Foreword

Most histories of ancient Egypt focus on the perceived ‘high-points’ of the civilisation, rarely giving much credence to anything that happened after the death of King Ramesses II around 1200 BC. The artificial impression of progressive steps of development towards the ‘climax’ of the New Kingdom assumes an inevitable decline thereafter. Of course, history is never so simple.

Egypt’s 26th Dynasty has suffered particularly poor publicity amongst non-specialists because of a lack of coherent archaeological finds or readily identifiable royal sculptures, but also due to the preponderance of rather non-Egyptian-sounding names like ‘Psamtek’ and ‘Apries’.

The recent initial misidentification of a colossus of Psamtek I as his much more illustrious predecessor Ramesses II is a case in point. Few might have expected that such a giant statue, found in fragments at Heliopolis in 2017 – apparently a newly commissioned sculpture rather than a usurped one – would have belonged to a king of the Saite Period. Yet the well-known *Histories* of Herodotus describe several such statues at the capital, Sais, and their cult is attested by the titles of a number of individuals.

The Saite Period is, as Roger Forshaw emphasises, one of resurgent power in terms of relatively strong internal unity and expansionist ambition. It was also one of acute historical awareness, drawing on over two millennia of established Pharaonic history, no doubt inspired by a consciousness of the ruling Dynasties’ Libyan roots. This combination of features makes the Saite Period of particular interest to historians of both Egypt and comparable peoples.

Roger Forshaw provides an extensive survey of Egypt at this time, drawing together disparate material little known outside a handful of specialists. The author is to be congratulated for presenting this in a form that is both accessible and honest about the drawbacks of our source material – something students of ancient history, especially that of Egypt, perhaps need to consider.

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