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**Karen Exell (ed.), *Egypt in its African Context: Proceedings of the conference held at The Manchester Museum, University of Manchester, 2-4 October 2009*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011. iv&114 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-4073-0760-2 (Pbk).**

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*Egypt in its African Context* is the first Egyptological volume to include contributions from African-centered scholars since Theodore Celenko's *Egypt in Africa*. The contributions also include essays by traditional Egyptologists, archaeologists, and Africanists. This volume is divided into two sections: 'Egypt in Africa' and 'Interpreting Egypt in Africa'. This volume aims to encourage further dialogue between African-centered scholarship and traditional Egyptology. The validity of African-centered approaches is clearly demonstrated and, moreover, the volume demonstrates the falsehood of categorizing ancient Egypt as Near Eastern as opposed to African.

Archaeologist C.A. Folorunso and Egyptologist Stephen Quirke set the tone with insightful perspectives in the Introduction to Part 1. Folorunso rejects the notion that ancient Egypt influenced cultural developments all over sub-Saharan Africa. Rather, the commonalities between ancient Egyptians and tropical African cultures reflect a common origin dating to the Neolithic period. Folorunso also argues that the history of ancient Egypt can clearly function as 'therapeutic' for both sides of the black/white racial divide. However, the concept of a black ancient Egypt is not therapeutic as much as it is a criticism of Eurocentric racism. Stephen Quirke observes that Egyptology and archaeology lack involvement from African-centered scholars and scholars conversant in African languages, which is largely due to institutional biases. This weakness, Quirke contends, can be overcome if African and African-American universities engage with Egyptology. Quirke observes that Egyptology needs perspectives from non-European

groups, particularly African-centered scholars and native Egyptians, in order to gain a better understanding of ancient Egypt (pages 7-8).

African-centered historian Kimani Nehusi provides an excellent discussion of the polemics in the opposition towards the 'African Egypt' position (pages 11-20). Nehusi also provides a succinct survey of African-centered scholarship that has challenged the racist biases of early Egyptology (pages 13-14). Most notable is the interdisciplinary work of African-centered Egyptologist Cheikh Anta Diop, which traditional Egyptologists often dismiss mainly because of his insistence on ancient Egyptian blackness. Nehusi also discusses the prevalent presumption of ancient Egyptian whiteness (pages 15-17). The 25<sup>th</sup> dynasty Nubian rulers are often erroneously referred to as the 'Black Pharaohs', which implies that the ancient Egyptians were white. Nehusi correctly argues that Egyptian art shows both Egyptians and Nubians with the same range of skin complexions and phenotypic features. The diverse physical types in these depictions would be defined as black in a modern context (page 15). Nehusi, overall, correctly observes that the denial of ancient Egypt as an African or black African civilisation is nothing more than Eurocentric racism.

Maria Gatto observes that Nubian pastoral culture had a great deal of influence on ancient Egypt's social development (pages 21-29). Gatto convincingly demonstrates that Nubian pastoral nomads were the African ancestors of Egypt and, in addition, that they even played a role in the origin of the entire African pastoral tradition. Gatto's analysis shows that influence between Egypt and Nubia was not unilateral (i.e. Egypt-to-Nubia) as is often assumed. Furthermore, Gatto clearly demonstrates Nubia's role in the social development of Africa.

Ana Jiménez discusses the power symbolism of the *Bos Primigenius* (a wild oxen) in early Saharan culture. She explains why the *bos* was chosen to represent the king as opposed to other animals (pages 30-42). In Saharan and Nilotic cultures, the cultural complex from which Predynastic Egypt emerged, the *bos* and bull were chosen as a metaphor for the power of the chief/king because of the dominance they showed in the

wild of the Neolithic Western Sahara. The leader's ability to hunt them was a testament to his prowess and it was believed he harnessed their powerful essence which enabled him to conquer and subjugate his enemies. The bull, being the Nilotic equivalent, reflected the same ideology for Nilotic (Abydos and Hierakonpolis) rulers. Overall, Jiménez provides a clear example of ancient Egypt's Nilo-Saharan roots.

African-centered Egyptologist Alain Anselin looks at the linguistic and archaeological evidence demonstrating the Saharan and Nubian antecedents of Predynastic Egypt, which reveals ancient Egypt to be part of a Northeast African pool of cultures (pages 43-53). Anselin shows African cultural unity between *Kemet* (Egypt) and other African cultures, both continental and in the diaspora, through the practice of libation (pages 54-65). Placing Egypt in the context of the African diaspora demonstrates the expansiveness of African cultural continuity and connections over time and space.

Nubiologist Solange Bumbaugh provides a much needed Nubio-centric perspective on the worship of Isis at Philae (pages 66-70). The evidence, Bumbaugh contends, suggests that a millennia long tradition of Kushite and Meroitic worship at Philae existed, which was distinct from that of Egypt. The broad significance of Bumbaugh's paper is that it shows an *additional* African perspective on Philae by giving agency to Nubian practices which are often assumed to have been 'Egyptianised'.

Part 2 discusses the different receptions of the 'Egypt in Africa' position. African-centered scholar Charles Grantham provides succinct summaries (pages 71-72). He takes issue with Folorunso's criticisms of the Afrocentric position. Grantham argues that Folorunso does not adequately address the issue of Egyptian racial identity. In addition, Grantham observes that Folorunso does not provide an in-depth discussion on the proponents of the 'Black Egypt' position. Grantham's criticisms, as discussed below, are legitimate.

Folorunso's analysis (pages 73-79) is similar to his earlier discussion in Part 1. He contends that arguments for Egyptian influence on tropical Africa are often predicated

on the assumed inferiority of the latter. Recent evidence and interpretations show independent cultural developments for tropical Africa, that were once credited to Egyptian influence. Reiterating his earlier conclusion, Folorunso maintains that the commonalities between ancient Egyptian and tropical African cultures indicate a common cultural source. Folorunso observes evidence which shows the biological connection between ancient Egyptians and tropical Africans (page 76) and tropical African influence on Egypt (page 78), but he does not consider the *additional possibility* that some of the ancient Egyptians descended from tropical African populations. Also, as Grantham contends, Folorunso clearly generalises Afrocentric scholarship and is ambiguous on the 'race' issue. Criticisms notwithstanding, Folorunso shows different ways to approach the relationship between ancient Egypt and tropical Africa.

José Lingua-Nafafé discusses the marginalisation of Egypt's African context in the European imagination (pages 80-91). Lingua-Nafafé, analysing fifteenth-century maps and Portuguese accounts, observes that this relationship was based on European perceptions of West Africans and their interests in the region. From this context, Lingua-Nafafé argues that Afrocentrism is a legitimate challenge to Eurocentric conceptions of the world. An Afrocentric Egypt is not black totalitarianism, as Lingua-Nafafé observes. Rather, it is a claim for Africa's place in world history. Afrocentrism sees the world as a product of all human cultures, some of which are defined as black. In this way, Afrocentrism is a response to Eurocentric racism. Lingua-Nafafé correctly concludes that an Afrocentric Egypt is a political claim about the cultural and historical location of Egypt that is pertinent to the rest of African identity.

Egyptologist Bill Manley argues that Petrie's elitist approaches were unique and sometimes went against contemporary attitudes (pages 92-97). This is evident in his analysis of the Qurneh Queen burial. Petrie never saw Egypt or Nubia as indigenous creations, but as products of an underlying European civilisation. Petrie did not see ancient Egypt and Nubia as white civilisations, but as white-influenced civilisations. Thus, rather than seeing the Qurneh Queen as an indigenous Egyptian or Nubian, Petrie maintained that the queen was of European-Asiatic admixture.

Clyde Winters illustrates the importance of a black ancient Egypt to Afro-American communities and Indian Dalits (pages 98-104). Winters, similar to Lingua-Nafafé, emphasises the empowerment that an Afrocentric Egypt connotes. Winters brings attention to the centuries of Afro-American scholarship that countered Eurocentric racism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Winters observes that the Dalits civil rights movement is influenced by Afro-American scholarship on ancient Egypt. Both groups see ancient Egypt and Nubia as part of their cultural heritage.

Sally Ann-Ashton discusses her experience as a white female African-centered Egyptologist (pages 105-114). Ashton provides anecdotes about the suspicion towards white African-centered Egyptologists who see ancient Egypt as a black African civilisation. Ashton actually engages black perspectives which are often marginalised by traditional Egyptology. For example, Ashton collaborated with African scholars and black community groups to make Fitzwilliam's online Egyptian gallery 'Virtual Kemet', which presents Egypt as a part of black history (pages 108-110). Ashton argues that facial reconstructions and re-enactments should portray the Egyptians with dark skin complexions and African hairstyles to avoid Eurocentric depictions (page 12). Moreover, Ashton correctly observes that an African-centered approach to Egypt is not racially or ethnically exclusive (pages 113-14). Overall, Ashton convincingly demonstrates that an African-centered approach allows for more inclusive Egyptology. Traditional Egyptology should follow Ashton's inclusive approach because it creates a dynamic subject.

The placement of Egypt in its African context and the inclusion of African-centered perspectives propel the dynamism of this volume. The archaeological discussions and African-centered scholarship clearly show that ancient Egypt cannot be isolated from its Nilo-Saharan context. Also, African-centered scholarship brings attention to some problematic biases in Egyptology and how those could be corrected. Furthermore, the 'Black Egypt' position is discussed in a scholarly manner which is rare in mainstream Egyptological discussions. In sum, the volume demonstrates that dialogue between

African-centered scholarship and traditional Egyptologists is beneficial to the study of ancient Egypt.