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The wealth of Africa The kingdom of Kush

Students' worksheets



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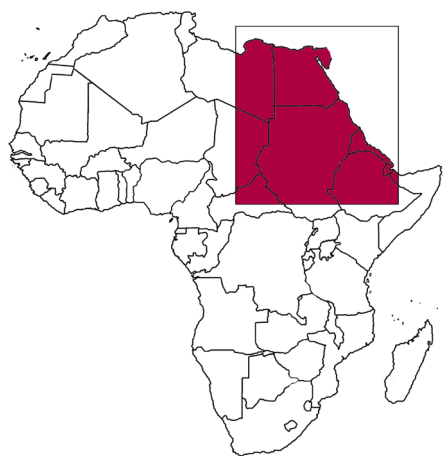
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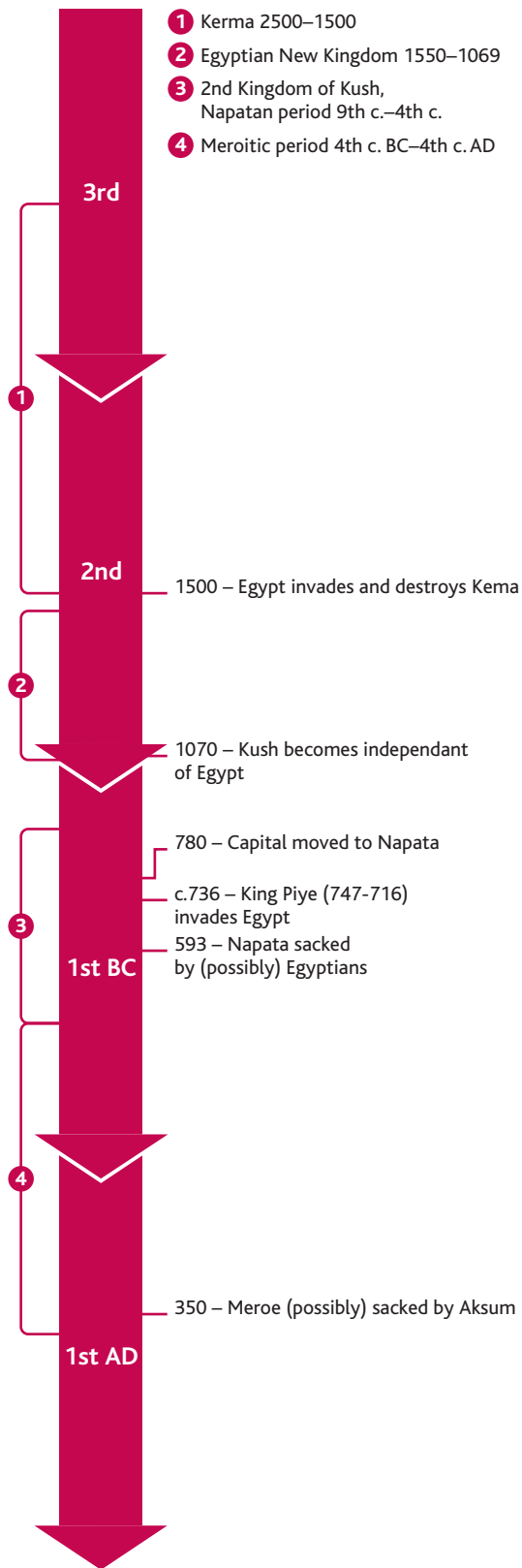
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KINGDOM OF KUSH



Millennium BC

- 1 Kerma 2500–1500
- 2 Egyptian New Kingdom 1550–1069
- 3 2nd Kingdom of Kush, Napatan period 9th c.–4th c.
- 4 Meroitic period 4th c. BC–4th c. AD



SHEET 1: WHAT WAS THE CITY OF KERMA LIKE?

The outline of the city of Kerma, the first capital of Kush, has slowly been emerging from the sand. It appears that it was made up of several different sectors, each with a particular function.

Source 1

Other inhabitants of the city appear to have lived in houses of irregular layouts that were clustered in four separate residential districts. These houses are of different sizes and are noted for their courtyards and gardens.

Bianchi 2004: 83

Source 2

The royal city [Kerma] was surrounded by substantial fortifications, including a wall 10 metres high. Four gateways gave access to the city, and roadways linked the gates and main structures. Many of the houses were of the traditional circular plan, of grass on a wooden frame, but others were rectangular of stone construction, and some of mud brick. Charles Bonnet has estimated that there were some 150 or 200 households, perhaps as many as 2,000 people living here.

Morkot 2000: 66

Source 4

The central block reserved for the owner had two or three floors, reached by a staircase. Dozens of jars were stored in the basements. These held cereals (sorghum) and dried fish. Around the main building were kitchens with large bread ovens, and quarters for family members or for servants.

Wealthy houses in the city, described by Bonnet 1986: 11

Source 6

There was a large building, circular in plan, with a conical roof, the height of which dominated the townscape. It may have served as Kerma's royal audience hall. It was surrounded by a series of smaller huts, some almost 5 metres in diameter.

Bianchi 2004: 85

Source 7

All around [the Deffufa were] large avenues, along which were the houses of the high officials of the kingdom. In fact, the size of certain houses suggests there was an elite class that watched the areas where goods were sealed and trade took place. Several bakeries with batteries of ovens have been found, where bread and probably beer were prepared for use as offerings.

Welsby and Anderson 2004: 80



Source 3: Model of city with Deffufa (white building)
© www.kerma.ch



Source 5: Temple
© www.kerma.ch



Source 8: Circular audience chamber, and deffufa
© www.kerma.ch

Task

Make a brochure for tourists visiting the city of Kerma in 1700 BC.

SHEET 2: WHAT WAS THE DEFFUFA?

The Western Deffufa rises out of the desert at Kerma looking a bit like, in its decayed state, an outcrop of natural rock. It is, however, clearly man-made and archaeologists have been puzzling over its exact purpose and significance. Here are some of their theories.

Source 1

The Western Deffufa is one of the most extraordinary structures in Nubia [Kush] and the only one of its kind. Originally, it was a solid rectangular mass of mud brick more than 150 feet long and 75 five feet wide, and probably stood considerably higher than the 60 feet that are still preserved. Within this solid mass there were no rooms and only the remains of a narrow winding stairway which had evidently led to the top of the structure.

Adams 1977: 199–200

Source 3

Reisner thought the Western Deffufa was the fortified residence of an Egyptian governor general of Upper Nubia... More recently, Hintze has suggested that the Deffufa was not Egyptian at all but part of the palace of the king of Kush, built by his orders.

Trigger 1976: 13–14

Source 4

The Deffufa is certainly not a fortress, however... Here surely is one of the depots or factories from which emerged the great Nile trade. It seems clear to me that the Kerma Deffufa was designed as an enormous watchtower... It would undoubtedly be to the advantage of the king and his officers to have first news of the coming of the boats, so as to have the landing parties ready for them.

Adams 1977: 201–202

Source 5

The Western Deffufa, with its extraordinarily thick walls of baked brick seems like the local replica of an Egyptian temple, which its outline suggests.

Bonnet 1986: vi

Source 6

The presence of rooms at all four corners of the building, in particular, did not seem to fit in with its role as a fort. Likewise, the placing of the entrance, surrounded by annexes in which attackers could easily hide, hardly seemed to match the needs of military architecture.

Bonnet 1986: 14



Source 2: Western Deffufa, Kerma
© J Anderson

Questions

1. What are the different explanations for the Deffufa in these sources?
2. Which one seems the most likely, given the description in source 1?

SHEET 3: WAS HUMAN SACRIFICE PRACTISED AT KERMA?

Archaeologists uncovering the burial ground at Kerma came across tombs that were quite unlike those in Egypt. Here there were no grand pyramids – these came later – instead a whole necropolis of shallow burials, some with gruesome secrets.

Source 1

The largest single tumulus [burial mound] at Kerma had a diameter of 90 metres, and the extent of the burial chambers within is greater than that in any Egyptian pyramid. The number of sacrificial human burials within this tomb exceeds that of any other known tomb in the world.

Adams 1984: 49

Source 3

Each of the large tumuli contained a mud brick burial chamber. In at least one of these the ruler was laid out on a bed of glazed quartz; in another the bed was of slate. Besides the main burial chamber there was a large open room. These contained the bodies of up to 400 human beings who appear to have been buried alive. These bodies were accompanied by a few artefacts and many were of women.

Trigger 1976: 16

Source 4

We see a noticeable increase in human sacrifices. One or two adults and up to seven children are sometimes found beside the main subject. On several occasions, a man, lying on a wooden bed, was accompanied by a woman and an adolescent. At the present time, we might suppose that these burials relate to a single family, where certain members agree to follow one of their own in death.

Bonnet 1992: 622

Source 7

Only 16 of the tombs certainly contained extra human burials.

Welsby 1996: 89

Questions

1. What evidence is there for human sacrifice at Kerma?
2. Why might there have been human sacrifice at burials?



Source 2: Large burial mound with ox skulls
© www.kerma.ch



Source 5: Double burial – one of these was probably a sacrificial victim
© www.kerma.ch



Source 6: Burial with sacrifices
© www.kerma.ch



Source 8: Bed
British Museum

SHEET 4: HOW GREAT WAS EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE ON KUSH?

It is perhaps not surprising, given their geographical closeness and historical development, that Egypt and Kush should have had many things in common. Have a look at these examples of art that were discovered in Kush and see if you can spot any similarities.

Source 1

Much that was produced at Kerma was heavily influenced by Egyptian techniques of manufacture and design... The rich at Kerma greatly admired Egyptian civilisation and ordered for their own use skilful copies of Egyptian furniture, jewellery, weapons and even architecture.

Trigger 1976: 14

Source 3

Bonnet admits that he went to Sudan to find Egyptian civilization. 'But step by step,' he confesses, 'I came to understand that the Nubian [Kushite] civilizations are really extraordinary. There might be Egyptian influences, but there is a Nubian originality and a Nubian identity.'

MacLeod 1997: 7

Source 4

Many items of manufacture and design at Kerma have been thought to be products of Egyptian craftsmen fitting in with local tastes. But it is equally possible that local [Kushite] craftsmen used Egyptian techniques to produce goods adapted to their own culture.

O'Connor 1984: 65

Source 6

Throughout their history the Kushite artists were continually borrowing from the current artistic trends in Egypt. [Yet] Kushite art still kept a distinctive character of its own. Kushite artists were clearly not simply stealing ideas but also adapting them, presumably to their own artistic traditions.

Welsby 1996: 177

Questions

1. The three pictures come from Kush. How much are they copying Egyptian styles?
2. How far do the written sources agree that Kush copied from Egypt?
3. Would you agree that Kush did not have an art style of its own?



Source 2: Sphinx with features of Taharqo, ruler of Kush and Egypt



Source 5: Ankh symbol imported into Napata (2nd Kingdom of Kush) British Museum



Source 7: Shabtis of Taharqo British Museum

SHEET 5: HOW SKILLED WERE KUSHITE CRAFTSMEN?

Kush is inevitably compared with Egypt in terms of its arts and crafts. Although we cannot be sure that some of these objects were not imported from Egypt, see if you think they show good craftsmanship.

Source 1

The most distinctive products of the Kerma culture were ceramics. The potters were able to produce incredibly fine vessels by hand, without using a wheel.

British Museum

Source 2

Kush was not totally dependent on Egypt for precious objects for the use of the rich. The relations with Egypt also inspired specialized production at Kerma, where local craftsmen made razors and daggers of bronze, faience vessels, wooden furniture decorated with carved figures of mica and ivory, as well as pots of high artistic value.

Hafsaas-Tsakos 2009: 66

Source 3

In the early Kushite period pottery was on the whole rather drab and is comparable with the low level of artistic merit of much of Egyptian ceramics...[Later, under Greek influence] Kushite fine white wares and egg-shell wares are amongst the most competent products of potters of any period in the Nile valley.

Welsby 1996: 163

Task

Search the British Museum's website to find larger versions of these images so that you can decide on the skills of Kushite craftsmen.



Source 4: Bronze razor
(Kerma)
British Museum



Source 5: Bowl (Kerma)
British Museum



Source 6: Cup (Meroe)
British Museum



Source 7: Pottery (Meroe)
British Museum



Source 8: Amphora
(Meroe)
British Museum



Source 9: Faience
perfume vase
(Meroe)
British Museum



Source 10: Gold jackal
(Meroe)
British Museum

SHEET 6: WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT KUSHITE SOCIETY?

Although we are learning more each year about Kushite society, we don't have the same level of knowledge as we do about Egypt. These sources may supply some clues, especially about the power of the rulers.

Source 1

The priests of Meroe were apparently able to decide when the king should die, and by tradition the king accepted their decision as having divine authority.

Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC), quoted in Welsby 1996: 32

Source 3

The main centre for the collection and administration of goods seems to have been the royal palaces: the main temples do not appear to have acted as major economic institutions as in Egypt.

Edwards 1998: 186

Source 5

Life expectancy may have been a few years less than the 20–25 year expectancy in Egypt.

Welsby 1996: 51

Source 6

Closely cropped hair is the most common hairstyle. This is sometimes decorated with a small topknot. A number of adult females had nails and hair stained with henna, a method of personal adornment still used in the Sudan today. At Meroe royal ladies are shown on reliefs sporting very long fingernails. Kohl was very commonly used as a cosmetic.

Welsby 1996: 52

Questions

1. What do the statues (source 4 and 8) tell you about the power of the rulers of Kush?
2. What other evidence is there of royal power and control?
3. What else can you learn about Kushite society from these sources?



Source 2: Royal sceptre
British Museum



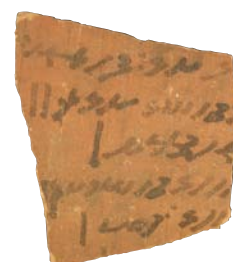
Source 4: The god
Amun protecting
King Taharqo
British Museum



Source 7: Sandstone relief from south wall of funerary chapel of Queen Shanakdakhete. The queen is enthroned, the prince is behind, and both figures are protected by wings of Isis.
British Museum



Source 8: Head of a king
British Museum



Source 9: Sherd of pottery
with Meroitic writing
British Museum

SHEET 7: HOW IMPORTANT TO KUSH WAS TRADE WITH EGYPT?

Kush occupied a strategic position in terms of trade. Not only was it close to the gold mines, and so could supply this material that Egypt craved, but it also controlled the route along which goods from the heart of the continent passed.

Source 1

The motive for the Egyptian expansion [into Kush] was to take control of the trade in slaves and African exotics such as ebony, ivory, incense, ostrich eggs and feathers, and hides from wild animals, as well as to obtain raw materials such as gold, copper and precious stones.

Hafsaas-Tsakos 2009: 60–61

Source 3

Trade (gold, precious stones, ivory, animal hide, ebony, cattle) also contributed to the city's [Kerma] wealth, due to its location in the centre of a fertile basin and at the crossroads of desert routes linking Egypt, the Red Sea and the heart of Africa.

Mission archéologique Suisse au Soudan 2010

Source 4

A text mentions the Kushites' fondness for Egyptian honey, oil, and ointments, as well as for woven garments.

Adams 1984: 41

Source 5

There is no evidence for the working of gold mines by the Kushites, nor of the goldfields... We may assume that forced labour was only one of the means by which Kushites had access to this material: trade with the desert dwellers would have been a more reliable option.

Welsby 1996: 169

Source 7

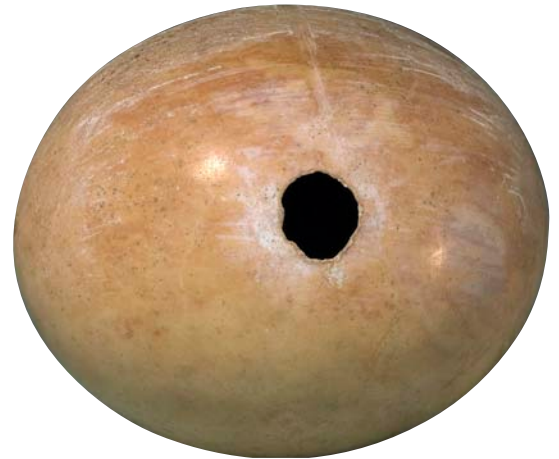
A small, elite group of Egyptian officials oversaw the manufactures and the export trade of Kerma on behalf of the Kushite ruler. They were, however, business rather than military or political figures.

Adams 1977: 216

Source 8

The control of the trade networks with the north, as well as the supply of raw materials from the south through trade and raiding, appear to have given a boost to the rise of Kush.

Hafsaas-Tsakos 2009: 66



Source 2: Ostrich egg, used for storage
British Museum



Source 6: Kushite gold jewellery
British Museum

Questions

1. Which goods did Egypt want?
2. How was Kush useful to Egypt?
3. How important was Egypt to Kush's prosperity?

SHEET 8: HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE GOVERNMENT IN THE KUSHITE ECONOMY?

As there was no coinage in Kush, historians are unsure how the economy worked. Those who didn't grow food still had to eat, and get paid. In the desert regions, archaeologists have found the remains of large water tanks (hafirs) which suggest that the government took responsibility for water supply.

Source 1

Some scholars believe that the Kushite economy worked as a redistributive system. Surplus produce, collected as taxes, was then shared out by the state. Others think that most people worked the land at subsistence level, contributing nothing to the state and receiving nothing from it.

Welsby 1996: 173

Source 3

There would have been a number of individuals who were not food producers. These included members of the army, the administration, the priesthood and the royal family. We have no evidence to show how these people were paid.

Welsby 1996: 173

Source 4

The climate is not ideal for vines, although limited local production did occur. Twelve structures identified as wine presses have been found in the north of the kingdom... A number of ancient writers record that cotton was grown in Kush.

Welsby 1996: 158–159

Source 6

The main industrial craft in Meroe was smelting of iron and the making of iron tools. Iron provided the farmers and hunters of Meroe with superior tools and weapons. The development and use of iron was thus partly responsible for the very success, growth and wealth of the Meroite kingdom.

Shillington 1995: 43

Source 7

The construction of water tanks involved considerable organisation and mobilisation of workers. As their use in recent times has shown, they would have needed an efficient government system to ensure they were regularly maintained.

Edwards 1998: 185

Source 8

The state [of Kush] showed off its presence at these hafirs [water tanks] by building temples and statues, some of them clearly designed to demonstrate the military power of Kush.

Welsby 1996: 37



Source 2: Ovens

Large groups of these have been discovered near grain stores. This might suggest that the collection of grain, and baking and distribution of bread, may have been organised by the state
© www.kerma.ch

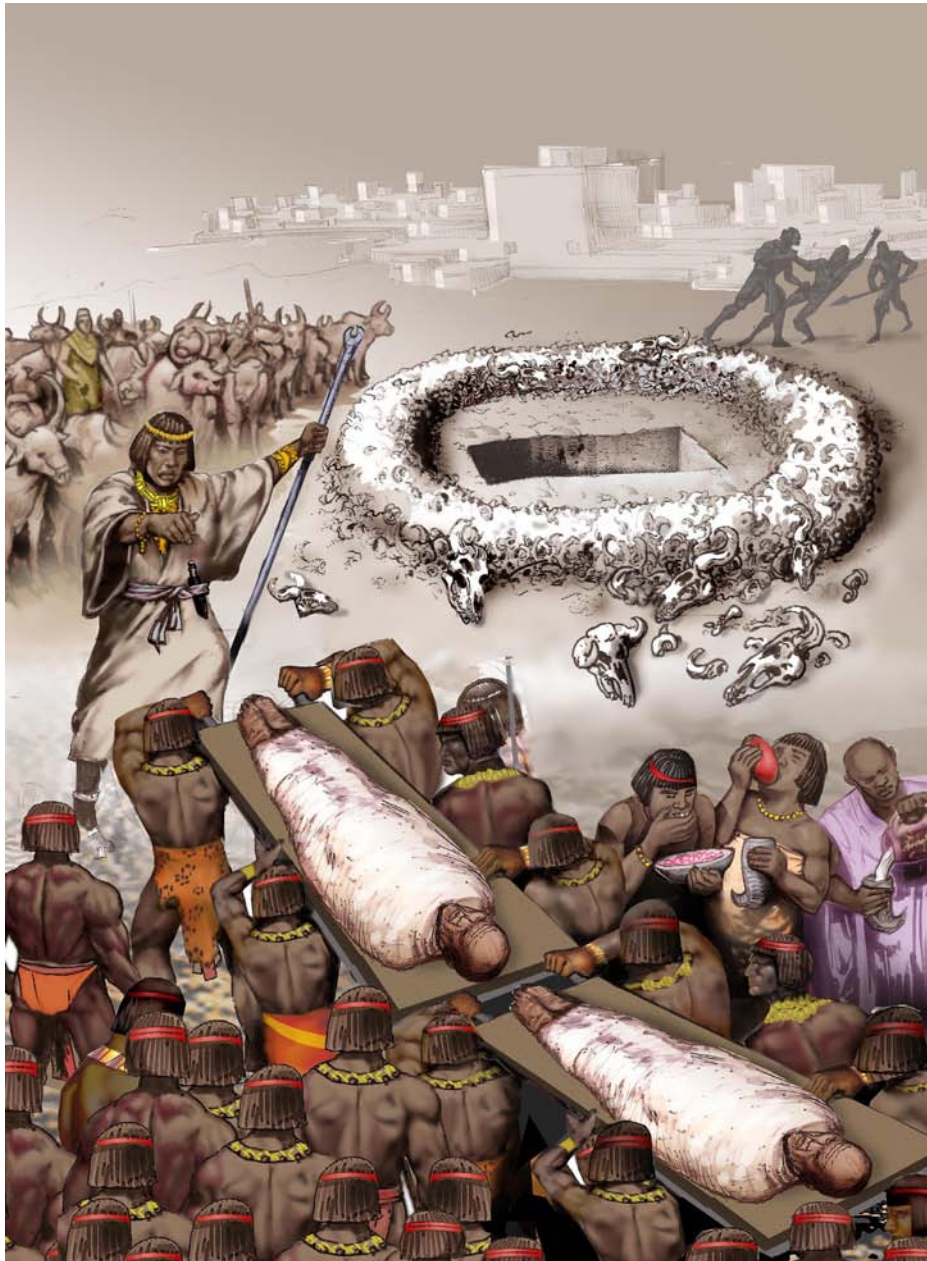


Source 5: Wall of a hafir at Basa

Questions

1. What did Kush produce?
2. How was the problem of water solved?
3. What evidence is there that the state organised the economy?

SHEET 9: BURIAL AT KERMA



Source 1: Illustration by Tayo Fatunla

Questions

1. Describe what is happening in this picture
2. Is everyone happy to be accompanying the King into the tomb?
3. Why might some of these people be glad to be buried with the King?
4. What does this tell you about Kushite society?

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Please help the British Museum improve its educational resources for schools and teachers by giving your feedback. The first 250 teachers or tutors to complete the online survey before 12.00 on 1 September 2011 will receive a printed set of illustrations of African civilisations by artist Tayo Fatunla. Visit www.surveymonkey.com/s/wealthofafrica to complete the survey and for terms and conditions.

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For teachers

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The CarAf Centre

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