



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

EFLA STUDY GUIDE

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

CLASS 5: Ancient Nubia/Kush (6000 B.C.E. – 1500 A.C.E.) *Part 2*

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.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Read the following materials (approximately 40-60 minutes):

1. Nubia: Ancient Kingdoms of Africa, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (pp. 24-59, 40-60 min)
2. [*“Neither Goddesses Nor Doormats: The Role of Women in Nubia” \[Excerpt\]*](#), by Tara L. Kneller (10-15 min)
3. Documentary excerpt: [*Amanishakheto: Warrior Queen of Nubia*](#) (4:18 min)

STUDY QUESTIONS

From *Nubia: Ancient Kingdoms of Africa*, Boston Museum of Fine Art (pp. 25 – 59)

1. True or False? It is believed that the idea of “divine kingship,” whereby the king rules as a god, came originally from ancient Egypt.
2. True or False? It was only through the royal men that Nubian rulers inherited the throne.
3. What was the relationship between the priests and rulers of ancient Nubia?
4. What happened when the priests told King Arkamani that god expected him to commit suicide?
5. Who was Piye (pee-ye)? What does the great stone stela at the temple of Amun at Jebel Barkal say about Piye’s conquests?
6. Who was Taharka? What did the Bible say about him?
7. True or False? Women held a very low status in ancient Nubia.
8. What does the name Candace refer to?
9. True or False? In ancient Nubian cultures, women with full figures were considered poor and unhealthy.
10. Who was Amanitore?
11. What is known about early Nubia and Egyptian religion?

12. True or False? Did the Nubians and Egyptians “share” similar religious beliefs and practices?
13. What was the Deffufa?
14. What are the two most famous colossal temples built in Nubia by Egyptian kings?
15. What type of activities occurred at temples such as Jebel Barka?
16. Name two other gods that the Nubians worshipped besides Amun.
17. When did the Nubians stop worshipping Amun as the supreme god? What was the name of the new “great god” that they begin to worship with equal status to Amun?
18. What was the dramatic new element discovered in Kerma burials?
19. What changed occurred after the location of the royal Nubian cemetery shifted south to Meroe about 270 B.C.?
20. How did Nubians live on a day-to-day basis? How were Nubian dwellings constructed?
21. What was the primary “occupation” in ancient Nubia?
22. When did ancient Nubians develop their own written language? When was this language deciphered?
23. How did jewelry figure into Nubian society?
24. What type of clothing did the ancient Nubians wear?
25. How was Nubian furniture constructed?
26. What function did pottery serve in ancient Nubia?
27. What type of food did Nubians eat?
28. True or False? Did the ancient Nubians wear make-up/cosmetics?
29. How did the Trans-Atlantic slave trade impact the history of Africa and Nubia?
30. Over the last three decades, what are some of the important new perspectives that have emerged regarding African history?