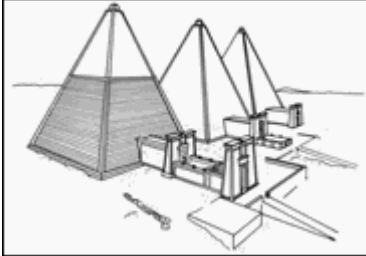




1. Napatan Period (ca. 900-ca. 295 b.c.)

Royal Burial Customs

Though written material is sparse, the tombs of the Napatan kings and queens found at Kurru, Nuri, and Jebel Barkal provide some information about Nubian culture during the Napatan Period.



The Napatan kings and queens, as well as the rulers of the Meroitic Period, used the pyramid, long known from the Old Kingdom (2575-2134 b.c.) onward in Egypt, as the form of the superstructure of their tombs. Like the Egyptians, the Nubians built their pyramids in stone. Napatan pyramids are much smaller than those built in Egypt; the largest, belonging to Taharka at Nuri, measures only 90 feet along the base, compared to 750 feet for the Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza. The Napatan pyramids are also much steeper than the Egyptian

examples, with a slope angle generally between 60 and 70 degrees, compared to the 51 degree slope of the Great Pyramid. Archaeologists also believe that the Nubian pyramids were not pointed at the top, but flat-topped.

Generally, there were no rooms inside the pyramidal superstructure of the tomb, but there was a small chapel where priests could make offerings to the dead built up against the eastern face of the pyramid. The actual burial chambers were below the ground, hollowed out from bedrock. Each tomb usually had two or three small rooms, with the body placed within the room most directly under the pyramid. While the kings at Kurru were buried on beds, those at Nuri and from later tombs were buried within wooden or stone coffins. Like the Egyptians, the Nubian kings were mummified. The queens of the Napatan period had pyramid tombs similar to those of the kings, but for the most part smaller and less ornate.



There are some stylistic differences among the pyramids from the three Napatan royal cemeteries. For instance, the pyramids at Kurru were built with smooth sides, while the tombs at Nuri have stepped sides. Kurru also presented the unique feature of twenty-four horse burials. These horse burials were dated to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty rulers, and may be the animals that pulled the royal chariots. Part of Piye's great stela notes his interest in horses: when he enters the royal stables of a town he has just conquered and sees the way the horses have been treated, he says: "I swear, as Re [the sun god] loves me, as my nose is refreshed by life: that my horses were made to hunger pains me more than any other crime you committed in your recklessness!"



The objects found in the royal tombs of the Napatan period provide quite a bit of information about the culture of the Kushite kings. One of the most conspicuous elements of Kushite culture is the way in which the Nubian kings styled themselves according to millennia-old Egyptian traditions. As mentioned above, they referred to themselves by the titles used by Egyptian pharaohs, such as "Lord of the Two Lands". They used the Egyptian language and script for their inscriptions. Some of the rooms under the Kurru pyramids are painted with scenes and texts that imitate the style of Egyptian rock-cut tombs. Though all of the Napatan tombs had been robbed in antiquity,



enough of the objects buried with the kings and queens remained behind for archaeologists to conclude that most of the material buried with these rulers was of Egyptian origin or inspiration. So, for instance, among the objects assembled for the burial of Queen Alakhebasken was a set of alabaster canopic jars, designed to hold her mummified internal organs.