composed in Egyptian, Aspelta's Election Stela describes the Kushite tradition of electing a successor to the throne that differs markedly from the Egyptian custom of crowning the son of the previous king. Piankhy moreover delights in his differences to the Egyptian rulers he conquers: he
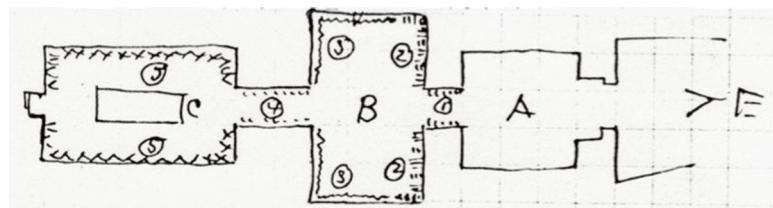
only on sites that contained significant numbers of excavated graves and are well published, it is possible to obtain data from four cemeteries that span a large geographical area from the West and South cemeteries at Meroë at the fifth cataract, through Sanam at the fourth cataract, to Missiminia and Qustul near the third and second cataracts respectively.[36] These cemeteries contain hundreds of excavated graves of the Early and Middle Napatan Periods (equivalent to the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties in Egypt).[37]

From these data we are able to see clearly that while shabtis were used extensively—in the thousands—in the royal cemetery at Nuri, not a single example is known from the thousands of non-royal Early and Middle Napatan graves that have been excavated (while shabtis were found in three Napatan tombs at Meroë South, the owners appear to have carried royal titles).[38] This reflects a pattern that is also seen in other categories of "Egyptian" material culture in Nubia, such as foundation

FIGURE 7: Sketch from Reisner's Nuri excavation notebooks, marking the location of shabtis in King Senkamanisken's tomb. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

gives women a prominent position in the iconography of the lunette of his stela, is happy to allow the Egyptian rulers to retain the title "king," complains about the Egyptian king Nimlot's treatment of his horses, and labels other Egyptian rulers as "impure" because they eat fish.[41]

Kushite material culture such as shabtis also demonstrates that Egyptian objects were used in different ways in Nubia than in Egypt, reflecting different practices of use. This cannot, however, have been a result of ignorance on the part of the Nubians: in fact, they were so familiar with Egyptian objects that it seems to have been important for them to own the latest trends in shabti styles from Egypt. For the kings at Nuri, this included owning shabti figurines with a back pillar (Fig. 8). This distinctive stylistic feature did not exist during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty

FIGURE 8: Shabti of King Senkamanisken with back pillar (tomb Nu. 3). Faience. Sudan National Museum 1631. Photograph by the author.

on either Egyptian or Kushite shabtis, but was introduced in the Twenty-sixth Dynasty in Egypt and adopted contemporaneously by the Middle Napatan royal family at Nuri. A second example indicative of the Kushite appetite for up-to-date styles is shabtis found at Nuri that, instead of the more usual two hoes, hold a single hoe in one hand and a seed bag cord in the other (Fig. 4). This feature was found on shabtis from the tombs of Tanutamani, Atlanersa, and Senkamanisken, as well as queens' burials from tombs Nuri 74, 53, 60, 41, 71, 78, 81, 82, 22 and 76, all of which date to a period contemporaneous with the Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty).[42] As discussed above, this unusual stylistic feature is only found in Egypt on particular Twenty-sixth Dynasty Theban shabtis, and suggests they may have been imported from Egyptian workshops.[43] In other words, it was not enough for the Nubian kings of the Middle Napatan period just to have shabtis, but it was desirable to furnish the tomb with examples that exactly matched the current stylistic trends in Egypt. The knowledge of shabti trends among the Kushites demonstrates that their use of shabtis in greater number and different arrangement than in Egypt is therefore unlikely to be because of ignorance of the "correct" way to use them; rather, it reflects the different meanings and uses that shabtis had in Kushite as opposed to Egyptian society.

POSTCOLONIALISM?

A framework of "Egyptianization" therefore does not capture the sophisticated ways in which the shabtis show us Kushite society adopted and adapted Egyptian material culture. Does the postcolonial standpoint taken by Haynes and Leprohon and Bovot (see above), in which the Kushites subvert the norms of Egyptian material culture to assert their indigenous identity, better explain the use of Egyptian objects in Kush? There are several problems with such a stance, beyond the observation noted above that the differences between Kushite and Egyptian shabtis are actually far smaller than generally acknowledged. Firstly, it is problematic to use a postcolonial framework to understand a form of culture contact that, by the first millennium BCE, was demonstrably non-colonial. There was no Egyptian governance over Nubia in the mid-first millennium BCE, and no political advantage to be gained among Egyptians for the Kushites to adopt Egyptian forms. In fact, only a

generation before the tombs at Nuri were built, the Kushites had been the invading force into Egypt, and indeed had ruled over it with various degrees of centralization for the better part of a century. Nor were the Kushite royal family looking back to Nubia's colonized past when using Egyptian forms: on the contrary, they were keen to demonstrate their understanding and possession of the very latest styles in Egyptian funerary provision, seen not only in their use of contemporaneous Egyptian shabti styles but also in new, Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty styles of canopic jars, heart scarabs, and foundation deposits.[44] Postcolonial theory was developed to understand in a more nuanced way cultural contact in situations where the adopting culture was less powerful than the culture from which it was adopting. Although initially a theory based mostly in discussions of discourse and text,[45] archaeologists have found it a valuable approach and through its use have been able to uncover the important role of material culture in colonial negotiation.[46] In such situations, it is a very powerful tool: it is able to bring into focus the continual mediation of indigenous agency, local cultural practice, and colonial power structures in a hybridizing culture.

Various aspects of this "entanglement" between two cultures with a clear power differential has been used to examine the material effects of the Egyptian colonial presence in Nubia to great effect by scholars, including most prominently Stuart Tyson Smith and Paul Van Pelt.[47] Many of these studies have focused on the period of Egyptian colonial occupation of Nubia from c. 1500–1000 BCE. However, the Napatan Period in the mid-first millennium BCE, and particularly the royal sphere, represents a very different political situation than the New Kingdom Egyptian colonial settlements, and postcolonial theory can no longer explain why the Kushite royal family adopted Egyptian material culture to such an extent. There was, as far as archaeological and textual evidence from Nubia can demonstrate, no Egyptian audience for these objects, and because of the power relationships between Nubia and Egypt, no Egyptian élite with whom the Nubians could ingratiate themselves for political gain. The Piankhy Stela depicts a culture who were very confident in their own superiority over the Egyptians. A postcolonial approach can offer little to the understanding of culture contact in which, as here, a more powerful culture adopts the culture of the

less powerful, since postcolonial theories are grounded in ideas of creativity, subversion and negotiation by a subjugated people in the face of an imposed, external culture.

However, scholarship by archaeologists working with postcolonial paradigms has uncovered several insights into cultural contact that are useful for informing interpretations of the use of Egyptian material culture in Kush, especially in finding approaches that will help to overcome the shortcomings of previous models. It acknowledges that emulation is unlikely to be a primary motive in cases of material culture borrowing.[48] Dietler, discussing the early periods of colonialism in Mediterranean France, advocates a concentration on local practices and consumption instead of power relations, in which the specific local logic and meaning of the imported goods and practices can be understood. The agency of the receiving culture can only be uncovered, he argues, when the culture contact is very locally contextualized. The entire repertoire of imported objects must therefore be examined in their local contexts in order to understand how they functioned in their new cultural context.[49] The framework of entanglement, derived originally from postcolonial approaches,[50] has also proved a productive method to consider the ongoing lives of Egyptian colonial settlements in Nubia after the New Kingdom,[51] and the ways in which their originally Egyptian features came to be incorporated into Nubian culture over the course of numerous generations.[52] Through this lens, the steep-sided pyramidal superstructures of the royal tombs at Nuri and el-Kurru were likely inspired by the monumental private tombs of the same form at places like Tombos rather than the Egyptian "originals" in Thebes. The architectural form would have come to be recognized through many generations of familiarity by a Nubian audience as "Nubian" as much as, or instead of, "Egyptian."[53] While useful in the non-royal sphere, however, such ideas of entanglement with an Egyptian colonial past do not address the first millennium royal Kushite interest in the latest Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty styles, nor the restriction by status of certain Egyptian object classes.

We have seen that models describing situations where unequal power relations exist between two cultures do not offer satisfying explanations for royal Egyptian material culture use in Kush. Despite their success in elucidating colonial situations, the

popularity of these models in archaeology has created problems. As early as 1991, Thomas commented that "an analysis which makes dominance and extraction central to intersociety exchange from its beginnings will frequently misconstrue power relations which did not, in fact, initially entail the subordination of native people."[54] More recently, several scholars have criticized the concentration on issues of unequal power relations in archaeology, because their popularity has led to a focus on ethnic identity in the ancient world at the expense of other forms of social grouping and organization.[55] As has been seen, the evidence from Napatan royal cemeteries of the first millennium BCE indeed leads us away from concerns of unequal power relations. Investigating the striking use of Egyptian material by the royal family does not show a contrast between Nubians and Egyptians: rather, when examined from a Nubian instead of an Egyptian point of view, it is clear that the difference emerges between those in Nubia who do use exceedingly large amounts of Egyptian material culture, and those who do not, i.e. between the royal family and non-royal Nubians. Even the Kushite élite appear to have been highly restricted in what Egyptian styles they were able to have in their tombs, missing key items of Egyptian burial equipment such as shabtis, foundation deposits, canopic equipment and inscribed objects. Egyptian material culture therefore often seems to have been used as a marker of status difference within Nubia, not of ethnic identity between Kush and Egypt.

So where might we go, if traditional models of colonial contact and ethnic identity do not help us to understand the presence of Egyptian material culture in Middle Napatan contexts? Dietler's interest in issues of consumption in culture contact is one particularly promising approach to gaining new understandings of different types of culture contact in the ancient world, and anthropological theories of exchange may well have more to offer than traditional frameworks of culture contact. A review of the literature reveals that other societies have been documented, both archaeologically and ethnographically, in which foreign goods play a role similar to what we see in first millennium Nubia— i.e. as tools of social display and as status symbols, rather than as bargaining chips in the power struggle of a colonial relationship.[56] These examples have rarely been discussed in relation to other theories of cultural contact, however, but as studies of non-

Western state structure and economy.

Nubia's African context provides a starting point. Other ethnographically documented cultures in Africa with similar ecologies to Sudan—low agricultural production and decentralized populations—have been shown also to have similar strategies to building power. This has led to the recognition of a so-called "African mode of production" in which there is an exclusive ascendancy of one group over long-distance trade.[57] This may also, in certain circumstances, take the form of particular goods in these societies remaining the sole prerogative of the royal family.[58] The restricted control over imported goods by one social group means that the "wealth" these goods represent is of a social rather than economic type (since the goods do not move beyond the royal family), which is then transformed into political power. Although the model's deterministic character is now old-fashioned, work has been done in later periods of Sudanese history to show the utility of such ideas in understanding Sudanic power structures. In the case of the Medieval Fur Keira dynasty, we have many historical records that show that very close royal control was exercised over trade.[59] Imported goods such as textiles, copper and tin did not necessarily have great monetary worth outside the Fur culture, but the heavy control over their use and redistribution by the royal family gave them great prestige. Likewise in the Funj Sultanate, long-distance trade was the monopoly of the Sultan and concentrated on specific goods, namely gold, slaves and ivory. The Sultan used his control of trade in order to exercise social control over his subjects, sometimes excluding people from the market for foreign goods.[60] David Edwards has also very productively examined the archaeological evidence from the late first millennium BCE Meroitic state with this model, showing that a large proportion of the grave goods in the royal and élite tombs of the Meroitic period are imported rather than local imitations.[61]

Applied more broadly, the phenomenon of royal or élite control over the acquisition and use of foreign goods has been termed a "prestige goods" economy. Helms' monograph, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal*, is one example of an ethnographic examination of such economies.[62] This theoretical framework is particularly useful for recognizing the political and ideological symbolism that, Helms finds, is attributed in numerous cultures to things from

geographically distant places: in other words, it recognizes that the extensive use of imported material culture can often be triggered by what we might call "positive" cultural reasons, rather than negative ones such as the perceived superiority of the culture that is being borrowed from.

The prestige goods economy model has seen far fewer applications in archaeological contexts. The Hallstatt Early Iron Age society, located in modern-day southwest Germany and France, is one of them, where the richest barrow burials incorporate Greek and Etruscan markers of burial customs and status in addition to local traditions. Here, the presence of foreign material culture in the highest status burials is interpreted not as emulation of foreign cultures, but as a strategy of power in which emphasis is placed on controlling acquisition of foreign wealth objects.[63] The objects obtained from abroad were not utilitarian, but luxury items. In addition to objects, those at the top of society also adopted customs and practices from elsewhere, including burial rites, as a means of controlling exchange. The degree to which a burial contained such imported objects correlated with status, and particular object types were restricted according to status. In particular, access to both imported wine and the Greek and Etruscan vessels required to mix and drink it were restricted by status in the western Hallstatt zone of Burgundy and southwest Germany. Amphorae for wine are found only in *Fürstensitze*, settlements in which political power was centralized. Greek bronze drinking vessels, of which the famous Vix krater is one example, were also confined to only the most élite graves. The distribution pattern of such objects is a function of their restriction to only the highest status contexts, rather than problems of availability: in the neighboring region of France at the same period, imported wine and its associated material culture was extremely widespread across many areas of society.[64]

The parallels between the use of foreign material culture in the Hallstatt culture and in first millennium BCE Nubia are obvious. In Kushite royal graves, emphasis was placed not only on exogenous objects, but certain foreign practices were also imported: the royal family not only included Egyptian objects (whether imported or locally manufactured Egyptian object types) in their burials, but were also buried according to Egyptian religious belief—the walls of King Senkamanisken's tomb are inscribed with Egyptian funerary texts from the

Book of the Dead, for example. Foreign object classes are restricted by status despite their limited "monetary" worth, with objects such as shabtis appearing only in royal tombs and never in non-royal burials. The use of foreign objects that adhered to the latest trends is important to maintain control over power in a prestige goods system, just as the Kushite royal family seem to have insisted upon obtaining shabtis that matched exactly the types Egyptians themselves were using at the same time.

The benefit of using a prestige goods economy model to interpret the reasons for the pervasive use of Egyptian material culture at Nuri is to focus attention on the role of Egyptian objects in the expression of Kushite royal status in Kushite society, while also taking account of the agency of the Kushite kings: the adoption of Egyptian material culture in Nubia was not inevitable because of Egyptian culture's "superiority", but was rather an active choice by the Kushites that reflects the use that Egyptian objects had in Nubian culture.[65] It recognizes that objects from one culture will take on new significances and meanings in their new cultural context, and that they are used for specific cultural purposes related to the new culture in which they are active, rather than the original one. By focusing on the Egyptian objects' function in Nubian society, rather than their relation to Egyptian society, we can avoid the pitfalls encountered by previous interpretations of this phenomenon that centered Kush's relationship with Egypt rather than its own social structure.

Although older models of cultural contact based on economic production, mostly concerning world-systems theory, have been criticized for their mechanistic explanation of modes of production and the lack of agency assigned to human participants in the system,[66] Dietler has now suggested a productive new approach focused on consumption, using locally-specific evidence that centres local agency in the process of adoption.[67] I here suggest that this approach might be taken further to better understand cultural contact in non-colonial situations, where power relations between the originating and indigenous adopting culture are of even less concern than in Dietler's case study of early colonialism.[68] Insights gained from prestige goods economy models, supported by ethnographic insights from other African cultures, provide a starting point for addressing the function of foreign material culture in the Kushite context, without

centering either the Egyptian appearance of the objects or inadvertently responding to problematic and outdated views on cultural superiority.

Several otherwise puzzling things about the Napatan case study are made easier to understand by the application of ideas derived from prestige goods economy models, suggesting that considerations of state and economic structure are a better way to understand the high degree of Egyptianization in first millennium Kush than theories of cultural contact and ethnic identity.[69] The very high concentration of Egyptian goods in an otherwise Kushite context (especially the higher degrees of Egyptianization in royal contexts), the restriction of certain classes of imported goods to the highest elite, and the transformations in meaning and use that the objects undergo to fit their new, rather than original, cultural context all reflect the important role Egyptian culture played in building power and status for the Kushite kings.

However, thus far the archaeological application of such theories of exchange has been fairly limited. The Kushite case study in fact has much to offer our understanding of the meanings and purposes foreign material culture may have in non-colonial societies. It provides us with a dataset that is well preserved and well excavated, and for which we have a wealth of contextual information. It also demonstrates the speed and degree to which foreign material culture may be adopted even in non-colonial situations, when no population from the originating culture is present, and when the power of the adopting culture is greater than that of the originating culture. The foreign material culture takes on new uses and meanings in its new cultural context that allow it to be extremely effective in the receiving culture with little to no reference to its originating culture. The Nubian data also demonstrates the way in which religion may be used within a prestige goods economy in order to offer further social control to the ruling class in an only loosely centralized society. Existing models of culture contact including hybridity and entanglement have continued to offer a powerful explanatory tool in archaeology when used to investigate colonial situations: however, they can create significant interpretive problems when applied to societies where such power differentials do not exist. Utilizing theories of state structure and economy instead allows us to see that in order to understand the use of Egyptian material culture in

first millennium Nubia, we must consider the power relations not between Kush and Egypt, but rather those within Kush itself.

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NOTES

[1] Dietler 2010, 27–43.

[2] General histories of Nubia and particularly the Kushite Kingdom include Welsby 1996 and Edwards 2004.

[3] Eide et al. 1994, 45.

[4] Morkot 2000 gives a narrative account.

[5] Dunham 1950.

[6] Dunham 1955.

[7] E.g., Batrawi 1946; Derry 1956; Engelbach 1943; Giuffrida-Ruggeri 1915; MacGaffey 1966; Strouhal 1971.

[8] Griffith 1922, 70–71.

[9] Van Dommelen 2006, 135.

[10] Dietler 2010, 46.

[11] Dietler 2010, 60.

[12] Török 2009, 329. See also Smith 2013 for a description of previously prominent models of culture contact in Egyptology and Nubian Studies.

[13] E.g., Millet 1990; Webster 1997; Haeussler 2013; Woolf 1997.

[14] E.g., Benoit 1965; Boardman 1980; Bouloumié 1981. For colonialism and culture contact in the ancient Mediterranean in general, see Van Dommelen 2012.

[15] E.g., VanValkenburgh et al. 2015; VanValkenburgh et al. 2017; Liebmann 2015.

[16] Most notably Bhabha 1994.

[17] Dietler 2010, 50–53; though note criticism by Matić 2017 of the problems caused by applying postcolonial theory to archaeological evidence, particularly in Egyptology.

[18] Haynes and Leprohon 1987, 22.

[19] Bovot 1996.

[20] Haynes and Leprohon 1987, 27.

[21] Bovot 1996.

[22] Naville 1912; Balanda 2014, 655.

[23] Friedman 1998.

[24] Griffith 1922, 75, pl. XVIII.

[25] Bovot and Ziegler 2003, 79; Aubert and Aubert 1974, 103; Leclant 1965, 166.

[26] E.g., Aston 2009a; Killen and Weiss 2009; Haring 2000; Haring 2009; Haring and Kaper 2009.

[27] Janes and Bangbala 2002, 154ff. Ankhhor: Bietak and Reiser-Haslauer 1978, Taf. 99; Padimahes: Chappaz 1984, cat. 119; Padihorresnet: Graefe 2003, Taf. 103.

[28] E.g., Appadurai 1986.

[29] An approach which has recently also proved productive for, e.g., Török 2009 and Lohwasser 2017.

[30] E.g., Van Dommelen and Rowlands 2012, 22;

31 Stockhammer 2013; Dietler 2010, 53. In the Nubian context, see Lohwasser 2017; Buzon et al. 2016; and Smith 2014.

31 Dunham 1955.

32 Aston 1994; Aston 2009b, 364–374; Stewart 1995, 52–57.

33 Dunham 1955.

34 E.g., the more than one thousand examples belonging to the Twenty-first Dynasty king Psusennes I: Aubert and Aubert 1974, 150–156.

35 Balanda 2014.

36 Dunham 1963; Lohwasser 2010; Lohwasser 2012; Williams 1990; Vila 1980.

37 In the absence of detailed pottery typologies it is very difficult accurately to date tombs to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty or post-Twenty-fifth Dynasty Middle Napatan period. The most reliable way of dating a Nubian tomb is with the discovery of a king's name within, and while the names of Twenty-fifth Dynasty kings are only very rarely found in Early Napatan graves, the use of writing becomes even more restricted in the Middle Napatan period and the names of the Middle Napatan kings are never found at these sites (with one exception of Meroë S 44, which contained two alabaster jars bearing the cartouches of Aspelta; Dunham 1963, 374: fig. 202). This means that it is almost impossible to date a non-royal tomb definitively to the Middle Napatan period. However, since shabtis do not appear in either Early Napatan or Middle Napatan non-royal graves, the lack of precise dating information does not in fact hinder the analysis.

38 Princess Mernua, tomb Beg. S. 85, dated to the reign of Anlamani/Aspelta, owned 88 shabtis. Tombs S. 132 and S. 214 did not preserve the titles (or in S. 214 the name) of the deceased, but the unusually high level of luxury Egyptian(ized) objects they contained suggests that they, too, belonged to royal women; Dunham 1963.

39 Lohwasser 2012, 316–318, discusses the lack of writing in non-royal contexts in Napatan Nubia. When writing does appear in a non-royal context, it is generally in the form of a king's cartouche. At Nuri, those bearing the title of king and queen mother have texts that greatly exceed those of lesser royal women in both number and variety, even on object types that appear in all tombs.

40 Grimal 1981a; Grimal 1981b.

41 Howley 2015b; Fitzenreiter 2011.

42 Dunham 1950, Dunham 1955.

43 Ankhhor: Bietak and Reiser-Haslauer 1978, Taf. 99; Padihorresnet: Graefe 2003, Taf. 103; Padimahes: Chappaz 1984, cat. 119.

44 Howley 2015a.

45 E.g., Bhabha 1994.

46 Dietler 2010, 53.

47 Buzon et al. 2016; Smith 2003; Smith 2014; Smith 2015; Van Pelt 2013.

48 Van Dommelen and Rowlands 2012, 25–26; Thomas 1999, 16.

49 Dietler 2010, 53–55, 346.

50 Particularly Thomas 1991.

51 There is evidence for ongoing occupation into the first millennium BCE at Tombos, Amara West, and Hillat el-Arab. Tombos: e.g., Smith 2014; Buzon et al. 2016; Buzon 2014; Schrader et al. 2014. Amara West: Binder 2011. Hillat el-Arab: Vincentelli et al. 2006.

52 E.g., Smith 2014; Buzon et al. 2016.

53 Buzon et al. 2016; Smith 2014; Ambridge 2007.

54 Thomas 1991, 84.

55 Mac Sweeney 2009; Silliman 2005.

56 Also noted by Smith 1998, 265.

57 Sahlins 1972; Strathern 1971; Coquery-Vidrovitch 1972.

58 E.g., Ekholm 1972.

59 Edwards 1996, 18; Walz 1979; Hasan 1979, 204.

60 Edwards 1996, 18; Spaulding 1985, 104-116.

61 Edwards 1996.

62 Helms 1993; see Barker 2008, 521–522 for a survey of other literature.

63 Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978.

64 Dietler 2010, 210.

65 As also stressed in the work of Smith and the "Interkulturalität" model of Lohwasser 2017.

66 E.g., Arafat and Morgan 1994; Dietler 1995; Woolf 1990.

67 Dietler 2010.

68 See also Smith 2014 for the application of Dietler's model to Meroitic and post-Meroitic Nubia.

69 As argued for Nubian history in much broader focus by Smith 1998, who also takes a political economy approach based around center-periphery interactions and transculturation processes.