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Forced Labour and Deportations in Ancient Egypt: Recent Trends and Future Possibilities

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Abstract

This contribution argues that forced migration and forced labour have been comparatively understudied topics in Egyptology. In this context, it introduces recent research on Egyptian Late Bronze Age deportation policies and paints a comprehensive picture of their political economy, including the geographic scope and societal and individual impacts on both the Egyptian and affected societies. Using this case study, the author highlights how Egyptologists can connect with scholars from other disciplines, which like International Relations and Migration Studies are more concerned with modern history and contemporary developments, to move the field forward and contribute to present-day issues.

Key-words: forced labour; forced migration; governance; Late Bronze Age; political economy

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Trabajo forzoso y deportaciones en el antiguo Egipto: tendencias recientes y posibilidades futuras

Resumen

Esta contribución sostiene que la migración forzada y el trabajo forzoso han sido temas comparativamente poco estudiados en egiptología. En este contexto, presenta una investigación reciente sobre las políticas de deportación egipcias de la Edad del Bronce Final y presenta un panorama completo de su economía política, incluido el alcance geográfico y los impactos sociales e individuales tanto en las sociedades egipcias como en las afectadas. Usando este estudio de caso, el autor destaca cómo los egiptólogos pueden conectarse con académicos de otras disciplinas, que como Relaciones Internacionales y Estudios de Migración están más preocupados por la historia moderna y los desarrollos contemporáneos, para hacer avanzar el campo y contribuir a los problemas actuales.
Key-Words: trabajo forzoso; migración forzosa; gobernación; Edad del Bronce Final; economía política

1 Introduction

In recent years, migration and unfree labour have gained new credence in scholarly inquiries, be it in historical sciences or political science. This is mainly to do with the increased visibility of related issues in Europe, North America, and Australasia, i.e. those parts of the world that are widely referred to as the West. Unfree labour and forced migration have never been off the map. Yet, the influx of (forced) migrants in the wake of wars in West Asia and North Africa and economic crises in Africa since the early 2010s have made them visible also for non-specialist researchers and the wider western public. Via recent results on Egyptian deportations in the Late Bronze Age (LBA, c. 1550 – 1069 BCE)(Langer 2021), commonly known as the New Kingdom among Egyptologists, this contribution elaborates how these developments can fertilize studies of premodern societies generally and in what way that can enhance the understanding of patterns in human history.

1.1 Why Discuss Forced Labour and Forced Migration in Ancient Egypt?

The question raised in the headline to this subsection is a legitimate one, considering that Egyptology has struggled for historical and structural reasons to develop any systematic, in-depth interest in matters of political economy (Moreno García 2009, 2014). It is also fair to assume that the discipline until now has been largely oblivious to the prospect that more fundamental research on the political economy of forced labour and migration may even be remotely possible. I argue that this is largely due to three factors: 1) the primary interests of the field in 'art', religion, and representative architecture (e.g. temples and tombs); 2) the tendency to approach research questions from a source-centred perspective, i.e. making the source material (e.g. individual objects and texts) the main focus of an analysis rather than having the underlying problem determine how a source is analysed; and 3) a general lack of multidisciplinary angles and interests, which forced labour and migration as constants in human history necessitate, though.

This does not mean that Egyptology has not been interested in matters of migration by any means. Especially over the past half-decade interest in all things foreign has surged. Yet, instead of studying the surrounding political and administrative structures of foreigners coming to and integrating in e.g. Middle and New Kingdom Egypt, Egyptology has primarily employed a lens of cultural history, e.g. studying the iconography of foreigners and their humiliation in Egyptian decorum (e.g. Janzen 2013; Baines 2016; Saretta 2016; Anthony 2017; Matić 2019). The question what all that had to do with the day-to-day administration of Egyptian society and its economy is an entirely different matter.

This question perhaps hits a little too close to home for many Egyptologists, considering the ever-increasing forced migrations and the seeming resurgence of slavery and other unfree labour practices around the globe in recent years. Pursuing answers to the question might thus be perceived as an intrusion of the contemporary, the grizzly real into the mythical 'Eternal Egypt' (Moreno García 2014); and ancient Egypt would no longer – one could easily get the impression as an outsider – function as a refuge from the complexities and ills of the present. And yet, exploring the matter offers Egyptology the possibility to connect and comment on these present-day complexities, perhaps improving their understanding from a 'deep past'. That would also respond to a decades-old call to produce more

social scientific research on ancient Egypt and develop 'alternative histories' based on that (Trigger et al. 1983: xi–xii).

Any history of unfree labour and forced migration in ancient Egypt would necessarily have to address slavery in this context, itself a controversial topic in Egyptology. While its existence in Egyptian society has often been disputed, based on the argument that slavery the way we (in the West) understand it was a product of Roman law and that direct Egyptian equivalents were not visible, I find a broader approach useful. Especially for premodern and global scenarios, Zeuske (2014: 100–102) has employed a wider understanding to account for regional and historical differences. According to him, slavery was marked by 1) direct dependency of one person to another person, who uses the slave's body as capital and can dispose over all aspects of their life, and 2) the presence of coercive institutions that maintain the slave status. Zeuske uses the term 'slaveries' or 'slave systems' to accommodate historical and regional differences, thus essentially globalizing the concept of slavery and making it suitable as an analytical tool for the investigation of ancient Egyptian society and premodern ones more generally. Studies incorporating Zeuske's wider understanding of slavery may thus enable its reintegration in scholarly discourse and the identification of different slaveries in ancient Egypt.

On a more superordinate level, Egyptologists can catch up to other ancient historians – prominently Assyriologists, who have investigated Assyrian deportations for over four decades – and ideally create linkage with scholars from others fields that are interested in historical deportation policies; these are e.g. researchers of International Relations (IR) or Migration Studies. Forced migration and unfree labour have been mainstays in international relations throughout human history, and IR scholars seek to contextualize historical immigration policies, where the Assyrian deportations of the early first millennium BCE appear as the first systematic deportations in history (e.g. in Wong 2015). The expositions below suggest a potentially more differentiated picture of Egyptian deportation policies as opposed to Assyrian equivalents, which means that Egyptologists could not only provide IR or Migration Studies scholars with much earlier case studies but also greater detail as to political and societal effects over extended periods and between different theatres.

Although I seemingly use forced migration and deportation interchangeably, it is important that the latter is a subset of the former. Because deportation is the mode of forced migration that is most visible

and abundant in the Egyptian source material, my case study discusses primarily deportations.

1.2 State of Research: Migration in Egypt and Types of Unfree Labour

The previous output on forced migration is fairly manageable. There has been just a single monograph, penned by Gundlach (1994), on deportations (referred to as forced resettlements by that author) in ancient Egyptian history. That study, however, is more of a discussion of related attestations in the historical and iconographic record than an in-depth study of the political economy of these resettlements, also marked by the absence of a solid theoretical foundation about deportations. Furthermore, that work only dealt with roughly the first half of ancient Egyptian history until c. 1650 BCE and left out the period that was marked by the most abundant evidence and the greatest extent of Egyptian forced migration and forced labour policies, as shown below.

Other than that, forced migration has primarily featured episodically in articles or chapters related to e.g. Egyptian grand strategy or economic policies in LBA West Asia (Helck 1971, 342–350; Ahituv 1978; Schulman 1982; Na'aman 1988; Hoffmeier 2004), children and childhood in ancient Egypt (Feucht 1990a; Feucht 1990b). Treatments of migration or travel in ancient Egypt have left out the question of forced migration and travel mainly appeared as the result of the traveler's own agency rather than coercion except in the case of convicts (Köpp-Junk 2015: 217–222, 235). More recently, Langer (2017) attempted to integrate contemporary Migration Studies theory in a discussion of LBA evidence and assessed which types of forced migration may be visible in the historical record. It is noteworthy that Assyriologists and Biblical archaeologists have been seemingly more interested in Egyptian economic policies abroad than Egyptologists themselves, though.

Beyond such at times more migration-centred works, forced migration has appeared more indirectly via unfree labour policies in ancient Egypt as the means to recruit forced labourers or slaves in the shape of prisoners of war (e.g. Bakir 1952; Bußmann 2014). Connected to that are fundamental discussions over the existence of slavery or unfree labour in ancient Egyptian society in the first place, either often denied based on Roman-style (chattel) slavery as the reference point or the failure to ascertain an awareness or feeling of the alleged unfree worker as being coerced to work against their

will. Such discussions aside, the following categories of unfree or forced labour(ers) have been identified in ancient Egyptian settings during the LBA:

1. *ḥm*: People designated by this term (pronounce: hem) were members of the lowest stratum in Egyptian society. As such, it indicates status rather than a specific occupation. *ḥm.w* were highly dependent individuals with limited rights (e.g. restricted movement) and their status was hereditary (Zingarelli 2010: 104). Due to these circumstances they have been likened to slaves (Moreno García 2008: 129–134). People with this status could be assigned any occupation.

2. *mr*-dependants: This term (pronounce: mer) designated a specific legal status, according to which a *mr*-dependant was bonded to a patron, who could temporarily loan out the dependant to clients, e.g. to royal construction projects *in lieu* of the patron himself to satisfy his own labour obligation to the king. A person, once a *mr*-dependant, probably had this status for life (Moreno García 1998; Papazian 2012: 94–95; Römer 2017: 82).

3. *jḫw.tj.w*: This term (pronounce: ikhutiu) designated agricultural workers bonded to the land they tilled, generally for an institution of the state. By the New Kingdom, these workers may have formed a class or stratum by themselves, and they have been likened to serfs (Moreno García 2008: 124–129).

4. *smd.t*-dependants: This term (pronounce: semdet) designated service personnel tasked with a broad range of menial labour. Their status and occupation were hereditary (Gabler 2018: 157–162).

5. Convict labour: These previous categories aside, the Egyptian jurisdiction sentenced convicts to forced labour in combination with exile on the margins of the Egyptian state (Müller-Wollermann 2004: 224–228).

6. Corvée labour: The existence of an Egyptian corvée system had been contested for a long time but is widely accepted by now. The premise was that Egyptians had to render their labour power to the state on a temporal basis (Helck 1975: 226–230; Moreno García 2011). Such a system was also installed abroad in the Levant, where vassals had to supply the Egyptian agricultural production in the Jezreel

Plain with workers (Na'aman 1988). In Egypt, one's personal labour obligation could be waived if one could send a servant instead, e.g. a *mr*-dependant.

It is important to keep in mind that such seemingly sharp distinctions between various forms of unfree labour are at the researchers' discretion. Lacking an original legal code, the connotations have to be reconstructed from the respective contexts and are thus subject to interpretation. In any case, recalling the concept of different slave systems mentioned above, it is legitimate to assign to LBA Egypt a set of different slaveries or unfree labour regimes existing in parallel, many of which were fueled by warfare and forced migration as shown below. In this sense, migration and unfree labour were closely intertwined in ancient Egypt, just as in our contemporary globalized world.

1.3 Sources and Methods

Due to the nature of the extant historical record, it is mainly deportations that make forced migration visible in LBA Egypt. For this reason, such forcible transfers of individuals or groups of people by a government between places (Wong 2015: 69) are the focal point of any related study. The analysis must rely on texts as the element of coercion is next to undetectable in material culture and the iconography of foreign captives fails to volunteer any viable information on political economy. Textual sources offering historical information, like international correspondence, Egyptian war reports, administrative documents (e.g. on landholdings or temple workforces) and autobiographies of individual soldiers and officials are thus the only viable lanes to gauge Egyptian foreign and economic policies.

It is crucial to extract as much quantifiable information on Egyptian policies as possible, for it is quantifiable data that ultimately enables not only the analysis of policies' economic and demographic impact but also an assessment of possible long-term consequences on both the Egyptian and adjacent societies. It is not possible to get the complete picture, as the resulting dataset will be fragmentary due to selective preservation of the historical record. That means the dataset echoes spatial and temporal biases, perhaps the sources were preserved only at a certain place or time or archived only then and there. For instance, most of the extant international correspondence stems from the Amarna Period (1352–1336 BCE) found at the erstwhile Egyptian capital of Akhetaten, in use only around that time, and covering about a generation worth of correspondence between

the Egyptian and other courts of the LBA. The richest information, both in terms of quantity and quality, stem from the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty and the reigns of Thutmosis III and Amenhotep II (1479–1425/1427–1400 BCE), which coincided with Egypt's greatest military activity abroad, also reflected by the quality of information in autobiographical texts of Egyptian officials not seen in later periods. Quantifications on the number of deportees reflect such biases: just over half of these originate in royal sources and autobiographies and at times are themselves fragmentary. But these varying degrees of fragmentation should not deter researchers from assembling all available information to approach as complete a picture as possible. Especially, as Egyptian numbers do not appear tempered with or exaggerated in comparison with Assyrian quantifications, which in turn are also much higher while covering a similar time span as the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 250 years)[1].

The vagaries of an incomplete, fragmentary dataset can be mitigated through the simulation of a more complete dataset. Based on information on annual deliveries from West Asia and Nubia in people and various commodities in the annals of Thutmosis III in the Temple of Amun at Karnak, it is possible to project low, average, and high estimates for the intake of deportees for the remainder of the Late Bronze Age, or rather the existence of the Egyptian empire in West Asia and Nubia. These deliveries were initiated after the Egyptian victory over Canaanite forces at Megiddo (Liverani 1990, 255–266; Liverani 2001, 180–182), which resulted in the vassalization of southern Levantine communities and increased the Egyptian sphere of influence into the northern Levant, where Egypt first faced the Mitanni and later the Hittites. Evidence suggests that deliveries from Nubia had already been in place since the reign of Thutmosis I (1504–1492 BCE) (Sethe 1906, 70.1–6; Spalinger 2006, 351–352), when Egypt defeated the Nubian state of Kerma and thus eliminated an old geopolitical rival in the South. That the deliveries continued beyond Thutmosis III's reign is indicated by the Amarna letters, where people regularly feature as bargaining chips in international relations or formed generally a part of trades. In Egyptian legal texts or administrative correspondence between officials, deportees appear only in case of irregularities, which suggests that the presence of deportees in ancient Egyptian society was probably more common than the fragmentary evidence volunteers. One can assume that these deliveries only ceased after Egypt lost its grasp over its West Asian

[1] On Assyrian quantifications generally, see De Odorico 1995.

and Nubian possessions, which occurred at different points in the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE. Thutmosis III's dataset thus results in the following annual figures taking the standard deviation into account:

	Low Estimate	Middle Estimate	High Estimate
West Asia	197	400	702
Nubia	20	70	101
Annual Total	**217**	**470**	**803**

Table 1: Estimated annual deliveries since the reign of Thutmosis III

This interplay of qualitative and quantitative approaches renders the political economy of Egypt's deportation policies a viable object of research.

2 The Political Economy of Egyptian Late Bronze Age Deportation Policies

2.1 Historical Backdrop

Around 1560 BCE, Egypt was divided into various polities that had sworn fealty to the Hyksos. Of West Asian origin (Schneider 1998: 5), this group had migrated to the Nile Delta on the Mediterranean Coast and eventually taken control of the area and subsequently turned Middle and Upper Egypt into its subjects. Located in Upper Egypt was the Theban state that went on to rebel again their Hyksos overlord at the time (Ryholt 1997: 293–307). The Theban leadership managed to drive out the Hyksos elites in a series of wars and then turned their attention south to the state of Kerma in Nubia, which had previously aligned with the Hyksos during the rebellion to carve up Thebes (Zibelius-Chen 1988: 64; Redford 1995: 130; Davies 2003: 6). Over several decades, the newly unified Egyptian state defeated Kerma and incorporated Nubia into its empire, establishing a system of colonial rule under a *de facto* military occupation (Török 2009: 157–181; Langer 2013: 98–103). The Megiddo campaign of Thutmosis III saw Egypt take control indirectly through vassals of the southern Levant in the 1450s BCE (Murnane 2000; Redford 2003: 1–51, 202–209; Langer 2013: 103–109), which served as the base to engage the other great powers in West Asia, the Mitanni and the Hittites over the next two centuries (James 2000; Bryce 2005: 154–189). The remainder of the LBA was marked by the so-called

LBA collapse. Although the Egyptian state weathered several crises, much opposed to other societies like that of the Hittites, the leadership of the state eventually transitioned to a Libyan elite (Kitchen 1986: 243–257; Spalinger 2005: 271–275). Against this background, the Egyptian state conceived and enacted its complex deportation policies, as subsequently outlined.

2.2 General picture: quantities, supply chain, impact, and composition

The LBA saw Egypt reach the climax of its geopolitical clout. Within that period, the Eighteenth Dynasty stands out as the time of the country's most considerable military exploits and spatial extent. These circumstances are echoed by the Egyptian deportations, which both were facilitated by Egypt's activity and enabled those at the same time as an integral feature of Egyptian foreign and domestic policies.

The figures in the extant record give the following picture: 165,953+x people were deported by the Egyptian state between 1560 and 1069 BCE; at least 142,014 in the Eighteenth Dynasty, 17,807 in the Nineteenth Dynasty, and 6,132 in the Twentieth Dynasty. Of these, 67 per cent originated from West Asia, 23.7 per cent from Nubia and other regions to the South of Egypt, 8 per cent from Libya, and 0.03 per cent from Egypt proper, while 1.3 per cent are unassigned and no values are included for the Sea Peoples (Tab. 2).

	Total	Percentage (%)
West Asia (a)	111,095	67
Nubia (b)	39,389	23.7
Libya	12,789	8
Egypt	7	20.1
Sea Peoples	x	x
Unassigned	2,719	1.3

a Includes Anatolia, North Syria, and the Levant
b Includes Lower and Upper Nubia, Akuyati and Irem

Table 2: Origins of Deportees in the New Kingdom

These values, of course, represent the big picture and do not capture spatiotemporal fluctuations. For instance, most West Asians, especially from North Syria, were deported during the Eighteenth Dynasty, while Anatolians were primarily targeted in the Nineteenth Dynasty, and Libyans

were moved in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth dynasties, as were Sea Peoples. The simulated, more complete dataset gives a slightly altered picture, thanks to the continual influx of deportees from the southern Levant and Nubia. The low estimate projects a total of at least 229,112 deportees for the Late Bronze Age, the middle/average estimate 305,851 people, and the high estimate 411,497 (Tab. 3). The general trend is one of a decline between the Eighteenth and Twentieth dynasties in both the original and the extrapolated datasets, with the greatest deportation activity occurring in the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty owing to the extensive wartime deportations under Thutmosis III and Amenhotep II. The following exposition of the structures of these deportations pertains to the original dataset unless noted otherwise.

	Low Estimate	**Middle Estimate**	**High Estimate**
Eighteenth Dynasty	174,989+x	213,665+x	273,685+x
Nineteenth Dynasty	39,941+x	65,742+x	99,713+x
Twentieth Dynasty	14,182	26,434+x	37,999
Total	229,112	305,851+x	411,397+x

Table 3: Estimated Figures of Deportees in the New Kingdom

The supply chain can be separated roughly into two distinct but interconnected regimes: wartime deportations and structural deportations. The former made for an irregular supply of deportees as it was contingent on warfare taking place and accounted for between 53 per cent (extrapolated) and 98 per cent (original) of all deportees. The latter made for a regular intake as Egypt's vassals in the southern Levant and occupied Nubia were obliged and expected to deliver people to the Egyptian state, which accounted for between 2 per cent (original) and 47 per cent (extrapolated) of all deportees in the shape of peacetime deportations. Structural deportations ensured the supply of people from abroad without the necessity to wage war. Both these regimes depended on and were a result of Egypt's foreign relations with adjacent societies and the more distant great powers of West Asia.

From a spatial perspective, most deportations took place within the Egyptian empire per the extrapolated dataset since they came as a result of the Egyptian occupation of Nubia and informal control of the southern Levant via its regional vassals. In the former theatre, Egypt itself selected and moved locals as deportees, while in the latter it was the vassals who selected and delivered the deportees, probably following rough directives on part of the Egyptian overlord's representatives on-site. Conversely, while

deportees were also moved as part of international wedding arrangements and formed part of the dowry, e.g. in Ramesses II's marriage with a Hittite princess (Beckman 1996: 125–129), such instances appear marginal for the political economy of Egyptian deportations.

As far as the destination of deportees in Egypt proper can be reconstructed, two sectors stand out as the most prominent beneficiaries: temples and private estates. Both were important factors in the Egyptian economy, with especially temples managing considerable agrarian landholdings and thus greatly contributing to Egypt's food security (Papazian 2012: 81–82). According to that, deportees were largely employed in agricultural occupations, like tilling fields, animal husbandry, tending to orchards, and food processing but also the production of textiles. One can expect similar tasks on a smaller scale, in connection with general domestic servitude, on private estates. The deportees as unfree workers received generally the status of *ḥm*, which placed them at the bottom of Egyptian society, and and *mr*-dependants especially in temples. As the latter, they were personally bound to the deity inhabiting a given temple, working for that deity's wellbeing and thus upholding the cosmic order, and became the *de facto* property of the temple.

On a societal scale, the deportations could have greatly complemented the agricultural workforce, estimated to be relatively small anyway at no more than 400,000 workers (Warburton 2016: 203–204), and enabled the state to put additional labour into other economic sectors or ease the labour obligations for Egyptians (Haring 2013: 624–627; Morris 2018: 122). That may have generated a diverse society, although the deportees in temples were apparently segregated from the rest of society (Helck 1957: 1556), and the policies contributed at least partly to the power transition from Egyptian to Libyan elites in the long run.

On the individual scale, soldiers and officials benefited from deportees as rewards for services to the king. A soldier could pursue a civil career and accumulate material wealth and social capital from his estate's agricultural produce and the deportee workers (Zingarelli 2010: 104–105), which probably also replaced him when he had to render labour to the state, increasing his leisure. This effect would have accumulated over several generations. Indeed, Warburton (2016: 203–205) recently argued that Egyptians were largely under-employed. Estate owners or, in fact, anyone possessing deportees or other *ḥm.w* could bestow them to their descendants (e.g. Allam 1993) or even sell them on, which made for another potential source of revenue. In this sense, the Egyptian deportations could have fed

into or even facilitated a privatized slave market, which ran in parallel to the deportation regime. In this context, deportees – brought to Egypt by the state, primarily the Egyptian army – could enter the slave market by first being given to estate owners, who could then begin to circulate the deportees among each other or sell them to people who previously did not own slaves or additional labour power, thus increasing the circle of individuals who could profit from deportees.

On neighbouring societies, the Egyptian policies probably had much more severe effects. At the time, about 590,000 people inhabited the southern Levant, while some incisive event dated roughly to 1400 BCE caused a marginal population decrease (Kennedy 2013: 573–587). That corresponds well with the reigns of Thutmosis III and Amenhotep, who account for both the greatest military and the most comprehensive deportation activities as discussed above. Considering only the structural deportations, the according population loss per the data projections would have amounted to 0.03–0.14 per cent annually, amounting to 0.6–2.8 per cent over a generation of 20 years. Adding the occasional wartime deportations, which enabled the relocation of a much bigger number of people in a single action, the population loss was likely more severe. Structural deportations, though, had a cumulative effect. This means that even the lowest estimate of an annual population loss of 0.03 per cent should have disrupted the regional demographics and economies in the long run. A focus on deporting able-bodied, young individuals for work in the Egyptian economy likely exacerbated the effect. In all of that, the Egyptians probably capitalized on tensions between their Levantine vassals, while aggravating these with the deportations policies, as suggested by reports of vassals raiding another's deliveries of people and other goods bound for Egypt (EA 287–288; Schniedewind and Cochavi-Rainey 2015: 1110–1113). Such infighting certainly enhanced Egypt's grip on its informal empire in a divide-and-rule move. In addition to deportations, there were also temporary migrations within the area: the vassals had to send corvée workers to cultivate the fertile Jezreel Valley, itself under Egyptian control since the Battle of Megiddo and whose produce went to Egypt (Na'aman 1988).

Nubia suffered smaller-scale deportations but also had a smaller overall population estimated at around 220,000 people (Smith 2003: 75, 195). Structural deportations would have seen an annual population loss of 0.01–0.04 per cent, amounting to 0.2–0.8 per cent over 20 years. The decrease was thus considerably smaller than in West Asia, albeit part of it was offset by Egyptian settler colonialism in Nubia and deported West

Asians (Schulman 1982: 315) – to what extent must remain unknown. Premodern societies presumably had an annual average population growth of 0.04 per cent (Poston and Bouvier 2010: 276) – the values surrounding Egypt's deportation policies both in Nubia and West Asia suggest that their societies capacity to reproduce were severely affected or even canceled by structural deportations alone; in the case of the southern Levant, a negative population growth might have already set in after a few years according to the worst case scenario. Toward the end of the LBA, the so-called LBA collapse occurs in the Eastern Mediterranean (Cline 2014). While demographics have not featured in any debates yet, it is worth raising the question if and to what extent the Egyptian policies contributed to these transformations in a way that local groups were less resilient to cope with the challenges. Future research may clarify that. Either way, these findings go against previous assessments that the impact of the Egyptian policies on the regional populations were negligible, which also holds for the role of foreign forced labour in Egyptian society (Ahituv 1978:103; Spalinger 2005: 136; Zibelius-Chen 1988: 121). The deportees themselves comprised largely members of the lowest social strata (90 per cent), while Nubian and West Asian elites accounted for roughly 1 per cent, as far as the stratification can be quantified. These figures align nicely with Trigger's (2003: 153–155) premodern stratification model. The gender ratio was evenly split, while the share of children among the deportees cannot be ascertained, in large part due to the volatility of related Egyptian terminology (Feucht 1995: 550). In sum, Egypt's main target were unskilled labourers to fuel especially the agricultural sector of its economy (both state-run and private) as *ḥm-* and *mr*-dependants, which also applied to elite deportees.

Nothing in the dataset suggests that the Egyptians had any conception of the long-term consequences of their policies. Neither that they disrupted the demographics of their neighbours, leading to severe repercussions over decades or even centuries, nor that they might have paved the way for a power transition from Egyptian to Libyan elites. Instead, the data paint a picture of Egyptian elites primarily interested in the short-term effect, be that political power over outward territory or economic gain at home.

3 Concluding remarks

These findings point to a complex interplay between the effects of the Egyptian deportation policies at home and abroad, linking various sectors

of Egyptian society and Northeast Africa with West Asia. It stands to reason that deportations are just the most visible mode of forced migration in ancient Egyptian history and that they complemented other involuntary as well as more voluntary migrations into Egypt, such as human trafficking or displacement, which appear at different points in Egyptian LBA sources. This means that migration and foreign labour likely had an even bigger role than is hinted at in these findings.

Nonetheless, the results already show that the extent of the deportation policies and the impact of unfree labour on the Egyptian and adjacent societies were grossly underestimated by previous scholars. Similarly, such results may engender a more realistic, nuanced perspective on the existence and weight of slavery and unfree labour generally in Egyptian society; that is, beyond grandiose statements such as "the pyramids were built by slaves" or "there was no slavery in Egypt, all workers were free", both extremes of which get touted by both amateurs and specialists in popular science, including social media.

Employing a more social scientific approach enables research to move beyond aesthetics and produce results that should also be of interest to other academic fields that Egyptology has traditionally struggled to connect with. Research on the political economy of ancient Egypt creates new nodes through which others can link up with, albeit simply for comparative purposes. In the present case, such nodes are regimes of forced migration and unfree labour, demography, the development of inequality in a society, or migration and political power at home and abroad as well as the question of (cyclical) power transitions among elites of different origins over extended periods of time. These issues apply to other premodern societies as well, like the aforementioned Assyrians, but also Rome, Mesopotamian societies, or American nations, just as more infamous modern deporters, like National Socialist Germany, the Stalinist Soviet Union or Imperial Japan. In this particular case, the question is how deportation policies have evolved over human history, whether there are any patterns, and the relationship between forced migration and unfree labour with the construction of a given society and what that has to say about the future of the human species, considering the migratory movements that are only to expand during the ongoing climate crisis. With the picture clearer for ancient Egypt now, Egyptology may have something to contribute to wider debates on current and future affairs as well as provide a model for the study of other premodern deportations.

The key for Egyptologists generally will be not to simply take ideas of other fields and read Egyptian source material against them, but to

actively venture out into and seek the conversation with these fields. Then Egyptology can move beyond the often-alleged focus on esoteric matters and explore to what extent its empirical insights can influence theoretical debates in history and social sciences and enhance enquiries into e.g. patterns in the organization of human societies. Egyptology is in a unique position to contribute to such debates as a field overseeing centuries and millennia of the development of a single society. The future with its great challenges will show whether Egyptologists will be able to realize this potential and bring it to fruition.

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