

Economic Systems Overview

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Agriculture was very important to both kingdoms. Egypt grew more crops than Kush, but Kush grew a greater variety of crops. Kush relied more on livestock (dairy products and meat) than Egypt did.

In Egypt and Kush, most people were farmers. Some people made things or were craft workers. Craft workers in Egypt were famous for their linen clothing and paper. Craft workers in Kush were famous for their iron tools and leather.

Large marketplaces developed in both kingdoms so that people could trade the things they had grown or made.

Egypt and Kush did not use money to buy things. (The Romans came up with the idea of money in this part of the world.) Instead, people used a barter system, or traded things, to get what they needed. Farmers, craft workers, doctors, scribes, priests, and nobles usually received a certain amount of grain for the work they did, or for the things they made. Sometimes they were paid in bread, jewelry, or animals.

Most slaves in Egypt and Nubia worked for a royal or temple estate. When slaves were owned by a family, for example, as a reward for military service, they were sometimes adopted and freed by that family. Slaves were mostly prisoners of war, or else they had been slaves for many generations, owned by a family and passed on from parents to children, just like a valuable business or piece of art.

Mineral resources were important to both Egypt and Kush. Egypt produced copper, stone, and natron (salt). Kush produced gold and iron.

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The rulers in both Egypt and Kush collected and stored the surplus grain. The people could pay their taxes in grain, and grain was traded with other countries. Grain was also given in tribute to the rulers.

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A king or queen ruled over Kush and over Egypt. The ruler of Egypt was called “pharaoh.” In both Egypt and Kush, the ruler had great power and prestige. The wealth and power of the Egyptian rulers came from the surplus of grain produced. Kush rulers gained power through their control of trade, as well as relying on agricultural surpluses.

The rulers of Egypt and Kush appointed people to help them govern the kingdom. The most important position was the Vizier (**viz**-eer). The Vizier carried out the orders of the ruler and was the only person that could speak directly to the ruler. Other people spoke to the Vizier.

Egypt and Kush divided their land into districts, called “*nomes*”. There were forty-two nomes in the kingdom of Egypt. During the New Kingdom, Wawat (northern Kush) was divided into three districts and southern Kush was divided into seven, for a total of 10. The ruler appointed a governor to oversee each nome.

Scribes kept all the records in Kush and in Egypt. In Egypt, scribes calculated how much tax everyone owed and they collected the taxes.

Everyone in Egypt paid a tax to the kingdom and the royal family. The taxes were actually presented as tribute (a gift) to the king. People could also pay their taxes in goods or in labor. People in Kush gave tributes to the ruler, instead of paying a tax.

The majority of the people in Egypt and Kush had no voice in their government. They did not own the land on which they worked or lived. The ruler or nobles owned most of the land. However, in Egypt, some land was owned by ordinary people in smaller holdings. Cities were places for business or religious celebration. Although most people in Kush and Egypt lived in small villages outside the cities, some Egyptian cities had large populations.

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People in Egypt and Kush believed in many gods. They believed that these gods controlled the natural systems (for example, the Sun and the Nile). The gods also provided moral guidelines. For example, the goddess Maat symbolized order and right; the god Thoth was the patron of learning; and Shesat the patroness of libraries.

In both Egypt and Kush, the ruler was believed to be the child of the Sun god, Amon-Ra. The ruler was the link between the people and the gods. Priests organized the people living in both kingdoms. They helped them grow food and make things that they shared with the gods.

The rulers of Egypt and Kush built large monuments and temples to honor and serve the gods.

The people of Egypt and Kush believed in an “afterlife.” They buried useful and valuable things in the graves with the dead so that the dead could use them in the afterlife. Some Egyptian and Kushite rulers buried people and animals with the dead to help them in the afterlife.

During the New Kingdom, the wealthiest Egyptians were buried under pyramids, while kings and queens were buried in special cemeteries (Valley of Kings and Valley of Queens) without pyramids. In Kush, anyone could be buried under a pyramid.

Priests served the gods in Egypt and Kush. The most powerful priests advised the rulers. Each *nome* had its own patron deities, usually a family of gods (father, mother, child). Some of the more important gods, like Horus, were worshipped at more than one place. Priests ran the temples. They also helped organize the daily life of the people.

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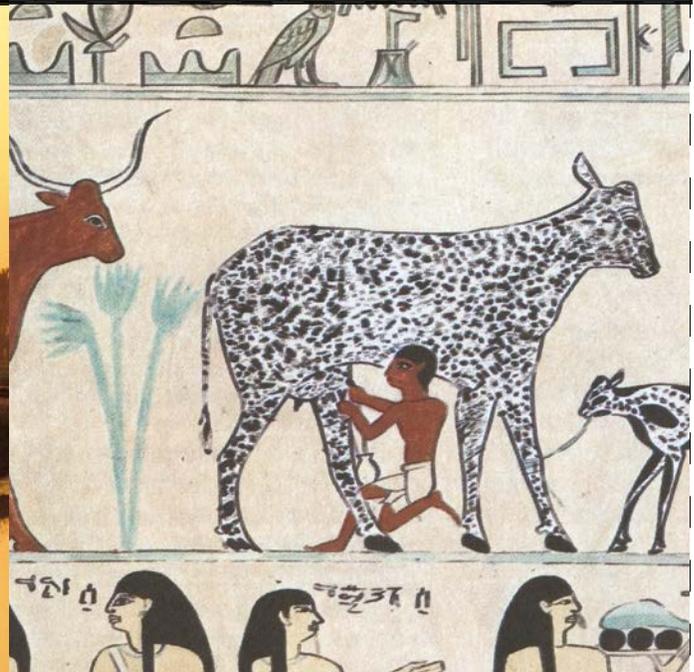
Wheat and barley were the most popular crops grown, used, and sold in Egypt. Kush grew mostly barley, millet, and sorghum.



Trade in Egypt and Kush connected African communities to European and Middle Eastern communities. Kush traded mostly with Egypt and with other kingdoms to the south. Egypt traded with Kush and with other kingdoms in the Middle East and Europe.



Dates and oases were so valuable in Kush that the orchards were passed from parents to children.



Kushites used many different animals for food and farming. They were famous for their fast horses.

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Kush's soldiers were famous for their archery skills. Egyptian soldiers were better with spears.



Egyptian rulers built many fortresses along the Nile where soldiers lived and trained.



The people in Egypt paid taxes to the pharaohs. They usually paid the tax with grain or animals.

Both men and women ruled Egypt and Kush at different times.

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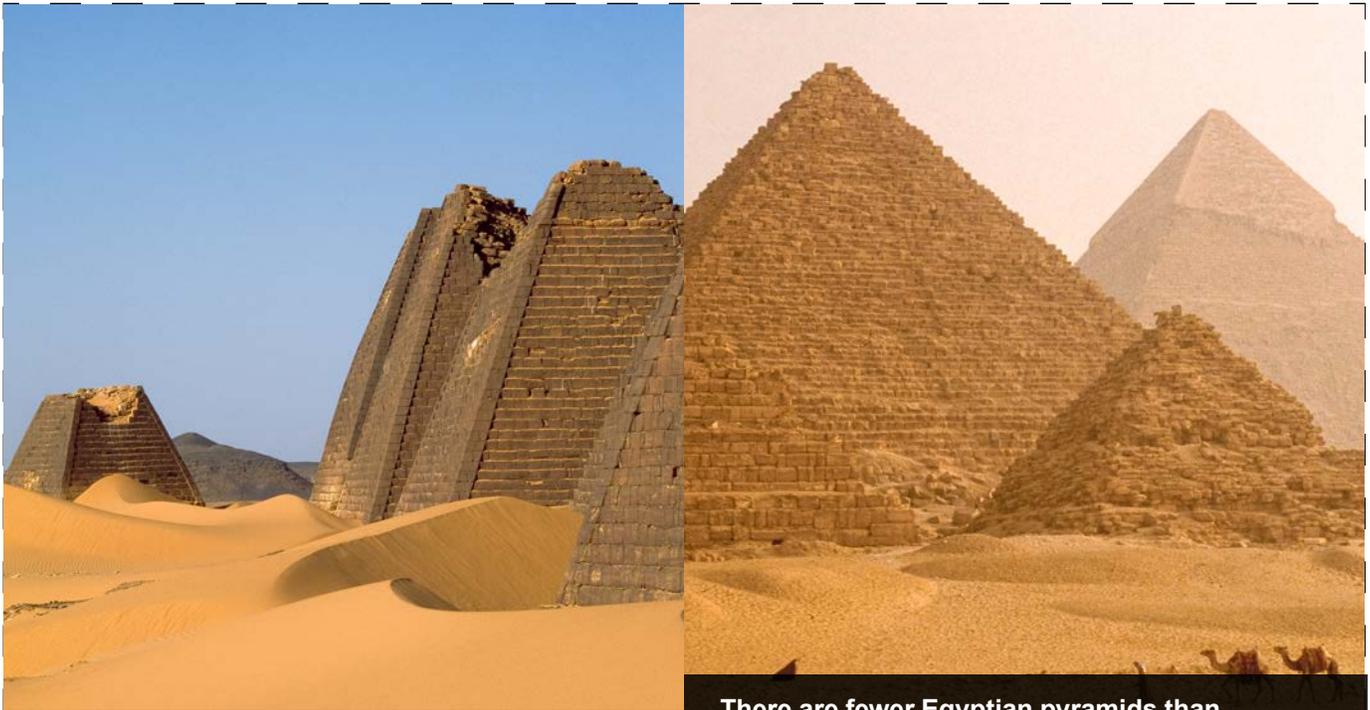
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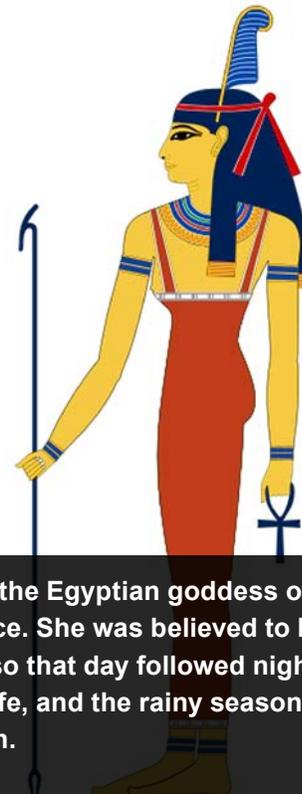


The pyramids built by the Kushites have steeper sides than those built by the Egyptians.

There are fewer Egyptian pyramids than Kushite pyramids because, at some point, Egyptians stopped building them.



Lion gods were important in both Kush and Egypt, but they represented different things. In Egypt, the lion goddess, Tefnut, was the daughter of Amon-Ra. She controlled the wind and rain. In Kush, the lion god, Apedemek, was a warrior and the son of Amon-Ra.



Ma'at was the Egyptian goddess of fairness and balance. She was believed to be in control of nature so that day followed night, death followed life, and the rainy season followed the dry season.

Chapter 1: The Old Kingdom (3000–2150 BCE)

During the Old Kingdom, Egypt's first kings built the Great Pyramids and the Sphinx at Giza. They also began trading linen for leather goods and gold with Kush. Farmers in Egypt traded their grain with the cattle-herding people of Kush. Trade was mostly local, and goods moved up and down the Nile.

The kings in Kush united their people and established a capital city at Kerma. They controlled the river trade north to the Second Cataract. North of Kerma, Kushites herded cattle and grew some grain, but not enough to trade. Some Kushite warriors moved to Egypt and became soldiers in the Egyptian army.

Near the end of the Old Kingdom, Egypt tried to obtain control of all trade on the Nile. Egyptian soldiers began to take cattle and other goods that the Kushites brought north on the river. They also captured some Kushites and made them slaves.



Early during this period, the Kushite kings gained control of trade on the Nile from about the Fifth Cataract to the First Cataract. Their power increased, and all the tribes in Kush paid tribute to the ruler at Kerma.

About 2050 BCE, Egypt seized control of the gold mines in northern Kush. They built a series of forts between Aswan and the Second Cataract. They staffed the forts with Egyptian soldiers to protect these areas and to control the river trade.

Then, a group of people from the eastern Mediterranean, known as the Hyksos, took control of northern Egypt. Whether the Egyptians had forced the Hyksos to come and live in Egypt or they had come of their own choosing, no one knows. However, by 1680 BCE, the Hyksos had taken control of Egypt, from the delta to Thebes in the south. The Hyksos signed treaties of alliance with the Kushite ruler, and together they planned to take over Thebes and rule all of Egypt.

Chapter 2: The Middle Kingdom (2050–1750 BCE)

Chapter 3: The New Kingdom (1550–1150 BCE)

First, the Egyptian kings from Thebes drove the Hyksos out of northern Egypt. They expanded their kingdom all the way into the Middle East. Then, the Egyptians conquered Kush all the way to Nepata. Led by Thutmose I, they defeated the Kushite army and sacked the capital at Kerma in 1502 BCE.

This was the age of the great pharaohs in Egypt—Akhenaton and his wife, Nefertiti, Tutankhamen, and Ramses II. The Egyptians built huge temples to the god Amon-Ra at Abu Simbel and Gebel Barkal, both in what was once Kush territory.

Egypt ruled most of Kush as a province. The pharaohs collected taxes from the Kushites and they controlled all trade passing through Kush. Kush royalty sent their young sons to Thebes. There, they attended Egyptian schools, spoke Egyptian, dressed as Egyptians, and ate Egyptian food. Egyptian royalty married Kush royalty. Even the common Kushites began to use Egyptian customs. This pattern continued for about 400 years.



The Egyptian empire became too big to rule. Nobles from different parts of the empire declared themselves “pharaoh,” often at the same time. The Egyptians began to fight among themselves, trying to control pieces of the empire.

Meanwhile, the Kushite kings united the cities of Kerma, Meroe, and Nepata. They took control of the Nile as far north as Thebes. In 750 BCE, a Kush king named Kashta took control of the city of Thebes and defeated the Egyptian “pharaoh” from Memphis. Kashta’s son, Piye (Pie-yay) gained control of all of Egypt and ruled as pharaoh.

Kush kings ruled over Egypt for the next 80 years. They rebuilt temples and monuments and built many new buildings. They also controlled all trade and travel on the Nile.

During this time, a powerful new kingdom was emerging in the east—the Assyrians. They controlled almost all of Arabia, and Kush and Assyria began to compete for control of the Mediterranean Sea.

Chapter 4: The Rise of Kush (1100–671 BCE)

Chapter 5: Invasion and Alliances (671 BCE–300 CE)

In 671 BCE, the Assyrians invaded and conquered Egypt. They drove the Kushites back to Nepata. Assyrian control over Egypt did not last long. By 332 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered Egypt, adding it to his empire. After that, Rome and then Byzantium controlled Egypt. They used Egypt's lands to grow large amounts of grain, which they shipped to the Roman and Byzantine capitals. The Nile became the main "highway" of trade between central Africa and the Mediterranean Sea. About 300 CE, the kings of Kush moved their capital to Meroe. The Kushites used the large iron deposits near Meroe to make many iron tools and weapons. These they traded to kingdoms in the east, south, and west.

The kings at Meroe signed a treaty with Rome. Roman soldiers began protecting trade caravans from Meroe to Alexandria. The nobles of Kush developed their own alphabet and written language, using an alphabet based on Egyptian hieroglyphs. Members of the royal families of Kush began to marry into African kingdoms to the south.

