Section 6: Nubia and Ancient Egypt

Nubia and Ancient Culture

Nubia was a region along the Nile River. Its history can be traced from c. 2000 BCE to modern day. It was culturally close to ancient Egypt, and the two regions had periods of both peace and war.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Describe the Nubian kingdoms, emphasizing their relationship with Egypt.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- Nubia consisted of two major regions along the Nile River, from Aswan to Khartoum.
- Nubian history can be traced from c. 2000 BCE onward to 1504 AD, when Nubia was divided between Egypt and the Sennar sultanate and became Arabized.
- Nubia and Ancient Egypt had periods of both peace and war.
- Around 3500 BCE, the “A-Group” of Nubians arose, existing side-by-side with the Naqada of Upper Egypt.
- Nubia was first mentioned by ancient Egyptian trading accounts in 2300 BCE.
- During the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (c. 2040-1640 BCE), Egypt began expanding into Nubian territory in order to control trade routes, and to build a series of forts along the Nile.
- The “Medjay” were people from the Nubia region who worked in the Egyptian military.
- Some Egyptian pharaohs were of Nubian origin, especially during the Kushite Period, although they closely followed...
the usual Egyptian methods of governing.

Key Terms

- **pharaohs**: A ruler in ancient Egypt

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**Nubia**

Nubia consisted of two major regions along the Nile River, from Aswan to Khartoum. Upper Nubia sat between the Second and Sixth Cataracts of the Nile (modern-day central Sudan), and Lower Nubia sat between the First and Second Cataracts (modern-day southern Egypt and northern Sudan).

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**The Nubian Region**: This map shows the modern-day location of Nubia.

Nubian history can be traced from c. 2000 BCE onward to 1504 AD, when Nubia was divided between Egypt and the Sennar sultanate and became Arabized. It was later united within the Ottoman Egypt in the 19th century, and the Kingdom of Egypt from 1899 to 1956.
Nubia and Egypt

Nubia and Ancient Egypt had periods of both peace and war. It is believed, based on rock art, that Nubian rulers and early Egyptian pharaohs used similar royal symbols. There was often peaceful cultural exchange and cooperation, and marriages between the two did occur. Egyptians did, however, conquer Nubian territory at various times. Nubians conquered Egypt in the 25th Dynasty.

Egyptians called the Nubian region “Ta-Seti,” which means “The Land of the Bow,” a reference to Nubian archery skills. Around 3500 BCE, the “A-Group” of Nubians arose, existing side-by-side with the Naqada of Upper Egypt. These two groups traded gold, copper tools, faience, stone vessels, pots, and more. Egyptian unification in 3300 BCE may have been helped along by Nubian culture, which was conquered by Upper Egypt.

Nubia was first mentioned by ancient Egyptian trading accounts in 2300 BCE. Nubia was a gateway to the riches of Africa, and goods like gold, incense, ebony, copper, ivory, and animals flowed through it. By the Sixth Dynasty, Nubia was fractured into a group of small kingdoms; the population (called “C-Group”) may have been made up of Saharan nomads.

During the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (c. 2040-1640 BCE), Egypt began expanding into Nubian territory in order to control trade routes, and to build a series of forts along the Nile.

Depiction of Battle with the Nubians: This painting shows Ramses II battling Nubians from his war chariot.
The Egyptians called a certain region of northern modern-day Sudan, where ancient Nubians lived, "Medjay." This name gradually began to reference people, not the region. Those who lived in this region worked in the Egyptian military as scouts, later as garrison troops, and finally as elite paramilitary police.

Some Egyptian pharaohs were of Nubian origin, especially during the Kushite Period, although they closely followed the usual Egyptian methods of governing. In fact, they were seen, and saw themselves, as culturally Egyptian. The two cultures were so close that some scholars see them as indistinguishable. Nubians appear to have been assimilated into Egyptian culture.