

Nubia

By: Corinne Frank

Midterm paper for Professor Salih Class: Cultures of the Middle East

Nubians are a tribal group based out of north and central Africa. Nubians live in both Upper Egypt and Northern Sudan, although the migration of tribes due to shortages of food and water is common. The ancient Nubian civilization ranged from approximately the 1st cataract on the Nile River at Aswan, Egypt, and ended around the 6th cataract on the Nile River by Khartoum, Sudan. This is a great portion of the Nile River, located directly in the center (Fernea, 4).

The Nubian people were known to have many names. Nubian people referred to themselves as “Ta -Seyti”, the land of the Archers Bow (Nubians). Egyptians referred to Nubia as “the Land of Gold” because materials were exported in abundance such as gold and ivory. Ancient Egyptians also knew the Nubians as “Nhsi” which meant the “Bronzed or Burnt people” (Redford, 5).

Nubia appears to be the most ancient civilization in Africa, other than the Egyptian civilization. They were ruled by extraordinarily powerful kings. These kings required royal tombs that were the equivalent of man-made hills, 30 meters wide, and 15 meters high (Nubians). They believed in taking their relatives with them to the afterlife, much like ancient Egyptians. They also believed in bringing with them the things that they need in everyday life, beer, water, food, grains and servants. The Nubians are recognized as having a distinctly similar way of life as the Ancient Egyptians. It is believed that the Nubians were a people first, dating back to 7000 B.C., where as the Egyptians date back to approximately 5000 B.C. and are currently more popularly discussed (Nubians).

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Kerma was the greatest Nubian city, and it encompassed a civilization stretching back to the ancient pastoral culture of Sudan that lived around 7000 B.C (Redford, 32). The world's two oldest cemeteries ever discovered are found here, dating back to approximately 7500 B.C. Nubia is also known for the domestication of cattle and goat, with evidence found alongside the eldest cemeteries. Previously it was believed that these events did not happen until much later in the evolution of civilizations (Nubians).

It is believed that two different tribes or culturally distinguished groups lived together in Kerma and maintained their cultural identities in peace. These were known as the Ancient Nubians. Each of these two cultures held a different wealth and social status but did not discriminate against each other. Fascinatingly they flourished as a great society, expanded, and conquered a good portion of land spanning through what we know today as Egypt and Sudan. Beginning at the 4th cataract on the Nile and expanding North to the 1st and south to the 6th. This gave them honorable control over what products and materials were capable of being transported between Egypt and Sudan, and between the Ancient Egyptians and other tribes or people, such as the Ancient Greeks, in later years.

Kerma was protected by two miles of ramparts that held their adversaries at bay for thousands of years. They were finally overtaken in 1500 by the Ancient Egyptian Pharaoh Tuthmosis I. This ended the Bronze Age for the Nubians, which had lasted some 220 years, fighting for their independence from Egypt. The Egyptians and the Nubians were major rivals throughout most of their existence together, both struggling to have more control over civilizations, people, and land. The fighting between the two civilizations became brutal and unreasonable. Amenhotep II is known for his capture of seven Nubian princes and executed them personally with a mace, as a sacrifice to Amon. He then had six of the bodies hung from the

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walls of the Temple Amon in Thebes and one was to be hung from the walls of a Sudanese city (Nubians). This disrespectful fighting continued for many years thereafter on both sides, provoking the leaders to retaliate with stronger force.

The beginnings of the Nubian people start in the Neolithic Period which spans from 5100-3100 B.C.E. There were early signs of life and civilization, including monuments for astrological purposes. There were people of influence and intelligence that lived during these times although there are not many indications as to who. There was however evidence of oared boats, pottery, domestication of goat and cattle, shell beads, and hooks and harpoons made from bone (Nubians). The Early Dynastic Period encompassed Dynasties 1 and 2 in Ancient Egyptian time and spanned from 3100-2686 B.C.E. Kerma, the first capital of Nubia is established and the Nubians are cataloged by early Greeks and Romans as “Ethiopians” (Redford, 32) The First Intermediate Period encompassed Dynasties 7 to 10 Egyptian, and was during a time spanning 2687 to 1990 B.C.E. At this time there was an expansion of Egyptians into Nubia at Lisht, near Memphis, Egypt. The Middle Kingdom which encompassed Dynasty 12 for the Egyptians spanned from 1991 to 1786 B.C.E. At this time a total of 223 pyramids were recorded in Nubia that were all Nubian made and designed. This was double the number in Egypt, made by the Egyptians. The New Kingdom encompassed Dynasty 18 during the years of 1567- B.C.E (Nubians). This was the Dynasty of Ramses the first, second and third. The Ramses Dynasty was known as Warrior Pharaohs for their hot temper and want to expanded and conquer. The Ramses lead the Imperial Age of Conquest from Syria to Sudan, trying to overtake as much property and as many people as possible. The Late Dynastic Period encompassed Dynasty 22, Egyptian, and was during the years of 935 to 730 B.C.E. Napata becomes the Nubian center beginning in 800 B.C., continuing for 400 years. Kerma is still in existence, although the importance and

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significance of the location has changed. In 747 B.C. Egyptians are under attack by foreigners and ask for Nubian protection and help. This began a Nubian cultural revival because the Egyptians, until now, had been dominating the Nubian people. This allowed for a reprieve for the Nubians of Egyptian control and dominance. The Egyptian Dynasties 23 to 25 were around 750 to 656 B.C. At this time King Taharqa, of the Nubians, leads a combined Egyptian and Nubian army into battle against the Assyrians of present day Iran, to protect Israel. This again is an important turning point for the Nubian people who gain control and show their presence to the world. During this time they begin building enormous tombs to signify their dominance (Nubians). Only a few decades later the Persian and Roman empire take over and the Arab conquest begins. The last of the ancient Nubian civilizations is the Merotic Monarchy which spanned for a short period between 1 and 20 A.D. This took place in present day Meroe, Sudan, as the Persians and Romans became strong the Nubians were pushed lower down the Nile River, farther into Sudan. The rulers of this last Ancient Nubian civilization were King Natakamani and his Queen Amanitore. The significance of this period is the unusual equality between the King and Queen and possibly, even between men and women, during this time (Nubians).

Some of the most important temples and monuments of the Nubians have disintegrated over time; many of them were made of mud brick, which is not resistant to the wind and sand erosion commonly caused in the desert (Redford, 32). The Amun Temples, known as Jebel Barkal, in Meroe, Sudan are an example of temples that did survive the harsh desert weather. The main temple has a recorded length of about 196 feet. Out front there are two pylons that still exist today and a row of ram sphinxes that no longer exist, but are believed to have been there. Inside of the Jebel Barkal there is a granite altar covered with sculptures and a hieroglyphic inscription of Taharqa who lived between the years of 750-656 B.C. This is known because his

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Cartouche was found inscribed inside. He had these temples built in dedication to the supreme god Amun (Nubians).

Modern day Nubians still exists, but no longer have their own country. They are split between Egypt and Sudan and have overcome many obstacles to survive. They are still struggling today to overcome their disadvantages of rural origins and historical involvements with slavery. Slavery for the Nubians and ended in the 19th century, which was simultaneous with the slavery of black people in North America (Fernea, 4). Another disadvantage the Nubians of today have had to overcome is the unfair construction of the High Dam in Aswan, which has created flooding in most of Egyptian Nubia and Parts of Sudanese Nubia. The Egyptian government built resettlement villages for the people whose communities were destroyed during the flooding, though this has increasingly disrupted their culture and way of life. This drastic shift is forcing the Nubian people to experience what other minorities all over the world have experienced; the loss of isolation and the push to conformity. The Nubian people have reacting to these drastic changes well, by adapting, without sacrificing the core of their cultural identity. As proof, “less than 15 years after the move to the resettlement camps the children were already dominating Aswan public schools and the adults were dominating local elections” (Fernea, 4). The fear of relocating the Nubian people was that they could begin to lose their heritage, sense of traditions, lifestyle and preservation of their culture. Fortunately, this was not the case. They began renovating houses to conform to their Nubian ideas of space and comfort which is both admirable and impressive that the adaptation process was so successful and did not hinder the growth and ideas of the people (Fernea, 4-5).

There are many different tribes of Nubian people that exist today in Africa. Some of the tribes are larger and more spread out, and likewise others are fewer and more compact. The Saidi

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are a Nubian people that belong to Upper Egypt, south of Aswan. These people are located in Esna, Edfu, Daraw, Kom Ombo, all Egyptian cities. These The Saidi are known for looking somewhat darker than Egyptians. The Gaafra is another tribe of present day Nubians, considered to be Saidis (Fernea, 13). It is said that it would be difficult to make a distinction between the two, although, they are vocal about their beliefs in the relation of themselves to the original Nubian people. The Fedija live in the south of Egypt and consider the Gaafra people to be “Arab Egyptionized” Nubians. The Fedija feel most at-home with the Gaafra people and many of the men from this area, when given a choice, have decided to serve in the Hagana, the Sudanese border unit, as opposed to the Egyptian Army (Fernea, 13). The Kenuz currently live near the old dam and the first cataract near Esna and Kom Ombo. They occupy one third of Egyptian Nubia today. The Kenuz speak a Nubian language but live over one thousand miles from what is believed to be their original ancestry, the Dongolawi (Fernea, 14). It is assumed that they were once the same social unit due to the great amount of space between the two people, but speak the same language. The Dongolawi make up the larger of the 2 groups and live in the more fertile, region of the Upper Nile. It is assumed that the Kenuzi people were originally a trade colony sent by the Dongolawi to oversee trade shipments being sent to Egypt (Fernea, 15).

The Nubian people established their own culture sometime around 7000 B.C.E. and over time many of the cultural traditions may have changed although their current traditions are very specific and belong solely to the Nubians. The social structure is broken down into Nogs. Nog describes all units of a familial membership. A man’s first Nog is his household –which is all encompassing – including social and economical responsibilities for his wife, children and any other relatives who live within the house. A man can only acquire his own Nog through marriage due to the guidelines and way of property division (Fernea, 20). The second Nog is based off of

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how the first Nog operates. It is comprised of the relatives with whom the man must divide the products of land and trees, no matter how small the share may be. This is comprised generally of the Nog of the man's Father and the Nog of the man's Mother. The Father's Nog generally receives most of the household property, and generally receives more overall than the mother's Nog. The largest Nog is comprised of all of the smaller Nogs which are spread over many villages. This is for the men who share the same family name, but do not have to be blood related (Fernea, 21). The way that the culture is, a child's world is split into 2 sets of relatives: The mother's group and the father's group. The mother's group will provide the indulgent, nurturing behaviors the child needs and is allowed, in turn, to act more informal, and homely. The father's group will instill in the child discipline and respect. A son is at all times expected to act respectably to avoid bringing shame to the family name. This is an effective method of parenting in tribes because each parent (and their group) can focus on one aspect of teaching at all times, without having to flip back and forth between discipline and love. The child learns when and where it is appropriate to act a certain way (Fernea, 21).

Materially a child is also split down the middle. A child owes less materially toward the mother, because the Nog he receives from the father will be split between the men of the woman he marries as well. Interestingly, the Nubian men still show respect to the mother by having the ability to recite their maternal lineage almost as readily as the paternal lineage, back seven or eight generations. Many Nubian men also carry the mother's name, rather than the father's, as their own second name. Generally in spoken form they use their mother's name as their second name, and in written, their fathers (Fernea, 21).

The Nubian people tend to be a peaceful people, free of gloating and bragging. Nubians do not believe in drawing such negative attention to themselves because it brings upon them the

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cast of the evil eye, which can be given from one or more of the other tribesmen. This is the superstitious circumstance in which a villager (a man, woman, or child) may be the carrier or possessor of the evil eye. Nubian people do not blame those people who carry the trait, but rather considered it misfortunate and in turn are a modest people. The evil eye is described as an “envious or admiring glance” and has been known to cause men to break their legs, houses to collapse, children to get sick and potentially die. The only believed way to ward off the evil eye is to live modestly, to carry blue beads, Quranic inscriptions, or a charm in the form of a hand (Fernea, 24-25). Disputes are generally uncommon between Nubian men, though if there is a problem it is initially attempted to be settled privately. In cases it cannot, other actions must be taken to settle the dispute and create peace between the tribe again.

Traditions of solving disputes between two men are specific. If two or more kinsmen are fighting, arguing or disputing something, generally a third party, older relative, will assist in settling the matter. If the argument persists and, or the addition of more kinsmen creates a larger dispute that becomes unmanageable, then a family council of the property-sharing Nog will be called, which is all men of the Nog. An elder kinsman presides over the council and mediates the two parties. He is required to hear both sides of the argument, allow for presentation of the case, and finally he is required to pass judgment, much like a court system today. Judgment is usually passed against a younger person and for an older person, the younger person is reprimanded for acting disrespectfully toward an elder, and the elder for not understand the immaturity of the youth. The younger person must kiss the forehead of the elder and ask for forgiveness to signify respect and the elder must embrace him publicly to signify forgiveness. This is generally the end of the council and the end of the dispute (Fernea, 22-23).

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Two major ceremonies to the Nubian people are the death ceremony and the wedding ceremony. A death ceremony has a required attendance out of respect for the dead, regardless of the degree of their Nog relation. Women are to sit inside the house of the deceased and men sit outside in temporary structures made especially for the occasion. If a person fails to do honor the deceased's family by repeating what was done at the last death ceremony for another family member then the person is considered disrespectful, and may be shunned from the community. Even a person who has moved away, who does not attend, is considered dead himself unless he returns within a reasonable amount of time and immediately shares his condolences. If he does not, then he is neglecting his duties and is described as "publicly declaring his lack of interest in the family and community" and is considered "parted forever" (Fernea, 25-26). He would then no longer be welcome.

The wedding ceremony is another important ceremony to the Nubians. An agreement for marriage can be made while the participants are infants, and even unborn. If this is the case, the bride-to-be and groom-to-be in question must at some point agree to the marriage, it is not forced upon them although resistance is not taken lightly, and generally not tolerated. Shareholdings within families and family relationships are a large part of who can marry whom. If a boy chooses a girl which his family and parents do not know then his chances of marrying her are unlikely, although not impossible. The girls appearance, manner and behavior are important to the parents and judged harshly. "Grace and poise are very important, and the ability to serve visitors with dignity, without nervousness, is looked for." At this point in the relationship the girl may not travel to the boy's home for visitation (Fernea, 27-28).

Engagement, Firgar, is finalized when the boy's closest relatives travel to girl's home to share a meal with the bride's family. This is when the bride's father announces the occasion and

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the families get to know each other, if they do not already. During this occasion the oldest or most respected man present asks God for his approval of the wedding of the couple and all people present then recite the first verse of the Quran (Fatiha). A similar visit to the groom's house is then conducted and arrangements for the final ceremony are discussed. For the public announcement to all of the tribesmen, the bride's father slaughters an animal, gojir, and all members of the villages and Nogs are obligated to come (much like a death ceremony), although the consequences of not showing up are not nearly as severe (Fernea, 27). If a member of the Nog does not show up it is taken as an insult, but nothing, otherwise, happens.

The Nubian people are connected by "favors owed and favors received" from one another. Each adult in each household is connected through this system called Karray. Each woman that has engaged in Karray with the bride or groom's mother must bring a contribution to the feast. This can include fine dishes, food, sugar, water, and any other number of items that could be potentially usefully throughout the ceremony. The ceremony is a lengthy process in which both the bride and the groom are doted on and lavished with many gifts. The bride and groom go through separate ceremonies and engage in karray with their Nog (Fernea, 28). The groom's ceremony generally operates in a circle in which the groom and his registrar sit in the middle. As the groom receives gifts the registrar writes down everything received and from whom it was received. This is the time when the groom's original and new nogs come together and give him his shares of land, water wheels, date palms, cows, houses, and other smaller gifts. These gifts are given across all generations from elder to younger, from younger to older, and from peer to peer. The extent of the gifts received will determine if he can afford his newly established life in Nubia or if he must go to a nearby city to find work in order to support his own Nog (Fernea, 28-29).

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The bride's ceremony is both similar although land is substituted for jewelry. Each member of the nog who has engaged in Karray with another person in her nog or with the bride herself is expected to participate. Nubian women are generally adorned with an extravagant amount of jewelry signifying their status and wealth. The night before the wedding ceremony there is a ceremony held called Kofferay dibbi which is very similar to the layla el-henna (Fernea, 28) for other Arab cultures. During this ceremony the bride is treated exceptionally by the women in the house and the groom, the same, by the men by the river.

The marriage ceremony begins at sun down, after prayers, and continues most of the night. "The marriage contract ('aqd) is written and signed (katib el kitab) by the local Ma'zoun, a government appointed local official" (Fernea, 28). A room (diwani) in the brides home is well decorated and prepared for the consummation ceremony in which the groom is taken to his bride, through dance, and will give her small gifts until she feels persuaded to talk to him. When this happens all the children must leave and the bride and groom will proceed to their diwani. In the Nubian culture female circumcision is a common and generally makes the initial consummation very uncomfortable for the bride. The couple stays in the diwani for the first 7 days of marriage in which the bride is expected to learn how to please and serve her husband according to his liking (Fernea, 29). After this period the bride is expected to become pregnant and the bride and groom will move to the groom's father's home. After some months of living in the father's home the groom is expected, in most cases, to move to a city in order to earn income to send home to support both his family and his Nog.

Nubia was a very remarkable civilization, and today Nubians are a remarkable people. It is unfortunate that they have been flooded out of their villages and so much of their civilization has been relocated to other locations and museums. It is very clear that the people of Nubia were

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strong enough to survive this long with their culture and tribal lifestyles constantly being disrupted. Nubians are a particular tribe, in which customs and respect are highly praised and modesty and grace are sought after.

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