

The Third Intermediate Period

The Third Intermediate Period (1070 to 653 B.C.) was the last major era in ancient Egyptian history that the country was not fully united under one king. Coming between the high points of ancient Egyptian civilization, the Intermediate Periods were times of civil war, social upheaval, and economic decline, but also cultural change and artistic innovation. Third Intermediate Period separates the New Kingdom and the Late Period.

Throughout much of the Third Intermediate Period, the country was divided into two parts; Upper Egypt (South) and Lower Egypt (North). Several dynasties competed for control in the Delta region of the North, while the priests of the God Amun or Amun-Re, whose temple was at Thebes, ruled as virtual kings in the South. Because of the great wealth of the temple of Karnak, the high priests of Amun were able to wield strong political power. Although the priests usually recognized the authority of the kings, many Egyptian kings, who lived mainly the North, were forced to share power with these powerful high priests.

Some of the kings and priests during the Third Intermediate Period were Libyans. Libyans moved into Egypt during the New Kingdom and some Libyan kings tried to control southern Egypt and prevent civil wars by installing their sons as high priests. This tactic was not successful; Egyptian and Libyan kings, priests, chiefs, and rulers continued to fight each other for control for many years, throwing the region into political chaos.

When Egypt was threatened with invasion by the Near Eastern kingdom of Assyria, the kings of Nubia were able to expel them for a time and create a great empire stretching from the central Sudan to the Mediterranean. They were eventually pushed back into Nubia by the Assyrians with the help of a dynasty of kings in the Delta. When the Nubians were conquered, the rulers turned on their Assyrian allies and seized control of Egypt in 664 B.C., the Late Period began. This ended the fighting that had marked the Third Intermediate Period.

