CHAPTER FIVE

Colonialism and a Reborn State in Nubia

Bronze Age Nubia was probably not tribal in structure, but instead was home to a long process of state formation. Lower and Upper Nubia may have combined into a state toward the end of the Early Bronze Age, and later Upper Nubia may have formed a state from the outset of Middle Bronze times. It certainly was one by 1650 B.C. when it took over control of Lower Nubia from Egypt.

In the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1070 B.C.) the momentum of state formation halted, or perhaps took on a new, more subtle form, in Lower and Upper Nubia. Egypt controlled both, militarily and politically, through this period. For their Nubian populations—always in a majority—this was a colonial experience, because many Egyptians emigrated into Nubia and settled there permanently. Southern Nubia, however, remained independent; and may itself have included a state form of organization.

The Nubian capacity for state formation was not destroyed by the colonial experience. Soon after 1070 B.C. Egypt withdrew from Nubia; subsequent hostilities with Egypt compelled most Lower Nubians to retreat into Upper Nubia. Within two centuries (by ca. 850 B.C.) the latter was ruled by a Nubian dynasty buried near Napata (a town near the Fourth Cataract), and in scale was again clearly a state.

The Napatan state was very dynamic, with an unprecedented capacity for expansion. By

750 B.C. the Napatan rulers dominated southern Egypt, and in 715 B.C. they conquered the Egyptian Delta. The resulting state combined Egypt; and Lower, and Upper—and perhaps even part of Southern—Nubia; if this last is true, the Egyptian-Nubian state was the largest ever found along the Nile in ancient and medieval times.

Egypt's internal fragmentation by 750 B.C. facilitated Nubia's expansion, but does not explain how Nubia became so powerful. Directly, Nubian power was based on the military and political organization of the Napatan state; but these in turn were rooted, at least in part, in the earlier Nubian experience of colonial government under the Egyptians. Scholars disagree, however, as to how these factors were interrelated.

Some suggest that after Egypt retreated from Nubia, the Nubians of Upper Nubia "returned to an essentially tribal way of life."[1] In this hypothesis, the Napatan royal line—starting in about 860 B.C.—would either have been a "lineage or local tribal group," possibly of southern Nubian origin,[2] or "locally influential chiefs" who gradually won control of Upper Nubia because they were supported by a small Egyptian or Egyptianized elite (mainly priests), which had provided some semblance of centralized rule after Egypt withdrew.[3]

Other scholars, such as Robert Morkot, emphasize that Nubians were leading players in the administration of Egyptian-held Nubia; and that this factor relates to the "emergence of a powerful independent Kushite state."[4] Building on this insight, I would suggest that Upper Nubia was likely to have survived as a state after Egypt's withdrawal; and that it was this state that generated the Napatan rulers, or was taken over by them, should they have come from southern Nubia.

The continuity of a state-level organization in Upper Nubia after Egypt's withdrawal depended on Nubia's strange political status under the Egyptians, and on the likelihood that much of its administration was run by Nubians, and possibly Egyptian-Nubians, the product of intermarriage.

Egypt treated Nubia, on the one hand, as an extension of the provincial system of governance typical of Egypt itself. Its administrative entities were organized to produce revenue for pharaoh and the gods' temples, yet its own productivity and prosperity—the sources of revenue—were also fostered. Indeed, much revenue stayed in Nubia, to support its administrators, army, and local temples. On the other hand, Egyptian Nubia's overall government was structured as if it were a vassal state systemically independent of Egypt. The pharaohs were directly acknowledged in official and temple inscriptions throughout Nubia; and occasionally actually appeared there, either to lead a military campaign or for other purposes. In reality, however, Nubia was governed by the "Viceroy of Kush," who reported directly to pharaoh (not to the southern Egyptian vizier); and the viceroy himself functioned as "pharaoh"—or better, as pharaoh's "emanation"—in Nubia, served by two "viceregal deputies" of Lower and Upper Nubia respectively, somewhat as pharaoh was served by the two viziers, of Lower and Upper Egypt. A "troop commander of Kush" oversaw Nubia's military forces, and collaborated with, rather than served, the viceroy.

This system served pharaoh well for much of the New Kingdom, but the viceroy was displaying great power and potential for autonomy even before Egypt's withdrawal; and it is likely that the system he headed (if not the office itself) survived to provide centrality in a still prosperous Upper Nubia, and fostered the rise of the Napatans.

The Conquest and Governance of Nubia

At the opening of the Late Bronze Age, Egypt systematically undertook the conquest of Nubia, finding it necessary before it felt secure enough to begin a similar program in Western Asia. Lower Nubia fell quickly, but Upper Nubia—the core of Kush—fought long and hard against the Egyptians. Kush was sufficiently threatening that Egypt's expansion into Asia could not be seriously undertaken until Nubia had been subdued.

For eighty-eight years Egypt fought a Nubian campaign every thirteen years (on average) as compared to one every twenty-seven years in Asia. Egypt's problems were twofold; Kush was strong and resistant, and it might receive military support from other Nubian polities, farther upstream in Southern Nubia. An early attempt to forestall the latter (pharaoh Kamose's army appeared in Miu in the Shendi Reach, probably via a flanking movement) was succeeded by a steady hammering of Kush itself.

Pharaohs Amenhotep I and Tuthmosis I conquered Sai, Kush's former subcapital, and the latter traversed all Upper Nubia, claiming to have divided it up among three vassal Nubian rulers (of Sai, Kerma, and Bugdumbush?). Under Tuthmosis II, Kush counterattacked, possibly led by these three erstwhile "vassals," and Tuthmosis' successor Hatshepsut had to fight at least four campaigns in Upper Nubia.

The site of Kerma itself may directly reflect these events. Bonnet notes that its defenses became particularly strong at this period, as if in anticipation of Egyptian attack; and that the town may have been sacked by Tuthmosis I, but regained independence and prosperity for a time.

After 1460 B.C. Egypt enjoyed full control of Lower and Upper Nubia until 1070 B.C., and organized the two regions as a combination of provinces and "vassal state" as discussed above. The viceroy, and the troop commander of Kush, visited Nubia often, but resided (and were buried) at Thebes, so as to maintain close contact with pharaonic government. The viceregal deputies, however, lived, with their families and staffs, permanently in Nubia; the capital of Wawat, or Lower Nubia, was usually Aniba (once, at least, replaced by Faras), and that of Kush, or Upper Nubia, was first Soleb and later Amara.

The farmlands and grazing areas of Egyptian Nubia were divided up in a most interesting way. In the 18th Dynasty, at least, Egyptian towns (probably largely Egyptian in population) were developed throughout Wawat and Kush; each was governed by a commander or mayor, and would have had a substantial agricultural hinterland, to ensure its subsistence and generate revenue for the state. These Egyptian centers, however, were set within a spatially larger administrative and economic

matrix, namely, several Nubian "princedoms," which seem to have been quite large in territory and population. Lower Nubia was covered by perhaps three, centered respectively at Kubban, Toshka, and Debeira, and Upper Nubia by as many as six—perhaps the former "territories" of Sai, Kerma, and Bugdumbush, now subdivided. The prince, or petty king, of each of these was regarded simultaneously as ruler of his people and as an official of the Egyptian government, responsible for maintaining order, generating revenue, and carrying out the instructions of pharaoh's government.

This mode of Nubian governance may have changed over time. In Lower Nubia, at least, the Nubian rulers lived in large towns or "capitals" filled with Egyptianized Nubians but set aside from Egyptian centers. Later, in the 19th and 20th Dynasties, the Nubian elite and, increasingly, the Nubian population as a whole, moved to the Egyptian centers. Moreover, the title "(Nubian) ruler," or *wer,* is much rarer, so the administrative system may have become more homogenized, with Nubians and Egyptians increasingly combined in its structure and operation.

Throughout the New Kingdom, Nubia was not just revenue producing, but was also highly accessible to Egyptian institutions and officials in addition to those actually resident in Nubia. Large estates were established in Nubia for the benefit of remote temples in Egypt like Amun's of Karnak and that of Seti I at Abydos. And officials of the central government came and went frequently, exercising the same authority as they held in Egypt, and—as in Egypt—quarreling with other officials over jurisdiction. But in all these regards, Nubia's experience was the same as the provinces of Egypt itself.

Nubians in Colonial Nubia

Some scholars believe that the Nubians were thoroughly demoralized by the colonial experience. It is suggested that in Wawat, or Lower Nubia, many were reduced to peonage, and others fled to Upper Nubia, or Kush, where "the Egyptian grip was not so strong" and a "tribal way of life" still possible.[5] However, others—with whom I agree—see the Nubian experience as more positive, one providing the Nubians with the means to survive as a state even after Egypt withdrew from the region.

The provincial mode of governance, operative in both Egypt and Nubia, was pervasive and sometimes arbitrary, but—as the Nubians would have found—not unduly oppressive. Egyptian governmental aims in both Egypt and Nubia were simple: to maintain the frontiers, enough internal order and responsiveness to guarantee a good revenue flow, and adequate supplies of manpower for regular labor and military levies. Within this context, the populations of both Egypt and Egyptian Nubia likely enjoyed substantial local autonomy and even individual freedom, restricted only by the limited governmental demands noted above, and by community customs and mores, which were probably quite strong. Egypt's state economy was redistributive, taking in income (much from land owned directly by temples and other government institutions) and re-allotting it for various purposes; but it was not monopolistic. Private entrepreneurship and

land ownership was substantial, even among government employees, most of whom were employed part-time.

Of course, if the Nubians—as distinct from Egyptians settled in Nubia—had been specifically singled out for exploitation, taxed excessively, stripped of their lands, and treated virtually as slaves, the Nubian experience would have been much more negative. However, this does not appear to be the case. As we shall see below, Nubian rulers enjoyed high status and may eventually have merged with the Egyptian administrative elite as a whole. Moreover, Nubian society—at least in Wawat in the 18th Dynasty—was not an undifferentiated mass of economically depressed people, but instead complex and stratified, with some members obviously wealthy, and many comfortably off.

Economically, the "Annals" of the pharaoh Tuthmosis III (1479–1424 B.C.) do not indicate that Egypt was unduly exploitive of Nubia. The "tribute," or more accurately revenue, of Wawat and Kush included an annual harvest tax, comparable to that levied in Egypt; and "ships" laden with Nubian products, especially exotic items imported from independent southern Nubia (the latter trade was probably managed by the government, and not something required of Nubian individuals and groups). Gold was another important Nubian product, but was presumably recovered by state-sponsored panning or mining, especially in the inhospitable Eastern Desert, where the richest gold mines lay.

Cattle were a regular part of the Nubian "tribute," but they were not demanded in excessive amounts. The annual average from Upper Nubia in the "Annals" was about 300, from a region that—according to the Middle Bronze Age evidence—was very rich in herds. "Slaves" (*hemu*) and others intended for permanent service in Egypt were also regularly included, but their numbers are small—for example, one year Wawat and Kush combined sent only about fifty "slaves"—and many, if not all, probably came from independent southern Nubia, not Egyptian Nubia.

Nubians, like Western Asiatics, participated in a spectacular, perhaps annual, ceremony, the presentation of tribute to pharaoh at one of his palaces in Egypt (Fig. 5.1). Such ceremonies were intended to emphasize pharaoh's status as "world ruler," and so in a sense they set the Nubians apart from Egyptians. In these ceremonies, Nubians and Western Asiatics represented the "other," the alien foreign world over which Egypt's gods had given pharaoh dominion. Yet in reality these tribute ceremonies (which are depicted in the tombs of many Egyptian officials) reflect the dualistic nature of Egyptian Nubia, simultaneously alien in a symbolic sense, yet increasingly closely integrated with Egypt in a real sense.

First, tribute ceremonies were *not* restricted to foreigners. In such ceremonies, Nubian rulers prostrate themselves before pharaoh, and other Nubians carry or accompany typical Nubian products and animals to be presented to pharaoh. This is a largely symbolic event; most of the Nubian revenue was processed directly by state agencies and was not seen personally by pharaoh. However, any official—Egyptian or Nubian—prostrated himself in pharaoh's presence, and the personalized and symbolic delivery of state income involved

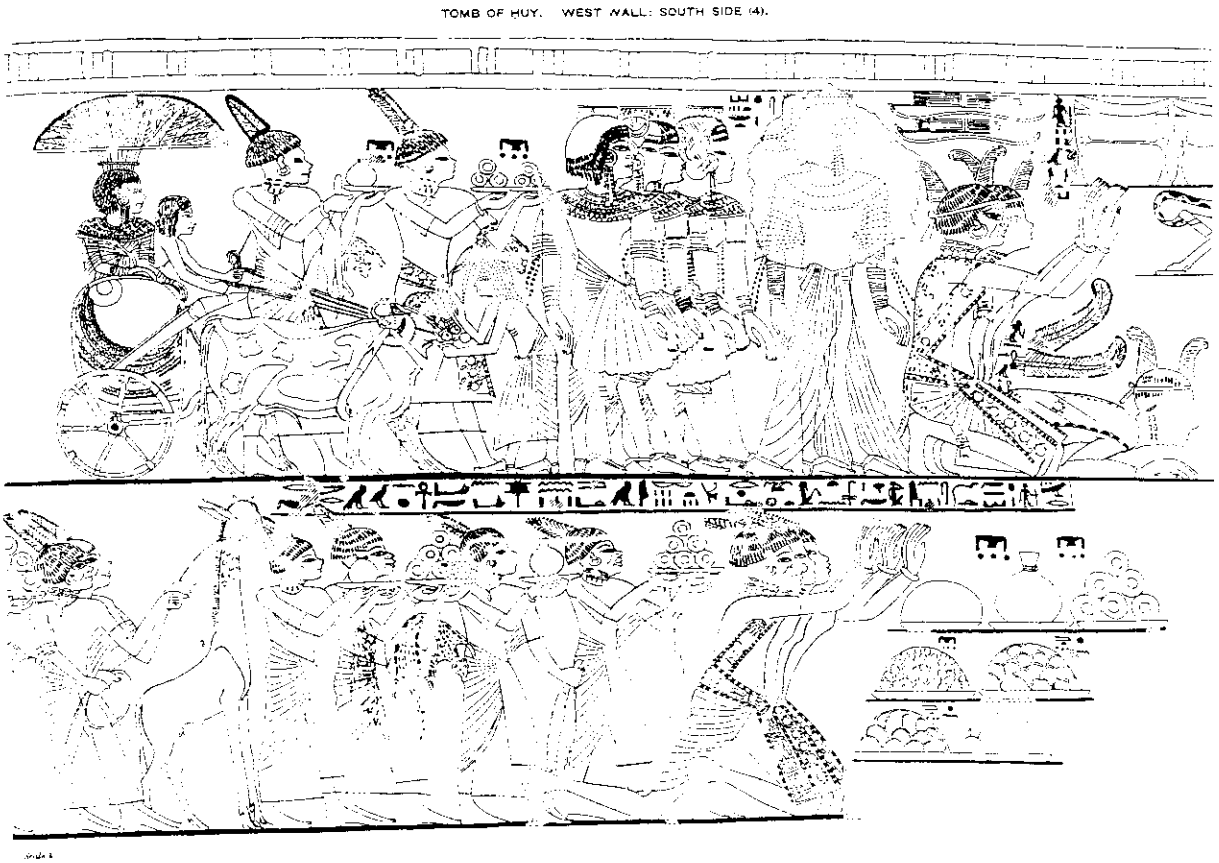

Fig. 5.1
The presentation of Nubian tribute to pharaoh Tutankhamun (1333–1323 B.C.), as represented in the tomb of the Viceroy of Kush, Huy. In the upper register, from the right: the three princes or rulers of Lower Nubia, including Hekanefer; a Nubian princess, and four princes, intended to live at pharaoh's court; Nubians bearing gold, and a Nubian princess in her ox-pulled chariot. Below, from the right: three rulers or princes of Upper Nubia; Nubians bearing gold; and a giraffe.
(From: N. de G. Davies, The Theban Tomb Series, *vol. 4:* The Tomb of Huy. *London: Egyptian Exploration Society [1926], pl. XXVII.)*

Egyptians also. The annual taxes levied upon the towns and the town hinterlands of Egypt itself were personally brought to the royal court by the mayors and other local officials responsible for revenue collection. As depicted in vizier Rekhmire's tomb, they carry gold in baskets, hold other products, and lead cattle, very much as Nubians and Asiatics do in the "tribute" scenes.[6]

The most detailed of the Nubian tribute scenes (in the tomb of the viceroy Huy; Fig. 5.1) reveal just how complex the relations

between Nubians and Egypt were. The prostrating rulers are apparently foreign vassals, but in reality members of an Egyptian administrative system, as we know from the titles they carried. Nubian princesses are being sent to join pharaoh's harem, and princelings to be raised at pharaoh's court, and then returned to Nubia educated in loyalty to him. Certainly, these practices were applied also to Western Asiatic princesses and princelings, but high-ranking Egyptians also sought for their daughters to enter pharaoh's family, and for their sons to achieve the rare privilege of education and service at the royal court; so once again the division between Nubians and Egyptians tends to dissolve in reality.

Finally, we see in such scenes handsome Nubian males who are being sent to serve pharaoh permanently, as well as cruelly bound prisoners evidently intended for servitude in Egypt—both categories are referred to in Tuthmosis' "Annals" and elsewhere. But this does not mean that Egyptian Nubia had become a slave pool for Egypt—indeed, since Egyptian Nubia was now an "administered zone" and not a "zone for incursion," the Nubians were political subjects "no longer alien (and thus vulnerable to capture), but subject and thus vulnerable to exploitation."[7] As we have seen, however, the Nubians were not unduly exploited (after all, the generation of revenue depended in large part upon the Nubians' well-being); and the "slaves" seen in the scenes probably all came from independent Southern Nubia.

In Wawat our best direct evidence on the Nubians comes from the Nubian princedom of Tekhet, which included the Faras-Ashkeit region thoroughly investigated by a Scandinavian team. The pattern seen there is probably typical for all Lower Nubia. In the 18th Dynasty, Tekhet was ruled first by the Nubian Ruiu (whose brother may have served in the Egyptian administration at Elephantine), and then in succession by his two sons, Djehutyhotep and Amenemhet. Elsewhere, we know of the ruler of another princedom, Miam (modern Aniba), a Nubian called Hekanefer whose father may have been another Ruiu, a Nubian official of the Egyptian administration of Aniba. The official status of the Nubian rulers as Egyptian officials, and the appearance of their relatives in the "Egyptian" bureaucracy, reveals an already high degree of integration.

The rulers of Tekhet lived in a large town south of the important Egyptian administrative center of Faras, together with a large Nubian population, which was C-Group in origin but largely Egyptianized in culture. The town itself was not located by archaeologists, but the cemetery of this community shows that it prospered over time, with a wealthy elite increasingly prominent. However, in its later phase—in the later 18th Dynasty—the cemetery is mostly lower class in composition, and it does not continue into Ramesside times. The Scandinavian team therefore suggested that here and throughout Lower Nubia the Nubians were in decline, and eventually died out; others suggest that they emigrated into Upper Nubia.

However, an alternative model seems likelier, namely, that first the rulers, then the elite, and finally the rest of such Nubian communities chose to reside at or near the Egyptian centers, which lay not far away. Here they were buried, alongside Egyptians and

Egyptian-Nubians, in the town cemeteries, where multiple internments (many people buried, over time, in a single burial chamber) were common. This has created the false impression that population levels fall in Nubia during the 19th and 20th Dynasties. Overall, the pattern just described suggests that the bureaucracy of Egyptian Nubia was increasingly dominated by Nubians, who—by the end of the New Kingdom—would have formed an elite experienced in running a relatively complex and sophisticated system of centralized government. This in turn would contribute to the continuity of state-level organizations after Egypt withdrew, even if the Lower Nubians withdrew into Upper Nubia, as seems to have been the case.

We know much less about the situation in Upper Nubia. Some scholars suggest that Egypt closely controlled only the northern part of this region, while the southern—equivalent to the Letti Basin—was largely autonomous, and even periodically in rebellion against Egypt. For various reasons, this latter notion seems unlikely. On the present evidence, slight as it is, we may hypothesize that Upper Nubians underwent the same experience as the Lower Nubians, and came to dominate the administrative system. This is a reasonable hypothesis, even if it is possible that some of these Nubians did not become as Egyptianized in culture as the Lower Nubians. However, archaeologically the status of the former Kerma-Group people, for most of the New Kingdom, remains unknown; and much excavation is required to test the notions outlined above, and perhaps to generate new ones.

The Independent Rulers of Southern Nubia

As in the Middle Bronze Age, the Egyptians continued to interact with the nomads, or Medjayu, of the deserts east of Nubia, and continued to trade with the people of Punt, on the Red Sea coast. The former Medjayu chiefdoms, perhaps the ultimately "nomadic states" of Aushek and Webetsepet disappear from the record, and new polities, like the chiefdom of Akuyta, appear. Over these Egypt seems to have maintained an uneasy dominion, with the Medjayu functioning more as allies than subjects. As for the Medjayu who had settled in Lower Nubia, they maintained their distinctive material culture, in some cases well into the New Kingdom, but do not seem to have played an important part in Nubian affairs.

However, of greatest interest, outside of Egyptian Nubia, are the polities that may have existed in Southern Nubia. No Bronze Age archaeology has yet been recovered for this region, so some scholars argue that it was uninhabited, or used only by nomads who left few archaeological remains. But the historical record suggests otherwise, and further indicates that Southern Nubia was not only of great interest to the Egyptians, but may ultimately have produced the family from which the Nubian rulers of post-New Kingdom times came.

Egyptian New Kingdom texts refer to periodic conflicts (as well as other kinds of contact) with a constellation of Nubian regions, named Irem, Gawerses, Tiurek, Weresh or Weretj, and perhaps Tirawa. Because they usually occur together in Egyptian lists of

"southern" enemies, it is likely that they were also physically contiguous to one another, running along a stretch of the Nile Valley, and including or extending into desert or semi-desert regions on either side. Some, and perhaps all, had a separate ruler, and hence each was a polity of some kind—a simple or complex chiefdom, or even a state.

Some scholars suggest that some or all of these five polities were relatively small-scale ones, located in Upper Nubia and filling the periodically rebellious Letti Basin area in particular. However, the historical circumstances discussed above indicate that they lay farther upstream, in Southern Nubia; and this likelihood is reinforced by the record of the expedition sent to Punt by Pharaoh Hatshepsut (1473–1458 B.C.) in the 18th Dynasty. This indicates that Irem was accessible from Punt, and therefore likely in Southern, not the more remote Upper, Nubia. Moreover, Irem included semi-arid or savannah environments supporting rhinoceri and giraffes, which were unlikely to have been found in Upper Nubia or its environs by this time. The same record indicates that the people of Irem were darker-skinned than the Puntites, wore different kinds of clothes, and probably had a different culture.

Certainly, environmental conditions suggest that Southern Nubia would have had a substantial population in the New Kingdom; and its people were well placed to be middlemen in the trade in exotic products between more southerly regions and Egypt. In this regard, the Egyptians may even have had contractual relationships or treaties with the polities of Southern Nubia. However, there were also hostilities: Egypt sometimes sent armies into this region, and on occasion Southern Nubia polities, especially Irem (as the northernmost, or the most powerful?), threatened or attacked Egyptian-held Upper Nubia.

On the one hand, the Egyptians may have sought to intimidate Southern Nubia and so protect Upper Nubia, and gain advantages in the flow of trade; Egyptian campaigns could also have secured the Nubian "slaves" discussed above. On the other, the Southern Nubians were probably determined to protect their political independence and control over trade routes; they may also have been tempted to raid and plunder the wealthy Upper Nubian province.

These circumstances suggest that some of the Southern Nubian polities, like Irem, were militarily powerful, centrally organized, and wealthy—and became increasingly so over time as interaction with Egypt continued and expanded. The degree to which any of them were complex chiefdoms, or even large and complicated enough to be called states, can only be established through archaeological survey and excavation; but certainly the delineation of Bronze Age Southern Nubia remains one of the most exciting challenges facing archaeologists in Nubia.

The Mysterious Tombs of Kurru

This excitement is intensified by the fact that Upper Nubia, for the period between the New Kingdom and the 25th Dynasty, is archaeologically almost as mysterious as Southern Nubia; and by the possibility that the histories of both regions became closely interrelated at this time.

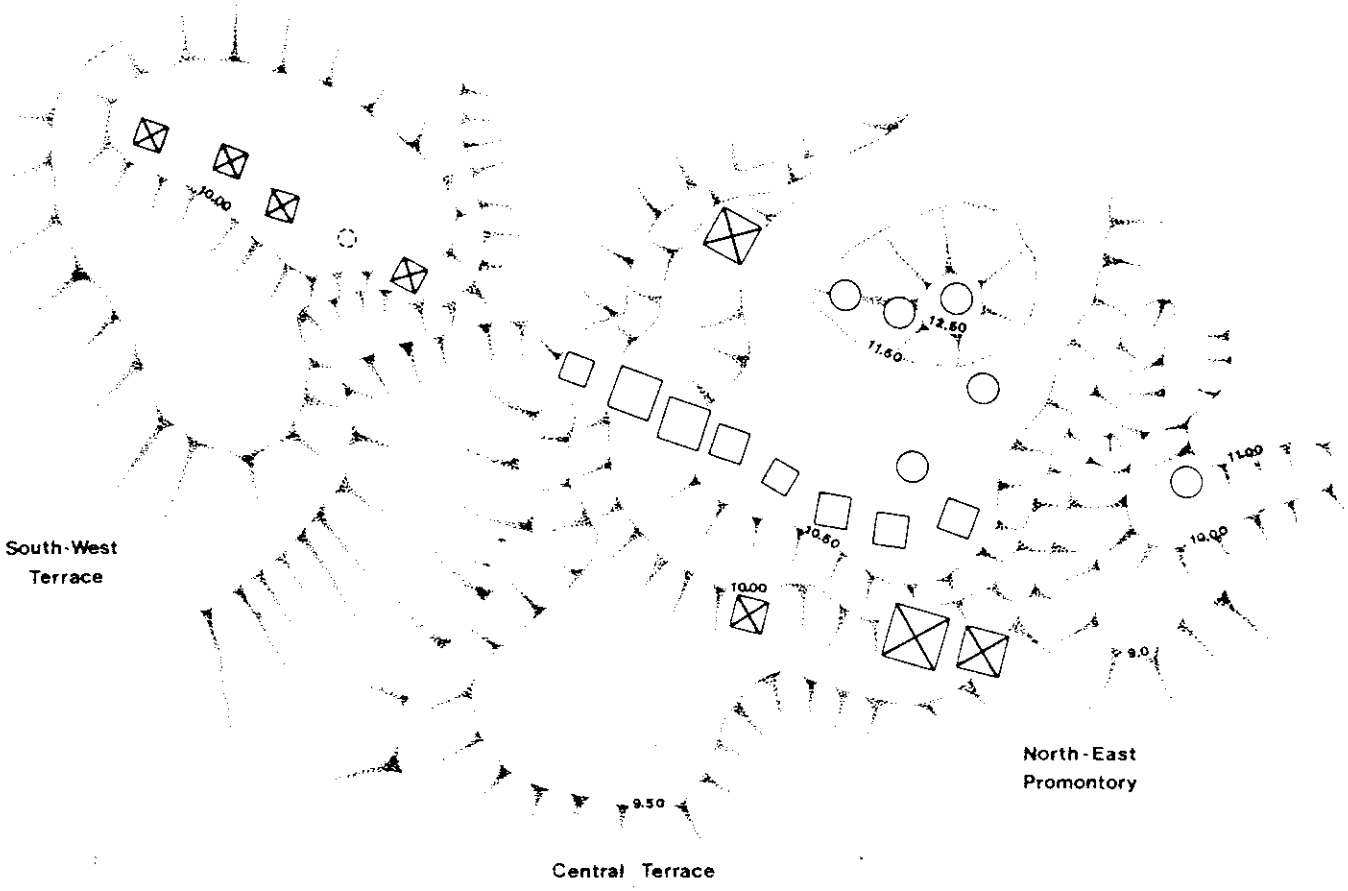

Fig. 5.2
Diagrammatic representation of the tombs at Kurru. Circles represent circular superstructures; squares are "mastabas;" and squares with crossed diagonals are pyramids. Drawing by Nicole deLisle Warshaw.

After 1000 B.C. neither politically nor culturally significant archaeological remains are known in Upper Nubia prior to the rulers' tombs of Kurru, near Napata, which begin in about 860 B.C. Yet, on the Egyptian side, we do catch glimpses of continuing relations with Nubia, before 860 B.C. In 925 B.C. Shoshenq I, then pharaoh of Egypt, invaded Judah and Israel, and had Nubians ("Kushites") in his army. Later, his son Osorkon I sent against Judah another army, headed by a general called Zerah the Kushite. In both cases, Nubians who had been settled in Egypt for generations might have been involved, but it is equally possible that the Nubians in question were recruited in Upper Nubia (the nearest inhabited part of Nubia at that time), or even dispatched from thence by some Nubian "ally" of the Egyptians.

Moreover, in about 840 B.C.—soon after the sequence of royal tombs at Kurru

began—Takeloth II, another Egyptian pharaoh, sent as "tribute" to the contemporary ruler of Assyria a rhinoceros, elephants, and monkeys, which could only have been obtained from Nubia. Since no hostilities with Nubia are recorded, the mechanism involved was trade, or even "diplomatic gifts," from the Nubians—the logistical challenge of capturing and forwarding a rhinoceros and elephants being particularly striking. So far as we know, live elephants had never before been forwarded to Egypt.

These references suggest that a centralized power may well have continued to exist in Upper Nubia (with significant connections with Southern Nubia, from whence the rhinoceros and elephants mentioned above would have come), a power finally finding archaeological expression at Kurru. Here, from 860 B.C. onward, an imposing cemetery (Fig. 5.2) developed over two sets of natural terraces, separated by a narrow valley; and, beyond a second valley, on a promontory to the northeast. Efforts to date the earliest Kurru tombs to the period just after the New Kingdom have been made, but are unpersuasive.

A low knoll on the central terrace represented the highest and hence perhaps most prestigious ground: here, four tombs with relatively high, circular superstructures were built, followed by two lower-lying ones, one on the northeast corner of the central terrace, the other "in balance" on the northeastern promontory. The superstructures were of sand and gravel, with a rough stone masonry skin. Later tombs were rectilinear "mastabas," built of well-cut stone masonry and running off to the southwest, along the upper part of the central terrace. Finally, on the terrace's lower slopes (the only ground left available if the earlier tombs were to be left undisturbed) three stone-built pyramids were erected, with a fourth on the southwest corner of the terrace. These are inscriptionally dated to pharaohs Piye, Shebitku, Shabako, and Tanwetamani of the 25th Dynasty (ca. 747–656 B.C.).

Because the Kurru cemetery ended up as a royal one, it is reasonable to assume that the tombs dated before Piye were also for kings (and queens), particularly as no tombs of comparable scale and elaboration are known elsewhere in Upper Nubia for this period. Indeed, Mastaba VIII is plausibly identified as King Kashta's (Piye's father), and XXIII may belong to Alara, a known royal predecessor of Kashta. Mastabas VII and XXI may have been for their queens. Later, the queens of Piye and his successors were buried in cemeteries separate from the king's tombs, to the northeast and southwest. The remaining mastabas and the earlier graves with circular superstructures[8] total eleven graves, distributed over less than a century. Four of five may be for the rulers of Upper Nubia at this time; the rest were probably for their queens.

The origins of this royal line are uncertain. They may have been generated by the Upper Nubian elite, which, I suggest, maintained centrality after Egypt withdrew. Or they may have been an intrusive group who took over the Upper Nubian state and combined it with their home polity, which would most likely have been in Southern Nubia. This second possibility needs to be taken seriously, given the connections between Upper and Southern Nubia, as indicated by Takeloth's tribute, and the fact that Southern Nubia may have been

included—at least in part—in the realm of the 25th Dynasty.

The rulers buried at Kurru, and hence the people they governed, were evidently familiar with Egyptian culture, but they were not themselves "Egyptianized" in any fundamental way. The evolution from circular superstructure to mastaba, for example, seems to be a purely Nubian process, and not a result of Egyptian influence or the presence of Egyptian architects.

The mastabas are essentially a monumentalized form of the circular superstructures, involving techniques and materials easily accessible to the Nubians. The circular superstructure, defined by a rough stone skin, is transformed into a stone-built mastaba, similar in size and proportions to the circular superstructures; the latter had a diameter, on average, of 7.00 meters, while the diagonal of the average mastaba was 9.50 meters. A further indication of the gradual transition from circular superstructure to mastaba is that one mastaba incorporated a circular superstructure within it, whereas another mastaba was earlier than the latest circular superstructure.

Further continuity is seen in the horseshoe-shaped enclosures (already built in dressed stone masonry) of the later circular superstructures, which become—corresponding to the change to greater regularity—the rectilinear enclosures of the mastabas. A single-cell chapel was attached to the latest tumuli, and continues to be used for all the mastabas. Finally, the burial-pit type of the mastabas is clearly derived from those associated with the circular superstructures.

The introduction of the pyramid, under Piye, is surely Egyptian-inspired, probably by the sight of the great pyramids in the Memphite region, which Piye captured.[9] But the change is still sensitive to the indigenous Nubian tradition of royal tombs, for the Kurru pyramids, like the mastabas (and unlike their Egyptian prototypes), are quite small—the average diameter is 13.50 meters. The pyramids have rectilinear enclosures and single-cell chapels, derived from the mastabas and not the Egyptian pyramids.

This architectural evolution, and the conceptual world it reflects, hints then at a fundamentally Nubian culture developing along its own lines, but assimilating Egyptian influence when the latter seems desirable to the Nubians. The artifacts associated with the Napatan tombs are, with a few exceptions, more Egyptian in character, and indicate a knowledge of Egyptian funerary customs and beliefs. Nevertheless, the milieu in which these objects and notions occur remains a distinctively Nubian one.

The archaeological evidence just reviewed cannot conclusively show whether the rulers buried at Kurru were Upper or Southern Nubian in origin. Certainly, Southern Nubians were probably little Egyptianized in culture, and we might expect the Upper Nubians to be more Egyptianized than is the case with the Kurru tombs; but we know so little of Upper Nubian indigenous culture in the New Kingdom that a definite conclusion cannot be reached.

CHAPTER SIX

The Great Kingdom: Napata and Meroe

The Challenge of Napata and Meroe

We have seen that in the Bronze Age Nubian political systems were of debatable status. Scholars disagree about whether specific polities were simple or complex chiefdoms, or even sometimes states. All agree, however, that in Napatan-Meroitic times the whole of Nubia was bound together in a single great kingdom, recognized as such by the other powers of the day. To these powers Nubia was "Kush" or "Ethiopia," the latter being the term used in Greek and Latin. Its center was first Napata (in Upper Nubia) and later, after 250 B.C., Meroe (in Southern Nubia), hence the term used here—Napatan-Meroitic.

The great kingdom of Napata and Meroe is of considerable importance for the history and cultural development of Africa as a whole, but it provides enormous challenges to the historian and archaeologist. While we know much about it, much more is unknown. Napatan-Meroitic Nubia is filled with known but unexcavated sites, and with others remaining to be discovered. Many questions need answering: what was the nature of the political system of the kingdom, what degree of social complexity did it reach, will we ever fully translate its written language, Meroitic, and hence learn more of its history?

We know, at least, that Napatan and Meroitic history is closely intertwined with that of contemporary Egypt, especially in the Napatan period. The latter begins about 860 B.C., with the earliest tombs of Kurru (see chapter 5); all its rulers were buried near Napata (hence the term "Napatan") until, in about 250 B.C., the royal cemetery was transferred to Meroe.

Egypt, contemporary with Napatan times, underwent many vicissitudes. After 1000 B.C. it gradually fragmented into some eleven small states, and then experienced the period of rule from Napata, about 750–660 B.C. When this ended, Egypt reunited under an indigenous Egyptian dynasty, the 26th, only to become part of the Persian Empire from 525 to 404 B.C. Briefly independent again, Egypt was recaptured by Persia in 343 B.C.

The Napatan state, ruled in succession by some forty kings, combined together Southern[1] and Upper Nubia, and much of Lower Nubia. As we have seen, from pharaohs Kashta to Tanwetamani, Nubia also controlled first much, then all, of Egypt, thus creating the largest state ever found along the Lower Nile in ancient and medieval times.

Egypt's Napatan rulers vigorously resisted Assyrian efforts to invade first the Southern Levant (a traditionally Egyptian sphere of influence), and then Egypt itself. Securely in control of Egypt, the Napatans did not try to restore full Egyptian unity, for an Egypt politically reintegrated might well turn against its Nubian conquerors. Finally, however, in part because of Assyrian pressure, the Nubians relinquished Egypt.

Once this happened, the status of Lower Nubia becomes uncertain. Although now very thinly settled, its key centers nevertheless remained populated, but by whom? Some suggest that places like Ibrim (in the center of Lower Nubia) were held continuously by Napata into the first century B.C.; but others argue that all Lower Nubia was dominated first by the 26th Dynasty, and then Persian-held Egypt, until 500 B.C.[2] By 400 B.C. at least, Napatan forces seem to have ranged freely in Lower Nubia, but soon, a little before the end of Napatan times, the Egyptian situation changed yet again.

Alexander the Great ended the Persian occupation of Egypt in 332 B.C., and it soon became ruled by a Greek-speaking, Macedonian Dynasty (the Ptolemaic, 304–30 B.C.) founded by one of Alexander's generals. Some scholars think that by 270 B.C. Ptolemy II controlled northern Lower Nubia, from Aswan to Maharraqa, a region named the *Dodekaschoenos*, or "Twelve Schoeni," by Ptolemy's Greek-speaking officials. That the Ptolemies held all Lower Nubia, as some believe, is unlikely.[3]

The Meroitic period, following the Napatan, was very long, some 600 years (250 B.C.–A.D. 350); for this period, we know of some fifty-seven kings, as well as a few reigning queens. Their annals were kept in Meroitic, a native language for the writing of which an alphabet was invented by 100 B.C. (earlier, the Napatans used Egyptian, and Egyptian hieroglyphs, at least for their monumental inscriptions). Meroitic as yet is only partly decipherable; the longest and most important inscriptions remain untranslated.

Contemporary Egypt was first Ptolemaic, then Roman. It became a Roman province in 30 B.C. as a result of Rome's imperial expansion; after A.D. 330 (after the Roman Empire had become divided in two) Egypt was ruled from Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Roman Empire.

The Meroitic kingdom was perhaps even larger than the Napatan. It included Southern and Upper Nubia, and *may* also have

annexed the "Gezira" ("Island"), that is, the Blue and White Niles and the territory between them. Sites partly or largely Meroitic in culture extend along the Blue Nile as far south as Sennar, about 300 kilometers upstream of Nubia, and the same might be true of the White Nile, although this remains to be proved. Certainly, the people of the Gezira were at least strongly influenced by Meroe, and probably dominated by it, even if the Gezira was not formally integrated into the kingdom.

In northern Nubia, as before, the situation was complicated. The Meroites generally had good relations with Ptolemaic Egypt, although they may have intermittently occupied the Dodekaschoenos, normally held by Egypt, but relations with Rome were initially hostile. Rome claimed all Lower Nubia as a client-state, provoking a Meroitic attack on Aswan in Egypt, in turn followed by a Roman counterattack that reached as far south as Napata. After further hostilities, peace was made in 21/20 B.C., and was sustained over a very long period.

The Dodekaschoenos continued to belong to Roman Egypt, while the rest of Lower Nubia became increasingly important to the Meroites. By the first century B.C. it was ruled by a governor (*peshto*) based at Faras; later, the regional capital shifted to Karanog (Meroitic Nalote; see chapter 7). By A.D. 200 settlement in both Roman and Meroitic Lower Nubia had become dense. Most of the Dodekaschoenos' inhabitants were in fact probably Nubian (and Roman and Meroitic officials collaborated in their governance), but they adopted a Romano-Egyptian culture very different from that of Meroitic Lower Nubia.

So far as outstanding issues in Napatan-Meroitic studies are concerned, all scholars agree that a much more representative range of sites needs to be excavated if we are to have a full picture of Nubian society, and the changes it experienced over time. Even the two chief centers, Napata and Meroe, are only partially excavated. With regard to mortuary remains, the royal cemeteries near Napata and Meroe, and to some extent the elite cemeteries of the latter, are relatively well known; Lower Nubian cemeteries provide a good sample of its population, but elsewhere few cemeteries of the period have been excavated. Although excellent studies of the extant material are being produced, they increasingly point up the excavational deficiencies I have just listed.

Other major issues are much more contentious. For example, some scholars argue that the Meroitic state at least was poorly integrated politically, despite its formal recognition of a single ruler. Thus William Adams suggests that we may "have to envisage a semi-autonomous feudal principality comprising both the Napatan [Upper Nubian] and Lower Nubian provinces of the Meroitic empire."[4] Others, however, think that centralization was more of a reality, an opinion with which I agree; as Trigger suggests, provincial officials perhaps "enjoyed a normal relationship to their superiors."[5]

The nature of the "fall" of Meroe, the collapse of both state and civilization, also stimulates divergent opinions. In the most dramatic versions, an already decaying kingdom was dealt a deathblow by an invasion (ca. A.D. 350) led by King Aezanas of Axum, a neighboring state located in what was to become

Abyssinia (today called Ethiopia). But one scholar has suggested that the inscriptions describing Aezanas' campaigns may refer to "purely local border raids within Ethiopia,"[6] and had no effect on Meroe. Today, as we learn more about the several successor kingdoms into which the great kingdom fragmented after A.D. 350, it is becoming clearer that Meroitic civilization did not "die," but rather underwent a transformation in which strong continuities from Meroitic times existed. Nevertheless, the causes of this transformation remain obscure, and require investigation.

Perhaps most contentious of all is the significance of "Egyptianization," of acculturation to some important aspects of Egyptian culture on the part of Napatans and Meroites. Was Napatan-Meroitic civilization dependent upon periodic stimuli from Egypt, or was it an internally stimulated phenomenon, albeit one incorporating some powerful Egyptian influences? We will return to this issue later.

The Land and Its People

However elaborate its superstructure of government, the basic resource of any state is its land and people. Napatan and Meroitic society was essentially a riverine one, extending from central Lower Nubia to modern Khartoum, and perhaps along the Blue and White Niles upstream of the latter. However, Napatan and Meroitic sites are not found east or west of the Nile, except in the western Butana (the Butana being the region between the Nile and Atbara rivers). Although future discoveries may alter this perception, it seems that the semidesert and savannah lands, as well as the whole Atbara River region, lay outside the frontiers of the kingdom.

Even so, the Napatan-Meroitic kingdom evidently encompassed very different environments, and hence peoples of different subsistence and surplus producing economies, and of different life-styles. In the south, the Gezira had a higher rainfall than the north, permitting "seasonal shifting agriculture throughout the whole region," a mix of cultivation and intensive herding along the White Nile, and "extensive agriculture" and "widespread animal husbandry" along the Blue Nile.[7]

The Nubian Nile proper, from the Sixth Cataract to central Lower Nubia, was primarily agricultural in economy. Simple irrigation methods linked to the annual Nile flood kept the numerous "basins" (low-lying depressions away from the river, but still subject to flooding) agriculturally productive, although animal raising was also quite important. Lower Nubia, as we have seen, was something of a special case. Its Meroitic southern two-thirds became densely settled only in the second and third centuries B.C. Throughout Lower Nubia extensive use was made of the animal-powered water-wheel (*saquia*), which enhanced agricultural productivity. Whether *saquias* were used elsewhere in Nubia is uncertain, but they may not have been as necessary as they were in Lower Nubia.

This sketch, based on modern analogies as well as (a very incomplete) archaeology, leads to an important conclusion: as in Egypt, the Napatan-Meroitic kingdom's prosperity depended on agriculture, supplemented by animal herding.[8] This economy must have pro-

duced a substantial surplus, for society was complex in itself, and supported an elite class as well as a state organization with a full panoply of kingship, bureaucracy, priesthood, and military. Trading, and warfare for purposes of plunder (and perhaps slaving, although this is doubtful), increased the wealth of the state and its elite. But much of the government's activity must have involved the collection and redistribution of revenue in cereals, other foods, and livestock; ownership or use of land could have been the elite's most significant asset, in terms of both income and status.

Napatan-Meroitic society was probably not homogeneous, but neither was contemporary Egypt's, with its growing Greek minority and Roman garrisons. We have little clear-cut information on ethnicity in the Napatan-Meroitic kingdom, but on the linguistic side we know that even in Napatan times the elite probably spoke Meroitic, a language not written down until the second century B.C. Yet, by Christian times (chapter 8) Nubian, a language different from Meroitic, was spoken throughout Nubia, and its existence has been detected as early as the Late Bronze Age. Did Meroitic and Nubian speakers share the Nubian Nile? And what was the ethnic and linguistic status of the Gezira, which interacted with the great kingdom, and may have belonged to it?

On the other hand, Napatan-Meroitic society was homogeneous in that it probably did not include nomads among its subjects. Nomads are notoriously difficult for a state based on sedentary agriculture to control, and those flanking Nubia were in any case possibly too powerful and well organized to be easily subjugated. According to modern analogies, Kordofan on the west and the Butana on the east were likely traversed by nomads, but we have not yet found Napatan-Meroitic sites occurring in either region.

One ecological niche, however—the western Butana, adjoining the region of Meroe—was not used by nomadic herdsmen because it lay outside the Butana's clay plains and their seasonally rich grass cover. This niche was exploited by the Meroites (and perhaps Napatans). They grazed animals and grew crops on the fertile soils of its shallow valleys (wadis). Along these wadis (which all opened up onto the Meroe region) a number of settlements, as well as sometimes imposing temples, developed, their water needs met in part by large artificial pools (*hafirs*). The whole pattern suggests a government-organized exploitation of the western Butana, as does the archaeology of its southern and southwestern edges. Stretching along these is a line of Meroitic settlements and *hafirs* that may mark and defend the frontier between the nomads and the western Butana, which in effect could also act as a buffer for Meroe itself. Indeed, just south of this apparent frontier a rock inscription at Gebel Qeili celebrates the victory of King Shorkaror (A.D. 20–30) over unnamed enemies who—given the geographical context—were probably nomads.[9]

Finally, we can even suggest how this diverse society was organized in terms of governance, at least in Meroitic times. Government was a centralized hierarchy structured according to the geographical regions described above. The pharaoh resided at Meroe, governing Southern Nubia directly or through an appointed representative. Lower and Upper Nubia were separate provinces, both overseen

by the *peker* (a titular, rather than actual "crown prince"), an official based at Napata who reported to the pharaoh at Meroe. The *peker* may have directly controlled Upper Nubia, but Lower Nubia was administered by his representative, the *peshto*, or governor. If the Gezira was also part of the kingdom, it too probably had its own governor (or governors, one for the White Nile, the other for the Blue), appointed or at least confirmed in office by the Meroitic pharaoh.

The infrastructure of each province perhaps consisted of towns and their districts, each headed by a mayor or equivalent official. This is the model suggested by the relatively well-known administration of Lower Nubia, but some scholars find this assumption unwarranted.

The Kingship

Most of our information about Napatan-Meroitic kingship comes from scenes and texts on temple walls (Fig. 6.1, 6.3), and triumphal stelae set up near temples to record the benefits king and god reciprocally present each other. These sources present the king as political leader, warlord, and chief ritualist of the kingdom; but how real was this apparently total power?

In some African and other states royal power was substantially limited by a "Council of Nobles," which could intervene decisively in the royal succession and condemn the ruler to commit suicide "on all sorts of pretexts." Even the divinization of the king could "complete his isolation from temporal matters by locking him in an illusory omnipotence."[10] However, rulers could seek greater independence, by building their own bureaucracy and establishing an army loyal to them, not any other institution, although the good will of the military toward the king might then become an important factor.

In Napatan times the latter situation seems the case (as if dependence on a "council" had existed, but had been ended). Whether this was also true in Meroitic times remains unknown, since the possibly relevant texts are untranslatable.

The Napatan succession was a relatively stable process, in that a rule of succession existed. Not matrilineal, as often thought, but rather patrilineal, it decreed that the heir normally had to be a son of a paternal brother of the deceased king.[11] However, this created not just one candidate, but rather a "pool" of candidates, from whom the "army" (i.e., army leaders?) chose the next king. Their choice had to be ratified in some way by the state god Amun, a process over which the priests might have had some influence. Sometimes, circumstances required exceptions to or deviations from the norm, as when the "best" or most powerful choice did not belong to the pool.[12]

Once in place, the Napatan or Meroitic king seems to have enjoyed considerable power, insofar as we can tell from the limited sources. The gods, and hence their priesthoods, were dependent on the king for the building of temples, the supply of cult items, and the allotment of lands and personnel to provide subsistence and income to the temple establishments. The bureaucracy, both central and provincial, was at least formally

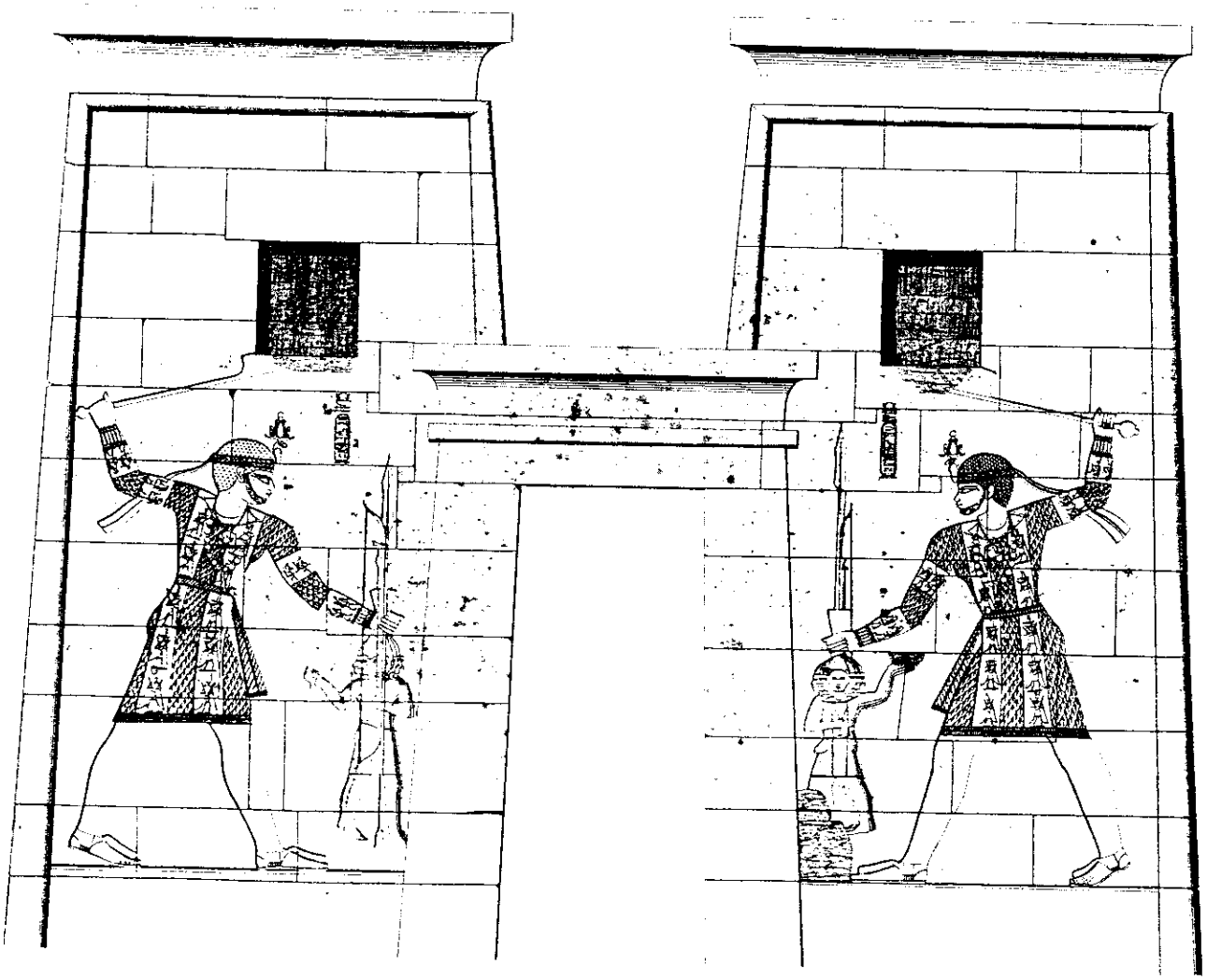

Fig. 6.1
A Meroitic royal personage, depicted on the pylon of his funerary chapel, near Meroe. From C. R. Lepsius, Denkmaler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien, *vol. x. Berlin: Nicolaische Buchandlung [1849–1856] bl. 49.)*

responsive to the royal will, although scholars argue as to how effective this really was. And warfare, an important feature of the Napatan-Meroitic state, was very much under royal control; the ruler sometimes led his forces into war, or at other times issued their orders. Military power would then have reinforced royal authority in other spheres of government.

These at times large-scale military campaigns could sometimes involve Egypt. Most spectacular was Piye's campaign, upon which Napatan control of Egypt was based, and which revealed the Nubian forces to be both highly aggressive and highly skilled, as did the Napatans' later conflicts with the Assyrians prior to the relinquishment of Egypt. Later,

Aswan in southernmost Egypt was twice attacked, first because rebellious officials of a Napatan ruler took refuge there, and later because it was the Roman base for military operations against the Meroites.

The Napatans, and presumably Meroites, also clashed periodically with nomadic peoples, the Blemmyes (Meded), east of Lower and Upper Nubia, and the Adadas (Rehrehs), east of Southern Nubia. The former on occasion raided riverine towns, plundering their temples, and also interfered with an important desert trade route linking Southern Nubia to Egypt. The Adadas were even more aggressive, periodically invading Southern Nubia—possibly seeking land upon which to settle, or power over tribute-paying peasants—and having to be driven off by Napatan armies. The Meroitic expansion into the western Butana, described above, may have been intended to buffer Southern Nubia against such pressure.

The most spectacular Napatan campaigns, however, are also the most enigmatic, for the locations of the regions involved remain uncertain. As recorded under the pharaoh Nastasen (335–315 B.C.), these "foreign lands" were to some degree centrally organized, for each had a *wer,* or ruler, and the plunder from them typically included women (over 2000 in one case); gold, sometimes in large amounts; and enormous numbers of cattle and other domesticated animals, a grand total of almost two million. The nomadic regions east and west of Southern Nubia were unlikely to support so many animals, yet the regions involved must have been reasonably accessible for so many animals to be driven into Nubian territory. It is likely, then, that these are chiefdoms or even proto-states located within the Gezira, which must have been accumulating wealth through trading in cattle and perhaps other products (ivory, ebony, etc.?). Afterward, the Meroites were likely to have continued raiding (as well as trading with) such a productive area or even, as we have seen, incorporated it within the kingdom.

Art and archaeology inform us about the life-styles of Napatan and Meroitic royalty. The kings wore distinctive clothing and regalia (Figures 6.1, 6.3), at first—in the Napatan period—closely following the traditional Egyptian model, but later a more original ensemble. The king wore a close-fitting white robe with—in the earlier Meroitic period—a cloak worn over it. Often a fringed shawl in red material was worn over the right shoulder, and had two or more tassels on long bands. The origins of these items were complex, and aspects of Ptolemaic royal dress were incorporated within it for a period. When the pharaoh is shown in a more active role, such as overthrowing enemies, he wears usually a knee-length kilt and, once, body armor probably made of leather, although metal would also be possible.

There were a variety of crowns, some modeled after those of the Egyptian pharaoh, but a distinctive favorite was a caplike head covering with two uraei (sacred cobras) decorating it. Napatan-Meroitic rulers also displayed a rich array of heavily modeled jewelry, including earrings, neck ornaments bearing ram's heads (emblematic of the god Amun), and armlets. When armed, the pharaoh carried bow and arrows, a sword slung in a scabbard hanging across his back, and a spear.

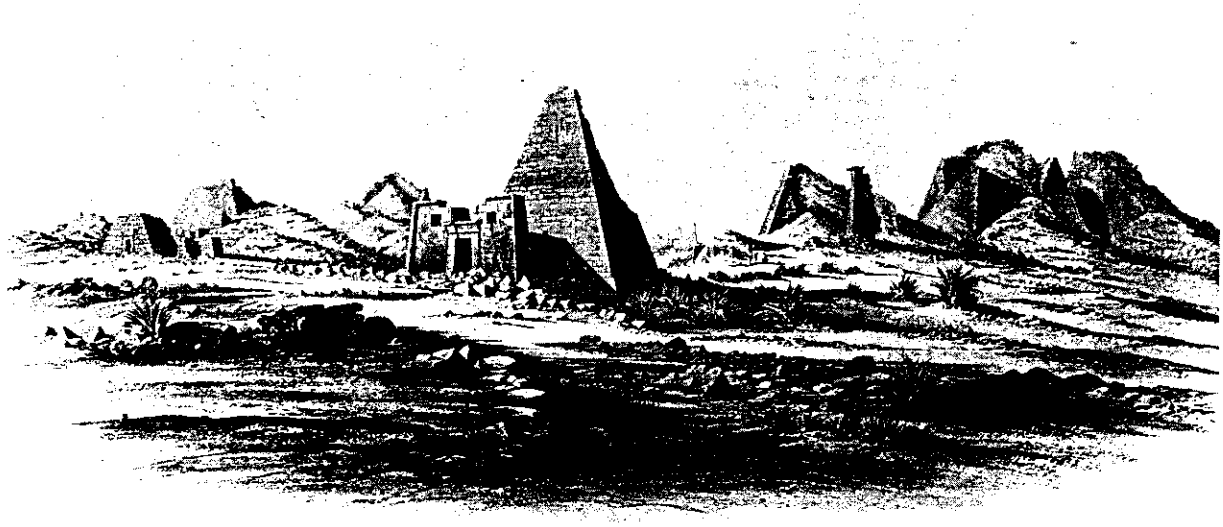

Fig. 6.2
A Royal Cemetery near Meroe.
(From: C.R. Lepsius, Denkmaler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien, *vol. X. Berlin: Nicolaische Buchandlung [1849–1856], bl. 138.)*

Neither the town of Napata, nor the city of Meroe (occupying about 1 square mile, or almost 259 hectares), has been fully excavated. However, it is clear that at both there were not only large temples, but clusters of palaces, usually in the vicinity of some of the temples. These palaces were often square in plan, somewhat like the smaller palaces of the *peshtos* at Karanog in Lower Nubia (see chapter 7), but the details of their internal layout is as yet poorly known.

Best known of the royal monuments are the kings' tombs, grouped first near Napata and later Meroe (Fig. 6.2). The superstructure was always pyramidal (with, however, a flat rather than pointed top), built either of stone masonry or, after A.D. 50, red brick or rubble covered with white plaster. Queens, princes, nobles, and even commoners were also buried under pyramids, with an attached chapel like that found with royal tombs. However, only the royal chapels had pylon gateways. Even the royal tombs were relatively small compared to Egyptian royal pyramids (which are all much earlier in date) and more steeply angled. The largest royal pyramid occupied less than 850

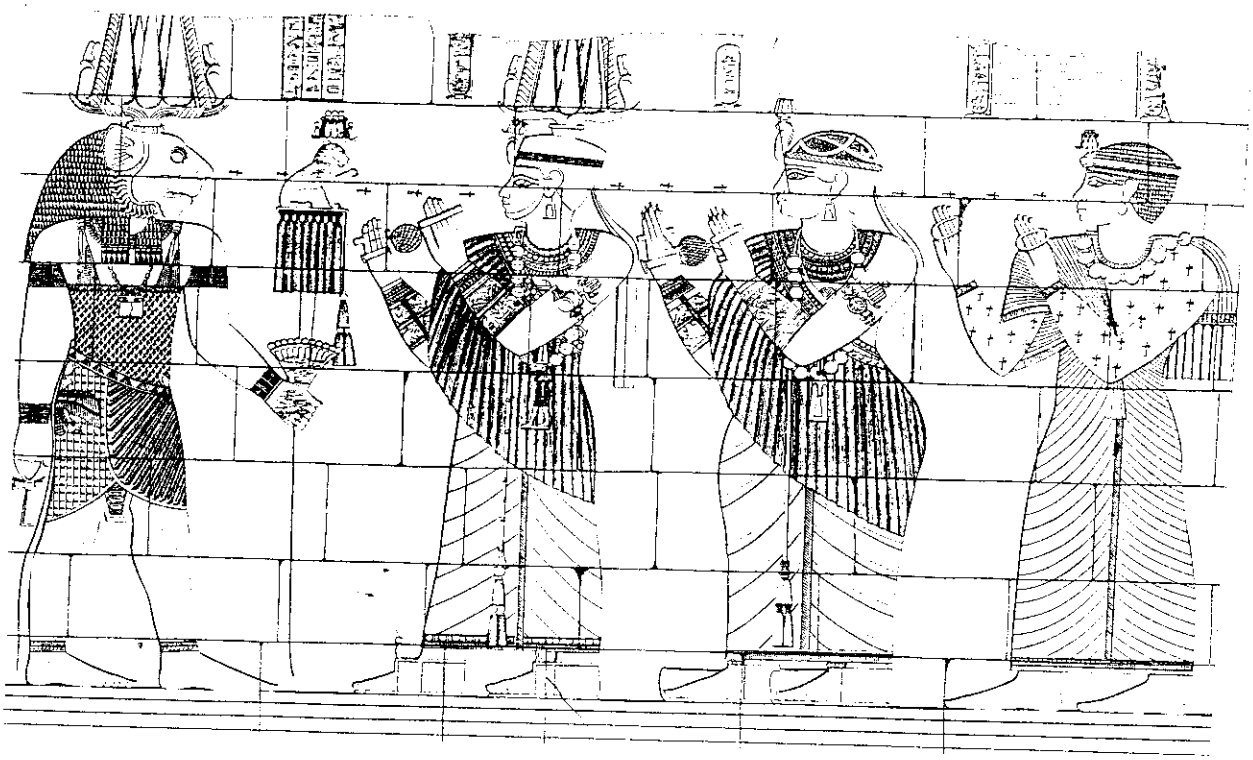

Fig. 6.3
A representation of the Nubian god Apedemak (far left) on a temple wall at Naga. Facing him are members of the Meroitic royal family, with the king in front.
(From: C.R. Lepsius, Denkmaler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien, *vol. X. Berlin: Nicolaische Buchandlung [1849–1856], bl. 62.)*

Temples were frequently being built and rebuilt throughout Nubia; some were at or near the great cities, but temples may also have been found in relatively small villages, like that of Meinarti in Lower Nubia.[15]

The larger temples are the better known, and are usually of two types. One is "Egyptian" in form: rectangular in plan, it has a pylon, forecourt, columned offering hall, and a sanctuary at the rear, surrounded by small chambers. The other is peculiar to Nubia: its basic form is of a single, square chamber with a pylon entrance. This "Nubian"-style temple was probably built for many gods, but it associates strongly with Apedemak, the lion god, and resonates faintly with Nubia's remote past.

At Middle Bronze Age Kerma (see chapters 3 and 4) one of the funerary temples in the royal cemetery had large blue faience lions (reminiscent of Apedemak's status as a lion god) inlaid in its facade[16]; and *all* the "temples" of Kerma (K XI, II, and I) had stairways to their roofs, which may have served as open-air, sunlit cult venues. Apedemak temples appar-

square meters, the smallest about 50 square meters.

In chambers below the pyramid the royal body and a rich array of equipment and gifts were placed. Unfortunately, none survived intact, although some important surviving artifacts from both Napatan and Meroitic royal tombs have been recovered.

Gods and Goddesses of Nubia

However important the king was in the social hierarchy of Napatan-Meroitic Nubia, the global picture or world view of the Nubians was dominated by a pantheon of gods and goddesses. Certainly, the king had a unique relationship to these powerful beings, and is the only human ever shown, in temples at least, as performing the cult for them. However, in contrast to Egyptian ideas about kingship, it seems that "the Meroitic ruler held his office by virtue of what he was rather than what he did for the gods."[13]

The Nubians' deities must have been seen as responsible for the birth and maintenance of the cosmos, as well as for specialized and individualized roles within that cosmos. The pantheon itself will probably increase in number as new evidence is uncovered, but it is clear by now that four deities dominated Nubian religion. In the funerary realm, Osiris and Isis; and in the temple cult, Isis, Aman, and Apedemak. All except the last are of Egyptian origin, yet they probably took on a distinctively Nubian character.

The principal cult centers of Isis, Aman (i.e., Amun, in Egyptian terms), and Apedemak in effect defined the geographical extent of the kingdom. Isis temples occurred throughout Nubia, but her chief shrine was on Philae Island, near Aswan in Egyptian territory. Philae was a tremendously popular place of pilgrimage for Nubians as much as Egyptians, and Meroites were in fact deeply involved both in its cult and in the administration of its temple estates.

Aman had many forms. A popular one was Amanape, but many Nubian towns had their own particular Aman. His cult, therefore, was quite widespread, and at Meroe itself was honored by a massive temple as large as that of Gebel Barkal, near Napata, his other chief cult center. However, historically Aman was strongly associated with central, or Upper, Nubia, where his cult had first been implanted by the Egyptians during the colonial period (see chapter 5).

Isis and Aman are usually shown as fully human in form, but Apedemak often has a lion's head (Fig. 6.3). His cult occurred throughout Nubia, but so far as present evidence goes, all his important temples were in Southern Nubia, at places like Meroe, Naqa, and Musawaret el Sufra.

Other important deities are known. They include some who were Egyptian in origin, like Horus and Mut, but others are Nubian, like the god Mash, whose cult in fact is so far found at only one place, Karanog (see chapter 7). Two particularly important gods, if of "second rank," were "hunter-gods and deities of the desert,"[14] Arensnuphis and Sebiumeker. They are usually represented together, as guardian statues in front of temples. Arensnuphis may be Egyptian, Sebiumeker Nubian in origin.

ently also permitted more sunlight to enter than did the "Egyptian" temple type. These slight indications suggest that Apedemak was not only Nubian in origin but may have deep roots in the Nubian past.

It has been suggested that, prior to the colonial period and the appearance of Egyptian gods in Nubia, the Bronze Age Nubians themselves had no specific gods of their own. This seems a priori unlikely; and in fact, as we have seen, Kerma had a substantial temple, indicative of a god's cult, from the Early Bronze Age onward. If more Bronze Age settlements are excavated, they too will likely have temples of some kind, and provide for Napatan-Meroitic gods a kind of "prehistory."

Their gods were probably quite important to the Napatans and Meroites in general, not just to their kings and priests. So far, no evidence for domestic cult places has been found, but many pious graffiti were scratched on temple walls and pylons, or at "sacred places" out in the countryside, by visitors evidently of low status; moreover, a number of personal names invoke the presence of a specific deity, or of an anonymous "god" likely to be the town or village god of the person in question.

Egypt and Nubia in Napatan-Meroitic Times

A subject only referred to indirectly so far is of great importance for Napatan-Meroitic Nubia, namely, its apparently strong acculturation to Egyptian norms. We have already seen that many of Nubia's gods were Egyptian in origin, and its art—the scenes on temple and funerary chapel walls, for example—is evidently Egyptian in some of its stylistic aspects. It follows closely the conventions of Egyptian art, and the dress and regalia worn by gods, kings, and others is often modeled on Egyptian prototypes.

Moreover, periodic "waves" of influence from Egypt can be detected throughout Napatan-Meroitic times, and some scholars have correlated these with major new initiatives evident in Nubia culture. The products of such influence might have distinctive Nubian attributes, it is suggested, but they nevertheless required stimuli from Egypt to come about. Without such stimuli, Napatan-Meroitic culture tended to stagnate and degenerate, for Nubians could not find such stimuli within their own society and ideology.

These scholarly notions of stagnation, degeneration, and stimuli are evidently laden with values and preconceptions that are not really appropriate. Nubian culture, whether in Napatan-Meroitic times or earlier in the Bronze Age, often takes on forms unfamiliar to scholars conversant with ancient Egyptian culture. However, as I emphasized when discussing the Bronze Age, this unfamiliarity may encourage us to underestimate what was happening in terms of political, ideological, and other developments among the Nubians. Nubian achievement must be estimated in its own terms, via the evidence supplied by Nubian archaeology and, increasingly in Napatan-Meroitic times, texts, not by reference to a misleading standard of comparison with some other, better-known culture.

This is not to deny that Napatan-Meroitic culture did absorb much from Egypt, in a variety of ways, the full complexity of which

THE MEROITIC ALPHABET

Hieroglyph	Cursive Letter	Phonetic Value
		a
		e
		i
		y
		w
		b
		p
		m
		n
		n̄(i)
		r

Hieroglyph	Cursive Letter	Phonetic Value
		l
		kh
		kh
		s
		sh
		k
		q
		t(i)
		te
		te
		z

Fig. 6.4
The Meroitic alphabet (Adapted from F. Ll. Griffith, Karanog.
The Meroitic Inscriptions of Shablul and Karanog.
Philadelphia: The University Museum [1911] p. 11.)

will not be realized for a long time. But we must place this interaction within a context that at least contributes to an understanding of its effects upon the Nubians, and also reminds us that these effects were, in the final analysis, quite limited.

First, in Napatan-Meroitic times intercommunication up and down the Lower Nile, between Egypt and Nubia, was developed to a degree unequaled in their mutual histories. That Napatans and Meroites were sensitive to developments in Egypt at many levels—religious and political ideology, art styles, and artifact types—is therefore not surprising. The interaction between Egypt and Nubia was particularly strong for historical reasons, but it was also part of a broader phenomenon. The contemporary Hellenistic and Roman periods were a time in which aspects of Egypt were often much admired throughout the eastern Mediterranean, and symbiosis between Egyptian and other cultures manifested itself in a number of ways. The Greeks resident in Egypt, including the Ptolemaic rulers themselves, became Egyptianized to a significant degree while yet maintaining a distinctively "Greek" culture, and in Roman times—among other things—the cult of Isis became widespread in Italy and elsewhere.

Second, the important ways in which Nubia manifested its cultural independence of Egypt should not be overlooked. These are manifold, if sometimes subtle. For example, the royal pyramids of Napata and Meroe descend from, I have suggested above, an almost purely indigenous Nubian line of tomb development. The Egyptian connotation of the pyramid of course was a reality, but in fact Egyptian pharaohs had not been buried under pyramids for centuries at the time the pyramid emerged as the chosen type of Nubian royal tomb; hence, in effect the process attests to a selective and indeed original attitude toward Egyptian culture.

Many other examples could be cited. Nubian religion was not monopolized by Egyptian deities, as we have seen, and even its Egyptian deities could be said to have been "Nubianized," to have gained histories, regional associations, and roles peculiar to Nubia and not their Egyptian homeland. In art, basic conventions may have been Egyptian, but in style and content it became distinctively Nubian, especially in Meroitic times. Perhaps most importantly, the Nubians retained their own language, rather than adopting Egyptian (although many Nubians must have been bilingual in Egyptian and their own tongue); eventually, they invented an alphabet (based on Egyptian hieroglyphs!) so that a Nubian language could be fully employed in all aspects of life—religion, ideology, administration, and business. Imbedded in the Nubian language or languages, of course, was a very particular and specifically Nubian world view, a whole range of important ideas about the supernatural, social organization, and the natural world that were very different from those of the Egyptians.

As I suggested earlier, it might be a useful idea to consider the Nubians' selective adaptation of certain Egyptian gods and ideas, of artistic conventions and artifact styles, of even—for a time—the Egyptian language and writing system (in Napatan times) as the discovery of a vocabulary through which the Nubians could express their world view in a way

that had not been possible or desired throughout much of the Bronze Age. This process would have begun in the period of close contact, the colonial period of the Late Bronze Age, and been sustained and intensified by such experiences as the Nubian occupation of Egypt in the 25th Dynasty, and the close and often friendly relations between Egypt and Napatan-Meroitic Nubia.

The adoption of this vocabulary was not a simple process, and involved a degree of emulation on the Nubians' part. Yet over time it became transformed, as a medium of expression, into an increasingly Nubian phenomenon, most obviously by the invention of written Meroitic, but also in many other ways. This in itself testifies to the dominant role of internal Nubian dynamics, social and other, that ultimately shaped Nubian society and culture throughout their long history, and were to continue to do so in the future.