

## **ANCIENT HISTORY: EGYPT**

### **To what extent did Egypt have an "empire" in this period?**

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An empire is defined in modern times as a geographically extensive group of states and people united and ruled by either a monarch or an oligarchy. The word empire however has constituted different meanings at different time periods meaning this definition does not necessarily suit the Ancient Egyptian Empire of the New Kingdom. In the New Kingdom Egypt time period, the Egyptian's established what has been referred to as an empire however, the nature of control over various civilisations makes it difficult to solely label it as such. Each pharaoh throughout the eighteenth dynasty made some contribution to the expansion and maintenance of Egypt's empire either in Nubia or Syria-Palestine which were Egypt's two main focus areas. The reasons behind establishing an empire centred on the need for security, the acquisition of resources and also the personal glory of the kings. Hence, the existence of an Egyptian empire in this time period is inevitable; however the extent to which Egypt had an empire is subject to debate due to the varying levels of control maintained by the pharaoh's of Egypt.

New Kingdom Egypt was a prosperous period of time characterised by pharaohs such as Amenhotep I, Thutmose I and III as well as Hatshepsut. This period of time began with the end of foreign control over Lower Egypt. The Hyksos were the foreigners occupying the delta region during part of the middle kingdom and their expulsion brought radical changes for Egypt. Most prominent of the changes was the development of a New Kingdom foreign policy that resulted in the formation of an Egyptian empire. The formation of this empire brought wealth and prosperity to the Egyptians through Nubia in the south and Syria-Palestine in the north. However, this would not have occurred without the actions of all eighteenth dynasty pharaohs that enabled Egypt to form, expand and maintain an empire.

The formation of the New Kingdom Egypt Empire revolved almost solely around the areas of Nubia and Syria-Palestine. These two areas were similar in regards to what Egypt could gain from them, but were different in the relation to how Egypt maintained their influence or even control. Nubia and Syria-Palestine can both be considered areas of concern for Egypt, hence making them important targets to begin their empire. Due to the threats present in and outside these areas, Egypt saw Nubia and Syria-Palestine as strategic security buffer zones. These two areas also offered access to trade routes and therefore various goods that Egypt is unable to produce domestically. The personal glory of the Kings was also a reason for the establishment of an empire. It is also important to consider the way in which the pharaoh's of Egypt maintained control of these two areas. This is the point where the definition of empire is not totally suitable. This is because in Syria-Palestine, Egypt did not acquire political control, unlike in Nubia. This makes the term "sphere of influence" more suited to the situation in the North.

Nubia was a political and economic necessity that accounted for much of Egypt's wealth and prosperity in the New Kingdom. This area had a history of Egyptian presence stretching back to the old kingdom however the New Kingdom was when Nubia truly became a prominent figure in Egypt's empire. Most significantly, Egypt gained and maintained political control over Nubia through the appointment of a Viceroy during Amenhotep I's reign. This political figure oversaw various things such as the control and protection of the area, building of temples and forts, collection of taxes and administering justice. This showed that Nubia was of utmost importance to the Egyptian pharaohs because of the benefits that could be gained from Nubia, the main benefit being that Egypt was able to exploit Nubia for its highly valuable resources. The most valuable resource for Egypt was gold that was in abundance at gold caravans near Edfu. Another significant point is that Nubia served as a trading corridor to Central Africa from which they gained other valuable goods such as frankincense, myrrh, ebony, ivory and precious oils. All these traded goods assisted in the development of wealth and prosperity during the New Kingdom, hence why Egypt felt it necessary to create an Empire in Nubia.

Another reason for maintaining control over Nubia is the security obtained. By maintaining political control over the area, the Egyptians were able to quell rebellions from the Nubians and the Kushites meaning that Egypt was never truly threatened by these people. The security experienced was due to the forts and garrisons built by Amenhotep I at Buhen during his reign. This enabled some of the Egyptian army to be permanent residents of the Nubia, enabling them to quell all rebellions as well as act as a deterrent for further revolts. Demonstrating the military power and political control of Egypt over the Nubian area is the Tombos Stele which shows how Thutmose I overthrew Nubia and Kush to maintain control. Thutmose III, a very important pharaoh in this time extended the boundaries of Egypt's control in Nubia to Napta and built an Amun temple there to emphasise his control. Therefore it can be seen that Egypt did in fact establish and maintain a politically controlled empire in Nubia.

Syria-Palestine was another area where Egypt gained and maintained a presence in the New Kingdom. Egypt however did not obtain political control over this area and therefore it cannot be defined purely as an "empire", but more correctly as a sphere of influence. The relationship between Egypt and Syria-Palestine is more of an alliance weighing in Egypt's favour. Unlike in Nubia, Egypt had no permanent political figure stationed in this area. The reason why Egypt chose not to seek political control over this region is because Syria-Palestine is far more advanced than Nubia as shown by its three hundred independent city states. The rulers of these states, known as Vassal Princes were able to maintain control in exchange for oaths of loyalty and regular tribute to Egypt. Also, as a way of ensuring the continuation of Egypt's influence was the use of Syrian Prince's sons as a hostage. They were taken from their home country to Egypt and brought up there to love Egypt. When they were of age they were returned to Syria-Palestine to rule, maintaining their love for Egypt.

In Thutmose III's first year as solo ruler of Egypt, he was presented with the threat that became known as the Battle of Megiddo. The battle began when Thutmose III was alerted to the fact that the Kings of Kadesh were plotting to overthrow Egypt. This led the pharaoh to Megiddo where he overthrew the Kings of Kadesh which is recorded on the Annals of Karnak where Thutmose III also praises the God Amun for his military and empire successes. The maintenance of an Egyptian presence in Syria-Palestine was achieved through yearly campaigns to the region during Thutmose III's reign. This amounted to seventeen campaigns in twenty years which assisted in the maintenance of a sphere of influence over Syria-Palestine.

Much like Nubia, Syria-Palestine provided opportunities for trade as Syria was a supplier of cedar, textiles, grain and wine and also served as a trading route to Asia. These were all items that Egypt was unable to produce domestically but were good that Egypt used abundantly. Also, by forming an "alliance" with Syria-Palestine, Egypt gained security from northern threats such as the Hittites and the Mitanni. These were two civilisations that had the military power to overthrow Syria-Palestine and Egypt, but the alliance between them provided security enough to stop these two groups. The final reason for the expansion of the empire into Syria-Palestine was for the personal glory of the kings. Thutmose III used this fact that he created the Egyptian empire to his advantage and was able completely legitimise his reign within his first year. Thutmose IV who came to the throne two pharaohs after Thutmose III married the daughter of the Mitanni King which essentially furthered the boundaries of Egypt's influence to the North. Hence, it can be seen that despite not clearly being defined as an empire, Syria-Palestine was in fact a crucial part of Egypt's foreign policy, and in conjunction with Nubia, formed the Egyptian empire or sphere of influence.

The extent to which Egypt established an empire in the New Kingdom is certainly debatable, accounting for the more common use of the term sphere of influence. Egypt's empire extended both to the North and South into Syria-Palestine and Nubia. These two areas offered many similar benefits to Egypt but differed in the ways they were administrated. Therefore, from the evidence shown above, it becomes clear that Egypt did in fact establish an empire and in conjunction with the Egyptian influence it held over other civilisations, Egypt is represented as a power house in the ancient world.