**X-Men: Last Class**

**Timothy Sandiford**

**Haycock, B. 1967. “The Later Phases of Meroitic Civilisation” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 50: 107-120**

While it is true that Haycock’s article has been rather overtaken by developments in evidence what is interesting about this piece, given its publication date of 1967, is that many of the ideas it suggests for the end of the Meroitic kingdom are still rather current. It also offers an interesting insight into the intellectual development of Late Meroitic studies during the 1960s and before.

Straight off the top of the paper Haycock criticizes approaches to the breakdown of the Merotic kingdom which seek to relay on models of decline, impoverishment, and ‘barbarization’ (ala A. J. Arkell and W. B. Emery) “It would be easier to discuss the views of Professor Emery if he gave more evidence or justification for them.” (Pg.107-108). This is certainly a theme we have encountered before when looking at Kushite and Meroitic evidence, often bemoaning the lack of specific evidence and the imprecise use of terms. Haycock also criticizes the use of secondary ancient sources to support the use of presupposed narratives independent of the archaeological evidence. Rather, the approach to this article looks for change from within the Meroitic state and its surrounding regions. This approach can be favorably compared to Fuller in which the author states that “An interpretation of the Arminna West data is presented below to suggest that the texture of social change in Lower Nubia cannot be reduced to the collapse of the central Meroitic state, nor to the arrival of X-Group immigrants.” (Pg. 203) The similarity in approach is striking considering that Fuller post-dates Haycock by 32 years.

Certainly, the tension we have in this article is between arguments of center and periphery. The assumption is that the Meroitic state is a centralized bureaucracy that exerts direct control from the center, rather than the model we have discussed before of the ‘segmentary society’ whereby relationships are negotiated and to a certain extent decentralized. It seems that Haycock believes in the model of a centralized Meroitic state “Possibly what was happening was not a process of general impoverishment, but simply that complete royal autocracy was giving way before the growth of a rich and powerful nobility.” (Pg.111) Even on this score Haycock has an interesting perspective “The concept of strong monarchical government was never accepted in the Sudan as readily as is Egypt because of the tribal and nomadic character of many of the people, and the natural barriers of desert and cataract which favored local loyalties.” (Pg. 116)

Much of this article is given over to a discussion of various collections of inscriptions from Philae, Dakka, and several other sites, which appear not to have been studied in much detail up to this point (i.e. 1967). He makes the point that careful study of these texts can yield important information regarding internal and external relationships, even in the absence of specific dating evidence being included in the text, this is especially true in the northern zone of Meroitic influence where;

“It seems that, in spite of the proclivity of the Nubian tribesmen for interfering in the increasingly strife-torn affairs of Roman Egypt, known from many references, and also perhaps from the prevalence of military titles amongst the Meroitic nobility, peace and order usually prevailed within Sudan.” (Pg.116)

He goes on to point out that is actual fact the inscriptional evidence tends to suggest that the only area of competition was in gift giving by Roman and Meroitic authorizes to the northern temples.

In summary, while the Haycock article has aged in many respects, especially in terms of conceptions regarding the range of possible societal configurations, it has many themes that remain current throughout the articles we have considered this week. I will end with perhaps my favorite quote from his paper, which comes in the final paragraph;

“What may be described as ‘the disaster theory of history’ has done much to bedevil our proper understanding of the development of the early Sudan as a continuous process from Neolithic times to the present day.” (Pg.120)