



Lesson Plan Companion (Teacher Handout + Unabridged Background Information)

Ancient Egypt in its many instances was undeniably a superpower of Antiquity, however traditionally, this role focused on Egypt somewhat apart from its African context, putting emphasis on its relationship with the rest of the ancient Mediterranean. Furthermore, the eclipsing of Egypt's powerful African neighbours such as the Kingdom of Kush leaves much to be desired in the pursuit of an answer to the question of what the role of Africans in antiquity was. This undeniably excludes the viewing of Egypt and its closest neighbours as distinctly African states of the ancient world, leaving people of African ancestry with an unacceptable level of representation in the study of antiquity. The Ancient Egyptian 25th Dynasty, a group of rulers from the Kingdom of Kush (modern day Sudan), who were not only significant in their expansion and consolidation of power but in the lasting legacy they left behind in Egyptian ancient history are a prime example of the integral role Africans played in the politics, culture, and religion of the ancient world and whose place we strongly believe must be further promoted in the field of Ancient History and Classics.

This lesson plan will aim to educate children on how the Sudanese 25th dynasty of Egypt emerged out of Nubia to rule one of the oldest and most important states in the history of human civilization.

Key Vocab

- **Kingdom of Kush-** The Kingdom of Kush was established in the region of Nubia (Now modern-day Sudan), whose cultural history extended as far back as 2500 BCE with the Kerma culture. It was brought under the sway of the Egyptian New Kingdom around 1500 BCE and became culturally Egyptianized to a large extent, developing a strong connection to the Egyptian god Amun who was believed to inhabit the holy mount Jebel Barkal¹. The area however, retained a distinct local culture and Nubians from the region were often shown in Egyptian artistic works with “darker skin and a cropped hairstyle”², this indicating a distinctly African identity as opposed to the later Near Eastern and still later Hellenistic genetic influence present further down the timeline owing to invasions from the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. The kingdom was intrinsically linked with neighbouring Egypt to the North and during the 25th Dynasty its kings reigned as Pharaohs over Egypt.
- **Stela-** A stone slab, usually decorated and inscribed with text used for “dedication, commemoration, and demarcation”³, in this case referring to the victory Stela of King Piye, commemorating his campaign in Egypt.
- **Dynasty-** Family of rulers.
- **Amun-** The Egyptian King of the Gods, by the time of the 25th dynasty, closely linked to the practice of Egyptian politics and central to Piye's invasion of Egypt in part owing

¹ National Geographic: <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/kingdoms-kush/#:~:text=The%20Kingdom%20of%20Kush%20is,Kerma%2C%20Napata%2C%20and%20Mero%3%AB.&text=Kerma%20was%20the%20most%20powerful,2450%20BCE%20and%201450%20BCE.>

² National Geographic: <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/kingdoms-kush/#:~:text=The%20Kingdom%20of%20Kush%20is,Kerma%2C%20Napata%2C%20and%20Mero%3%AB.&text=Kerma%20was%20the%20most%20powerful,2450%20BCE%20and%201450%20BCE.>

³ Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/stela>



to his significance in Kushite religious tradition in his relation to mount Jebel Barkal which the Egyptians “declared to be the god’s southern home”⁴.

- **Upper Egypt-** Region of Egypt consisting of “the entire Nile river valley from Cairo South to Lake Nasser”⁵ (Though neither Cairo nor Lake Nasser would have existed during the 25th dynasty)
- **Lower Egypt-** Region of Egypt “consisting primarily of the triangular Nile River delta region”⁶

(Upper and Lower Egypt depicted on a map below, Image taken from: <https://www.worldhistory.org/egypt/>)



- **Nubia-** Region of ancient Africa spanning from “near the first cataract” of the Nile “in Upper Egypt” to the modern Sudanese Capital of Khartoum in the south⁷, the Kingdom of Kush was located within Nubia.
- **Napata-** Kushite capital.
- **Nile Delta-** The triangular fertile area of the Nile whereupon it meets the Mediterranean sea in Lower Egypt.
- **Coalition-** In the case of Tefnakht I, a temporary union of petty rulers from the broad area of the Nile Delta assembled to resist the Kushite invasion.
- **Third Intermediate Period-** The period of discord and chaos following the collapse of the Egyptian New Kingdom lasting from c. 1069 BCE and running to the 656 BCE⁸. The period was characterised by Egypt not being unified under a single ruler, although some scholars disagree, the 25th dynasty is generally included in this period.

⁴ Archaeology- <https://www.archaeology.org/issues/174-1505/features/3146-sudan-nubia-dangeil-cult-of-amun-ra>

⁵ Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Upper-Egypt>

⁶ Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lower-Egypt>

⁷ Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nubia>

⁸ ‘The Chronology of Ancient Egypt’ by K. A. Kitchen in the *World Archaeology Journal*: https://www-jstor-org.bris.idm.oclc.org/stable/124743?seq=6#metadata_info_tab_contents



Piye's Invasion of Egypt

- Before the Kushite invasion, Egypt's overall ruler had been uncertain as many smaller chiefs and princes some of whom came from the 23rd, 22nd and 24th Egyptian dynasties had argued over who would become Pharaoh. Tefnakht, a Libyan Prince from the Sais region wanted to expand his power past his capital of Sais and become ruler of upper Egypt. By contrast, the Kingdom of Kush was a powerful kingdom with connections to Upper Egypt especially running back centuries. When threatened, the Kushites would undoubtedly strike back, especially as King Piye likely "saw it as his duty to liberate Egypt...from what he considered to be the forces of barbarism"⁹.

Piye's Campaign According to the Victory Stela¹⁰:

- Piye is warned of the advance of Tefnakht and his allies southwards.
- Piye Assembles his army and prepares for war
- Piye orders his men to ritually cleanse themselves in the waters at the Temple of Karnak following which his army swear allegiance to him.
- Piye's army defeats a fleet of coalition ships on the Nile sending prisoners back to Napata.
- The tablet then records a list of enemies to the North including Piye's former ally, King Namlot of Heliopolis.
- Piye fights another battle, this time on land near the city of Herakleopolis, they gain a victory and forces his enemies to retreat.
- Piye's army besieges Hermopolis and Piye himself, who up until this point had remained in the South, upon hearing of his enemy's retreat, travels North.
- The tablet makes further mention of victory being sanctioned by the god Amun
- Piye conquers three more strongholds and takes prisoners
- After prolonged besiegement, Hermopolis surrenders to Piye's forces.
- The ruler of Herakleopolis affirms his own loyalty by offering tribute to Piye.
- Three more cities surrender to Piye's army.
- Piye reaches Memphis and demands its' surrender.
- Memphis refuses to surrender and Tefnakht reinforces his defences.
- Piye launches an assault on Memphis using commandeered ships and boats to attack the harbour.
- Memphis falls and many of the Nile River Delta rulers also fall to Piye.
- Piye visits Heliopolis and performs various religious ceremonies.
- Piye visits Athribis and performs further religious ceremonies.
- Mesed revolts but is swiftly defeated.
- Tefnakht surrenders to Piye through the sending of an envoy and swears and oath of allegiance to Piye.
- Piye accepts the surrenders of his last remaining opponents.
- Piye returns home to Kush with his plunder.

⁹ Digging into Africa's Past:

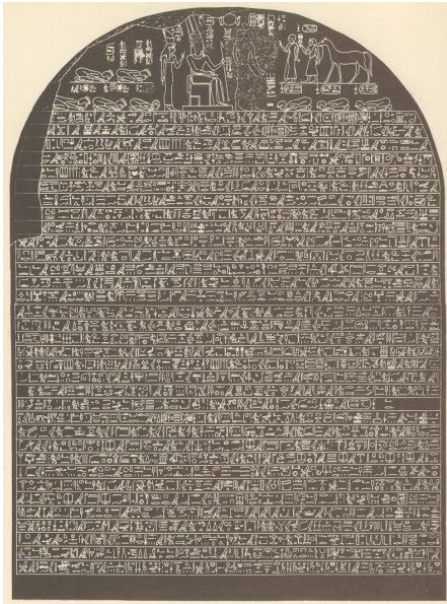
<https://web.archive.org/web/2007111210906/http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2007/870/heritage.htm>

¹⁰ Translation of Piye's Victory Stela abbreviated above: <http://www.attalus.org/egypt/piye.html>



negritudelearning@gmail.com

With his campaign a success, Piye returns home to Mount Barkal in Napata, enriched by the plunder of his campaign and rules until his death and burial following which his successor, Shebitku consolidated his predecessor's gains by conquering the rest of Egypt and uniting it under the 25th dynasty.



Piye's Victory Stela (pictured to the left). (Image used from the 'Africa Updates' twitter account:

<https://twitter.com/africaupdates/status/1205551571519582214?lang=hi>)

The best evidence we have for the ascension of the 25th Dynasty to power, written in hieroglyphics, the tablet presents the invasion as a holy war, making frequent mention of the god Amon and religious ceremonies to appease him. This would have legitimised the invasion to a degree, likely making it far easier to be accepted by the Egyptian population following the invasion on account of sharing the same religion.

Shebitku & Shabaka (716-690 BCE)

After King Piye's Egyptian campaign it was up to his successor to fully consolidate his gains.

Historians are unsure as to who actually succeeded King Piye; however, we know it was either Shabaka or Shebitku, with the most likely being Shebitku initially. According to David N. Edwards, Shabaka launched a campaign into Egypt at some point between 711 and 709 BCE following which he became Pharaoh at Memphis, Egypt's traditional capital¹¹, proceeding to forge trade links with the neighbouring Assyrian Empire under King Sargon II. We know this from archaeological evidence from Assyria (various modern day middle eastern states) bearing his name.¹² Shabaka funded several building programs at Memphis and Thebes and died in roughly 700 BCE, buried in the Royal cemetery of el-Kurru in the Kushite Homeland.¹³

Shebitku is also mentioned in the Assyrian epigraphic record as Edwards mentions, however all we really know of him is what can be gathered from "some small shrines and shrine extensions at Thebes" and his tomb in el-Kurru¹⁴, presumably relegating his importance in the achievements of the 25th Dynasty.

¹¹ The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan, Pg. 120

¹² The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan, Pg. 120

¹³ The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan, Pg. 120

¹⁴ The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan, Pg. 119 & 121



Taharqa (690-664 BCE)

Historians think Taharqa was probably a son of King Piye, becoming Pharaoh in roughly 690 BCE around the age of 25¹⁵. His architectural legacy outshone his predecessor through the sponsoring of major building programs in both Egypt and Nubia, most prominently in the Egyptian city of Thebes¹⁶. In 674 BCE, Taharqa fought a war with the Assyrian Empire under the rule of King Esarhaddon with Taharqa eventually defeating them. 671 BCE saw a new war with Assyria, this time the Assyrians were more successful, taking control of Memphis and even capturing Taharqa's heir and bringing him back to Assyria with them¹⁷, we know of this victory in part through the existence of another Stela, called the Victory Stela of Esarhaddon, recording the return of the Assyrian emperor to Assyria and written in Akkadian, an ancient Mesopotamian language¹⁸. In response to this Taharqa managed to retake Memphis and the Assyrian campaign lost its momentum owing to the death of their king. The ascension of the new Assyrian King, Ashurbanipal, spelt the beginning of the end for the 25th Dynasty with Taharqa once again losing Memphis and dying shortly after. Despite his losses, Taharqa ruled Egypt in a relatively prosperous period¹⁹.



Victory Stela of Esarhaddon (Pictured to the right).

Another example of a victory Stela proving a valuable source to knowing about this period of history. Similarly to Piye's Stela, Esarhaddon's also makes frequent mention of the deities he believes he owes his victories to, in this case being gods of the Mesopotamian east rather than Egyptian.

(Image used from Wikipedia page on the Stela:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victory_stele_of_Esarhaddon)

¹⁵ The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan, Pg. 121

¹⁶ The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan, Pg. 121

¹⁷ The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan, Pg. 121

¹⁸ Victory Stela of Esarhaddon Translation:

<https://www.kchanson.com/ANCDPCS/meso/victorystele.html>

¹⁹ The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan, Pg. 121



Tantamani (664-656 BCE²⁰)

Tantamani was a son of the Pharaoh Shabaka. He managed to recapture the city of Memphis and secure the loyalty of the princes of the Nile Delta, however, was defeated once again by Ashurbanipal in 663 BCE, who retook Memphis and captured and destroyed the city of Thebes²¹. While the Kingdom of Kush was able to retain some of its presence in upper Egypt, their rulers' time as Egyptian Pharaohs was at an end marking an end to the 25th Dynasty which had ruled for around a century.²²

What does the 25th Dynasty of Egypt say about the role of Africans in antiquity?

The 25th Kushite dynasty of Egypt thus the Kingdom of Kush are an example of one of the many powerful and influential African civilizations in the ancient world, the traditionally euro-centric study of antiquity means there is far less material on these groups than for say Rome or Greece. What we as historians can gather however, and what is clearly demonstrated by example of the 25th dynasty, is that Africans played a massive role in the ancient world and with this example particularly, from an era at which major European civilizations such as Rome, were still in their infancy.

²⁰ Digging into Africa's Past:

<https://web.archive.org/web/2007111210906/http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2007/870/heritage.htm>

²¹ The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan, Pg. 121

²² The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan, Pg. 121



Activities

1. Match a description of a character to their name:

King Piye	The Kushite Pharaoh we know least about.
Tefnakht I	The Kushite Pharaoh who first defeated the Assyrians.
Shebitku	The Kushite King who first invaded Egypt.
Shabaka	The last Pharaoh of the 25 th Dynasty
Taharqa	The Egyptian Pharaoh who ruled the Nile Delta Coalition
Tantamani	The Kushite Pharaoh who invaded Egypt again.

2. Find the points on the map referred to in the questions:

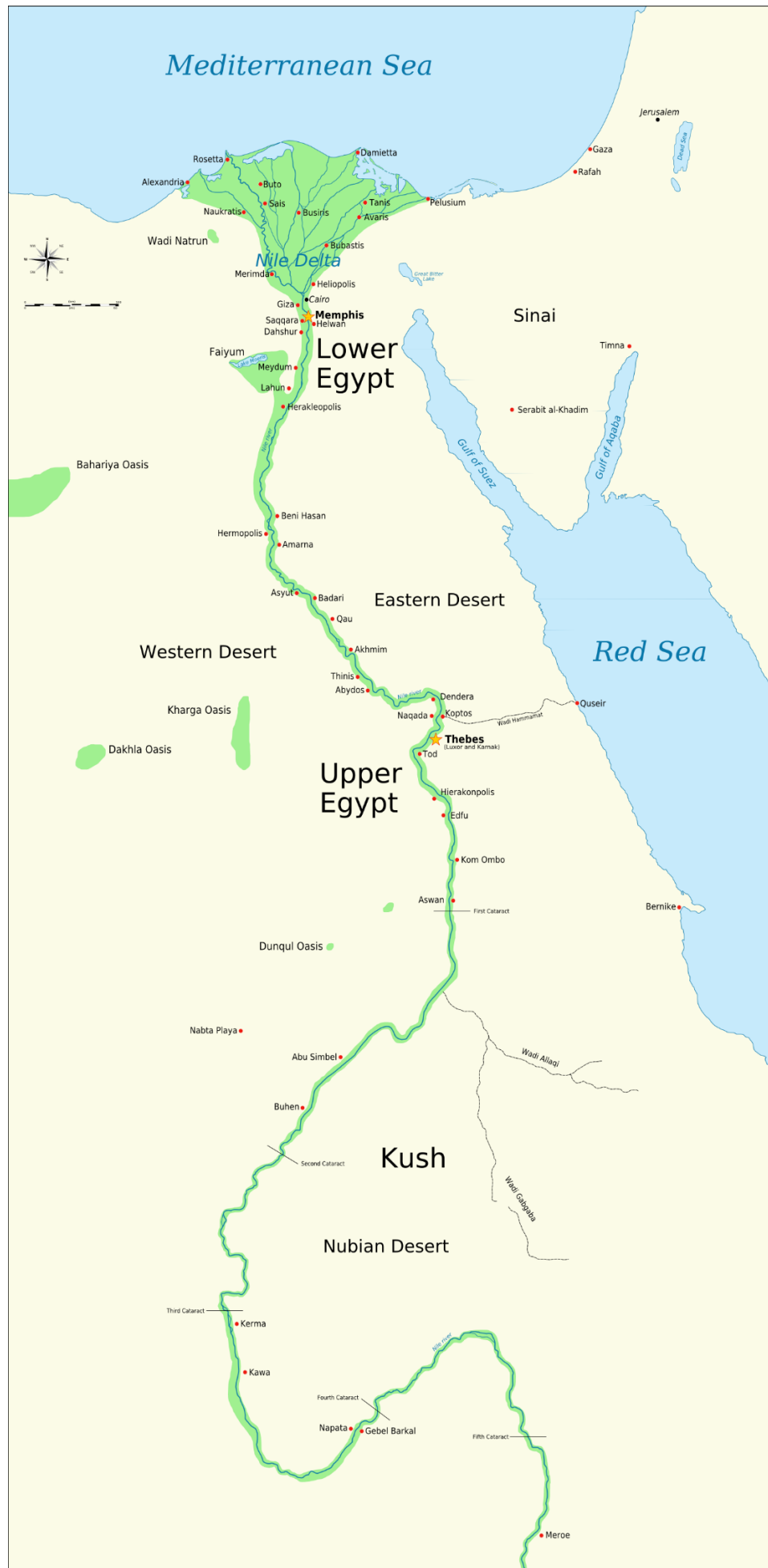
- Where was King Piye's capital?
= Napata, Kingdom of Kush
- Where did Tefnakht I rule from?
= Sais, Lower Egypt
- Where did Shabaka install himself as Pharaoh?
= Memphis, Lower Egypt
- Where did Taharqa sponsor building programs most prominently?
= Thebes
- Which two major towns did Piye besiege during his campaign?
= Hermopolis and Memphis.

3. Write a short story in the first person as a Kushite marching North with King Piye's army to invade Egypt, describing the journey.

Try to include the events described in the lesson, why are you marching? What will you achieve? Who are you fighting against? Who are you fighting for? What God are you fighting for?



negritudelearning@gmail.com



Map for Activity 2. (Image credit:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ancient_Egypt_main_map.png)



negritudelearning@gmail.com

Bibliography+ Useful Extra Material

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Britannica- Stela: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/stela>

Britannica- Upper Egypt: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Upper-Egypt>

Britannica- Lower Egypt: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lower-Egypt>

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Archaeology- The Cult of Amun (By Daniel Weiss): <https://www.archaeology.org/issues/174-1505/features/3146-sudan-nubia-dangeil-cult-of-amun-ra>

National Geographic- The Kingdom of Kush: <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/kingdoms-kush/#:~:text=The%20Kingdom%20of%20Kush%20is,Kerma%2C%20Napata%2C%20and%20Mero%C3%AB.&text=Kerma%20was%20the%20most%20powerful,2450%20BCE%20and%201450%20BCE>

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Documentary on the 25th Dynasty and Kingdom of Kush:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfqGa2RdEoU&ab_channel=Timeline-WorldHistoryDocumentaries