



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

EFLA STUDY GUIDE

UNIT 1: Ancient Africa (200,000 B.C.E. – 476 A.C.E.)

CLASS 4: Ancient Nubia/Kush (6000 B.C.E. – 1500 A.C.E.) *Part 1*

OVERVIEW



Egypt is often considered **synonymous** with Nile Valley civilization. Its dominance in the historical record and popular imagination overshadows the **prominence** of other Nile Valley kingdoms, including those of Ancient Nubia—the oldest civilization to emerge along the Nile River.

Geographically, Nubia describes an area located in southern Egypt (Lower Nubia) and northern Sudan (Upper Nubia), which in ancient times extended more than 1,000 miles from the first cataract to the sixth cataract in the city of Khartoum. There was continuity throughout Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia that resulted in strikingly similar architectural, religious, and cultural achievements. For many years, archeologists dismissed the significance of Nubia and often portrayed these dark-skinned Africans as inferior and attributed their cultural developments to the people of Ancient Kemet/Egypt. However, recent discoveries reveal that Nubian civilization predated Kemet by thousands of years and likely provided the foundation for Kemetic/Egyptian dynastic rule.

Not at all an inferior or secondary kingdom, Ancient Nubia thrived alongside Kemet, and was rich with its own cultural traditions. Its central location, which linked southern and northern Africa, including the Mediterranean, made it the most powerful trading center in the world. Rich with natural resources and access to fine goods such as gold, copper, ebony, ivory, incense, semi-precious stones, animal skins, and ostrich feathers, Nubia was attractive to Egyptian elites, but it was also a potential threat. Although these two civilizations overlapped, they also competed with each other for control over land, trade, and resources.

Much of what we know about Nubia comes from Kemetic artifacts and texts as well as documentation from the Greeks and Romans. It is believed that the word Nubia derived from the Egyptian word nub—meaning gold. In fact, Nubia had the greatest supply of gold in the ancient world. The Ancient Egyptians called Nubia “Ta-Sety” or “The Land of the Bow,” referring to the skillful use of the bow and arrow (archery) among Nubian hunters and warriors. During the

Middle Kingdom (2030 – 1640 B.C.E), the name “Kush” was used to refer to the powerful Nubian empire that once stretched into northern Ethiopia. Among Ancient Greeks and Romans, Nubia was actually called “Ethiopia,” a broad term used to describe Africans to the south of Kemet.



Archeologists have divided Nubian history into [arbitrary](#) designations called the A Group, B Group, and C Group. In other instances, the archeological site determines the name of the people such as the Kerma culture—named after the city of Kerma—and the Meroitic civilization—named after the city of Meroe. Due to the absence of archeological evidence and an inability to [decipher](#) the Meriotic writing system (which shares similarities with Egyptian hieroglyphics), much about the Ancient Nubians is still unknown.

The relationship between Nubia and Kemet is often relegated to the 25th Dynasty, a period of Nubian (Kush) rule over Kemet, which is also referred to as the era of the “Black Pharaohs.” The reference to Kushite rulers as the “Black Pharaohs” or “Black kings” of Kemet wrongly suggests that Black Africans never ruled Kemet and denies the reality that the Ancient Kemites/Egyptians were also Black according to modern conceptions of race. The 25th Dynasty is significant because it represented a renaissance or high mark in Ancient Kemetic history, establishing one of the largest empires in ancient times, and the last Golden Era of native African rule of Egypt. By 750 B.C.E., Kemet had suffered a period of economic decline and disunity as a result of the influx of Libyan invaders. In the mid-eighth century, Nubians conquered Kemet, reunited the upper and lower regions, and [reinvigorated](#) Kemetic material culture. The 25th Dynasty ruled Kemet for more than a century until the Assyrian conquest around 650 B.C.E.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- ✓ Recognize the cultural contributions of Ancient Nubian civilization, including those that predate Ancient Kemet/Egypt, and the Nubian-ruled 25th Dynasty.
- ✓ Identify the Nile Valley region on a map including the Nile River and the major cities and religious sites of Egypt, Nubia, and surrounding African countries.
- ✓ Understand the complex relationship between Nubia and Kemet/Egypt including trade, mutual cultural customs, and conquest.

ASSIGNMENT

Read the following materials (approximately 45 minutes):

1. [Racism and the Rediscovery of Ancient Nubia](#) (5-7 min) [PDF](#)
2. Documentary: [NUBIA: The "Forgotten Kingdom"](#) (excerpt, 4:55 min)
3. Nubia: Ancient Kingdoms of Africa, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (pp. 7-24, 40-60 min)

STUDY QUESTIONS

From Racism and the Rediscovery of Ancient Nubia

1. What did Greek traditions have to say regarding the Ancient Nubians?
2. Who were Karl Richard Lepsius and Bayard Taylor? What race did they say the ancient Nubians belonged to? Why?
3. Why do you think no Black or African historian was involved with any of the major early excavations of ancient Nubia?
4. Today, who are considered the “first Egyptologists?”

From Nubia: Ancient Kingdoms of Africa, Boston Museum of Fine Art

5. What were the dates of Ancient Nubia’s Prehistoric Period and where was it located?
6. What are the dates of the A-Group, C-Group and Kerma Culture and what do their names refer to?
7. What city is Nubia’s northern border located? What city is Nubia’s southern border located?
8. Why was the Nile river so important the growth and development of ancient Nubia?
9. How does the landscape of ancient Nubia differ from that of ancient Egypt? Why is this significant?
10. Why was Nubia called “The Gateway to Africa?”
11. What did the Greeks and the Romans call the territory south of Egypt? What did it mean?
12. How did the ancient Nubians and Egyptians represent their skin color? (Correction of

text needed. Read below!)

13. What was the name of the oldest Nubian culture that developed during the prehistoric period? What items did this culture create that are among the oldest in the world?
14. What advances did the Nubians make during the Neolithic Period (5000 – 3100 B.C.E)?
15. What is the name the Egyptians gave for the area of Nubia? What did it mean?
16. How did the treasure inside the tombs of Nubia's A-Group (3100 – 2800 B.C.E.) kings compare with that of Egyptian pharaohs of the time?
17. When did the Egyptians first conquer parts of Nubia?
18. What was the name of the southern area of Nubia?
19. What was the Pan Grave culture (2200-1700 B.C.) known for?
20. True or False: The Kerma Culture (2000 – 1500 B.C.) was one of the most powerful states in Nubian history?
21. The Kerma Culture joined forces with what group to conquer Egypt during the 16th Dynasty?
22. How long did Hyksos and Nubians from the Kerma Culture rule ancient Egypt?
23. What was the result of the war between Egypt and the Hyksos/Kerma Culture in 1550 B.C.E.
24. What was the great achievement of the Kingdom of Kush during the Napatan Period (750 – 270 B.C.E.) under Kushite king Piye?
25. How did the 25th Kushite Dynasty fall?
26. What became of the Kushite Empire after they were defeated and pushed out of Egypt following the 25th Dynasty?
27. What caused the decline of the Kingdom of Kush during the Meroitic period?
28. What are some of the Ancient References to Nubia from the Bible and ancient historians?