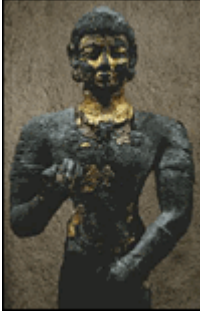




1. Napatan Period (ca. 900-ca. 295 b.c.)

History

The origins of the rulers of Kush remain unknown. Among the royal Napatan tombs at the site of Kurru are a number of early tumulus burials in which the bodies are laid out on beds. Though there were no inscriptions found in these tumulus graves to identify the people buried in them, tumulus graves are a distinctive Nubian tradition, so the Kushite kings were most likely of Nubian origin. Some scholars believe that the development of the Napatan monarchy took place without any influence from Egypt. Other scholars believe that the Kushite kings rose to power as a result of an arrangement between local Nubian chiefs and a group of Egyptian or Egyptianized priests. These priests would have been left behind at the great Amon temple at Jebel Barkal when Egypt withdrew from Nubia at the end of the New Kingdom. The priests perhaps needed the military power of local chiefs to maintain their position within the religious system of the local government, and so an alliance was formed. This hypothesis might explain the rapid rise to power of the Kushite kings, since they would have been supported by the well-established priesthood. The tumulus graves at Kurru, then, would belong to these powerful local chiefs. The lack of written evidence from the Kushites themselves prevents archaeologists from deciding which hypothesis is correct.



Whatever their origins, by about 770 b.c. the Kushite kings were powerful enough to contemplate extending their rule to the north. The first ruler whom we know by name is Kashta (770 b.c.-750 b.c.); though few details are known about his life, it is apparent that during his reign he journeyed to southern Egypt, where he left a monument at Aswan. More is known about the reign of Kashta's son Piye (pronounced "pie"), whose name was formerly read as Piankhy, Egyptian for "the living one." Piye left a large stela, now in the Cairo Museum, describing the major events in his reign. Piye apparently spent the first two decades of his reign peacefully, at his capital of Napata, though the stela tells us he also ruled over southern Egypt. Then he received a request from officials at Thebes for military protection against a local ruler from the Egyptian Delta named Tefnakht, who wanted to rule over all of Egypt. Piye himself traveled north to Egypt and successfully pursued and destroyed Tefnakht's army. After this time, Piye used the ancient titles of the Egyptian pharaohs, though he never returned to Egypt and lived the remainder of his life in Nubia. Piye is generally considered the founder of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty in Egypt.



Piye's successors managed to retain control of Egypt for about 50 years, but the rulers of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty were eventually ousted from Egypt by the Assyrians, who lived in the area of modern Iraq. Although some of the Nubian rulers of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty are not well known, Piye's son Taharqa (690-664 b.c.) stands out in the archaeological and historical records of the time. Although Taharqa spent much of his reign trying to repel Assyrian forces from Egypt, he was also able to carry out an extensive building program in Egypt and Nubia. Taharqa's renovations and additions are visible in the Theban temple of Amon at Karnak as well as in the Nubian temple of Amon at Jebel Barkal. He also constructed a temple at Kawa, which became an important religious center of the Kushite kingdom. When Taharqa died, after having returned to Napata, he left southern Egypt under the control of his nephew and successor, Tantamani. Tantamani was unable to keep the Assyrians at bay, and was soon forced to quit Egypt and return to Napata. Tantamani's reign (664-653 b.c.) officially ends the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, though the Kushite kings continued to use titles such as "pharaoh" until the end of the Meroitic Period.

With Tenutamon's retreat into the homeland, the Kushite kings entered another dark age, during which little is known about events in the Nubian kingdom. A few of the 20 generations of kings



buried at Nuri after Taharqa, however, have left inscriptions that give glimpses into historical events. Because these inscriptions were in the Egyptian language and script, which had been adopted by the Kushites, scholars have been able to translate them. So, for instance, King Anlamani (623-593 b.c.) apparently a great-grandson of Taharqa, left an inscription describing his visit to the temple at Kawa. King Aspalta (593-568 b.c.), brother and successor of Anlamani, was probably on the throne when the Egyptian king of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, Psammetik II, invaded Nubia. Psammetik's invasion, though his armies may have reached Napata, had no lasting effect on the relations between the two countries. Aspalta is also the first king whose name has been found at Meroe, in the south, although the formal southward shift of the capital seems to have taken place slightly later.

We also have a few inscriptions from the last kings of the Napatan Period (Irike-Amanote, Harsiyotef, and Nastasen); all are similar in content and describe the coronations of the kings and some of the battles in which they fought. From such inscriptions, we learn that the Kushite kings all claimed to have been chosen by the god Amon at the temple of Jebel Barkal.