



2. Meroitic Period (ca. 295 b.c. - a.d. 320)

Meroitic Cities

Portions of the city of Meroe itself have been excavated, so we know a bit about the plan of a few of the larger buildings at the site. Some of the buildings cleared by archaeologists were built of burned brick, but the majority of the city was probably built of plain mud-brick, dried in the sun. The largest excavated part of Meroe was called by the excavators the "Royal City." This area



consisted of a series of buildings surrounded by a large enclosure wall; the area inside was about 300 yards long by 150 yards wide. One of the buildings inside was identified as a bathhouse, similar to Roman baths found in Europe. There was a temple to Amon attached to the eastern.

Another important Meroitic site was Musawwarat es-Sufra. The plan of this temple complex seems to show no town buildings or any cemeteries; the entire site was covered over with large scale buildings built of stone. The so called Great Enclosure consists of a temple on a platform surrounded by a maze of stone walls. There are no formal inscriptions on any of the walls to give archaeologists a clue about the function of the building, though over the centuries passersby have scattered graffiti into the walls.

The many large scale ramps and corridors at Musawwarat, as well as the elephant reliefs carved on the columns around the central temple, have suggested to some scholars that this site was used as a training area for elephants. Though this theory about elephant training sounds farfetched, the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt did use elephants as war animals, so perhaps the Meroites captured the elephants and trained them before trading them with the Egyptians. There is a relief at Musawwarat that shows a king riding an elephant, and one wall at the site ends in a carved elephants; both features seem to point out that the elephant was important to the people at Musawwarat.