



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

The Meroitic Period in Lower Nubia

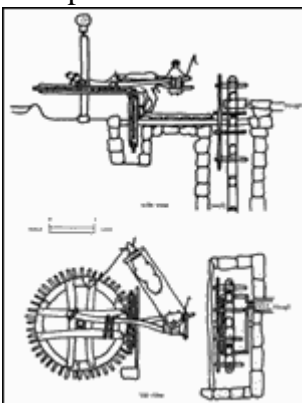
The Ptolemaic kings of Egypt ruled Egypt after Alexander the Great conquered the country. The Ptolemies wished to control the area of Lower Nubia between Aswan and the Wadi Allaqi, because the Wadi Allaqi was the entrance to the gold mines in the eastern desert. The distance between Aswan and the Wadi Allaqi measured 12 schoenoi, according to the Graeco-Egyptian system of measurement, so the region was called the Dodekaschoenos ("land of the 12 schoenoi") during the Ptolemaic era. The region was administered as part of the Ptolemaic empire, and was considered sacred to the goddess Isis.

When the Roman's took over Egypt, the cooperation in Lower Nubia between Egypt and Nubia ceased abruptly. The Roman's expected Nubia to pay tribute to them. In 23 b.c., the Meroites rebelled and attacked the city of Aswan in Egypt. Though the Nubian's were eventually forced to retreat by the Roman army, they no longer had to pay tribute.



Around the same time, in the first century b.c., the Meroitic Nubian's began to resettle the area in Lower Nubia from Maharraqa to the Second Cataract. By the second or third century a.d., this stretch of the Nile had become a very important northern province of the Meroitic culture. The major cause for this resettlement may have been the introduction of the saqia, a type of animal driven water wheel, which may have been invented in Mesopotamia. An ox is used to turn a large wheel, set parallel to the ground. The movement of the first wheel causes a second, vertical wheel to revolve; the second wheel, in turn, causes a third wheel, around which are set rows of small pots, to rotate through the source of water.

The small pots fill with water as they revolve; when they reach the top of the wheel, they tip over and spill the water into a trough, where it runs off into irrigation canals. By using the saqia, the



Nubian's could irrigate a far larger stretch of land, which made Lower Nubia able to support a fairly large population. This northern province of the Meroitic kingdom apparently had four major centers: Qasr Ibrim, Karanog, Gebel Adda, and Faras.

The funerary stelae of the officials buried in Lower Nubia, though still largely untranslated, have provided quite a bit of information about the governmental structure in Meroitic Lower Nubia. One scholar who studied these funerary monuments sees three main officials in the area, whose offices were hereditary: the "Royal Crown Prince", the "General of the River", and the "Prince of Akin".

The Crown Princes apparently were only distantly related to the kings in the Meroitic heartland, and reigned from Napata. The Generals of the River were most influential in the area of the Dodekaschoenos. "Akin" may be the Meroitic term referring to the region of Lower Nubia. The Princes of Akin actually resided and were buried at Karanog.