



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

Royal Burial Customs

The royal tombs of the Meroitic Period, like those of the Napatan Period, supply quite a bit of information about the rulers of the kingdom of Kush who reigned from Meroe. The royal tombs are located in two cemeteries (called the North and South cemeteries) in front of the desert hills to the east of the capital city. A third cemetery, called the West Cemetery, contains no burials of ruling kings but contains the tombs of queens and royal relatives. Most of the kings are buried in the North cemetery; the upper class had used up most of the available spots in the South Cemetery before the kings began to be buried in Meroe.

Like the earlier royal tombs, the Meroitic royal tombs have a pyramid-shaped superstructure, built out of stone. Like the Napatan tombs at Nuri, the pyramids are stepped. The other components of the Meroitic tombs are like the Kurru and Nuri examples : they have a chapel on the eastern face of the pyramid and two or three subterranean rooms below. The tombs at Meroe show a gradual decrease in quality; the latest examples are no longer built entirely of stone, but have a rubble core covered with stone blocks. The Meroitic royal tombs were also robbed in antiquity.



The later tombs at Meroe show a feature not seen in the Napatan royal burials. Some of the bodies inside the tomb seem to have been sacrificed: the consorts and servants of the kings were killed and buried with him, so that their spirits would be able to serve him in the afterlife. The largest number of sacrificed people seems to have been six. In addition to the human sacrifices, there were more numerous examples of sacrificed dogs, camels, and horses.