# 1. INTRODUCTION

Egypt and Mesopotamia, the cradle(s) of civilization, are often studied separately. This study takes another approach and focuses on the relations between these two river-based civilizations. Contacts between Egypt and Mesopotamia are attested already in the late fourth millennium BCE (when both lands transitioned from prehistory to history) as well as in the Amarna period (when the rulers of Egypt, Babylonia, and Assyria interacted in the diplomatic arena). These contacts intensified in the seventh century BCE when the Neo-Assyrian empire fought with the Sudan-based kings of Kush and conquered Libyan-dominated Egypt. This study deals with this period, during which Assyria (centred in today's north-eastern Iraq) was the dominant power of the Near East (Figs. 1-2).[1]

## 1.1 Aims and questions

The overarching aim of this work is to discuss relations between Africa and Mesopotamia. The preciser aims of this study are to identify Africans (Egyptians, Kushites, Libyans) in Neo-Assyrian texts, and to discuss the presence of Africans in the Neo-Assyrian empire from the viewpoints of individual-biographic and collective-demographic levels and perspectives.

The following research questions (centred on five interrogative words) are posed. *Who* were these Africans (in terms of ethnicity, gender/sex, age, and class)? *What* did these people do (in terms of profession)? *When* did they live (in terms of reign or time period)? *Where* did they live (in terms of the Assyrian heartland and provinces, the vassal states, or Africa)? *How* were they incorporated into the Assyrian realm (in terms of forced/voluntary, etc.)?

## 1.2 Previous research

Most previous research on Africa in the Neo-Assyrian empire tends to focus on Mesopotamia in Egypt (rather than on Egypt in Mesopotamia) and on Assyrian royal inscriptions (rather than on Assyrian letters and documents), and it also tends to have either a philological or historical-political perspective (rather than a socio-cultural perspective).

Regarding the philological perspective, Egyptologists have often used the writing of Egyptian names and words in cuneiform to reconstruct the vowel system in the Egyptian language (the hieroglyphic script renders only consonants and semi-vowels) (see e.g. Steindorff 1890; Ranke 1910; Edel 1980; Leahy 1993). Concerning the historical-political perspective, studies have often had the aim of

[1] For an overview of African-Mesopotamian relations (with references), see section 1.5.

reconstructing historical events related to the conquest of Egypt by the Neo-Assyrian state (see e.g. Kitchen 1973; Spalinger 1974; Onasch 1994; Kahn 2006). To a lesser extent, economic and ideological perspectives have been applied to describe the interaction between Egypt, Kush, Libya and the Neo-Assyrian empire (see e.g. Elat 1978; Fales 1981).

Studies based on the socio-cultural perspective are relatively uncommon. K. Radner (2009; 2012a) has written two papers on the African prisoners of war in the battle at Eltekeh in 701 BCE and on Egyptian scholars at the Assyrian court, and the present writer has written a paper about the representation of Egypt(ians) and Kush(ites) in Neo-Assyrian state letters and documents (Karlsson 2018). However, the former papers are limited in scope, and the latter paper is centred on ideology. The paper by I. Huber (2006) on Egyptians in later Mesopotamia merely gives a survey.[2] There are also some dated and very brief articles concerning Egypt in Assyria, such as the article by L.W. King (1914) on examples of Egyptian influence in Nineveh, and the article by W. Struve (1927) on a Libyan-Egyptian prince referred to as a son-in-law of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. A note on archaeological evidence of Egyptians in Nineveh has been written by O. Pedersén and L. Troy (1993). An “archive of Egyptians” (termed N31) in Assur has attracted some scholarly attention, but mostly by way of archival classification and text publication rather than content-based discussions (see e.g. Pedersén 1986: 125-129; Donbaz and Parpola 2001: 117-154; Faist 2007: 125-149).[3]

## 1.3 Material and method

This study builds upon two kinds of textual sources. Firstly, there are compilations of personal names from which to proceed. First and foremost, there are the six volumes of the work “The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire” (PNA). This work lists all personal names attested in texts from the Neo-Assyrian empire, and contains etymological comments for each name and biographic data for each individual. Around 8 000 names and 30 000 individuals are attested in Neo-Assyrian texts (Radner 1998: xii). The online database “The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire online” (PNAo) complements the printed volumes, and covers names and individuals appearing from 1998 onwards. The most recent

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[2] It should be noted here that Africans are attested textually also in southern Mesopotamia. For the phenomenon of Egyptians in Babylonia, see Wiseman 1966; Hackl and Jursa 2015.

[3] That said, there are two MA-theses written on the subject, namely R. Mattila’s “Egyptian Personal Names in Cuneiform Documents” from 1983 and Helsinki University and C. Draper’s “The Egyptian Diaspora in Assyria: A Study of the Cuneiform Evidence, c. 1074-612 BC” from 2014 and Cambridge University. The former work is in Finnish (and has therefore been unavailable to me), and the latter work came to my attention only in the final stages of the preparation of the present study. In her book on everyday texts from Assur, B. Faist (2007: 126) announces that she (in collaboration with H.-U. Onasch) will present a study on the N31-archive some time in the future, but such a work does not seem to have appeared, as of December 2021.

version of the database contains 2 657 entries and was last updated in August 2018.[4] The PNA-volumes are partly built upon the work “Assyrian Personal Names” by K. Tallqvist (1914) and to a lesser extent upon works on Mesopotamian and Egyptian personal names (Stamm 1939; Ranke 1935, 1952).

Secondly, the present study relies on various compilations of Neo-Assyrian texts, notably those of the “State Archives of Assyria” (SAA) series and those of the “Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian periods” (RIMA) and “Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period” (RINAP) series. Texts not included in these text corpora are (for example) accessible in the “Studien zu den Assur-Texten” (StAT) series and in the online database “Archival Texts of the Assyrian Empire” (ATAE).[5] The narrations in Assyrian royal inscriptions about military campaigns to Egypt and some archives of Egyptians from Assyrian cities (notably from the city of Assur) are especially informative with regard to this study. These Egyptian archives from Assyria are particularly relevant, as they are focused on the ordinary citizen rather than on the elite.

In his work of identifying archives and libraries from tablets discovered at the German excavations 1903-1914 on the site of ancient Assur, O. Pedersén (1986: 125-129) identified an archive of Egyptians, which he named N31. This archive consists of around 100 tablets. The majority of these is kept in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum.[6] A substantial minority of the tablets is housed in the Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin.[7] Two tablets from the archive in question are stored in London and Copenhagen.[8] The N31-archive derives from the western settlement area near the Nabu temple (Fig. 3), and its texts date to 675-612 BCE (with most texts dated to the latter half of the seventh century). The contents of the tablets are focused on loans, purchases, and legal settlements. *Kiṣir-Aššur* (45.), *Lā-turammanni-Aššur* (3.-4.), and *Urdu-Aššur* (5.) are the main protagonists in this archive of Egyptians (Donbaz and Parpola 2001: xvi; Faist 2007: 125-129).

A second archive of Egyptians was discovered from the tablets found during the renewed German excavations in Assur (the western settlement area) in 1989-1990 and 2000-2001. O. Pedersén (1998: 143) refers to it as Assur 52 in his survey of archives and libraries in the ancient Near East. In her publication of the archive, K. Radner subdivides these texts into the archive of *Dūrī-Aššur* (Assur 52a) and the archive of a group of Egyptians (Assur 52b).[9] The 15 tablets of Assur 52b (which can be dated) date to 658-632 BCE (that is, to the reign of Ashurbanipal), and they are all concerned with legal matters (Radner 2016: 79, 121).

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[4] See http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/pnao (last checked 2021-12-28).
[5] See http://oracc.org/atae/corpus/ (last checked 2021-12-28).
[6] Published by V. Donbaz and S. Parpola in StAT 2, pp. 117-154, nos. 164-233.
[7] Published by B. Faist in StAT 3, pp. 125-149, nos. 78-101, 114.
[8] BM 103956, published by F.M. Fales in *ZA* 73, no. 11, and Copenhagen National Museum 8612, published by T. Jacobsen in *CTNMC*, no. 68 (and then by J.N. Postgate in *FNLD*, no. 18).
[9] See Radner 2016: 82-121, nos. I.0-I-72 (Assur 52a), and 121-126, nos. II.1-II.15 (Assur 52b).

A third archive that can be referred to as an archive of Egyptians is the one of *Inurta-šarru-uṣur* (and a few related individuals) from Nineveh. The said main owner of the archive can be identified as an Egyptian, as the texts of the archive include numerous Egyptian names. The archive was discovered through Iraqi excavations in the eastern and western parts of Nineveh in 1967-1968. A broken pottery jar containing around 33 clay tablets was excavated from a site near the Shamash gate in eastern Nineveh.[10] *Inurta-šarru-uṣur* is defined as a "son of the palace" (*mār ekalli*) and in a leading position in relation to some Egyptians in Nineveh. The tablets can be dated to 669-612 BCE (with most texts dated late), and they consist of documents (dealing with loans, purchases, legal settlements) and other types of writing, including a letter (Pedersén and Troy 1993: no. 48).

Methodologically, Africans in Neo-Assyrian texts are identified on the grounds of etymology, ethnonyms, family relations, and institutional affiliations. In other words, personal names in African languages,[11] references to someone as "the Egyptian/Kushite/Libyan", references to someone as closely related to an identified African, and references to someone as tied to an African political or cultural institution are pivotal to the process of identifying Africans. Naturally, identifications are based on qualified assumptions. The problematic term ethnicity aside, it is not self-evident that an individual with an African name really was African, that an individual referred to as "the Kushite" was Kushite, that someone married to an identified Libyan was Libyan, or that someone tied to an Egyptian temple was Egyptian. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume all this, unless evidence to the contrary exists.

The following principles are applied with regard to etymology. Personal names considered safely African (whether on contextual and/or etymological grounds) in the PNA-volumes are accepted as African also in the present study.[12] Critical analysis is undertaken with regard to names that are classified as likely or possibly African in the PNA-volumes as well as concerning names that are etymologically unclassified in the PNA-volumes. Critical analysis is also undertaken regarding the names in PNAo (of which all are unclassified) as well as concerning names in texts not considered in the PNA-volumes or in PNAo.

There are five components integral to the above-mentioned critical analysis. To begin with, the reading or interpretation of Akkadian and Egyptian, aided by the standard dictionaries CAD and Wb, is essential. Secondly, earlier research (e.g.

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[10] Published by K. Ismail and J.N. Postgate in TIM 11, nos. 3-30e (and then by R. Mattila in SAA 14, pp. 271-292, nos. 426-457, 459-460).

[11] It should be noted here that the definition of an African name in this study is that at least one component of the name can be identified as expressing an African language. For example, there are examples of personal names that have one Egyptian element and one Akkadian element, such as *Amān-išme*, meaning "Amun has heard".

[12] Regarding the former (contextual) identification ground (relevant e.g. in the enumeration of names belonging to Egyptian vassals), it may not always be clear what African linguistic elements the name consist of.

Yoyotte 1952; Edel 1980; Zeidler 1993) on African names and words in Mesopotamian cuneiform is valuable. The lists in the study by H. Ranke (1910) on Egyptian names and words in Mesopotamian cuneiform are crucial in this respect.[13] Thirdly, textual contexts are also pivotal. For example, the likelihood that an unclassified, clearly non-Akkadian name in an archive of Egyptians is Egyptian and refers to an Egyptian is high. Likewise, the presence of clearly African names close to an unclassified, clearly non-Akkadian name makes it likely that the latter is African as well. Fourthly, the compilation by H. Ranke (1935) of Egyptian personal names is a vital tool. Finally, the naming traditions in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia play a role in the interpretation of names.

The last-mentioned component of critical analysis requires some discussion. In his comparison of Egyptian and Mesopotamian naming traditions (making use of the study by J.J. Stamm (1939) on Mesopotamian names), H. Ranke (1952: 250-256) concludes that the similarities far outweigh the differences.[14] He lists 14 names which have exact counterparts and 21 names which are very similar in content.

Examples of similarities include the common tradition of giving names to newborns, the common option of changing names (either by the parents or by the name bearer), the circumstance that Egyptian and Mesopotamian names were meaningful (adapted along with language development), the bipartion of Egyptian and Mesopotamian names into profane and religious names (with the latter growing in importance throughout history), the custom of having short forms of names in both cultures, the tradition of referring to individuals as "the servant of DN" or the like in both cultures, and the circumstance that "word names" in both cultures can be grouped in the same way, namely in those involving animal or plant names, names indicating descent or professions, names for adornments, names referring to various parts of the body, names pointing to the day or month of an individual's birth, and names expressing the belief in resurrection.

Examples of differences include the Egyptian custom (not found in Mesopotamia) of having the same name for several family members (who are then distinguished by the attributives elder/younger, etc.), the circumstance that men and women could have the same name in Egypt (as opposed to Mesopotamia), and the fact that "clause names" which contain imperatives (often with requests of a deity intervening) were very rare in Egypt, but not in Mesopotamia.

Regarding African individuals identifiable in other ways than through etymology, ethnonyms, family relations, or institutional affiliations, there may be instances in which individuals (even if they bear perfectly Akkadian names) can be

[13] A revised version of his "Verzeichnis der in keilschriftlicher Umschreibung erhaltenen ägyptischen Worte und Eigennamen" (Ranke 1910: 43-62) is presented below (table 7.1.5), serving as a methodological tool.

[14] Ranke (1952: 253, 255) here summarizes that "gegenüber diesen Zahlreichen Ähnlichkeiten zwischen ägyptischen und akkadischen Namen treten die Verschiedenheiten zurück", and "aber alle diese Unterschiede sind, den Zahlreichen und das Grundsätzliche betreffenden Ähnlichkeiten gegenüber, fast belanglos".

linked to African ethnicity in that they are embedded in textual contexts where identified Africans dominate. For example, these individuals may act as witnesses for (or with) Egyptians, they may be business partners with Egyptians, and they may be part of the same labour force as Egyptians. Such circumstances increase the probability that these individuals were Egyptians. As a rule of thumb in this study, individuals who can not be identified as Africans by means of etymology, ethnonyms, family relations, or institutional affiliations but who appear in African textual contexts at least three times and among several groups of Africans are classified as "indirectly identifiable as Africans".

Africans are not always named in texts from the Neo-Assyrian empire. Sometimes, African individuals and groups may be referred to simply as "the Egyptian" or as "15 Kushite women". These people are, of course, also relevant for the present study. Anonymous Africans can be detected through the search-words *Muṣur(āiu)* "(Lower) Egypt(ian)", *Paturisu/Urisṣu* "Upper Egypt",[15] *Magan/Makan* (another name for Egypt),[16] *Kūs(āiu)* "Kush(ite)", and *Meluḫḫa* (another name for Kush) in the online databases ATAE, RIAo, RINAPo, and SAAo.[17] When the search-words alone or in combination with another/other (directly connected) word(s) refer to individuals or groups, there are attestations of anonymous Africans.

The collection and analysis of biographic and demographic data are central for this study. Certain interrogative words (mirroring the research questions stated above) are highlighted in this process. Data on *who* (in terms of ethnicity, gender/sex, age, and class) the Africans in Neo-Assyrian texts were, *what* these people did (in terms of profession), *when* they lived (in terms of time period or reign), *where* they lived (inside or outside Assyria, etc.), and *how* these Africans were incorporated into the Assyrian realm are central to the discussion.

More concretely, biographic data are first gathered on the basis of what the individual PNA-entries say, and then on the grounds of what the texts in which the person in question appear can tell, as well as on what the contexts (historical, religious, ideological, archival, etc.) of the texts in which the person in question appear suggest. The demographic data are processed in several steps. First, the collected biographic data of every African individual are sorted under headings related to identities, properties, and settings (responding to who, what, when, and where).[18] Then, statistics based on this material, showing, for example, the

[15] For the distinction between Lower and Upper Egypt in Assyrian texts, see Karlsson 2020a.

[16] The twin terms Magan and Meluhha originally (i.e. in the third millennium BCE) referred to Oman and the Indus valley respectively but pointed to Egypt and Kush respectively in the first millennium BCE (Heimpel 1997).

[17] See http://oracc.org/atae/corpus/; http://oracc.org/riao/corpus/; http://oracc.org/rinap/corpus/; http://oracc.org/saao/corpus (last searched 2021-12-28).

[18] Due to the complex nature of the issue of mode of integration (speaking of circumstances and the interrogative word how), this issue is treated only in the discussion sections (notably in subsection 3.2.3) and not through demographic statistics (which require relative unambiguity).

proportion of Egyptian Africans compared to Kushite Africans or the proportion of African women in relation to African men, are compiled. Finally, conclusions based on these statistical data about African demographic structures in the Mesopotamian-Assyrian context are drawn.

Regarding the afore-mentioned headings on identities, properties, and settings, the following (admittedly rather coarse) distinctions are made.[19] Concerning ethnicity, data are sorted into Egyptian, Kushite, or Libyan. The dichotomies male/female and adult/child, and the differentiations upper/lower/slave are pivotal with regard to sex/gender, age, and class.[20] Regarding time, data are sorted into reign or time period, depending on how informative the sources are.[21] Additionally, the terms *pre*-conquest era and *post*-conquest era (related to the first Assyrian conquest of Egypt in 671 BCE) are employed. Concerning place, distinctions are based on whether the person lived in Africa, in other vassal states, in Babylonia, or in Assyria. A distinction between Assyria proper/the Assyrian heartland and Assyria is made in the discussion.[22] Of course, the incomplete nature of the sources may lead to situations where full classifications can not be made.

Focusing especially on ethnicity, references to "Kushites" or "Libyans" in this book are made principally from a linguistic standpoint, meaning that they are realized when the sources mention an individual with a Kushite or Libyan name, or an individual qualified by such an ethnonym, or an individual closely tied to an identified Kushite or Libyan. Some scholars question the distinctions between Kushites and Egyptians or between Libyans and Egyptians in this time period (see e.g. Baines 1996; Morkot 2000). Other scholars maintain that there are cultural markers (other than language) that differentiate Libyans and Kushites from

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[19] The coarse nature of the distinctions are due to the incomplete nature of the sources. As a way of compensating, nuances will be identified and discussed.
[20] The distinction male/female is usually made on the basis of the DIŠ-sign which indicates male personal names (*MZL*, sign 748) and the MUNUS-sign which indicates female personal names (*MZL*, sign 883). By "upper class", people defined as political (rulers), religious (priests), military (officers), and administrative (officials) leaders, people who belong to the intelligensia (scholars, scribes), people who are closely related (in terms of kinship) to individuals of the afore-mentioned groups, and people who are mentioned frequently and prominently in the sources (but without their having labels which indicate social rank) are meant. By "lower class", people not defined as above or as slaves are meant. By "slaves", people who feature as objects of business transactions are meant. The terms *ardu* and *amtu* are too broad and complex to be used as bases for classification.
[21] Ideally, the tablet in question carries a date. Without a date, texts must be dated on the basis of other pieces of evidence, such as archaeological context. As for time periods, the term "post-Ashurbanipal period" refers to the time span 630-612 BCE, and the term "post-imperial period" points to the time from 611 BCE to the end of the earliest phase of the Neo-Babylonian empire.
[22] While Assyria proper/the Assyrian heartland refers to the land delineated (roughly) by Nineveh in the west, Arbela in the east, and Assur in the south, Assyria points to (broadly) the land between the Euphrates and the Tigris in northern Mesopotamia (Figs. 1-2). Justifying the inclusion of non-exiled (and relatively free-standing) Africans in this study, rulers like Taharqa and Mentuemhat still belonged to the *sphere* of the Neo-Assyrian empire. The movement from the Nile to the Tigris does not just refer to people migrating but also to transfer of authority.

Egyptians even in this period of intense contact (see e.g. Leahy 1985; O'Connor 1990; Török 1997; Ritner 2009). The term "Africa(ns)" corresponds to the modern, geographic notion of the term, employed here in a practical, pragmatic sense. Having said that, it is possible that the mutual dependence on the Nile might have lead to a sense of shared identity, triggered for example by the interaction with people beyond the easternmost Nile branch and Sinai.

## 1.4 Theory

In terms of theory, the concept of ethnicity is pivotal in this study. Ethnicity points to a group of people that share certain attributes (such as a common ancestry, language, customs, and religion) that differentiate them from other groups of people. This concept is generally understood in a constructivist sense, pointing to the idea that ethnicity is fluid and dynamic rather than fixed and static. Consequently, ethnic groups are seen as results of social processes, implying that ethnicity is constantly negotiated. Although ethnicity can be used interchangeably with the term nation, it is distinct from the concept race, in that ethnicity is not a biological given (Barth 1969; Smith 1986).[23]

The transition from a belief in primordial and essentialist ethnicity, where ethnicity is regarded as fixed and static and as a basic human condition (virtually a biological given), to a belief in ethnicity as socially constructed is detectable in the disciplines of Assyriology and Egyptology. Previously, the concept of race was widely used, leading to an emphasis on differences between Sumerians and Akkadians and claims of a uniqueness and isolation of ancient Egypt in relation to its African neighbours (see e.g. Bilabel and Grohmann 1927; Petrie 1939). Nowadays, it is commonplace to recognize the complexity of the concept of ethnicity in Egypt and Mesopotamia (see e.g. Kalvelagen et al. 2005; Matić 2020).

Concepts regarding ethnic minorities in empires, such as assimilation, acculturation, integration, and multiculturalism, are also crucial in this study. The concepts of assimilation and acculturation point to a strict policy on the part of the majority ethnic group in relation to the minority ethnic group, while the terms of integration and multiculturalism indicate a less strict policy, according to which the ethnic minority can co-exist with the ethnic majority without having to give up its cultural identity. At the same time, both the attitude of the majority ethnic group as well as that of the minority ethnic group play a part in this dynamic. In other words, responses (surrender/resistance) to the demands of the majority group also matter (see e.g. Chandra 2012).

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[23] Drawing from the anthropologist F. Barth, the sociologist A.D. Smith outlines six characteristic features of ethnicity: the use of a common name for the group, a myth of common descent, shared histories of a (perceived) common past, one or more distinctive cultural elements (often language or religion), a sense of having a territorial homeland (either ancestral or current), and a self-aware sense of membership among the group.

Regarding the attitude on the part of the majority group, earlier research diverges with regard to the strategy of the Neo-Assyrian empire in relation to conquered peoples. Some scholars argue that the strategy in question was centred on political and economic goals and carried no real aim of “Assyrianizing” the local population but implied a policy of (loose) integration and multiculturalism (see e.g. Machinist 1993; Bagg 2011). Other scholars claim that the strategy indeed was to Assyrianize the local population, that it aimed at acculturating and assimilating the other, and that it proceeded from an ethnocentrism and a dichotomy Assyrians vs. foreigners (see e.g. Spieckermann 1982; Zaccagnini 1982). It may be relevant to refer to minimalist and maximalist interpretations in this context.

The relative status of the minority in the eyes of the majority matters as well. Some scholars have identified an “Egyptomania” in Assyria (Feldman 2004; Karmel Thomason 2004: 157-161). This Egyptomania could, for example, occur by way of an influx of Egyptian or Egyptianized objects, such as ivories with Egyptian motifs and cylinder seals illustrating Mesopotamian cuneiform and Egyptian deities (Figs. 11-12). It could also be expressed through the import of Egyptian scholars (Radner 2009). It has also been suggested that Assyrian relief sculpture and “obelisks” were inspired by Egyptian art (Kaelin 1999; Reade 2002: 189; Frahm 2011: 73-75). Such a sentiment (Egyptomania) could have affected the way the Assyrian state treated its Egyptian subjects.[24]

Concerning the attitude of the minority group, earlier research also diverges regarding the self-perception of the ancient Egyptians on ethnicity. Some works, often proceeding from official sources, detect an idealistic (Egyptians vs. foreigners, Order vs. Chaos, etc.), inward-looking, and self-sufficient (even xenophobic) attitude on the part of the Egyptians (see e.g. Loprieno 1988; Assmann 1990). Other works identify a more pragmatic approach, according to which not everything foreign was automatically alien and inferior, recognizing that Egyptians too may be subjected to acculturation and assimilation. Official sources present a biased picture and hide the fact that ethnicity in Egypt was a complex issue (see e.g. Baines 1996; Matić 2020).[25]

Bringing Kushites and Libyans into the debate on ethnicity in Egypt, official Egyptian sources tend to convey ethnic stereotypes (see e.g. Helck 1977; Gordon 2001) while other sources often indicate blurred ethnic boundaries (see e.g. Cohen 1992; Baines 1996). Regarding the stereotypes, visual representations of Libyans

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[24] The Assyrian kings distinguished between Egypt and Kush, and there is a tendency that the latter was not as esteemed as the former (Karlsson 2019). On his victory stele, Esarhaddon proclaims that he “tore out (*nasāḫu*) the roots (*šuršu*) of Kush from Egypt” (RINAP 4 98, r 45-46), and the image on the stele displays a Kushite captive much smaller than Esarhaddon and clearly smaller than the accompanying (Levantine) captive (Fig. 4).

[25] The self-perception of the Kushites on ethnicity seems similar to that of the Egyptians. Although it is unfair to say that Kush was fully Egyptianized (Török 1997), the Kushite kings adopted much of the Egyptian worldview (Morkot 2000), and e.g. borrowed the topos of the “miserable Asiatic” in their inscriptions (Karlsson 2021c).

and Kushites (and Asiatics) smited by the mace of the Egyptian king or trampled on by the feet of the Egyptian king come to mind. Libyans and Kushites (and Asiatics), being part of the hostile and generic "Nine Bows" (*psḏt-pḏwt*), are pictured as the eternal enemies of an ethnically homogenous Egyptian state (Helck 1977). As noted, these perceptions belong to the fictive, ideological sphere and to the foreigner *topos* rather than to perceptions rooted in the "real" world expressing *mimesis* (Loprieno 1988). As concluded by C. Riggs and J. Baines (2012: 9) in their entry on ethnicity in Egypt in which the presence of "Nubians" and "Libyans" (among others) in Egypt is highlighted, "any notion that the ancient Egyptian population was ethnically uniform in any period should be abandoned as a fiction projected by the dominant ideology and often largely accepted by Egyptologists".

## 1.5 Historical background

In order to put the following presentations and discussions in context, an outline of African-Mesopotamian relations will now be given. Prior to the Greek-Persian era, there are four periods in which African-Mesopotamian contacts were especially frequent, namely the late prehistoric period, the Amarna period, and the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods.[26]

Starting with the late prehistoric period, there is archaeological evidence of contacts between the Uruk-based Mesopotamian culture and the late Naqada culture in Egypt. Cylinder seals, motifs in the visual arts (such as juxtaposed mythical animals), and elements of palace architecture (such as niched facades) all typical of Mesopotamia appear in early Egypt, and the art of writing has been counted among the cultural impulses from Mesopotamia (see e.g. Kantor 1952; Moorey 1987; Budka 2000). Even though the latter in particular has been questioned in recent years (see e.g. Wengrow 2011), cultural exchanges between Egypt and Mesopotamia certainly took place in this period.[27]

Moving on to the Amarna period, that is, to the 14th century BCE, there is textual evidence of contacts between the kings of Egypt on the one hand and the kings of Assyria and Babylonia on the other. Letters written by the rulers of Assyria and Babylonia to the Egyptian kings have been found in the remains of the royal archive of the short-lived Egyptian capital city Akhetaton (modern el-Amarna). This high-level correspondence shows that envoys travelled between the two regions and that there was a custom of exchanging gifts between Egypt and Assyria and between Egypt and Babylonia. The individual representatives of the great

[26] See also the bibliographic online resource "A Bibliography of Studies on Egyptian-Mesopotamian Relations", downloadable at (permanent link) http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-334908 (last updated 2021-07-06).

[27] That said, the notion of a "dynastic race" that invaded Egypt from the north-east and introduced civilization in Egypt (see e.g. Petrie 1939; Derry 1956; Emery 1961) is generally disregarded in modern scholarly literature.

powers greet each other as "brothers" (*aḫu*) (see e.g. Moran 1992; Cohen and Westbrook 2000; Liverani 2001).[28]

Continuing to the Neo-Assyrian period, a clash between an alliance (led by Damascus and Hamath) in which Egypt (at this period dominated by kings with Libyan names) was a part and the troops of the Neo-Assyrian empire under Shalmaneser III (858-824) took place in the mid-ninth century BCE and early Neo-Assyrian period (934-745). It resulted in (according to Assyrian sources) an Assyrian victory. The "black obelisk" of the same ruler includes images and texts about Egyptian tribute to Assyria (Dietrich 1975a; Röllig 1997; Helck 2005).[29]

During the late Neo-Assyrian period (744-612), Tiglath-pileser III (744-727) established the western limit of the Neo-Assyrian empire at the doorstep to Egypt. Hanunu, ruler of Gaza and a foe of Assyria, fled to Egypt. In the reign of Sargon II (721-705), Egyptian-Assyrian relations were complex. Sargon II, in some sources, claims that he encouraged trade between Egyptians and Assyrians and that he received tribute from Egyptian rulers. Nevertheless, a battle between Egyptian troops, supporting the ruler of Gaza, and Assyrian forces is recorded in Assyrian royal inscriptions. The sources claim that the Egyptians were defeated and that the ruler of Gaza was captured. Another Levantine ruler, Yamani of Ashdod, sought refuge in Egypt, but was eventually extradited to Assyria by the Kushite ruler controlling much of Egypt. During the reign of Sennacherib (704-681) there was a battle between a Levantine coalition including troops from Egypt and Kush and Assyrian troops. According to Assyrian texts, the Assyrian forces defeated the African troops. However, Egypt escaped conquest at this time (Dietrich 1975a; Röllig 1997; Helck 2005).

During the reign of Esarhaddon (680-669), the Kushite state, controlling the whole of Egypt, became an arch-enemy to Assyria. After an initial failed conquest attempt in 674 BCE, the Assyrian army managed to conquer (northern) Egypt in 671 BCE, defeating the forces of Taharqa (690-664), king of Kush. The conquest is commemorated in texts and on stelae and glazed tiles (Figs. 4, 9-10). Uprisings followed, and a new campaign to Egypt was initiated in 669 BCE, but it was halted by the death of Esarhaddon. The army of his son, Ashurbanipal (668-c. 631), marched to Africa in 667 BCE and re-conquered Egypt, making Taharqa flee to the south once again. The victory is commemorated in texts and through wall reliefs (Fig. 8). The new ruler in Kush, Tanutamon (664-656), successfully re-conquered

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[28] 14 letters (EA 1-14) between Babylon and Egypt and two letters (EA 15-16) from the Assyrian king have been preserved. While the Babylonian-Egyptian relations were well-established, the Assyrian-Egyptian relations were relatively novel. The Babylonian king complains to his Egyptian "brother" about him having direct contact with the Assyrians whom the Babylonian ruler saw as his subjects. In the inscriptions of the later Assyrian king Ashur-bel-kala (1073-1056), Egypt is the sender of exotic tribute (Kuhrt 1997: 350-352, 361).

[29] That said, there is no consensus regarding the identification of Egypt here. For detecting Egypt, see e.g. Grayson 1996: 23, 150; Karlsson 2016: 200-202. For sceptical approaches, see e.g. Garelli 1971: 38-40; Collon 1995: 161.

northern Egypt in 664 BCE. This caused the Assyrian army to return and victoriously re-enter Egypt, sacking Thebes in the process. Necho I (672-664), the main Assyrian vassal in Egypt, was succeeded by his son and heir Psammetichus I (664-610) as Assyria’s man in Egypt, the latter even granted an Akkadian name. Gradually, Psammetichus I managed to diminish Assyrian and Kushite influence in Egypt and establish a native Egyptian state independent of Assyria. During the civil war in Assyria in 652-648 BCE, Psammetichus I was allied to the Babylonian ruler Shamash-shuma-ukin (668-648). Later on, however, Egypt, first under Psammetichus I and then under Necho II (610-595), aided Assyria in its fight for survival against a coalition of the Medes and the Babylonians around 610 BCE, probably for geo-political reasons (Dietrich 1975a; Röllig 1997; Helck 2005).

Concluding with the Neo-Babylonian period, relations between Egypt (initially ruled by Psammetichus I and later by Necho II) and the Neo-Babylonian empire (which had taken over from the Neo-Assyrian empire) were generally conflict-ridden. In a decisive battle at Carchemish in 605 BCE, the Assyrian-Egyptian coalition was defeated, leading to the final blow to Assyria and to Babylonian dominion over the Levant. Egyptian kings repeatedly encouraged Levantine rulers to rebel against Babylonia, resulting for example in the fall of Judah. At one stage, Babylonian forces under their ruler Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562) took advantage of an internal conflict between Apries (589-570) and Amasis II (570-526) to attack Egypt in 567 BCE. Although the effects of this attack are partly unclear, the fact is that Amasis II (who opposed Babylon) remained on the Egyptian throne. A period of stalemate and relative peace followed. Eventually, both Egypt and Babylonia were incorporated into the Persian empire, whose troops seized Babylon in 539 BCE and Egypt in 525 BCE (Dietrich 1975b; Spalinger 1977; Röllig 1997).[30]

[30] For details of this period, see e.g. Vogt 1957; Spalinger 1977; Kahn 2018. Notably, Egypt proper was threatened by Babylonian forces already in 601 BCE, a few years after the battle at Carchemish. According to a Babylonian chronicle, the battle ended in a stalemate, and the Babylonian army retreated (Lipiński 1972).