



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

Meroitic Religion

Archaeologists have recovered several Nubian temples that date to the Meroitic Period. Most temples are not large; the typical plan consists of one rectangular room with a massive pylon entrance. Some of the temples had columns in the interior, which would have supported the flat roof. Meroitic temples were decorated with carved scenes on the walls, which show a combination of Egyptian iconography and Nubian details. So, for instance, a Meroitic ruler may be shown smiting enemies in a scene known from the earliest periods of Egyptian history (ca. 3100 b.c.).

In Nubia, though, a queen may be shown in this pose. In Egypt, only the king performed this duty. The temple reliefs also depict the standard Kushite royal costume: Kushite kings wore two cobras, called uraei, on their foreheads as symbols of royalty. Egyptian kings wore only one. The Nubian kings could wear different crowns, but often wore a skullcap with a headband. Another Kushite royal emblem was a gold necklace with ram-headed pendants (the ram is a symbol of the god Amon).



Since the Meroitic language is still unknown, we do not know any Nubian myths or legends. We do know that many Meroitic temples were dedicated to the Egyptian god Amon; since Meroitic kings continued to build their names with the name of this god, Amon worship probably continued through the end of the Kushite kingdom.

There were, however, Meroitic temples dedicated to other, particularly Nubian, deities: at the site of Naqa is a well-preserved temple dedicated to the lion god named Apedemak, who is a god found only in Nubia. There was apparently a sun god, who also has no Egyptian equivalent, who may have been worshiped at a temple in Meroe. The Egyptian goddess Isis was also worshiped extensively in Meroitic Nubia; she appears on funerary monuments with the Egyptian god Anubis, often shown with the head of a jackal.