

interest in Lapita, will be given the opportunity to critically evaluate the conclusions reached by the author about Tonga's position in Lapita settlement and subsequent cultural transformations.

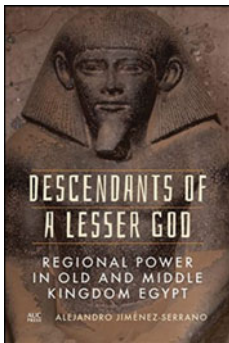
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ALEJANDRO JIMÉNEZ-SERRANO. 2023. *Descendants of a lesser god: regional power in Old and Middle Kingdom Egypt*. Cairo/New York: The American University in Cairo Press; 978-1-649-03175-4 hardback 65\$.



Located in the southernmost province or *nome*, which was called Ta-sety in ancient Egyptian, and serving as the cemetery for the high elite of its capital Elephantine (in modern Assuan), the Qubbet el-Hawa is one of the better-researched provincial cemeteries of ancient Egypt. The burial site is renowned for the autobiographies adorning the walls of certain tombs, which detail the involvement of the local elite, specifically in the adjacent region of Nubia. These inscriptions offer valuable insights into the interactions between Egyptians and the diverse Nubian populations during the Old to Middle Kingdom periods in the First Cataract region, as well as with other Nilotic cultures further south.

Descendants of a lesser god is a much-needed study that highlights the importance of exploring the sociocultural and historical significance of a provincial region to fully understand the ancient Egyptian society. Alejandro Jiménez-Serrano's novel approach provides a local history of the southernmost Egyptian *nome*, allowing readers to delve into the lives of the elite and their kin groups. This exploration recognises the importance of kinship and social organisation in a region geographically detached from the state capital. It also analyses in detail the social processes that occurred throughout the entire country.

The book's informative Introduction outlines the necessity and objectives of the study. It also discusses the sources used to illustrate the daily life of the people who resided in Elephantine and how novel research approaches to existing evidence led to new information. The rationale for selecting Elephantine as a case study is that the region is well-documented

through textual and archaeological data for the relevant time period. The book sheds light on two intriguing historical and sociocultural aspects: the site's location in a border zone and the associated duties of local officials. Additionally, it explores the deification process of a high-ranking member of the elite and its significance in legitimising the rule of the *nome* by the local elite.

The subsequent eight chapters discuss these officials and their burial places, emphasising the importance of kinship. The first two chapters offer background information on the region. Chapter 1 highlights the importance of the southernmost *nome* in ancient Egypt's history and introduces the various Nubian groups residing in the adjacent eastern and western deserts. Chapter 2 outlines the excavation history of the Assuan region, detailing the various missions and their projects. Subsequently, the history of high officials and their duties is examined chronologically. An important development in the ancient Egyptian administration during the later Old Kingdom becomes evident in the Assuan region as well: high positions were no longer exclusively granted to members of the royal family. This shift allowed high officials to establish parallel power structures in the province through the inheritance of titles. Of particular interest regarding Elephantine is the replacement of state-sent officials by the local elite during the Sixth Dynasty (discussed in Chapter 3), who ruled the southernmost *nome* until the end of the Middle Kingdom. During the First Intermediate Period, the region was governed by *nomarchs* (provincial governors) from other *nomes*, particularly those from Thebes. Under the leadership of one of these rulers, Intef II, the veneration of the Old Kingdom local high official Heqaib was initiated and used to legitimise local rule (as discussed in Chapter 4). With the reunification of the country and the onset of the Middle Kingdom, Ta-sety regained autonomy. Its high officials became the primary authority concerning the peoples of Nubia and the eastern desert, undertaking a crucial role for the Egyptian government in their efforts to conquer these regions. Concurrently, the revered ancestor Heqaib's status was elevated to that of a god. *Nomarchs*, including Sarenput I, claimed lineage from Heqaib, calling themselves his son to legitimise their rule (as discussed in Chapter 5).

The next two chapters delve into the lives and duties of the most renowned leaders of the southernmost *nome*, focusing on the architecture and decoration of their tombs. Chapter 6 examines the legacy of Sarenput I, while Chapter 7 looks at the accomplishments of Sarenput II. Chapter 8 outlines the importance of kinship as well as the positioning and development of the tombs in the Qubbet el-Hawa following the rule of Sarenput II. It considers the social stratification and spatial organisation of tombs emphasising a notable change in burial practices during the later period of the Twelfth Dynasty, particularly in tomb QH 33. The construction of the chapel of the statue directly above the burial chamber transforms the sepulchre into more than a representation of Osiris' funerary realm; it also underscores the deceased's identification with the reborn sun. The epilogue illuminates the situation in the *nome* during the Thirteenth Dynasty, highlighting the loss of power by the local elite following the country's separation and the relocation of the kings to nearby Thebes.

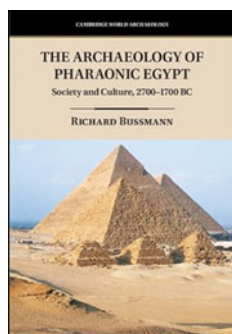
The book is an exemplary study of historical analysis, considering all available evidence and employing approaches from various disciplines. It seamlessly combines sources, ranging from the author's own project results—a re-evaluation of previous excavations at the Qubbet el-Hawa—to the analysis of textual and iconographic evidence, the interpretation of titles and

the use of archaeological data. Moreover, it examines the high elite through the notion of kinship. This multifaceted approach not only makes the book an enjoyable read but enhances understanding, supported by a variety of visual media.

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RICHARD BUSSMANN. 2023. *The archaeology of pharaonic Egypt: society and culture, 2700–1700 BC*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 978-11070-303-81 hardback £100.



With this book, Richard Bussmann places himself alongside Barry Kemp, Bruce Trigger, David O'Connor and Allan B. Lloyd in a group of major Egyptologists who see the importance of approaching ancient Egypt from a social perspective. This opens space for theoretical and methodological awareness and comparative approaches that ultimately remove ancient Egypt from a place of exceptionalism and take it seriously as a hierarchical, complex and diverse ancient society like many others. Drawing and expanding on ground-breaking syntheses such as 'Ancient Egypt: anatomy of a civilization' (Kemp 2018) and 'Ancient Egypt: a social history' (Trigger *et al.* 1983), *The archaeology of pharaonic Egypt* adds

depth to the perception and discussion of ancient Egyptian society, especially due to its emphasis on people and their agency beyond royal monuments and texts. Most importantly, and moving in the opposite direction of traditional Egyptology, the book highlights the existence and input to social relations and culture of communities comprising the vast majority of the population in all historical periods, conventionally referred to as 'non-elite'. This continues Bussmann's interest in social diversity as expressed in the agency of a variety of actors that shaped the complexity of ancient Egypt beyond elites and their partial textual sources (e.g. Bussmann 2020, 2022). This also moves Bussmann's work away from the aforementioned social syntheses of Egyptian history and archaeology; these have mostly focused on the social and material structures that limit agency, while the focus here lies mostly with the communities that shaped ancient societies through their agency.

The archaeology of pharaonic Egypt excels as an example of mature theoretical reasoning stemming from the evidence. Criticisms of Egyptology's lack of interest in theory have been published in the past. According to those critiques, Egyptology should incorporate externally developed theory into its discussions to allow for a greater dialogue with other social sciences (e.g. Moreno García 2014). It is important to include theoretical perspectives into the interpretation of the Egyptian evidence. Bussmann's anthropological take on the Egyptian evidence, however, adds to it and builds theoretical reasoning, which then becomes