

# Chapter 10 The Kingdom of Kush

## 1. Introduction

In this chapter, you will learn about the African kingdom of Kush. Kush was located on the Nile River, to the south of Egypt.

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. Many painted scenes of

Egyptian life decorate the walls. But on closer examination, not all the people in the paintings are Egyptian. Some people look a little different. They have darker skin and curly hair. These people are Kushites (KUH-shites). 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 about the relationship between Egypt and Kush and the influence of each culture on the other. You will also discover how the location of Kush influenced its history and how Kush created its own unique civilization.



## 2. The Egyptianization of Kush



Aside from 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 name 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 and linen for Kush's gold, ivory, leather, and timber. The Egyptians also bought slaves.

At times, Egypt raided Kush or took control of some of its lands. During the New Kingdom (about 1600–1100 B.C.E.), Egypt's power was at its height. Egypt conquered Kush. Kush was

## Chapter 10 The Kingdom of Kush

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 under Egypt's control, Kushite society became Egyptianized, or more like Egypt. For example, Kushites spoke and wrote in Egyptian. They worshiped Egyptian gods and wore Egyptian-style clothes. Kush's archers fought in Egypt's army. Kush's royal princes were sent to Egypt to be educated.

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

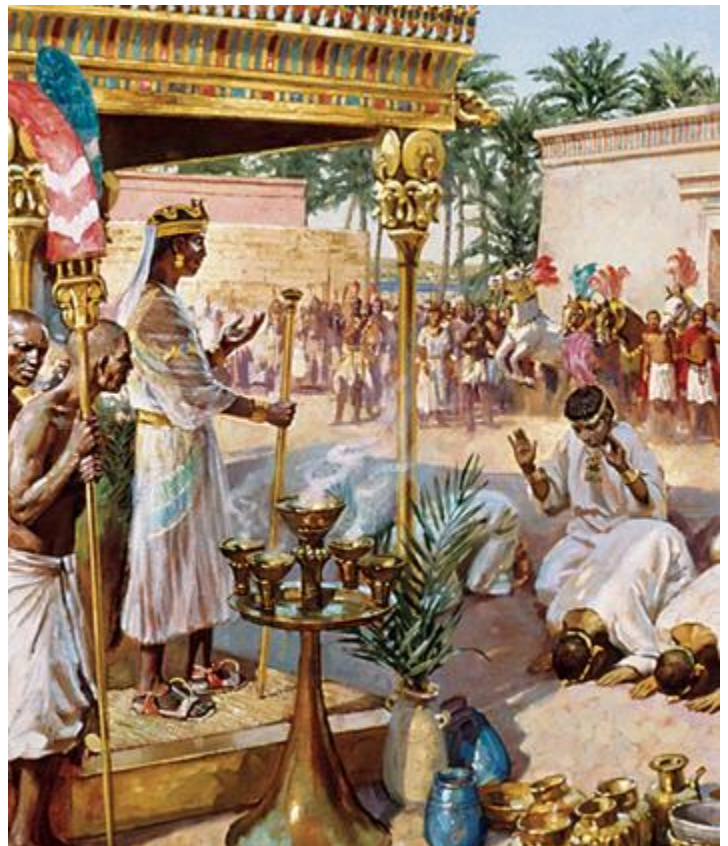
### 3. Kush Conquers Egypt

After the collapse of the New Kingdom, Egypt fell into political chaos. At least ten Egyptian kingdoms fought one another 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 Piye, king of Kush.

After his conquest of 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 (MER-oh-ee), located on the southern Nile River, to the Mediterranean Sea. In Egypt, Piye and his family became the 25th dynasty, or line of rulers. Kushite pharaohs ruled over Egypt for nearly a century. Historians have traditionally called them the "black pharaohs."

The Kushite pharaohs did not want to destroy Egypt. 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 built by Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II at Abu Simbel.

By the 670s B.C.E., Egypt was being attacked by the Assyrians. The Assyrians had



## Chapter 10 The Kingdom of Kush

created a powerful empire in Mesopotamia. In 671 B.C.E., an Assyrian king invaded Egypt. For many years, the Kushites tried to hold off the forces of the Assyrians. But the Assyrians used their advanced iron weaponry to drive the Kushites out of Egypt. By the mid 650s B.C.E., the last of the Kushite pharaohs had fled to Kush.

### 4. The Kush Capital of Meroë

A new dynasty in Kush followed the Kushite pharaohs that had ruled Egypt. About 590 B.C.E., Egypt once more invaded Kush and was able to destroy its capital city, Napata (NAP-uh-tuh). 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. Most of these routes took traders through Kush. As a result, Kushites traded with many lands. Some of these lands were nearby, such as other African kingdoms and Arabia. 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. Because of their superior knowledge of iron technology, the Assyrians had triumphed over the Kushites in Egypt. The Kushites were now determined to equal the military might of 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.



## Chapter 10 The Kingdom of Kush



### 5. Kush Returns to Its African Roots

After its separation from Egypt, Kush returned to its African roots. Artwork, clothing, and buildings no longer imitated Egyptian styles. Kushites worshiped an African lion-god rather than Egyptian gods. The Kushite people wrote and spoke a native language called Meroitic (mer-uh-wid-ik), after Meroë, which had its own alphabet.

Kushite 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. Kandakes 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. The Romans had taken over Egypt as they expanded their vast empire. They then demanded tribute from Kush. Kandake Ama nirenas and her son, Prince Akinidad, led an attack that destroyed several Roman forts on Kush's borders. The war with Rome raged on.

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.

### Summary

**In this chapter, you learned about the African kingdom of Kush. Kush had a complicated relationship with ancient Egypt, its neighbor to the north.**

**The Egyptianization of Kush** Kush's location on the Nile River and its natural resources made it a trade center. During the New Kingdom period, Egypt conquered Kush and Kushites adopted Egyptian ways.

**Kush Conquers Egypt** Under the rule of King Piye, Kush conquered Egypt. Kushite pharaohs ruled Egypt for nearly a century, building new temples and pyramids in both Egypt and Kush. Then the Assyrians forced the Kushites to leave Egypt.

**The Kush Capital of Meroë** Meroë became the capital of Kush about 590 B.C.E. It was the center of Kushite industry, such as ironwork, and trade for 1,000 years.

**Kush Returns to Its African Roots** Kush returned to its African culture and revived the African practice of powerful women leaders, called kandakes. Kandake Amanirenas stopped Rome's attempt to take control of Kush.