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Main content

Article Preview :

From Slave to Pharaoh: The Black Experience in Ancient Egypt. By DONALD B. REDFORD. Baltimore: JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2004. Pp. ix + 218. \$44.95.

With a profound interest in the sources and the story they have to tell, Donald B. Redford brings to his work a lively critical imagination that makes it always fresh. Redford presents us with a discussion of relations between subsaharan Africa and Egypt, featuring prominently the brief, but triumphantly notable Twenty-fifth Dynasty. It deals with much the same subject as Robert Morkot's recent work, *The Black Pharaohs: Egypt's Nubian Rulers* (London, 2002).

It must be noted that the book's title does not reflect the actual subject well. The rulers of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty had never been slaves, nor were they descended from slaves, as far as we know. While the population of the Nubian Nile Valley had been occupied and colonized for the most part, they also had never been slaves. Slavery existed in Egypt, and it may have been more important than Egyptologists have wanted to admit, and the enslavement of subsaharan Africans also occurred. However, the acquisition of subsaharan Africans to the exclusion of others, the large-scale deportation of Africans to a non-African place, the deliberate cultural creolization, and the systematic social isolation of subsaharan Africans did not happen. Without these elements, the Black experience, as understood in North America, cannot rightly be thrust onto ancient Egypt. Instead, the experience of subsaharan Africans (including Nubians) in relation to Egypt was far more complex, right from the beginning, because Egypt is an African place. To be fair, Redford has recounted enough of the complexity in the relationships to refute the title. The title does not detract from the book, but many readers will not get what they might expect, for it is not an investigation of the lives...

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Egypt's pharaohs delivered divine justice from beyond the grave. Whether alive or dead, pharaohs were the source of all law and order in ancient Egypt. Photograph by DEA/Getty Images. Read Caption. Crimes in ancient Egypt tended to be divided into two categories: crimes against the state and crimes against individuals. Desertion, treason, and slandering the pharaoh fell into the first, while acts such as homicide, injury, robbery, and theft fell into the second. Much of what is known about ancient Egypt's legal system comes from the New Kingdom period (ca 1539-1075 B.C.) and the archaeological site of Deir el Medina, across the Nile from Thebes. Right: Slaves are punished by an official on the third-millennium B.C. tomb of Mereruka ... Read More. "From Slave to Pharaoh presents a lively account of this period of Nubian rule during Egypt's 25th Dynasty." (Mariam Ayad Odyssey). "A timely contribution to the rapidly growing literature on Nubian and Sudanese studies." The sub-title 'the black experience in Egypt' seems unfortunate and a bit presumptuous. Imagine an alternative book that rounds up negative Egyptian statements on people like lighter-skinned Libyans, Syrians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Mesopotamians etc and calls it 'the White experience in Egypt.' Such a title and the development of it, would seem questionable at the very least. The same thing applies to this book. In From Slave to Pharaoh, noted Egyptologist Donald B. Redford examines over two millennia of complex social and cultural interactions between Egypt and the Nubian and Sudanese civilizations that lay to the south of Egypt. These interactions resulted in the expulsion of the black Kushite pharaohs of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty in 671 B.C. by an invading Assyrian army. Redford In From Slave to Pharaoh, noted Egyptologist Donald B. Redford examines over two millennia of complex social and cultural interactions between Egypt and the Nubian and Sudanese civilizations that lay to the south of Egypt. T Ancient Egyptian Pharaoh. Social and Administrative Constitution The inhabitants of Egypt were divided into classes, the most respected being that of the priests charged with the upkeep of the temples. Rich and very influential, they were exempted from taxes and were maintained at the expense of the temple. The other classes were the nobility, charged with the higher levels of religious and political government of the provinces, the scribes or civil servants of the royal administration, and the people itself who were mainly peasants and artisans. The Society of Ancient Egypt. Posted in: The Ph...