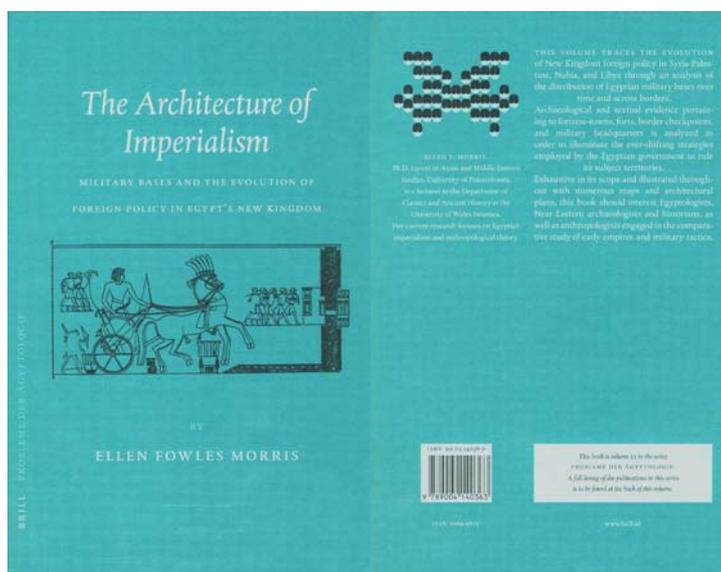


Morris, E.F. 2005. The architecture of imperialism. Military bases and the evolution of foreign policy in Egypt's New Kingdom. – Leiden, Brill

Book review by P.J. Cowie



The historical manifestation of Egyptian imperialism, its various forms, theatres and phases, has of late received much additional and deserving attention. Several important and occasionally innovative studies have recently appeared that favourably augur the advent, with the benefit of new data and fresh theoretical approaches, of yet more. The present reviewer, for example, stands amongst those scholars who seek currently to cast their own slant on both long-established and new evidences informing the phenomenon of New Kingdom imperialism, each researcher with their own particular perspective. The particular work under review is positioned squarely within this ongoing process, simultaneously utilising both broad regional and chronological perspectives (in seeking to include data from all theatres of direct imperial engagement, during all relevant periods), *and* adopting a specific focus (the examination of military bases in the archaeological and textual sources as a phenomenon instructive for foreign relations).

Some restructuring and several updates notwithstanding, 'The architecture of imperialism' represents the final, revised publication of author and researcher Ellen Fowles Morris's doctoral dissertation of essentially the same title ('The architecture of imperialism: an investigation into the role of fortresses and administrative headquarters in New Kingdom foreign policy'), successfully submitted to the former Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (now the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations) at the University of Pennsylvania in 2001. Wide-ranging in scope and comprehensive in its chosen area of detail, this work no doubt also represents the springboard for a forthcoming volume by the same author (currently Lecturer in the Department of Classics, Ancient History, and Egyptology, University of Wales, Swansea), provisionally entitled 'Ancient Egyptian imperialism', and reportedly under current contract from Blackwells Publishing, Oxford.¹

At just short of nine hundred close-typed pages, the somewhat epic size of the published work makes it impracticable to provide full review of Morris's presentation and arguments in the present forum. It should be noted from the outset, however, that her treatment of the intended topic is quite comprehensive: no area of evidence is conspicuously lacking and the data discussed is generally up-to-date to the point of submission and publication. The format of the book is well-organised and structured methodically, if also somewhat complex and multi-layered by necessity of the author's chosen scope.

The content of the work is framed effectively by prefatory and concluding materials. Morris opens with a concise introduction, in which her overall thesis is briefly explained and the model of 'Élite emulation and Egyptianization', propounded by Carolyn Higginbotham (2000) as a viable explanation for the extant archaeological data (in Canaan at least) rightly rejected. The work concludes with a Bibliography of pleasing detail and length (50 pages), reflecting Morris's extensive research efforts and consultation of the available sources, this followed in turn by a basic but effective Index.

As regards overall appearance and publication quality, this strongly-bound work is pleasingly legible and free of typographical errors, an achievement that has of late occasionally eluded the publication team at Brill (witness their recent treatment of Donald Redford's manuscript for his 'Wars in Syria and Palestine of Thutmose

¹ cf. the author's departmental web page, <http://www.swan.ac.uk/classics/staff/em/>.

III' (2003)). The author has largely (and conspicuously) chosen *not* to illustrate the content of her work with either line drawings or photographs, the exceptions mostly being those few examples of Egyptian military architecture that find their way into the monumental reliefs. This is not a problem in itself, as the majority of sites and artefacts discussed attract rich visual documentation elsewhere. One cannot help but feel, however, that a more extensive if still judicious inclusion of images might not have helped increase the attractiveness and overall value of the work for the interested novice or lay-person. Happily, the work is rich in both regional maps and architectural plans, the latter carefully re-drawn, it seems universally, 'after' their respective original sources in a clear generic style throughout, with scale and direction carefully indicated (this is a definite improvement on several earlier Brill publications of scholarly dissertations, which frequently lifted images direct from their original sources with decidedly mixed and often unsuccessful results. The publication quality of Caroyln Higginbotham's 'Elite emulation and Egyptianization' (2000) springs readily to mind in this regard).

The examination of Egypt's foreign military bases of the New Kingdom period, their administration and place within larger foreign policy, proceeds within on a carefully staged chronological basis. Each opening with a concise historical overview, the subsequent chapters treat successively a well-recognised phase of historical or cultural development from within the broadly-accepted dynastic schema of the New Kingdom, *viz.* the Early 18th Dynasty, the Mid 18th Dynasty, the Late 18th Dynasty, *etc.* One observation in this regard: although pleasingly reliant on archaeological data (a clear distinction in each chapter being drawn between textual and material evidences), little if any reference is made in the work to the various established regional periodisations within the Levant, Nubia and the Libyan littoral themselves. This is perhaps a wise decision on reflection, the major phases of Egyptian political history serving to create a unifying framework for the comparative study between the regions that concludes each chapter. The concern must be, however, that this could impose an artificially centralised organisational schema upon what were discrete regional developments. With the wide perspective adopted, however, it is difficult to imagine how such disparate materials might be more effectively organised.

In the resulting presentation, Morris proceeds even-handedly to examine the various theatres of imperial engagement, each of the early chapters divided into lengthy Nubian and Levantine sub-sections. Investigating the 19th and 20th Dynasties respectively, chapters five and six add also Libya to the overall survey. Not unexpectedly, that which becomes readily apparent once again by virtue of this particular study is the general lack of correspondence in the Egyptian approach to, and experience of, each of the foreign lands in which they exerted their imperialist endeavours. Physical geography, cultural demography, internal and external pressures and influences combined, all guaranteed that Nubia, the Levant and Libya each followed its own unique developmental vector within the larger Egyptian imperial system. As a result it must be wondered whether, with the attendant possibility of greater detail and enhanced discussion, it might not have been advantageous to simply divide the original dissertation into three separate publications, the diligent reader otherwise being constantly asked to alter his/her perspective from central Africa, to Syria-Palestine, to the Libyan coast, with little apparent instructive comparison arising from the process.

That would have been one solution. It is in the guise of a wide-ranging and competent survey, however, that 'The architecture of imperialism' finds its greatest strength, conveniently summarising the extant textual witness to Egyptian military bases and their administration within wider foreign policy, and integrating it closely with the broad variety of archaeological evidences currently available. Though no new data is herein presented, much useful discussion does centre around that which has only been progressively available in approximately the last decade, with widely-varying levels of publication and debate. Particularly useful in this respect is Morris's inclusion of the burgeoning data from the many newly-excavated sites in the North-East Delta and coastal Sinai Peninsula, now increasingly recognised as a vital interface between the Nile Valley and its Near Eastern counterparts.

Morris's approach is largely materialist and non-theoretical: few new historical insights are developed beyond the integrated understanding of Egyptian military bases and their administration in various incarnations, the author keen to explore the possibilities of meaning inherent within such specific examples of Egyptian terminology as *dmj*, *mktr* and *sgr*, amongst others. A significant part of the conclusion to this work is dedicated to discussion of the latter, with mixed success only, largely owing to the notorious imprecision and shifting semantics of Egyptian terminology. In this particular contribution, 'The architecture of imperialism' acts as a partial counterpart to the recent study of Egyptian military action in the Levant completed by Michael Hasel, entitled 'Domination and resistance: Egyptian military activity in the Southern Levant, ca. 1300-1185 BC' [1998]. In this last volume the terminology of Egyptian warfare was explored in detail, alongside other topics: Michael Hasel, then, deals with the dynamic, Ellen Morris with the static, expression of Egyptian imperialism.

There is, overall, little in Morris's larger historical reconstruction with which most scholars would disagree, at least, those scholars *not* subscribing to that school of thought which attempts to characterise much of our evidence for Egyptian involvement in the Levant, for example, as almost purely Canaanite elite emulation and Egyptianisation, rather than progressively enhanced instances of intervention and direct rule with the larger Canaanite *milieu*. For Syria and Canaan then, Morris offers simply but effectively an enhanced and updated version of reconstructions already made by such as Weinstein (1981, 1992) and Singer (1988).

The present reviewer, in fact, discovered but one novel suggestion in the present volume that he felt absolutely compelled to contradict (pp. 274-276). Thus, in seeking to understand the motivation behind the

marked change in the Egyptian level of engagement in the Levant, from an apparent 18th Dynasty approach of relatively *laissez-faire* imperialism combined with a policy of *divide et impera*, to the 19th and 20th Dynasties' system of fortresses, residencies, increased presence and determined intervention, Morris discovers explanation within a short passage from the so-called 'Edict of Horemheb' (*Urk. IV*, 2149, 14–2151, 13). This pharaoh's position between the late 18th Dynasty 'Amarna crisis' and the militaristic 19th Dynasty is taken as convenient confirmation of the explanatory thesis, his proclamation promising to bring an end to the abuses wrought by royal agents journeying the Nile, imposing heavy demands for royal supplies on local mayors. Morris seeks to link this 'instance of cravenness' with the much older institution, by the founder of empire in Western Asia, Thutmose III, of a system of provisioned harbours in the Levant, to be drawn upon by Egyptian troops and royal officials. She proceeds thereupon to suggest that Horemheb's reform of the practice in Egypt would have the same effect in foreign territories as well, the resulting change in policy whereby "the crown would assume more direct administrative and fiscal responsibility for its own undertakings" regarded as the legal motivation for the construction of Egyptian fortresses and residencies, together with an enhanced Egyptian presence in Canaan, in the subsequent Ramesside period.

The tenuous nature of this suggestion (just how could the presence of more Egyptians in an enhanced system of military infrastructure be regarded as less onerous than previous exactions?) is quickly revealed by the faulty assumption that any reform in Egypt would necessarily gain applicability in imperial territories; by the unequal comparison between *ad hoc* exactions of late 18th Dynasty officials in Egypt itself, compared to the organised supply arrangements instituted over a century previously in Canaan; finally, with the realisation, made apparent when the text of the passage is examined *in full* and *in context*², that Horemheb's reform applied specifically to those "agents of the queen's estate and the scribes of the offering tables of the royal quarters" (Murnane, 1995: 237–238) only, who demanded additional provision of the local mayors at the time of the royal progress for the Festival of Opet, no other occasion being mentioned. On the whole, it would seem that increased possibilities for the rebellion and defection of Egypt's strategic holdings in Canaan and Syria, viewed against the backdrop of repeated aggressive intervention by the Hittite Empire and (later) elements of the Sea Peoples, would provide a far simpler and more effective explanation for the enhanced level of Egyptian engagement in Canaan during the Ramesside period, than making undue extrapolation from an instance of domestic reform, undertaken before the full nature of these external threats even emerged.

A single doubtful suggestion should not serve to detract, however, from the great value generated by 'The architecture of imperialism' for students and scholars of the period overall. Morris, in conclusion, should be congratulated on making available to a wider audience an excellent and highly readable survey of Egyptian military bases and administration in the New Kingdom period. The somewhat exorbitant publication price of €230/\$300 notwithstanding,³ Morris's contribution to our overall understanding of Egyptian imperialism should remain an informative and useful text for some time to come.

Morris, E.F. 2005. *The architecture of imperialism. Military bases and the evolution of foreign policy in Egypt's New Kingdom*. Leiden, Brill. 891 pp. ISBN 9004140360. Price €230/\$300 (hardback)

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² The translated extracts of the passage from the 'Edict of Horemheb' in the present work under review are remarkably and somewhat misleadingly select. For convenient contemporary translations of the passage and the Edict as a whole, cf. Kruchten (1981), Murnane (1995: 237–238).

³ Without detracting from the author's worthy labours, it must seriously be questioned whether this price accurately reflects the actual (let alone the ethical!) cost of development, production and distribution of a substantially revised scholarly dissertation to the publisher.

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