

◀ A painted fragment of a tomb wall shows Kushites bearing gifts for the pharaoh.

The Kingdom of Kush

10.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, you learned about daily life in Egypt during the New Kingdom. In this chapter, you will learn about Egypt's neighbor to the south, the African kingdom of **Kush**.

The civilization of Kush thrived from about 2000 B.C.E. to 350 C.E. Kush and Egypt had a close relationship throughout much of Kush's long history. Signs of their close ties can be found in pictures on the walls of some Egyptian tombs and temples.

A good example is the tomb of Hatshepsut, Egypt's first female pharaoh. If you entered the tomb, you would see many painted scenes of Egyptian life.

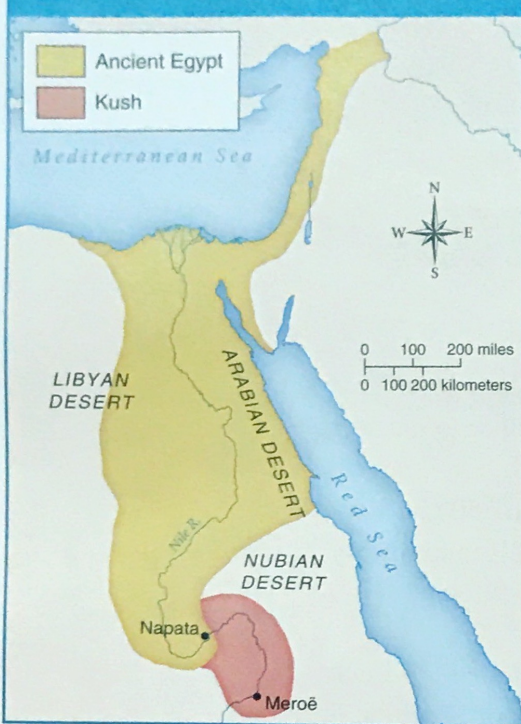
But step a little closer, and you might notice that not all the people in the paintings are Egyptian. Some look a little different. They have darker skin and curly hair. These people are Kushites. In some scenes, the Kushites appear to be bearing gifts. In others, they look as if they are armed with bows and arrows. As these images suggest, Egypt and Kush had a complicated relationship. Sometimes it was peaceful. Often it was not.

In this chapter, you will learn more about the **relationship between Egypt and Kush**. You will discover how each culture influenced the other. You will also learn how Kush created its own unique civilization.



Use this illustration as a graphic organizer to explore the history of the kingdom of Kush.

Egypt and Kush, 1600–1100 B.C.E.



10.2 The Egyptianization of Kush

Next to Egypt, Kush was the greatest ancient civilization in Africa. Like its neighbor to the north, Kush grew up around the fertile banks of the Nile River. Kush was known for its rich gold mines. In fact, another word for Kush is Nubia, which comes from *nub*, the Egyptian word for gold.

Kush's location and natural resources made it an important trading hub, or center. Kush linked central and southern Africa to Egypt. Pharaohs sent expeditions on ships south along the Nile to buy, or sometimes steal, goods. The Egyptians traded grain, beer, and linen for Kush's gold, ivory, leather, and timber. They also bought slaves.

Several times Egypt raided Kush or took control of parts of its territory. During the New Kingdom period (about 1600–1100 B.C.E.), Egypt's power was at its height. Egypt used its power to conquer Kush. Kush was forced to pay tribute to Egypt in the form of gifts.

The pharaoh appointed a governor to make sure the tribute was paid every year. The Kushites gave the governor gold, cattle, ivory, ebony, ostrich feathers, and slaves.

While Kush was under Egypt's control, its society became "Egyptianized." Kushites spoke and wrote in Egyptian. They worshiped Egyptian gods and wore Egyptian-style clothes. Kush's famed **archers** were hired to fight in Egypt's army. Princes from Kush's royal families were sent to Egypt to be educated.

Around 1100 B.C.E., Egypt's New Kingdom collapsed. After this, Kush regained its independence. However, Egyptian culture persisted. About 900 B.C.E., a new line of Kush kings was established. But even these kings continued to follow Egyptian traditions.

archer a person who shoots with a bow and arrow

While Egypt controlled Kush, the Kushites brought gifts to Egypt's governor as tribute. Sometimes the gifts included exotic animals such as giraffes and monkeys.



10.3 Kush Conquers Egypt

After the collapse of the New Kingdom, Egypt fell into political chaos. At least 10 Egyptian kingdoms fought each other for power. The constant fighting made Egypt weak and unstable.

In the mid 700s B.C.E., Kush took advantage of Egypt's weakness. Kushite armies invaded Egypt. In about 730 B.C.E., the kings in northern Egypt surrendered to Kush's King Piye.

After conquering Egypt, Piye declared himself pharaoh. One of his titles was "Uniter of the Two Lands." The kingdom of Kush now extended 1,500 miles. It reached from the Kushite city of Meroë, on the southern Nile, to the Mediterranean Sea.

In Egypt, Piye and his family became the 25th **dynasty**, or line of rulers. Kushite pharaohs ruled Egypt for nearly a century. Historians have traditionally called them the "black pharaohs."

The Kushite pharaohs did not want to tear Egypt down. Instead, they wanted to revive Egypt's past glory. They built magnificent new temples and pyramids in both Egypt and Kush. One of the most beautiful was the temple at Jebel Barkal. It was modeled after the temple of Ramses II at Abu Simbel. (You visited Ramses' temple in Chapter 8.)

By the 670s B.C.E., Egypt was being threatened by the Assyrians. As you read in Chapter 6, the Assyrians created a powerful empire in Mesopotamia. In 671 B.C.E., an Assyrian king invaded Egypt. For many years the Kushites tried to fight off the Assyrians. But the Assyrians used their advanced iron weapons to drive the Kushites out of Egypt. By the mid 650s B.C.E., the last of the Kushite pharaohs had returned to Kush.

dynasty a family or group that rules for several generations

This painting shows Egyptian royalty bowing and offering gifts to King Piye. In the past, Kush had been forced to pay tribute to Egypt. Now Egypt had to pay tribute to Kush.



10.4 The Kush Capital of Meroë

A new dynasty followed the Kushite pharaohs in Egypt. About 590 B.C.E., Egypt invaded Kush and destroyed its capital city, Napata. The Kushites decided to make Meroë their new capital. Meroë was 300 miles south of Napata, safely out of Egypt's reach.

Meroë's location helped Kush remain an important center of trade. Traders used the Nile, the Red Sea, and overland routes to transport their goods. These routes all took them through Kush. As a result, Kushites traded with many lands. Some, like other African kingdoms and Arabia, were nearby. But Kush also traded with such distant lands as Rome (on the peninsula of Italy), India, and possibly even China.

Meroë was a large and wealthy city. It became the center of a Kushite civilization that lasted for nearly 1,000 years. At its height, the city thrived as a great center of industry as well as culture. It became especially well known for producing iron. The

Assyrians had triumphed over the Kushites in Egypt because of their superior knowledge of iron technology. The Kushites were determined to equal the Assyrians.

Meroë had everything needed to produce iron. It had a rich supply of iron deposits. It also had plenty of forests, which provided the wood needed to make charcoal. The charcoal was used to heat the iron deposits. Once the hot iron separated from the rock, it was cooled in the Nile's waters.

Ironworkers in Kush made a variety of things. They crafted weapons such as spears, arrows, and swords. They also created tools to make farming faster and easier. These tools included axes for quickly clearing forests and hoes for loosening soil.

Kushites used iron to make many useful objects. Here we see Kushite ironworkers crafting spearheads.



10.5 Kush Returns to Its African Roots

After splitting away from Egypt, Kush returned to its African roots. Artwork, clothing, and buildings no longer imitated Egyptian styles. Kushites worshiped an African lion-god instead of Egyptian gods. They wrote and spoke a native language, called Meroitic (after Meroë), which had its own alphabet.

Kush art and architecture flourished. Artisans made beautiful pottery, cloth, and gold and silver jewelry. Rulers built grand palaces, temples, and pyramids.

Kush also revived the African practice of female leadership. Powerful **kandakes**, or queen mothers, ruled Meroë. The kandakes usually co-ruled with their sons or husbands. They were considered goddesses and were very powerful.

One of the greatest kandakes was Queen Amanirenas. She defended Kush against the powerful Romans in 24 B.C.E. (You will learn about the Romans later in this book.) The Romans had taken over Egypt. Now they were demanding tribute from Kush. Amanirenas and her son, Prince Akinidad, led an attack that destroyed several Roman forts on Kush's borders.

After three years of fierce fighting, Rome signed a peace **treaty** with Kush. Kush no longer had to pay tribute to Rome.

Under Amanirenas, Kush had defeated the most powerful empire in the world. The kingdom of Kush survived for nearly 400 more years. In 350 C.E., Kush fell to invaders from the African country of Ethiopia.

kandake a powerful female leader who co-ruled Kush with her husband and sons
treaty a written agreement by which two or more states agree to be peaceful



Amanirenas and her son, Akinidad, watch a Roman fort burn. Amanirenas fought side by side with her soldiers, even losing an eye in battle.

10.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about the African kingdom of Kush. Egypt and Kush had close ties for centuries. Each country invaded and conquered the other. Kushite pharaohs ruled Egypt for nearly a century. After the Kushites left Egypt, Kush created its own, more African, culture. In the next chapter, you will learn about Egypt's northeastern neighbors, the ancient Hebrews.