Section 5
The Cultures of Nubia

Chapter 3
Ancient Egypt and Nubia
Objectives

- Examine the relationship between Nubia and Egypt.
- Learn about the Nubian kingdoms centered in Kerma, Napata, and Meroe.
Key Terms

- **ore** – a mineral or a combination of minerals mined for the production of metals
- **Lower Nubia** – the region of ancient Nubia between the first and second Nile cataracts
Upper Nubia – the region of ancient Nubia between the second and sixth Nile cataracts

artisan – a worker who is skilled in crafting goods by hand
In 690 B.C., Taharka, the greatest ruler of his dynasty, was crowned king of both Nubia and Egypt.

Taharka’s mother journeyed 1200 miles from Nubia to Memphis to see his coronation.
Archaeologists have found pottery, weapons, and jewelry at Nubian burial sites dating back to 6000 B.C.

There was also evidence of trading.
The region of Nubia was located south of ancient Egypt, beyond the first cataract of the Nile River.

For most of their long history, Nubia and Egypt were peaceful, friendly neighbors.
The Egyptians called Nubia “Ta Sety”, the land of the bow.

The Nubian archers were so skilled that the Egyptians hired them for their armies.
Egypt valued Nubia for its rich mineral resources such as gold, copper, and iron ore.

Because of its location, Nubia became a bridge for goods traveling between central Africa and Egypt.
Powerful kingdoms rose in Upper Nubia, the region between the second and sixth Nile cataracts, rivaling Egypt for control of land.

The most powerful of these kingdoms were in the cities of Kerma, Napata, and Meroe, ruled by Kushites, people who lived in southern Nubia.
Why did Nubia and Egypt become rivals?

Nubia and Egypt became rivals due to Nubia’s strategic location as a bridge or gateway for goods traveling between central Africa and Egypt. Nubia also had rich mineral resources, such as gold, copper, and iron ore. Three powerful kingdoms rose in Upper Nubia and began to challenge Egypt for control of the land.
Because Egypt was weakening, by about 1600 B.C., the Kushite kingdom had expanded from the city of Kerma into parts of southern Egypt.

These Nubians are known as the Kermite culture and their kingdom lasted from about 2000 to 1500 B.C.
Kerma’s Wealth

Kerma gained wealth and power by controlling the trade between Central Africa and Egypt.

Kerma devoted much energy and resources to royal burials, burying their kings in mounds of earth as large as football fields.

The kings’ bodies rested on gold-covered beds surrounded by jewelry, gold, and ivory.
Conflict With Egypt

Around 1500 B.C., Pharaoh Thutmose I sent his armies into Nubia for a war that lasted about fifty years.

The Egyptians took control of Nubia as far as the fourth cataract for the next 700 years.

During this period, the Nubians adopted many Egyptian ways and the two cultures became mixed.
What were some characteristics of Kerma?

Some characteristics of Kerma:
- Its artisans who made highly prized pottery,
- devotion of a lot of energy to royal burials, and
- Kerma losing a 50-year war with Egypt and coming under its control which led to them adopting some aspects of Egyptian culture.
In the land called Kush, south of Kerma lay the Nubian cities of Napata and Meroe.

After centuries of Egyptian rule, the Kushites rose again to power centering their kingdom in the Nubian city of Napata and then later in Meroe.
In the late 700’s B.C., the Kushites expanded their power into Egypt.

They moved their capital city to Thebes and then to Memphis.

By the time Taharka became pharaoh, the Nubians controlled all of Egypt.
The pharaohs of Egypt’s Twenty-fifth dynasty were Nubians.

The Napatan kings admired Egyptian culture and they brought back many old Egyptian ways and preserved them.

The rule of the Napatan kings did not last long; about 660 B.C., they were forced back into Nubia.

The Nubians never again controlled Egyptian land.
After moving south of Egypt’s reach, the Nubians founded a royal court in the ancient city of Meroe which became the center of an empire that included much of Nubia and stretched into central Africa.
The desert east of Meroe held large deposits of iron ore which the Nubians used to make weapons and tools such as iron plows allowing them to produce generous supplies of food and iron weapons allowing them to control trade routes that ran all the way to the Red Sea.
Today, Meroe remains largely a mystery.

The Nubians of Meroe created their own system of hieroglyphic writing, but scholars have been unable to fully understand these writings.
Meroe began to weaken in the A.D. 200’s and it fell to the Africa kingdom of Axum in the next century.

Features of Nubian culture have lasted for 3500 years.

To this day, Nubian styles of pottery, furniture, jewelry, braided hairstyles, and clothing survive among people of the modern-day African country of Sudan.
Women held very high status in Nubian society.

Most often, the children of the ruler’s sister would be next in line for the throne.

Compared to Egypt, Nubia had many more women as rulers.
How did the people of Meroe use iron ore?

The people of Meroe used iron ore to make weapons and tools. Plows help them farm and weapons helped them control trade routes.
1. (a) What was the relationship between Egypt and Nubia?

At first, they were friendly and traded goods. In time they became competitive, struggling over power and control of the land.
1. (b) How did the Nubians and the Egyptians borrow from each other’s cultures?

The Nubians adopted many Egyptian gods and traditional ceremonies.

Many Nubian artifacts were found in tombs of Egyptian pharaohs.
2. (a) What were the resources of Kerma?
   The work of its artisans (jewelry and pottery) and its geography for trade routes and minerals.

2. (b) What part did Kerma’s wealth play in its conflict with Egypt?
   Because Kerma was wealthy when Egypt was weak, Kerma was able to conquer and expand into southern Egypt.
3. (a) How are the histories of Napata and Meroe tied to Egypt?

Napata conquered Egypt at a weak point in its history.
Napatan rule restored and preserved many old Egyptian ways.
Egypt traded with both Meroe and Napata, benefiting from their resources.
3. (b) What signs of Nubian culture exist in Africa today?
Do you think present-day Africans are likely to be interested in Nubian culture? Explain why or why not.

Nubian culture can still be found in styles of pottery, furniture, jewelry, and fashion. They would be interested in Nubian culture because it was part of Africa’s history and remnants may still exist in their culture today.