




5-1-1972

Contacts between Rome and Ancient Ethiopia

John Theodore Swanson
Butler University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ugtheses>

 Part of the [African History Commons](#), and the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Swanson, John Theodore, "Contacts between Rome and Ancient Ethiopia" (1972). *Undergraduate Honors Thesis Collection*. 288.

<https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ugtheses/288>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

CONTACTS BETWEEN ROME AND ANCIENT ETHIOPIA

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Classical Languages

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

and

The University Honors Committee

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation

Summa cum laude

With High Honors in Latin

John Theodore Swanson

May 1, 1972

D
701
Blanch
5917

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION. 1

CHAPTER II. CONTACTS BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND THE
MEDITERRANEAN WORLD (3000 B.C.-
400 A.D.) 6

CHAPTER III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LAND OF
KUSH (1000 B.C.-400 A.D.) 38

CHAPTER IV. CONTACTS BETWEEN ROME AND KUSH. 51
(50 B.C.-300 A.D.)
Military Contacts
Diplomatic Contacts
Commercial Contacts

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION. 67

MAPS 69
The River Nile from Thebes to
the Sudd
East Africa
North Africa

BIBLIOGRAPHY 71

I. INTRODUCTION

At the death of Augustus, Rome possessed four principal provinces in Africa: Numidia, Africa (Tunisia), Cyrenaica, and Egypt. Soon after, Mauretania as well would become a province, thus creating a sphere of direct Roman control stretching across the top of the African continent. These territories would become Rome's most valuable possessions, economically and culturally; their influence on Roman history, an influence not to be overlooked by historians, would be profound. Yet the narrow strip of land that was Roman Africa represents only a tiny portion of the vast bulk of the African continent, and there were peoples beyond the Roman frontiers who inhabited that continent and from time to time came into contact with Romans or with Roman subjects. These peoples were those whom the Greeks and the Romans called Ethiopians—"dark-skinned" or "black" men who lived in the desert or up the Nile or in the lands beyond. The history of the contacts between these peoples and the Romans has been somewhat overlooked by historians, despite the fact that there are numerous indications that these contacts were both

many and important. Admittedly, there is a dearth of contemporaneous evidence of relationships between Ethiopians and Romans, and it is also true that much more archaeological work must be done before we can even begin to describe the histories and cultures of most of the Ethiopian nations. However, the lack of these materials should not deter us from evaluating the records that are at hand; indeed, sufficient evidence does exist to permit us to sketch in a picture of the interrelationships of the Roman world with the ancient African world.

In this paper I shall concentrate in particular on the contacts between the Roman world and Ethiopia during the period 50 B.C. to 300 A.D.—from the time when Rome began to expand onto the African continent to the time of the effective beginning of Rome's decline. The term Ethiopian, as used by Greek and Roman alike, was applied indiscriminately to all of the dark-skinned dwellers of the desert and of the upper reaches of the Nile.¹ In our time, Ethiopia has come to mean a

¹Africanists and anthropologists today differ quite thoroughly over the ethnic and racial backgrounds of the classical Ethiopians since the term was applied to so many different peoples, including many whom scholars would prefer to distinguish from true Negro types. Yet the Romans and Greeks saw no need for such distinctions. To them, all dark-skinned peoples were Ethiopians, regardless of where in Africa they lived or of the degree of their pigmentation. Thus all of Africa below Roman territory was Ethiopia to the classical world. See Frank M. Snowden, Jr., Blacks in Antiquity (Cambridge:

very specific part of Africa, the area once known as Abyssinia, and the inhabitants of this region generally do not have the Negroid characteristics usually associated with the classical term "Ethiopian." However, in order to avoid confusion the word "Ethiopian" will be used in this paper with the purpose for which it was intended by the classical world, and similarly "Ethiopia" will refer to all of those lands south of Roman Africa and inhabited by Ethiopians—again the classical usage. When reference is made to the specific territory of the modern nation of Ethiopia, the term "Abyssinia" will be used.

Another definitional problem arises with the word "Sudan." Geographically, the Sudan is the broad belt of grasslands stretching across Africa below the Sahara Desert. But there is also a modern country known as the Sudan, located south of Egypt. Again to avoid confusion, the spelling "Soudan" will be used in this paper to describe the geographical grasslands. "Sudan" will refer to the territory enclosed by the borders of the modern nation of the same name.

The focus of this paper will be limited in a very important way: much of the consideration will be directed towards contacts between Rome and Kush, an

The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 1-29 for a discussion of this point.

Ethiopian kingdom which flourished during the period 750 B.C. to 200 A.D. and which was located in the general area of the Dongola Reach of the Nile.² A number of comments will also be made with regard to contacts between all of Ethiopia and not only Rome but also the pre-Roman Mediterranean world. However, much of this paper will be devoted to Rome and Kush in particular, because the Kushites were the Ethiopians with whom the Romans were best acquainted; thus they are the Ethiopians about whom the Romans spoke the most. In addition, we have a great deal of historical and archaeological information about Kush. The Kushites and their successors were often militarily and commercially involved with Rome, and these interrelationships were of some importance during the lifetime of the Roman Empire.

It is not my intention to study in this paper the relative status of the black man in Ancient Rome; that is a topic better left to others.³ Instead, I hope to re-emphasize the fact that Sub-Saharan Africa does have

²The area of the Kushite kingdom at its height probably included the stretch of the Nile Valley from the Second Cataract of the Nile to modern Khartoum. The Dongola Reach is specifically the great bend of the Nile between the Third and Sixth Cataracts.

³See, in particular, Snowden, Blacks in Antiquity, pp. 101-218.

a history which predates the arrival of colonialism; consideration of the extent of Roman contacts with such essentially African—as opposed to Mediterranean—states as Kush reveals clearly that in classical times Africa did have a history of its own. It would be inaccurate to claim that these contacts extended directly into the heart of Africa for they most probably did not; yet to overlook the contacts that did occur would be to perpetuate an inaccuracy. Relationships between Rome and Ethiopia had a history which encompassed well over three centuries, and on that basis alone a consideration of those relationships is justified.

II. CONTACTS BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD (3000 B.C.- 400 A.D.)

Archaeological and historical evidence indicates that contacts between Ethiopia and the Mediterranean world predate the founding of the First Dynasty of Egypt and continue down to Roman times. If the specific contacts between Rome and Kush are to be adequately considered, we must first investigate some of these earlier contacts and the contacts of Rome with other parts of Ethiopia. Kush and Nubia¹ were integral parts of Egyptian history; Romans and Greeks were present on both the west and east coasts of Africa and may even have ventured across the Sahara; Phoenicians may have circumnavigated the African continent—these facts and others merit fuller discussion if we are to put Roman-Kush contacts into an historical perspective. Some of these contacts were very, very tenuous at best; yet they still merit some evaluation.

The history of Egypt begins with six major

¹Nubia is the term applied to that stretch of the Nile between Aswan (the First Cataract) and the Third Cataract. Nubia is divided into two parts, Lower Nubia (the First Cataract to the Second Cataract) and Upper Nubia (the Second Cataract to the Third). The term "Nubian" is often applied to all of the peoples of the northern Sudan and southern Egypt.

eras:² the Archaic Period (Dynasties I-III, 3200-2680 B.C.), the Old Kingdom (Dynasties IV-VI, 2680-2258 B.C.), the First Intermediate Period (Dynasties VII-X, 2258-2052 B.C.), the Middle Kingdom (Dynasties XI-XII, 2150-1785 B.C.), the Second Intermediate Period (Dynasties XIII-XVII, 1785-1580 B.C.), and the New Kingdom (Dynasties XVIII-XX, 1580-1085 B.C.). During the three kingdom periods, Egypt was governed by a strong, central administration. In the Old Kingdom, the age of the great pyramids of Giza, Saqqara, and Meydum, the government was centered at Memphis in the Nile Delta, while in both the Middle and New Kingdoms Thebes, a city far up the river, served as capital. Nubia was always in close contact with Egypt throughout these eras, but it was especially so during those times when strong pharaohs ruled Egypt. Indeed, the indications are that Lower Nubia was conquered by Egypt as early as the Old Kingdom and that Egyptian sway was extended over all of Nubia during both the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom. Upper Nubia may have been in Egyptian hands even earlier than Middle Kingdom times.³

² This listing is taken from Walter A. Fairservis, Jr., The Ancient Kingdoms of the Nile (New York: New American Library, 1962), pp. 95, 123-124, 165.

³ The following comments on the history of Egypt in the Sudan are synthesized from three works in particular: Fairservis, Kingdoms of the Nile; A. J. Arkell, A History of the Sudan to 1821 (London: The Athlone Press, 1961); and Walter B. Emery, Lost Land Emerging (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967).

There are a number of explanations for the interest which the pharaohs seemed to take in Nubia. First, it was the terminus of a major caravan trade that even then was bringing animals and minerals up from Central Africa. Control of Nubia gave Egypt control of this trade. Second, Nubia itself was rich in resources, particularly in gold and copper. Furthermore, it provided much of the vast quantities of rock that went into the construction of pyramids. However, the economic value of Nubia and the upper reaches of the Nile should not be overstated. This was generally a dry, agriculturally poor area inhabited by pastoralists, so that its economic value to Egypt probably did not extend beyond its mineral wealth. Third, the peoples who lived in the upper reaches of the Nile were potentially troublesome. They were nomadic types, primarily, and often raided into Egyptian territory. Therefore, control of Nubia became a military necessity; the truth of this statement is ably borne out by the remains of massive Egyptian fortresses which are scattered throughout Nubia.⁴ The fact that there

⁴For example, large forts were constructed at sites near Semna, Uronati, Faras, Iken, and Buhen, among others. Of these, Buhen was the largest, consisting of "an elaborate series of fortifications built on a rectangular plan, 172 by 160 meters, which enclosed a town containing domestic habitations, barrack buildings, workshops, a temple, and the governor's palace. . . . The elaborate defense system which enclosed the small

are so many of these structures and the fact that they were as strong as they were would suggest that the threat against which they were directed must have been a considerable one. However, while these forts certainly served the purpose of guarding and holding Nubia for Egypt, there is a great deal of doubt as to whether the defense of Egyptian colonists was also part of their duty; there is no evidence of extensive Egyptian colonization of the region. Probably only those Egyptians directly involved in the administration, commerce, or defense of the area actually resided in Nubia, and they only as long as their particular duties demanded.

Contact between Egypt and Nubia diminished during the intermediate periods of Egyptian history, since these were years in which disorganization prevailed within Egypt. The government became decentralized and the pharaohs could no longer maintain a strong military presence in Nubia. However, even during these periods contacts of sorts did continue. For example, there is indication that during the Second Intermediate Period, when Lower Egypt⁵ was under the control of the

town consisted of a massive brick wall, 4.8 meters thick and eleven meters high, relieved at intervals on its outer face with the usual projecting rectangular towers." Emery, Lost Land Emerging, pp. 197-198.

⁵Lower Egypt is the land of the Nile Delta. Upper Egypt is the southern half of Egypt.

barbarian Hyksos and the Egyptians were on the defensive, some Nubian chieftains formed an alliance with the invaders. On the other hand, later evidence suggests that Nubians fought in the service of the pharaohs who restored Egyptian power over the north in the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Dynasties. In fact, Nubian—that is, Ethiopian—archers and soldiers were common elements in the armies of nearly every pharaoh.

But Egyptian contacts with Ethiopia were not limited to Nubia. "With the increase of Egyptian prestige in Nubia, the way was open for exploration into the far south,"⁶ and Egyptian traders took advantage of these opportunities provided by control of Nubia. The earliest record of exploration that we have is that of a certain Harkhuf, a nobleman in the service initially of the Sixth Dynasty pharaoh Menera. This Harkhuf engaged in four expeditions to the far south, apparently travelling the caravan routes into the desert west of the Nile, once perhaps journeying as far as Darfur.⁷ On another occasion he brought back

⁶ Emery, Lost Land Emerging, p. 177.

⁷ At this time the desiccation of the Sahara was probably not as advanced as it is today, so these trails may not have traversed true desert. However, even if they did, these journeys would hardly have been impossible. See Arkell, History of Sudan, pp. 44-45.

from the south a "dancing dwarf" to amuse pharaoh.⁸

Trade with the south was pursued in other dynasties. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the sea voyage to the land of Punt—probably Somaliland—undertaken in the reign of Queen Hatshepsut of the Eighteenth Dynasty. On the walls of her mortuary temple (across the river from Thebes) is an account of the journey of five ships down the Red Sea to Punt, where a number of goods—myrrh in particular—were acquired. There is no reason to believe that such a voyage was atypical of the trading ventures conducted in the reigns of most of the strong pharaohs; indeed, there is some evidence which indicates that trade with Punt was carried on overland as well as by sea. That Egypt was acquainted with Punt and Darfur should not be taken as an indication that Egyptians wandered all over Africa; however, there can be little doubt that its contacts with those lands mentioned were quite extensive.

After the Twentieth Dynasty, Egypt underwent a

⁸The pharaoh was Pepi II, and in a letter to Harkhuf (which we have a record of) he said, "Thou hast said in this thy letter that thou hast brought a dancing dwarf of the god from the land of spirits, like that dwarf which the treasurer of the god, Burded, brought from Punt. . . . Thou hast said to my majesty: 'Never before has one like him been brought by any other. . . .'" Fairervis, Kingdoms of the Nile, p. 91. The dwarf may have been a pygmy or a bushman (bushmen also are short of stature).

steady decline and its contacts with Nubia and the south suffered accordingly. Moreover, this time Egypt would not return to the pinnacles of power it had achieved during the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms. With the exception of the Saite period,⁹ foreign powers dominated Egypt and were those who came into the most extensive contact with Ethiopians. Libyans conquered Egypt and ruled it from 950 to 730 B.C. They were driven out by Kush, which established a Nubian dynasty that controlled Egypt from 730 to 650 B.C.¹⁰ Next, Assyria invaded Egypt and ruled it for a very brief period, being itself soon replaced by the Saitic kings. Following this interlude, the Persians controlled Egypt for over a century (525-404 B.C.); the years from 400 to 332 B.C. saw a chaos that would only end with the arrival of Alexander the Great.

The Assyrians, the Saites, and the Persians all came into contact with Ethiopians—primarily with Kush. It was a Kushite dynasty which was driven out of Egypt by the Assyrians; the Kushites apparently had meddled in Asian affairs and had provoked the Assyrians into attacking them. Attack Assyria did, sacking Thebes and forcing the Kushites back into Nubia and the Sudan.

⁹The Twenty-sixth Dynasty was an Egyptian dynasty with its capital at Sais in the Nile Delta.

¹⁰See Chapter III.

The Kushites seem to have made an attempt to reconquer Egypt. Shortly after 600 B.C. the Saites and the Ethiopians clashed, and Psammetik II, the Saitic pharaoh, apparently succeeded in driving back the forces of Kush—he may even have invaded the Sudan himself, reaching and sacking Napata, the capital of Kush.¹¹

The Persians too became militarily involved with Kush. In 525 B.C. Cambyses defeated Psammetik III at the Battle of Pelusium, and Egypt thus became a Persian province. Apparently Cambyses was attracted by the wealth of the Ethiopians for he decided to conquer them too. Setting out with a large army, he foolishly attempted to march directly south through the desert so as to strike quickly and directly at the Kushites; the army got lost in the desert and ran short of provisions. With much of his army dead or dying, Cambyses was forced to give up the attempt.¹²

Cambyses was not the only foreign ruler of Egypt to become interested in Ethiopia. Similarly, the Ptolemies were drawn toward the south, and there is indication that Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.)

¹¹The evidence for this campaign is mostly in the form of inscriptions. See Arkell, History of Sudan, for a discussion of these inscriptions, pp. 144-146.

¹²Herodotus History iv. 17-27 gives us this account. Thus far no archaeological evidence has been uncovered to support his story—yet there is really no reason to assume that it is untrue.

mounted an expedition into Nubia, probably in order to control the gold mines and minerals of the area¹³ and perhaps to check the possibility of Kushitic or nomadic incursions into Upper Egypt. However, relations between Ptolemaic Egypt and Kush appear to have been reasonably friendly afterward, as indicated by the lack of recorded conflict (although during this time Lower Nubia was fluctuating between Kushite and Egyptian control).¹⁴ But Ptolemaic control of Egypt was ended by Rome in the First Century B.C., and with this, amicable relations between Egypt and Kush came (for a brief while) to a close.

Thus far, contacts between the Mediterranean world and Ethiopia have been considered only in terms of relationships with the Ethiopians dwelling specifically south of Egypt; the pattern of Roman relationships with this area and with this people will

¹³Diodorus Siculus Library of History i. 37.

¹⁴Another possible indication of friendly relations between the two powers is found in monumental remains in Lower Nubia. Temples at Philae and Dakka, for example, appear to have undergone construction under the auspices of Kush at one time and Egypt at another. "It has been suggested that this curious mixture of monumental effort by the Nubian and Egyptian rulers was an amicable arrangement; something in the nature of an exchange of courtesies." However, the author qualifies this comment by suggesting himself that the differences in style may be the result of alternating Egyptian-Kushite control of the area (which itself may have been an "amicable arrangement"). Emery, Lost Lands Emerging, p. 286.

be considered in a later chapter. At this point, our attention will be directed toward contacts between the Mediterranean lands and other areas and peoples of Ethiopia. In order to consider this topic most expeditiously, we shall arbitrarily investigate first the situation with regard to West Africa, next the situation with regard to the Central Sahara and the Soudan, and finally the situation with regard to East Africa.

When we speak of West Africa and its intrusion into the history of the classical world we are referring primarily to the West African coast and to the colonial and commercial enterprises of Phoenician and Carthaginian sailors along that coast. It is well established that Phoenician, Carthaginian, and Greek sailors had all ventured beyond the Pillars of Heracles by the Sixth Century B.C., attracted primarily by the amber trade that was flourishing on the west coast of Europe.¹⁵ There was less to attract merchants south of Gibraltar, but the Phoenicians and Carthaginians appear to have pioneered the West African coast anyhow. The Periplus of Hanno is the earliest description of the West African coast that we have; it had been engraved on a stele in the Temple of Cronos at Carthage, and a copy of it,

¹⁵See Walter W. Hyde, Ancient Greek Mariners (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 27-50, 117-155.

translated into Greek, has come down to us.

It pleased the Carthaginians that Hanno should voyage outside the Pillars of Hercules, and found cities of the Libyphoenicians. And he set forth with sixty ships of fifty oars and a multitude of men and women, to the number of thirty thousand, and with wheat and other provisions.¹⁶

According to the document, Hanno sailed south for a number of days, founding seven colonies (probably in the area of modern Morocco) before coming to a "river, very great and broad, which was full of crocodiles and hippopotami. . . ,"¹⁷ probably the Senegal River.¹⁸

The expedition continued southward, touching onto the coast occasionally but not coming into any real contact with the natives they saw there. They apparently reached a point on the coast of modern Sierra Leone before turning back because of dwindling supplies.

Most authorities agree that Hanno's Periplus describes a journey that actually took place; estimates on the date of this trip range from 570 to 470 B.C. However, there is no indication that the Carthaginians ever duplicated Hanno's voyage. The colonies along the Moroccan coast and one founded at the mouth of the Senegal River (if indeed that is the river that was

¹⁶The Periplus of Hanno, trans. Wilfred H. Schoff (Philadelphia: The Commercial Museum, 1912), p. 3.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁸See Schoff, Periplus of Hanno, for comments on the text. Also see Rhys Carpenter, Beyond the Pillars of Heracles (n.p.: The Delacorte Press, 1966), pp. 81-100, and E. H. Bunbury, A History of Ancient Geography (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), I, 332-333.

described by Hanno) were maintained at least until the end of the Second Punic War by the Carthaginians—and probably even afterward, either by the Romans or by the Carthaginians. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Carthaginians ventured any further south than the Senegal after 470 B.C.

Hanno did not sail in the waters beyond Sierra Leone; thus the question arises as to whether or not anyone else did. There are but a few accounts that would suggest penetration into the seas beyond this point, and the validity of these accounts cannot be ascertained. Probably the most famous of these tales is the story told by Herodotus of the circumnavigation of Africa by Phoenicians about the year 600 B.C.

Necos, king of Egypt. . . when he had made an end of digging the canal which leads from the Nile to the Arabian Gulf, sent Phoenicians in ships, charging them to sail on their return voyage past the Pillars of Heracles till they should come into the northern sea and so to Egypt. So the Phoenicians set out from the Red Sea and sailed the southern sea; whenever autumn came they would put in and sow the land, to whatever part of Libya they might come, and there await the harvest; then, having gathered in the crop, they sailed on, so that after two years had passed, it was in the third that they rounded the Pillars of Heracles and came to Egypt. There they said (what some may believe, though I do not) that in sailing round Libya they had the sun on their right hand.¹⁹

What makes this account particularly interesting is that it is sufficiently detailed to permit us to make some

¹⁹Herodotus History iv. 42.

conjectures on its validity. Numerous scholars have pointed out that the concept of the crews stopping and planting a crop is quite feasible, and that the time allotted by Herodotus for the journey would have been appropriate for the ships of those days, if indeed an attempt had been made to sail them around Africa. Other scholars have argued with great fervor that the types of vessels used by the Phoenicians could not possibly have survived such a voyage. Herodotus' closing remark has been eagerly noted by some as a verification of the voyage, for it is true that a ship sailing around the southern end of Africa, having crossed the Equator and travelling from east to west, would have the sun on its right hand. Herodotus probably would not have known this; therefore his critical attitude toward that fact tends to lend some credence to his basic story.²⁰ But of course, there is no way that his story can be truly authenticated, and even if this voyage did take place, it obviously did not have much effect on the pharaoh who ordered it in the first place or on anyone else, for we have no information that anyone ever attempted to duplicate the journey by acting upon the knowledge that the Phoenicians must have brought back with them.

There are, though, other tales of voyages down the West African coast which are much harder to verify

²⁰For commentary on this account, see Carpenter, Pillars of Heracles, pp. 70-78.

than the story of the Phoenician circumnavigation. Herodotus tells us of a Persian by the name of Sataspes, whom Xerxes had condemned to death as punishment for his raping of a young virgin. It seems that at the last moment Xerxes decided that death would be too easy a punishment for Sataspes, and so substituted a penalty worse than death: he ordered Sataspes to sail out of the Pillars of Heracles into the Western Ocean, down the coast of Africa, around the continent, and back to Persia through the Arabian Gulf. So Sataspes set out. In a journey that consumed many months, he sailed far down the West African coast, and is said to have stopped at one point along the shore and seen "a race of little men who wore palmleaf clothing" and fled into the hills at his approach.²¹ Finally, still on the coast of West Africa he came to a place where his ship would go no further, and so he turned around and sailed back to Persia the way he had come. He presented himself before Xerxes, who—alas for poor Sataspes—was very angry that the voyage had not been completed as ordered and, accepting no excuses, ordered now that Sataspes suffer the original punishment.

Herodotus, as usual, has told a delightful tale, but this may be a tale with some truth to it. The little

²¹Herodotus History iv. 43.

men seen by Sataspes could have been either pygmies or bushmen; although these are today found only in the most isolated parts of Africa, twenty-five hundred years ago they may have been more widely spread through the continent. And the reason that his ship might not have been able to progress any further at one point is that he may have sailed as far as the Gulf of Guinea, where he would have been met by a powerful counter-current caused by the prevailing winds.²² However, once more we are dealing in the realm of sheer conjecture.

There are not many other stories of journeys down the West African coast. There is one in Pliny's Naturalis Historia which tells us that the historian Polybius sailed down that coast; he too came to a river filled with crocodiles²³—reminiscent of Hanno's voyage. Polybius apparently was given the authority to undertake this journey by Scipio Aemilianus when the latter was engaged in his African campaign.

Between Sataspes and Polybius is a span of some three hundred years. If during this period some enterprising Carthaginian, Greek, or Roman ventured down the West African coast, we know nothing about his journey.

²²Carpenter, Pillars of Heracles, p. 80.

²³"... flumen Bambotum crocodilis et hippopotamis refertum." Pliny Naturalis Historia v. 1.

And after the time of Polybius there is only one other notable account of an effort to sail down that coast that can be considered to have taken place before 400 A.D. This voyage was made by a certain Eudoxus of Cyzicus, dated to the second half of the Second Century B.C.—only a few years after Polybius is supposed to have made his trip. Strabo tells us that this Eudoxus was a Greek merchant and that he had travelled to India and on his return had been blown off course. As a result, he stopped on the coast "south of Ethiopia" and was shown by the natives the figure-head of a ship which he determined could only have been built in Spain.²⁴ From this, he concluded that some Spanish ships had actually circumnavigated Africa from west to east; he then resolved to duplicate this voyage himself. He made one trip far down the West African coast and was apparently engaged in another when the account of his activities breaks off. Strabo says that the motivation behind Eudoxus' efforts was a desire to by-pass the duties imposed by Alexandrian tax-collectors on goods being shipped from India to the Mediterranean. At any rate, too little is told of his voyages to permit us to comment reliably upon them.

This is essentially all that we know about the

²⁴Strabo Geography ii. 4-5.

various efforts by the Mediterranean world to come into contact with Ethiopia by sailing down the West African coast or by circumnavigating the African continent. The accounts that we have are not many, and, putting aside the question of their veracity, none of them tells us a great deal about any of the indigenous peoples that might have been met on the various journeys. The problem lies in the fact that exploration by sea is not likely to reveal very much of the interior of any land mass. Furthermore, there were very few penetrations of the African continent by land from the west coast. In fact, there is but one account of an actual land expedition that penetrated beyond the Atlas Mountains and that is given by Pliny. He describes the march of a Roman army under the command of Suetonius Paulinus into Morocco and across the Atlas range. However, he tells us virtually nothing about any contacts Suetonius might have made with the peoples of the interior.²⁵

In sum, the classical world actually made few real contacts with Ethiopians in West Africa—at least, we only know of a few. Some colonies were established on the west coast, but we know next to nothing about

²⁵Pliny Naturalis Historia v. 1. Suetonius Paulinus was the father of the biographer of the Caesars. He was propraetor in Mauretania in 42 A.D.

their relationships with the peoples already on that coast or in the interior. What little activity there was that was undertaken by Mediterranean peoples in this area was essentially of an exploratory nature, principally by sea.

The situation in the Central Sahara and the Soudan was somewhat different, for this was a region of considerable commercial importance to the classical world. It was through the Central Sahara that the major trading routes connecting Central Africa with the Mediterranean passed. However, except for a few isolated cases we have no record of Romans or other Mediterranean peoples actually following these routes and penetrating into the Soudan. Most of the work of bringing goods across the desert was handled by middlemen—primarily by the Garamantes, a people with whom the Romans had considerable contact.

Whether or not the Garamantes were Ethiopians is a moot point—they "were designated by some authors as Ethiopians; by others they were distinguished from Ethiopians."²⁶ At any rate, the Garamantes inhabited the Fezzan, a relatively fertile area hundreds of miles south of Carthage and almost in the geographical center of the Sahara; the lands beyond the Fezzan were all

²⁶ Snowden, Blacks in Antiquity, p. 112.

considered parts of Ethiopia by classical writers. What is important for our purposes is that the Garamantes controlled the caravan routes from these southern territories, since most of the trails came north through the Fezzan. Therefore the Garamantes represented an important link between the Mediterranean world and Ethiopia. The Carthaginians traded with the Garamantes, although probably not as extensively as Rome later would. Carthage probably got much of what it wanted from the interior through its west coast colonies, although we cannot be sure of this.²⁷ The fact that carbuncles were present in ancient Carthage is the only evidence we have of any trans-Saharan trade in Carthaginian times.²⁸ However, without actually mentioning it as such, Herodotus seems to have described one of the possible routes to the south, a route which would have passed through the land of the Garamantes.²⁹ Apparently these trade routes were open

²⁷R. C. Law, "The Garamantes and Trans-Saharan Enterprise in Classical Times," Journal of African History, VIII (1967), 188.

²⁸Ibid., p. 186-188.

²⁹Herodotus' story involves a journey by some Nasamonian youths into the desert. They said that they reached a town after having passed through the land of the Garamantes, then the desert, and then a great marsh. The town was by a river in which crocodiles were visible (History ii. 32-36). Carpenter devotes a careful analysis to the details in this account and concludes that these Nasamonians (Nasamonians were a Libyan people)

in the Fifth Century B.C., and a caravan trade of which we are unaware may have been operating then. Regardless, we can be reasonably sure that the caravan trade was operating by the time that Rome had come into control of North Africa.

In 19 B.C., the Roman general Cornelius Balbus invaded the Fezzan, capturing a number of cities, including Garama, the capital of the Garamantes.³⁰ It is probable that this action was primarily punitive, since there is no record of permanent Roman occupation of Garama or the other towns; the specific objective of the campaign was to stop the Garamantes from hindering trade between the Mediterranean and the Fezzan.³¹ The fact that the Romans took such a step suggests that they considered that trade to be quite important. Indeed, it was so important that on at least

reached one of the ancient watercourses of Lake Chad; these watercourses have dried up over the last few thousand years (Pillars of Heracles, pp. 106-131). Law concludes that the route probably taken passed southwest from the Fezzan to the Niger River or to one of its since dried-up tributaries ("Trans-Saharan Enterprises," pp. 182-186). Both authors believe that a potential trade route was being described by Herodotus.

³⁰Pliny describes the campaign. After naming some of the towns of the Garamantes, he says, "Omnia armis Romanis superata et a Cornelio Balbo triumphata, uni huic omnium externo curru et Quiritium iure donato: luippe Gadibus genito civitas Romana cum Balbo maiore patruo data est." Naturalis Historia v. 5.

³¹"Ad Garamantes iter inexplicabile adhuc fuit latronibus gentis eius puteos. . . harenis operientibus." Pliny, Naturalis Historia v. 5.

two other occasions Romans actually set out into the desert beyond the land of the Garamantes, apparently in order to secure the caravan routes from the incursions of nomads and brigands. The reports of these expeditions come to us at best second-hand, for the initial accounts were found in the works of the geographer Marinus of Tyre by Ptolemy,³² who repeated Marinus' stories in his own Geography. The first account involves "Septimius Flaccus, legatus Augusti pro praetore in command of the third legion, [who] setting out from Libya, advanced into Ethiopian territory, 'three months' beyond the land of the Garamantes. The exact extent of Flaccus' penetration into inner Africa is uncertain because neither the rate of his march nor the duration of his rests in the oases is known."³³ The other tale concerns one Julius Maternus, who set out "from Lepcis Magna [sic] and [journeyed] southwards from Garama in company with the king of the Garamantes, who was going against the Ethiopians, [and] in four months arrived in Agisymba, a land of the Ethiopians, where rhinoceroses gather."³⁴

³² Claudius Ptolemaeus, the Second Century A.D. astronomer, mathematician, and geographer.

³³ Snowden, Blacks in Antiquity, p. 141.

³⁴ Ptolemy, quoted by Law, "Trans-Saharan Enterprise," p. 193.

The location of Agisymba is obscure³⁵ but it appears that Maternus must have made it across the desert to a fertile area—perhaps the region about Lake Chad that Carpenter has selected as the terminus of the trans-Saharan trail described by Herodotus. Both of these expeditions took place in the waning years of the First Century A.D., and while Flaccus' trek has the appearance of a purely military outing, one led by a titled official, Maternus' expedition may have been essentially a trading venture. As far as we know, Julius Maternus had no official title; he may have been a civilian acting on his own. Admittedly, the specific account mentions that the Garamantes were "going against the Ethiopians," so perhaps there was a military purpose among the motivations behind the expedition. Maternus' role in the affair may nevertheless have been a commercial one.

Pliny's and Ptolemy's accounts are the only historical references we have to actual Roman operations in and beyond the Fezzan but they do suggest that the Romans took a great interest in this part of Africa. But these are not the only indications. Garama flourished during the early years of the Christian Era and the architectural remains of the capital of the

³⁵Ptolemy's location of Agisymba is probably wholly inaccurate, as is his description of most of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Garamantes show great Roman influence. It probably would not be unfair to say that at the height of the Roman Empire Garama was the capital of one of those wealthy tributary states that ringed the borders of Roman territory. Roman coins have been found even south of Garama, at Fort Polignac, Fort Platters, and Ti-m-Missao, and in these areas there are remains of structures that exhibit some of the characteristics of Roman architecture.³⁶

What was the trade that went on between Rome and Ethiopia over the Saharan trails? It certainly involved animals—the vast quantities of exotic species that were slaughtered in the arenas of Rome were usually of Ethiopian origin, brought up from Central Africa via the Sahara and the Fezzan.³⁷ Gold travelled the same route, as did ivory and slaves. In short, the trans-Saharan trade helped to enrich the Roman world and made a wealthy world capital out of Garama. Indeed, the prosperity of the Garamantes would endure until the

³⁶Law, "Trans-Saharan Enterprise," p. 197. Coin finds must be evaluated with care; they may mean nothing. Coins are very easily deposited (accidentally or on purpose) by later generations. Therefore, their discovery may not be a true indication of Roman presence or influence.

³⁷For examples of the numbers of animals that were killed in the arenas, see James Wellard, Lost Worlds of Africa (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1967), p. 67. Numerous classical authors refer to Ethiopia as a major source of animals for the arenas.

coming of Islam.³⁸

Thus in the Central Sahara the contacts between the Mediterranean world and Ethiopia were essentially trade contacts, contacts in which the Garamantes took part as important middle-men. Despite a limited amount of contemporaneous evidence, we have good reason to believe that these contacts were quite extensive. Trade by its very nature is a contact between peoples, and, although direct physical contact between Romans and Sub-Saharan Ethiopians was probably limited, there is no doubt that the trans-Saharan trade was important to the classical world.

Trade was also the keystone of relations between the Mediterranean world and East Africa, and we have in regard to this area perhaps our best contemporary evidence of Greco-Roman/Ethiopian relationships— with the exception of the area of Kush. Actually, down to the First Century A.D. the evidence of Greek and Roman activity in East Africa is rather sparse; what little evidence there is refers to other peoples of the Mediterranean. In the New Kingdom period of Egyptian history we have the record of trading voyages to Punt, and various Biblical passages suggest that the Hebrews and the Phoenicians engaged in similar trade down the

³⁸ See Wellard, Lost Worlds of Africa, pp. 63-78 for a more extensive commentary on the history and culture of the Garamantes.

Red Sea.³⁹ The objective of these journeys was surely the Somali coast and southern Arabia, both of which territories, at least after 1000 B.C., were controlled by a number of small but very wealthy Arabian coastal kingdoms. These southern Arabian states flourished for nearly two millenia as middle-men in the trade between India and Egypt.⁴⁰

By the First Century B.C., Greek merchants were undoubtedly also taking part in the lucrative Indian trade (the story of Eudoxus of Cyzicus, for example, suggests this). And furthermore,

The new conditions of peace and security which rose under the monarchy of Augustus fostered a fresh spirit of enterprise. The compelling motive of exploration was an unmixed love of gain arising from the rapid growth of wealth in Rome and the western provinces, which led to a demand for oriental luxuries on a scale unknown before. The Romans did not participate directly in the eastern trade, which they left in the hands of Greeks and others, but they backed the Greek merchants with their prestige and eventually also with their capital. Greek seafarers showed a new readiness to make long journeys into the unknown East.⁴¹

³⁹For example, i Kings 10: 26-28. "And King Solomon made a navy of ships . . . on the shore of the Red Sea And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold . . . , and brought it to King Solomon."

⁴⁰The Queen of Sheba, of Biblical fame, was probably from one of these lands. Ophir was undoubtedly either one of these kingdoms or a subject territory of these Arabs. See Basil Davidson, The Lost Cities of Africa (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1959), pp. 171-174.

⁴¹M. Cary and E. Warmington, The Ancient Explorers (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1963), pp. 73-74.

This new readiness undoubtedly had another source as well. Sometime in the first half of the First Century A.D., a Greek merchant-captain by the name of Hippalus, having marked the alternating directions of the prevailing monsoon winds in the Indian Ocean, sailed straight across the Indian Ocean from the entrance to the Red Sea to the coast of India. It was the first time that a sailor of one of the Mediterranean nations had taken advantage of the steady monsoon winds to avoid the long, arduous process of hugging the coasts of Arabia and Persia in order to reach India. The volume of trade with India increased substantially after Hippalus' exploit.⁴²

As the Mediterranean world became better acquainted with India, so did it also with the East African coast. The East African coastline became part of the circuit of the Indian Ocean trade. Indeed, the whole stretch of coast from Myos Hormos at the north end of the Red Sea to Rhapta, the last recorded port down the East African coast, was dotted with towns and harbors which provided many of the goods of Ethiopia—gold, ivory, animals, myrrh, rhinoceros horn—that

⁴²Hippalus' voyage is first mentioned in The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, trans. Wilfred Schoff (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), p. 45. The Arabians and the Persians were surely familiar with the nature of the monsoon winds, but they are not likely to have directly told Greek sailors anything about it. See Hyde, Greek Mariners, pp. 205-207.

made their way to Italy. Furthermore, we even have a record not only of these towns and ports but also of the major goods which each exported.

The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea is a document, apparently written by a Greek merchant residing in Alexandria sometime around 60 B.C.,⁴³ which describes two voyages and gives the itinerary of each. One of the voyages is down the east coast of the Red Sea and from thence eastward to India; the other, which is of particular interest to us, follows the west coast of the Red Sea southward and continues on south down the East African coast. The document has been described as a pilot's manual; yet regardless of its value in that regard it is for us a priceless description of the early history of the East African coast.⁴⁴

⁴³See Schoff, Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, pp. 7-16 for an analysis of the date and authorship of the Periplus.

⁴⁴For extensive commentary on the Periplus see Bunbury, History of Ancient Geography, II, 443-479; Hyde, Greek Mariners, pp. 208-232; and Schoff's notations on the Periplus, pp. 52-101. The document errs at a number of points with regard to the actual geography of the area (which suggests that the author had not himself made this journey but perhaps was repeating what he had heard about it from someone who had been down the East African coast) but the errors are not so serious as to deny the overall geographical accuracy of the whole document. The following comments in the text are a summarization of the African cruise as described in the Periplus, pp. 22-29.

The journey begins at the north end of the Red Sea, and the first two major ports reached are Berenice and Adulis, both on the Red Sea coast. After this, the author takes us further down that coast, stopping at a number of towns and finally rounding the Cape of Spices (the eastern tip of the African continent, today known as Cape Guardafui). A short distance beyond the cape is the town of Opone, which is praised for the quantity of cinnamon produced there and for the quality of its tortoise shell. Beyond Opone is a long stretch of coast in which there are no good harbors. Finally, the Island of Menuthias (which has been variously identified with Pemba Island and with Zanzibar) is reached. Two days' sail beyond this island is Rhapta,⁴⁵ the last market-town on the African coast. Here the author notes the presence of many Arabs, who have inter-married with the natives (who are not really described). He mentions that the chief exports of Rhapta are ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoise shell, and palm oil, and concludes his account by telling us that the coastline beyond Rhapta is unexplored.

⁴⁵There is great doubt as to the exact location of Rhapta. Some authors suggest that it is near modern Bagamoyo, others identify it with Pangani, and still others with Kilwa. The difficulty arises because the location of Menuthias Island is uncertain. However, regardless of its exact location, Rhapta can be generally sited on the East African coast in the vicinity of Pemba and Zanzibar.

The greatest value of the Periplus is that it indicates how extensive contacts between Rome (as represented by the Greek merchants in its service) and the east coast of Africa must have been; there can be little doubt that the route it describes was a well-travelled one. Indeed, there are some other accounts that at least support the fact of Greco-Roman presence on the East African coast in the First and Second Centuries A.D. Ptolemy mentions that a Greek sailor named Dioscurus sailed beyond Rhapta and reached a promontory which he named Prasum—perhaps Cape Delgado on the coast of modern Mozambique.⁴⁶ Another comment by Ptolemy strikes us as especially interesting:

Concerning the voyage from Aromata to Rhapta, Marinus tells us that a certain Diogenes, one of those who were accustomed to sail to India, having been driven out of his course, and being off the coast of Aromata [the spice region below Guardafui] was caught by the north wind, and after having sailed with Troglodytica [the eastern shore of Ethiopia] on his right, came in twenty-five days to the lake from which the Nile flows, to the south of which lies the promontory of Rhapta.⁴⁷

Nothing is said about Diogenes beyond this spare account. But if this story is true, it means that a Greek sailor, having been driven off course and down the East African coast, had beached and marched inland,

⁴⁶J. Oliver Thomson, History of Ancient Geography (Cambridge: The University Press, 1948), pp. 211-212.

⁴⁷From Ptolemy's Geography, quoted by Hyde, Greek Mariners, p. 285.

finally coming upon Lake Victoria, the chief source of the Nile, or to one of the other great East African lakes. And it also means that we must accord Diogenes a rank among the greatest explorers of all time. But even if the story is not true, we are still left with questions. Whether from Marinus or from the gossip of Greek sailors who had been down the African coast and had heard tales about the interior, Ptolemy had somehow learned of the existence of snow-covered mountains in the interior of Africa and of the existence of two large lakes from which the Nile flows, thus coming remarkably close to the solution of the problem of the Nile's source—seventeen hundred years before John Hanning Speke would discover Lake Victoria and Samuel Baker would come upon Lake Albert.⁴⁸ Ptolemy must have gotten this information from someone familiar with the situation on the East African coast, and while we cannot know who that person was, the fact that there must have been such a person further substantiates the presence of Romans and Greeks on the East African coast.

⁴⁸At one point in his Geography (iv. 7.7), Ptolemy says (in Latin translation), "Nilius . . . , quae ex lacubus duobus superius positis profluunt" At another (iv. 8.2), he says, "extenditur Lunae mons. a quo nivalem aquam accipiunt Nili lacus" His location of the lakes (by latitude and longitude) is not quite accurate, nor is his description of a range of snow-covered mountains stretching five hundred miles across East Africa. But there are some snow-covered mountains in East Africa (the Ruwenzori range, Mounts Kenya and Kilimanjaro) and two lakes, Victoria and Albert, are the principal sources of the Nile.

This literary evidence does suggest that the Greeks and Romans did sail along the eastern shores of Ethiopia. However, we do not have corresponding archaeological evidence to substantiate the point. No remains dating to classical times have been found on the East African coast, and while some Roman and Parthian coins have turned up in East Africa, no one knows exactly where or under what circumstances they were found, so the value of their testimony is dubious.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the weight of the literary evidence is such that we may say with great certainty that Rhapta and the other cities mentioned in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea did indeed exist, and that contacts between the Greco-Roman world and Ethiopia were extensive along the East African coast.

However, the record of these contacts, in addition to the fact that it is not as large as we would like, suffers from the same deficiency that plagues the records of similar contacts in the other parts of Ethiopia. We know something of the activities of the Mediterranean peoples in these contacts but we know almost nothing about the responses of the Ethiopians to these relationships, and the Egyptian, Phoenician, Greek, and Roman records that we have do nothing to

⁴⁹G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, "East African Coin Finds and their Historical Significance," Journal of African History, I (1960), 31-34, 42-43.

reduce this ignorance. What we have is a biased account, with no countervailing evidence to balance against it. However, there was one area of Ancient Ethiopia which was quite extensively involved with the Mediterranean world and about which we today know a great deal. That area of Ethiopia—the land of Kush—proved to be especially interesting to the Roman world.

III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LAND OF KUSH (1000 B.C.-400 A.D.)

The kingdom of Kush flourished between 750 B.C. and 300 A.D. Before the records of its relationships with Rome will be specifically considered, its history will be first described, so that we may have a solid basis on which to evaluate those records.¹

The Kushite kingdom which conquered Egypt in about 730 B.C. was a much Egyptianized one—which is only to be expected of a state that had spent two thousand years under Egyptian influence. However, archaeologists today generally agree that Kush was much more than simply an extension of Egypt; its roots are to be found in the culture of the peoples whom the Egyptians had overcome.² It is difficult to say whether

¹The general comments that I shall make about the history of Kush are based on the material in the following references: Arkell, History of Sudan (perhaps the standard work in English on the history of the Sudan); Emery, Lost Lands Emerging; and Fairervis, The Ancient Kingdoms of the Nile. Also of particular value were William Y. Adams, "Post-Pharonic Nubia in the Light of Archaeology, I," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, I (1964), 102-120 and William Y. Adams, "Post-Pharonic Nubia in the Light of Archaeology, II," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, II (1965), 160-178.

²The concept that Egyptians, Libyans, or wandering Hamites founded the ruling dynasty that made Kush into a major power has been generally rejected by

these peoples were pure Negroes, but that is a question which is really irrelevant to this paper; the Greeks and the Romans considered the people of Kush to be true Ethiopians.³ At any rate, they were certainly different in a number of respects from the Egyptians, as can be deduced from their different burial customs. For one thing, the Egyptian kings were buried in pyramids or in rock-cut tombs. Until the middle of the Eighth Century B.C., the Nubian monarchs were buried under "simple circular mounds of gravel with pebble or rubble patching."⁴ The Nubian kings were buried on beds; the Egyptian pharaohs were buried in sarcophagi. Furthermore, the tombs of the Nubians give evidence of Suttee sacrifice—the ritual murder of servants, friends, and wives of dead chieftains. Human sacrifice of this sort seems to have died

archaeologists and anthropologists. See D. M. Dixon, "The Origin of the Kingdom of Kush (Napata-Meroe)," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, L (1964), 121-132. As for the "Hamitic myth" in particular, "It would be well-nigh impossible to point to an individual and recognize in him a Hamite according to racial, linguistic, and cultural characteristics to fit the image that has been presented to us for so long. Such an individual does not exist." Edith R. Sanders, "The Hamitic Hypothesis, Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective," Journal of African History, X (1969), 521-532.

³For extensive commentary on the races and language groups of the Upper Nile, see Wyatt MacGaffey, "Concepts of Race in the Historiography of Northeast Africa," Journal of African History, VII (1966), 1-17.

⁴Dixon, Origin of Kush," p. 129.

out early in the First Dynasty in Egypt.⁵ These are some of the differences between Egypt and pre-Kush Nubia that archaeology has revealed to us.

In the years after the Twentieth Dynasty of Egypt, Egyptians withdrew from Nubia, and in the years between 1000 B.C. and 700 B.C. strong leaders appeared among the Nubians who lived in the upper Nile Valley. Unfortunately, archaeology and history are silent about this period. However, the general opinion of scholars is that these leaders were of Nubian origin, although undoubtedly much Egyptianized. Suddenly, in the middle of the Eighth Century B.C., a powerful kingdom emerged in the Sudan and, led by the kings Kashta and Piankhy, this nation—Kush—invaded and conquered Egypt. Succeeded by the kings Shabako, Shebitku, Taharqa, and Tanwetamani, the two rulers Kashta and Piankhy founded the Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt. The Kushites controlled the entire reach of the Nile from Nubia to the Delta until about 654 B.C., by which time it is clear that the Assyrians had succeeded in driving the Ethiopians completely out of Egypt and had set up the Saite dynasty in their place.

⁵B. G. Haycock, "The Kingship of Cush in the Sudan," Comparative Studies in Society and History, VII (1965), 463.

The Egyptian occupation probably had more effect on Kush than it did on Egypt. In order to legitimize their claim to rule, the Kushite kings—already much Egyptianized—adopted even more Egyptian practices. They built pyramids as tombs for their bodies, replacing the old tumuli burials. Furthermore, they adopted the Egyptian practice of mummification, as well as the practice of burial in sarcophagi (instead of on beds). Egyptian language and hieroglyphics became the standards at the Kushite court, as did Egyptian art and architecture. Centered at its capital of Napata (although Thebes served as capital for a while during the occupation), the kingdom of Kush controlled a vast domain. Even after its expulsion from Egypt, Kush still maintained a hold over a territory stretching from Lower Nubia to the site of modern Khartoum.

However, after 650 B.C. and its expulsion from Egypt, Kush began to decline—perhaps due at least in part to a severance of relations with Egypt. The decline would continue for some three to four hundred years, a period about which we have very little information. What little we do know is derived primarily from the study of the pyramids of the kings of Kush and of the inscriptions of the era, the chief result of which is

that we have a list of the kings who ruled Kush and of their queens; we can give an approximate date to each of their reigns. Unfortunately, the list— actually lists, for more than one scholar has examined the evidence and each has come to his own conclusion (and this is part of the problem we have)— may or may not be accurate; no one knows for sure. However, there are at least two facts about the years 600 to 200 B.C. about which we can be fairly certain.

First, the capital of Kush was moved from Napata (near the Fourth Cataract of the Nile) to a city much further up the Nile River—Meroe. No one can say for sure when this transferral occurred, although the best opinion suggests that it probably happened in the Sixth Century B.C.⁶ Nor does anyone

⁶There was a tradition among the Ancients that Meroe was founded by Cambyses, King of Persia, who supposedly invaded Ethiopia late in the Sixth Century B.C. (for example, Diodorus Siculus, Library of History i. 33: "Meroe . . . a famous city . . . founded by Cambyses and named by him after his mother Meroe."). The tradition, of course, is nothing more than a myth. There is no record of Cambyses ever having successfully penetrated far into Kush (see pages 13-14). All archaeological evidence suggests that Meroe was a city founded and inhabited solely by Ethiopians. However, G. A. Wainwright suggests plausibly that this tradition of Cambyses founding Meroe may relate to the actual rise of Meroe as an important power in Ethiopia at the same time that Cambyses was operating in Ethiopia. The Ancients may simply have gotten two contemporaneous events mixed up. If so, we might fairly date Meroe's rise to the late Sixth Century B.C. "The Date of the Rise of Meroe," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, XXXVIII (1952), 75-76.

really know why the transferral took place, although if we are to take the Sixth Century as the period in which the event occurred there may be some relation bwtween the rise of Meroe and the supposed sack of Napata by Psammetik II in about 590 B.C.⁷ Almost everything about this transfer is obscure, and there are some scholars who believe that at various times Kush actually divided into two separate kingdoms, each ruled by its own royal family, one at Napata and one at Meroe. However, by the Christian Era it is evident that Meroe was the strongest and most important city in Kush, and there is good reason to assume that it was equally important in the preceding three to four centuries.⁸

Secondly, the kingdom of Kush underwent a "de-Egyptianization" phase, and as a corollary to this development native Kushite influences became more important. The most obvious indication of this occurrence is the more extensive use of a distinctly Meroitic language, which was written in hieroglyphics that are different from Egyptian.⁹ In addition,

⁷P. L. Shinnie, Meroe (New York, Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), pp. 32-33.

⁸Herodotus writes in the Fifth Century B.C.: ". . . . a great city called Meroe, which is said to be the capital of the Ethiopians." History ii. 29.

⁹We have as yet only partially translated this language; thus we can read but a few of the Meroitic inscriptions.

relatively non-Egyptian forms began to appear in the arts. Pottery came to display a profoundly Meroitic influence, blending Greco-Roman and Egyptian styles with a native Nubian base. Finally, there are indications of a return to some of those Nubian burial practices that had been abandoned during the years of greatest Egyptian influence. For example, in the pyramid of a certain king Harsiotef (who has been dated generally to the Fourth Century B.C.) a number of bodies were found in addition to that of the king—perhaps an indication of the revival of Suttee, which had disappeared during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty.¹⁰ It must be noted that even during the height of Egyptian influence the Kushite monarchy maintained some distinctly non-Egyptian characteristics, and these continued on into the Meroitic period.¹¹ In fact, more

¹⁰Haycock, "Kingship of Cush," p. 475.

¹¹For example, the throne appears to have passed not from father to son, but rather from the king to his nearest living relation within his own generation. A son would become king only after the death of his last uncle. On the other hand, the Egyptian throne was passed directly from father to son. Also, while the Egyptian pharaoh was supposedly divine by heredity, the Kushite king was divine by selection. He would have to undergo a process of selection in which the king of the gods himself, Amun, made the final decision (presumably through his priests). Not until that selection was made did the Kushite king receive the privileges of both kingship and divinity. Both of these aspects of the Kushite kingship may be suggested as non-Egyptian influences, probably derived from the practices of the early dwellers of Nubia and the Dongola Reach. Haycock, "Kingship of Cush," pp. 466-470.

non-Egyptian traits may have appeared, for there is some evidence that queen regents came to be extremely influential in Meroitic politics in the First Century B.C. and afterwards;¹² such a practice may reflect new non-Egyptian influences at Meroe.¹³

Napata remained a center of great religious and cultural significance and was apparently the site of the coronation of the Kushite kings, but from the First Century B.C. until the fall of Kush Meroe was the most important city in Ethiopia. It was located in a region with a relatively good rainfall (unlike Napata—and perhaps one of the factors in the transferral of the capital from Napata to Meroe) which could support such crops as millet and cotton without reliance on artificial irrigation.¹⁴ Moreover, there were valuable deposits of iron about Meroe, as well as the forests that would be necessary to provide fuel for any iron-making industry. And indeed such an industry did develop at Meroe; vast mounds of iron slag which surround the remains of the city give ample proof that Meroe was the first great iron-working center of Ethiopia. Iron implements appear in Kushite tombs as

¹²Some of the largest royal pyramids are those of queens. Inscriptions also suggest that at times queens had great power.

¹³Haycock, "Kingship of Kush," p. 477.

¹⁴Shinnie, Meroe, pp. 158-160.

early as the Sixth Century B.C., but these pieces were probably imports.¹⁵ A true iron industry probably did not develop until the First Century B.C.

However, the wealth and importance of Meroe were not solely attributable to the goods it produced itself. Like Napata, Meroe profited from its location on the trade routes between Egypt and Central Africa. In the centuries before the birth of Christ, Meroe was in close commercial contact with Ptolemaic Egypt; the fact that there was a brief Egyptian "renaissance" in Meroe during this period is indication of improved ties with the north.¹⁶ Later, the Romans would maintain these trade links. At any rate, there can be little doubt that from the years 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. Meroe prospered and that Kush prospered with it.

But in the years after 200 A.D. Meroe began to decline. We do not know why this occurred; the archaeological and literary record simply is too sparse. All that we can say for sure is that by 350 A.D. (and probably even sooner than that) the land that had been under Meroitic control appears to have been conquered by King Ezana of the kingdom of Axum.¹⁷ In an inscrip-

¹⁵Dows Dunham, "Notes on the History of Kush, 850 B.C.-A.D. 350," American Journal of Archaeology, L (1946), 385.

¹⁶Shinnie, Meroe, pp. 41-42.

¹⁷Axum was and is a city in the Abyssinian highlands.

tion at Axum, Ezana (who reigned from approximately 325-375 A.D.) claims to have defeated a people called the Noba who were troubling his territory in the region of the Island of Meroe.¹⁸ It is probable that by this time Meroe was already defunct and that the Noba were nomads who had moved into this formerly Kushite area.¹⁹ Perhaps due to the incursions of nomads from the deserts east and west of the Nile, perhaps due to the incursions of the Axumites, Kush had ceased to exist by the Fourth Century A.D.

Nevertheless, there were successor nations in the area south of Egypt which carried on some of the traditions of Kush. There were the nomad tribes—the Blemmyes and Nobatae are the ones most prominently mentioned in Roman chronicles, as a result of their frequent incursions into Roman territory. Probably the most important archaeologically of the states which appeared in Nubia and in the Dongola Reach was the group of peoples collectively called the X-Group

¹⁸There was a classical tradition that the Nile, the Atbara River, and the Blue Nile all were interconnected, so that an island was formed. It was called the Island of Meroe and the city of Meroe was located on it. This is an inaccurate description of the actual flow of these rivers—there is no such island. However, the term "Island of Meroe" has come to have a geographical meaning that refers to the general area that the Ancients actually thought was an island.

¹⁹See Shinnie, Meroe, pp. 52-57 for a copy of Ezana's inscription and for commentary upon it.

by modern authorities. Many of the earlier authorities on Sudanic history were of the opinion that the kings and peoples of Meroe had migrated from Meroe into the desert—to, for example, Darfur and Khordofan in the south—and had been replaced by an entirely new stock of people, who were those whom we now call the X-Group. These new invaders brought with them a new language, the ancestor of the modern tongues spoken in the northern Sudan; efforts are often made to identify these peoples with the Blemmyes and the Nobatae.²⁰ However, the most recent scholarship denies this idea of an exodus by Meroites out of their traditional territory. Rather the archaeological remnants of the X-Group peoples show so many similarities with Meroitic remains that it seems likely that the X-Group peoples were the same basic stock that had formed the basis of the Kushite state. The differences between Meroitic and X-Group culture can be explained by an influx of peoples from the south—perhaps the Blemmyes, perhaps the Nobatae, perhaps both of these and others—who brought with them their own language and superimposed it and some elements of their culture (they probably had little culture of their own) on the old Meroitic base. Thus the X-Group civilization was

²⁰ See, for example, Arkell, History of Sudan, pp. 174-185 and Emery, Lost Land Emerging, pp. 294-312.

formed.²¹

In addition to these Sudanic nations, there was one other successor state of Meroe that was of great importance—although it perhaps would be unfair to slight this power by calling it a successor state of any nation. Sometime between 1000 B.C. and 400 B.C., emigrants from the South Arabian kingdoms crossed the Red Sea and, intermingling with the indigenous inhabitants, established a new kingdom and culture centered at the city of Axum. The Kingdom of Axum soon became a major trading power. Its chief port, Adulis, was mentioned in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, as was the fact that Zoscales, the king of Axum, controlled much of the African coastline of the Red Sea. Axum was essentially a kingdom based on trade, and it became a most wealthy one. Originally a commercial rival of Meroe, it eventually appropriated most of the trade between Central Africa and Egypt (perhaps a factor in the decline of Meroe). By the Fourth Century A.D. Axum was the most powerful nation

²¹For further information on the relationship of X-Group to Meroitic civilization, see Bruce G. Trigger, "The Languages of the Northern Sudan: An Historical Perspective," Journal of African History, VII (1966), 19-25; B. G. Haycock, "The Later Phases of Meroitic Civilization," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, LIII (1967), 107-120; and Bruce G. Trigger, "The Royal Tombs at Ballana and Qustul," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, LV (1969), 117-128.

in all of Ethiopia. And its power and influence continued to grow in the years after the dissolution of the Roman Empire.²²

The Axumites were not precisely a Negroid people,²³ but once again that is a distinction which is irrelevant to our purpose, for the classical world and its successors considered them to be Ethiopians.²⁴ They were among those Ethiopians with whom the Romans dealt, but they achieved greatest prominence in the annals of Byzantine historians; and these deal with a time period beyond that with which we are concerned.

²²For specific information about Axum, see Jean Doresse, Ethiopia, trans. Elsa Coult (London: Elek Books, 1956), pp. 13-89; David Buxton, The Abyssinians (New York, Washington: Praeger Publisher, 1970), pp. 34-52; and Edward Ullendorff, The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 47-100.

²³The modern Ethiopians claim the Axumites as their ancestors.

²⁴For example, Procopius writes, "on the opposite mainland dwell the Aethiopians who are called Auxomitae, because their king resides in the city of Auxomis." History of the Wars i. 19.

IV. CONTACTS BETWEEN ROME AND KUSH (50 B.C.-300 A.D.)

The period of Roman history about which we are concerned falls within the range 50 B.C. to 300 A.D., because we are dealing with contacts between Rome and Ethiopia south of Egypt and because it was not until the second half of the First Century B.C. that Rome began to make its presence in Egypt felt. Three hundred A.D. has been selected as the end point for our consideration because it was after that date that Kush had ceased to be a major power, and it is Roman-Kush relationships with which we are most concerned. In order to facilitate our discussion, these relationships will be considered in terms of three arbitrarily selected categories: military contacts, diplomatic contacts, and commercial contacts.

Military Contacts

The first Roman prefect of Egypt was Cornelius Gallus, who set the frontier between Egypt and the south first at the First Cataract and later moved it up the Nile to the Second Cataract, thus bringing all of Lower Nubia into Roman territory. Cornelius Gallus was replaced as prefect by Aelius Gallus, who about

26 B.C. was entrusted with a command that was to march into and subdue Arabia. He apparently bungled this task atrociously and was recalled in the summer or fall of 25. Appointed to succeed Aelius was Gaius Petronius, and it was Petronius who first engaged in military conflict with the land of Kush.

We have three accounts of this conflict¹ and all are sufficiently similar to confirm the reality of the events they describe. Strabo gives us the earliest and the longest account.² He says that the Ethiopians were "emboldened by the fact that a part of the Roman force in Egypt had been drawn away with Aelius Gallus when he was carrying on the war against the Arabians . . . ," and attacked Lower Nubia, capturing three cities in the Dodekaschoinos³ and "pulling down the statues of Caesar." Petronius responded to this invasion immediately, setting out with a large force and inducing the Ethiopians to retreat. He drove them back across the border and attacked and captured the Ethiopian town of Pselchis. From there he marched even deeper into the

¹ There are actually four if we include Augustus' boast that during his reign his forces invaded Ethiopia. But he gives no details.

² Strabo Geography xvii. 1.54.

³ Dodekaschoinos is a Greek translation of an Egyptian word meaning "land of twelve furlongs." It was another term for Lower Nubia. Emery, Lost Land Emerging, p. 286.

territory of the enemy, taking Premnis, "a fortified city," and then attacking and sacking Napata. This marked his deepest penetration into Ethiopia, but on his return to Egypt, "he fortified Premnis better, [and] threw in a garrison and food for four hundred men for two years" and then set out for Alexandria. However, after he had departed, the Ethiopians marched against Premnis. But when they reached the fortress, they discovered that Petronius had returned, having somehow learned of their new advance. A parley was held and Petronius urged the Ethiopians to bear their grievances directly to Caesar. This they did, conferring with Augustus at Samos, probably in the winter of 21-20 B.C. From Augustus they obtained "everything they pled for," including a remittance of the tribute Petronius had imposed upon them after taking Napata.

Pliny the Elder gives us another version of this campaign.⁴ He says that Petronius captured a number of Ethiopian towns, including Pselcis and Primis (Premnis?), and that, marching up the Nile past the Third Cataract, he reached and sacked Napata.⁵ That was the farthest into Ethiopia that Petronius advanced, and that is all that Pliny tells us.

⁴Pliny, Naturalis Historia vi. 35.

⁵". . . diripuit et Napata." Pliny, Naturalis Historia vi. 35.

The final account of this affair is that of Cassius Dio.⁶ He says that the Ethiopians had marched into Lower Nubia as far as Elephantine, "ravaging everything they encountered." But, learning of Petronius' approach, they fled back into their own country, where they were overtaken by the pursuing Romans and defeated. Petronius then captured Napata, "among other cities" (which are not named), and "razed it to the ground." He then withdrew, leaving behind a garrison "at another point." The Ethiopians then attacked that garrison. Petronius rushed back to the rescue and brought the enemy to terms.

The similarities between these three accounts are obvious; the story of the campaigns must have been a rather common one. All three reports describe the sacking of Napata by a Roman army under the command of Petronius. Two appear to mention Pselchis (Pselcis) and Premnis (Primis) among the towns captured by the Romans. Furthermore, two suggest that the final resolution of the affair was a diplomatic one.

All three authors imply that the conflict resulted in a crushing blow to the Ethiopians. However, the evidence within Strabo's account would suggest that the Roman victory was not quite so overwhelming as one

⁶Cassius Dio Roman History liv. 5.

might be led to believe. Strabo did say that after a parley the Ethiopians sent representatives to Caesar Augustus himself and that these ambassadors received everything they had asked for. Even the tribute imposed by the all-conquering general Petronius was revoked. This hardly sounds as if the Romans were dealing from a position of total strength. Augustus at this time was in an expansionist mood; he was attempting to extend Rome's borders into a number of areas then beyond the Roman perimeter, and his imperialist aims could have included the addition of Ethiopia to the Empire.⁷ Thus the Ethiopian attack which sparked the whole conflict may have been either a preventive attack by the Kushites, having perhaps learned of Rome's plans and deciding to take advantage of Aelius Gallus' absence from Egypt with a large number of troops to strike first, or else a response to some unnamed act of Roman aggression.⁸ If Augustus had wanted to expand

⁷The idea that Rome wanted to conquer Ethiopia (Kush) is by no means widely accepted, and there are those who maintain that even at this time Augustus' foreign policy was essentially a defensive one. However, the facts seem to suggest otherwise. See Arthur Boak and William Sinnigen, A History of Rome to A.D. 565 (London: The MacMillan Company, 1965), pp. 287-292 and Shelagh Jameson, "Chronology of the Campaigns of Aelius Gallus and C. Petronius," Journal of Roman Studies, LVIII (1968), 80-82.

⁸In support of this idea, we find in Strabo (Geography xvii. 1.54.): "Petronius asked the reasons why they had begun war, and when they said that they had been wronged by the Nomarchs, he replied that these were not rulers of the country, but Caesar"

into Kush and if Petronius had really been so successful, Augustus surely would not have conceded as much to the Ethiopian ambassadors as he did. That he did indicates that the Roman army was not as successful in its Ethiopian campaign as suggested.

Yet another fact supports this conclusion. Strabo's and Dio's accounts both mention that the Ethiopians mounted a second attack, this one after Petronius' departure from Ethiopia. If Petronius had so devastated them as reported, they could not possibly have been able to regroup as quickly as they did and counter-attack.⁹ Furthermore, there is an inscription at Meroe which appears to give a Kushite account of this whole affair and which seems to describe a somewhat less glorious outcome for Roman arms.¹⁰ Unfortunately, we are unable to read the entire message and are therefore uncertain as to its exact meaning.

Nevertheless, we can be certain that a clash between Rome and Kush did take place. Although biased in favor of Rome, the literary evidence for the conflict is sufficiently consistent to confirm the reality of the event. Indeed, there may be archaeological support

⁹Jameson, "Campaign of Petronius," p. 75.

¹⁰L. P. Kirwan, "Rome Beyond the Southern Egyptian Frontier," Geographical Journal, CXXIII (1957), 12-13.

for some of the statements in these Roman accounts. Both Strabo and Dio mention that the ruler of the Ethiopians during this affair was Candace, whom Strabo describes as a "masculine sort of woman, and blind in one eye."¹¹ Pliny also says that a woman named Candace ruled Meroe, although this statement is not made in connection with his description of Petronius' campaign.¹² As mentioned in Chapter III, archaeologists have confirmed the fact that queens exercised great political power in Kush at this time; perhaps the Candace of these classical authors was one of these politically powerful women.

Another archaeological discovery may confirm one of Strabo's comments. Strabo mentioned that the Ethiopians had pulled down the statues of Caesar when they had first invaded Egypt. Later they were compelled to return them. But perhaps not all of them—

¹¹Strabo Geography xvii. 1.54.

¹²Pliny Naturalis Historia vi. 35. The idea that Kush was ruled by a queen whose name was Candace was common in classical times. In the Bible, Acts 9.28 we have this: "Behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship." We do not know who this fellow was or what ever became of him; in the Bible we learn only that he was converted by Philip. Nevertheless, we see here an example of this belief that Ethiopia was ruled by a queen. However, we have no archaeological proof that Kush was at all times governed by a "Candace." There were kings during this period as well.

at Meroe, an archaeological expedition was digging in the sand under the threshold of a building and uncovered a magnificent bronze bust of Augustus. It may be that one of the statues of Caesar was not returned to the Romans by the Meroites, and if so, it may be that we have that very bust in our possession today. It is a romantic thought—but there is no way that we can verify it. However, it gives further support to the fact that the Romans and the Kushites fought one another between 25 and 21 B.C., although the struggle is more likely to have resulted in a stand-off between Ethiopian and Roman arms than in the smashing Roman victory that Strabo, Pliny, and Dio claim.¹³

For some two hundred years after this affair there was peace on the southern Egyptian frontier—perhaps a further indication that the Romans had gained such respect for their southern neighbors' military prowess as to avoid military confrontation with them. In fact, there is only one indication of conflict between Rome and Kush after 21 B.C., and that is so unreliable as to be in grave doubt.¹⁴ Until the

¹³See Jameson, "Campaign of Petronius," for commentary on the date and results of the war.

¹⁴An inscription in Greek has been found in Egypt; many parts of it are missing and it cannot be dated by outside evidence. One reading of it has, "The Ethiopians

Third Century A.D., both Rome and Meroe were strong enough to check the incursions of the desert nomads into the Nile Valley, and, there being no conflict between the region's two major powers, Nubia was probably at peace. However in the Third Century Rome was rent by internal struggle and was unable to maintain its former strength on the Nubian border. At the same time, the raids of such nomads as the Blemmyes and Nobatae into both Roman and Kushite territory began to increase, and Meroe itself began to decline.¹⁵ The remaining history of the military contacts between Rome and Ethiopia south of Egypt from this time until 300 A.D. is the story of conflict between the Romans and the raiding nomads; Meroe has dropped out of the picture.¹⁶ The most complete and important comment we

are in line. The Romans advance, the infantry under the command of a certain Rufus, cavalry captain Trogus." Another reading suggests that the inscription really refers to a fight between Romans and Blemmyes, with Troglodytes helping the Blemmyes (the Troglodytes were a people of the desert east of the Nile). This would take the fight described out of the Meroitic period. But considering the lack of corroborating evidence of a struggle between Romans and Ethiopians after 21 B.C., we can be fairly sure that the inscription does not refer to a Meroite-Roman clash. See E. G. Turner, "Papyrus 40, 'Della Rocolta Milanese,'" Journal of Roman Studies, XL (1950), 57-59.

¹⁵There may have been some relationship between Rome's declining strength and the fall of Kush. Perhaps Kush could not resist the nomads without Rome's help.

¹⁶For a summary of the very limited evidence of conflict with the nomads during the reigns of Probus and Aurelian, see Snowden, Blacks in Antiquity, p. 137.

have on the troubles of the era is that of Procopius, writing some two hundred years after the fact in the early Sixth Century A.D.¹⁷ He says that the emperor Diocletian visited Egypt and travelled up the Nile, visiting the much-troubled area of the Dodekaschoinos (still a Roman territory). Observing "that the tribute from these places was of the smallest possible account" and that a great deal of time and money was being wasted by the Empire in defending Lower Nubia, he decided to draw the frontier back from the Second Cataract to the First. In addition, he invited the Nobatae to come and settle in the abandoned region, thus creating a buffer against the Blemmyes in particular. "Since this pleased the Nobatae, they made the migration immediately . . . , and took possession of all the Roman cities and the land on both sides of the river beyond the city of Elephantine." Finally, Diocletian decreed "that to them and to the Blemmyes a fixed sum of gold should be given every year with the stipulation that they should no longer plunder the land of the Romans." But as Procopius concludes, "they receive this gold even up to my time, but none the less they overrun the country there." Thus despite Diocletian's efforts, trouble with the nomads continued

¹⁷Procopius History of the Wars i. 19.

into the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, at which time these peoples became the subjects of a number of Byzantine writings.

There is little that archaeology can do to confirm or deny Procopius' remarks. One can only surmise that, as he says that money was being paid to the Blemmyes and the Nobatae in his own time, he would have known that such payment was occurring and too the origin of that payment. However, we have no reason not to accept his statements, for they are certainly consistent with one of the facts that archaeology is indeed able to tell us about Nubia at this time: that it was in great turmoil.

Diplomatic Contacts

There are a number of records of diplomatic contacts between Rome and Kush—most of which are in the form of inscriptions and are what we today call graffiti. Surprisingly enough, most of these inscriptions date to the Third Century A.D., the time of Meroe's decline, a fact which leads at least one scholar to suggest that, whatever the status of the central state at this time, Meroitic influence was very strong in Lower Nubia (the site of most of these inscriptions) and that perhaps some variant of the Kushite state survived here after power at the capital

had collapsed.¹⁸ These inscriptions generally are in Meroitic; the titles "great ambassador to Rome" appears frequently and the evidence suggests that "long-range border negotiations" were taking place between Rome and these Meroites.¹⁹ But inscriptions indicating diplomatic contacts between Rome and Kush are not limited to the Third Century or to Nubian locations.

One Roman envoy posted to Meroe left his name, on his way through Egypt, on the walls of the tomb of the pharaoh Rameses V in the Valley of the Kings. On one of the pyramids of Meroe, there is an inscription in Meroitic hieroglyphs recording a mission bringing gifts from Caesar, "great king of the land of the west." And south of Meroe, far from the Nile, at Masauwarat (the site of a small but imposing Meroitic palace) there is the southern-most Latin inscription known, commemorating a visitor from Rome to this remote spot.²⁰

These inscriptions provide ample proof of diplomatic contact between Rome and Kush. However, in at least one case we have a written record of a diplomatic/exploratory mission sent by Rome to Kush. In Seneca's Quaestiones Naturales the philosopher is discussing the flow of various rivers, and, having brought up the subject of the Nile, he mentions a conversation he had had with two centurions, who had been sent by the Emperor Nero to travel up the Nile

¹⁸Haycock, "Later Phases of Meroe," p. 118.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Kirwan, "Rome Beyond the Frontier," p. 18.

in search of the river's source.²¹ On their journey they met the king of the Ethiopians and were given a safe-conduct pass by him for their trek into the far upper reaches of the Nile.²² What causes us to lend special credence to this story is the statement that follows, for the soldiers said that they penetrated as far as a great swamp which blocked their passage. Here they claimed to have seen two large rocks from which the Nile was flowing.²³

The centurions did not claim to have found the source of the Nile and we today cannot identify the two great rocks that they were talking about. However, from their description there is no doubt that they reached the great Sudd, a massive, floating tangle of brush and weed far up the Nile in the southern Sudan—a swamp which has for centuries barred passage by way of the river into the interior. This alone is ample proof that these soldiers actually did undertake such

²¹Seneca Naturales Quaestiones vi. 7. "Ego quidem centuriones duos, quos Nero Caesar . . . ad investigandum caput Nili miserat"

²²Seneca Naturales Quaestiones vi. 7. ". . . cum a rege Aethiopiae instructi auxilio commendatique proximis regibus penetrassent ad ulteriora."

²³Seneca Naturales Quaestiones vi. 7. "' . . . quidem, aiebant, pervenimus ad immensas paludes, quarum exitum nec incolae noverant nec sperare quisquam potest Ibi, inquit, vidimus duas petras, ex quibus ingens vis fluminis excidebat.'"

a mission and that they did travel far into Ethiopia.

However, Seneca makes the whole trip sound like a friendly, exploratory mission; we have good reason to believe that it was more than that. In Pliny's Naturalis Historia we find this: ". . . an exploring party of praetorian troops under the command of a tribune lately sent by the emperor Nero, when among the rest of his wars he was actually contemplating an attack on Ethiopia, reported that there was nothing but desert."²⁴ Pliny makes further reference to the report brought back by this party and says that the soldiers reached Meroe and discovered that the land was greener about that city. Nevertheless, either their report discouraged Nero's desire to invade Ethiopia or else his deposition interfered with any plans he might have made, for nothing further is related.

Were the missions described by Seneca and Pliny one and the same? They may well have been; the purpose of finding the source of the Nile would have been an appropriate cover for a spy mission of this sort. Cassius Dio has something to add to this discussion; he says, "Nero . . . did not sail against the Ethiopians . . . as he had intended. He did among other things send

²⁴vi. 35. "Certe solitudines nuper renuntiavere principi Neroni missi ab eo milites praetoriani cum tribuno ad explorandum, inter reliqua bella et Aethiopicum cogitanti."

spies to Ethiopia" ²⁵ It may be that here in Seneca and in Pliny we have the details of one of the first recorded espionage tales in history.

Commercial Contacts

Most of the inhabitants of Kush were farmers or herdsmen. Nevertheless, trade was an important aspect of Meroe's economic life. We have good reason to believe that Rome and Kush were in close commercial contact, even though we do not have any literary sources that give evidence of that contact. ²⁶ Some scholars have downgraded the importance of trade between Rome and Meroe, and it is true that by the Third Century Axum had established a monopoly over most of the trade in this area. But in the first two centuries of the Christian Era Kush experienced such a great degree of prosperity that this fact can only be explained if we assume that there was at least some trade with Roman

²⁵Roman History Epitome of Book lxii (p. 149). This is dated about 66 A.D., just before Nero departs on his tour of Greece.

²⁶ Nevertheless, some authors (Diodorus and Strabo in particular) give extensive descriptions of the customs and living conditions of the Ethiopians of Meroe. These descriptions are in error in many of the particulars, but they offer some comments that archaeologists have since confirmed. These authors must have gotten their information from someone who had been to Kush—perhaps a soldier, but also perhaps a merchant. There must have been many Greek and Egyptian merchants who either traded with Meroe or had themselves made the long trip upriver.

Egypt. Archaeology verifies this by showing us that there were many Roman imports at Meroe, particularly imports of glassware.²⁷ In addition, Roman architectural influences are evident at Meroe, especially in the structures that resemble Roman baths and that may indeed have been public bathing areas.²⁸ Some Roman coins have been found in Meroitic territory, although this may not mean very much, especially since Kush had no coinage of its own and since therefore trade between it and Roman Egypt would have probably been carried on in the form of barter.²⁹

What might Kush have exported to Rome? Undoubtedly, the traditional products of the caravan trade were passed on by Kush to Egypt—including ivory, gold, wild beasts, spices, and slaves.³⁰ While many of these goods could have been obtained from the Garamantes, from Adulis, or from the East African ports, there is no good reason not to believe that they were also obtained by Rome from Kush.

²⁷Shinnie, Meroe, pp. 130-131.

²⁸Ibid., p. 79.

²⁹M. Rostovtzeff, The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 307.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 306-307. See also Kirwan, "Rome Beyond the Frontier," pp. 18-19.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is certainly reported that in the interior . . . there are tribes of people without noses, their whole face being perfectly flat, and other tribes that have no upper lip and others no tongue. Also one section has the mouth closed up and has no nostrils, but only a single orifice through which it breathes and sucks in drink by means of oat straws, as well as grains of oat, which grows wild there, for food.¹

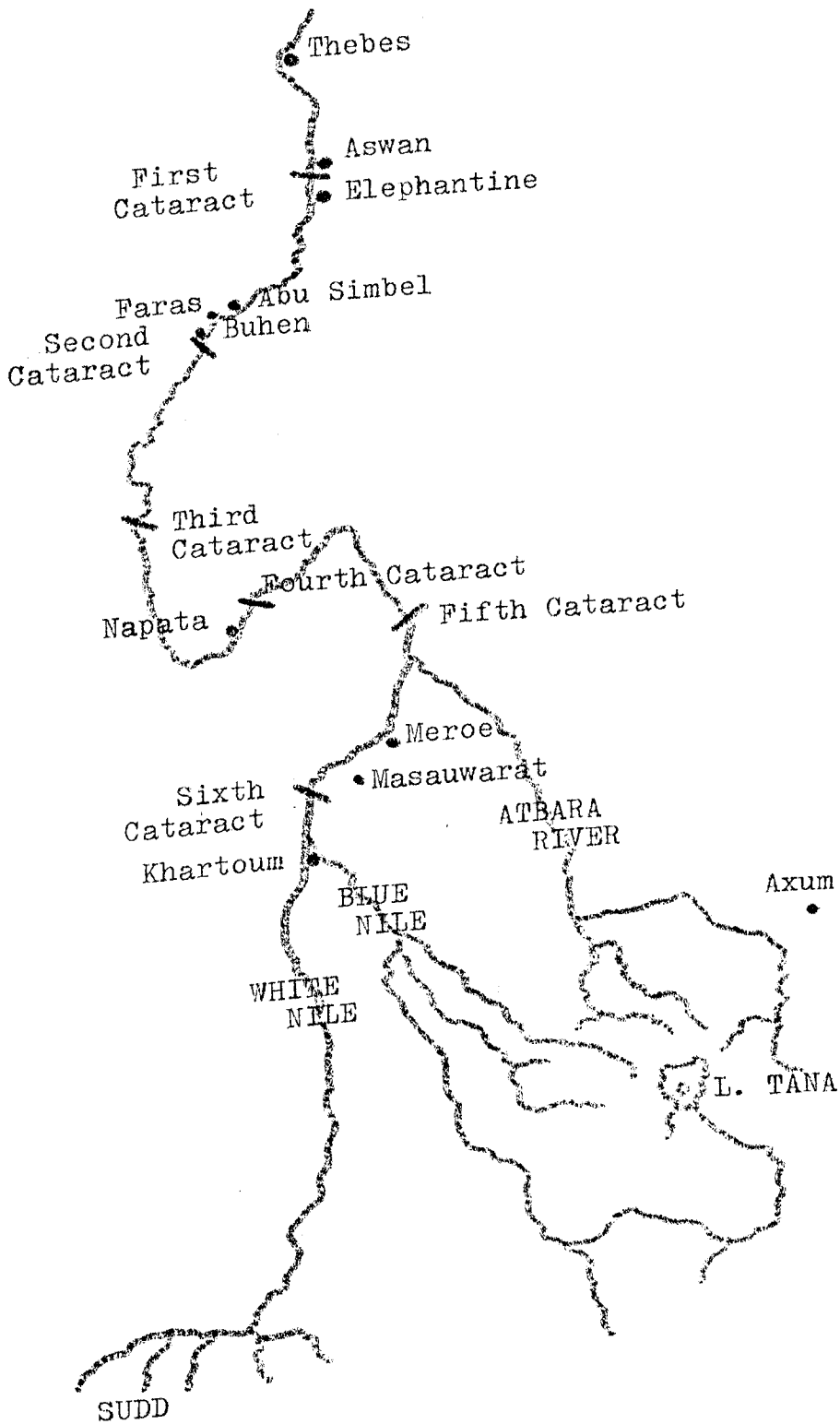
The Elder Pliny's credulous description of some of the peoples of the interior of Ethiopia is unfortunately typical of most of the information had by the Romans about Africa. However, there were a few areas of Africa with which Rome was well-acquainted, as this paper has shown, and with these areas the classical world did interact. This paper has considered that interaction up until about 300 A.D., but I do not want to leave the impression that after this period interaction between the Mediterranean world and Africa ceased. Nubia would undergo a long development, first under Christian and then under Islamic influence. Axum would flourish and die, to be succeeded by an equally powerful and prosperous Abyssinian kingdom. The East

¹Pliny Naturalis Historia vi. 35. "Ferunt certe intima gentes esse sine naribus, aequali totius oris planitie, alias superiore labro orbas, alias sine linguis. Pars etiam ore concreto at naribus carens uno tantum foramine spirat potumque calamis avenae sponte provenientis ad vescendum."

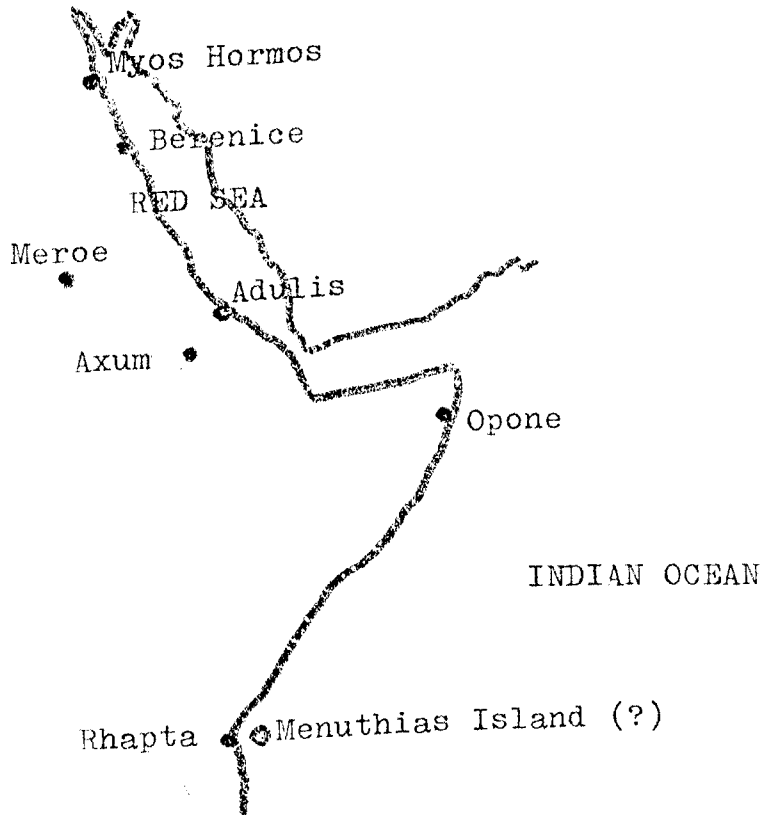
African coast would develop a distinctive history and culture of its own. And, in succeeding years, the deep interior would come to the attention of first Arab and *then European explorers*, traders, and soldiers.

I have attempted to show that the roots of this interaction were present in Roman times—indeed, that they were present even earlier. I do not claim that contacts between Rome and Ethiopia were a dominant factor in Roman history nor that they altered and reshaped the cultures of either society. But these contacts were more extensive than is commonly supposed, and they were significant to the degree that they did leave some marks on the histories of both Rome and Africa. Most of Pliny's comments about Africa were sheer conjecture, but some were based on fact. His information, and that of Diodorus, Strabo, Seneca, Dio, and the others cited, provide at least an introduction to the concept of African history.

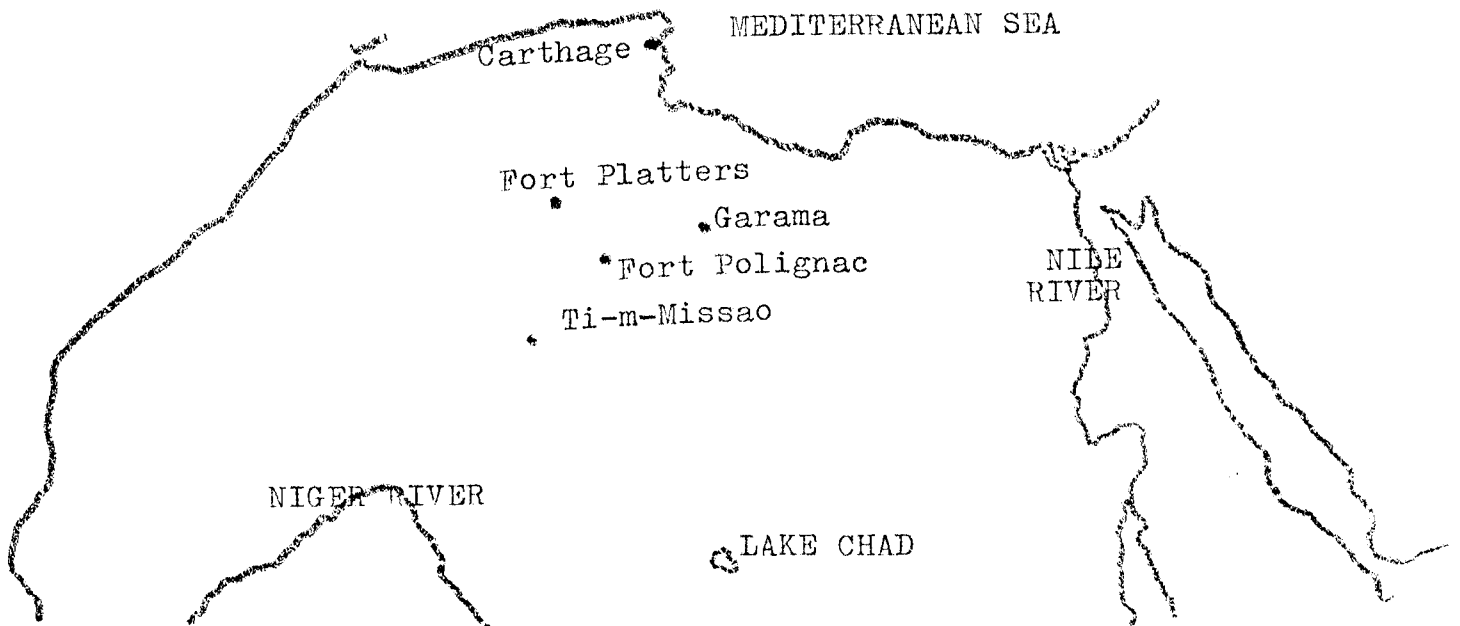
The Nile River from Thebes to the Sudd



East Africa



North Africa



BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CITED

Books

- Arkell, A. J. A History of the Sudan to 1821. Second Edition: London: The Athlone Press, 1961.
- Boah, Arthur, and Sinnigen, William. A History of Rome to A.D. 565. London: The MacMillan Company, 1965.
- Bunbury, E. H. A History of Ancient Geography. Vol. I and II. Second Edition: New York: Dover Publications, 1959.
- Buxton, David. The Abyssinians. New York, Washington: Praeger Publisher, 1970.
- Carpenter, Rhys. Beyond the Pillars of Heracles. n.p.: Delacorte Press, 1966.
- Cary, M., and Warmington, E. H. The Ancient Explorers. Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1963.
- Cassius Dio. Roman History. Translated by Ernest Cary. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1925.
- Claudii Ptolemaei. Geographia. E codicibus recognovit Carolus Mullerus. Parisiis: Editore Alfredo Fironin-Didot, MDCCCXI.
- Davidson, Basil. The Lost Cities of Africa. Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1959.
- Diodorus Siculus. Library of History. Translated by C. H. Oldfather. London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1935.
- Doresse, Jean. Ethiopia. Translated by Elsa Coult. London: Elek Books, 1956.
- Emery, Walter B. Lost Land Emerging. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967.
- Fairservis, Walter A., Jr. The Ancient Kingdoms of the Nile. New York: New American Library, 1962.

- Herodotus. History. Translated by A. D. Godley. London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1921.
- Hyde, Walter W. Ancient Greek Mariners. New York: Oxford University Press, 1947.
- Pliny, Naturalis Historia. Translated by H. Rackam. London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1942.
- Procopius. History of the Wars. Translated by H. B. Dewing. London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1914.
- Rostovtzeff, M. The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957.
- Seneca. Naturales Quaestiones. In Opera quae Supersunt. Vol. I. Edited by Fredericus Hasse. Lipsiae: in Aedibus B. G. Teubneri, MDCCCXCIII.
- Shinnie, P. L. Meroe. New York, Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967.
- Snowden, Frank M., Jr. Blacks in Antiquity. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Strabo. Geography. Translated by Horace Leonard Jones. London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1932.
- The Periplus of Hanno. Translated by Wilfred A. Schoff. Philadelphia: The Commercial Museum, 1912.
- The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea. Translated by Wilfred A. Schoff. New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1912.
- Thomsen, J. Oliver. History of Ancient Geography. Cambridge: The University Press, 1948.
- Ullendorff, Edward. The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Wellard, James. The Lost Worlds of Africa. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1967.
-

Journals

- Adams, William Y. "Post-Pharonic Nubia in the Light of Archaeology," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, L (1964), 102-120 and LI (1965), 160-178.
- Dixon, D. M. "The Origin of the Kingdom of Kush (Napata-Meroe)," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, L (1964), 121-132.
- Dunham, Dows. "Notes on the History of Kush, 850 B.C.-A.D. 350," American Journal of Archaeology, L (1946), 378-388.
- Freeman-Grenville, G. S. P. "East African Coin Finds and their Historical Significance," Journal of African History, I (1960), 31-43.
- Haycock, B. G. "The Kingship of Kush in the Sudan," Comparative Studies in Society and History, VII (1965), 461-480.
- Haycock, B. G. "The Later Phases of Meroitic Civilization," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, LIII (1967), 107-120.
- Jameson, Shelagh. "Chronology of the Campaigns of Aelius Gallus and C. Petronius," Journal of Roman Studies, LVIII (1968), 71-84.
- Kirwan, L. P. "Rome Beyond the Southern Egyptian Frontier," Geographical Journal, CXXIII (1957), 13-19.
- Law, R. C. "The Garamantes and Trans-Saharan Enterprise in Classical Times," Journal of African History, VIII (1967), 181-200.
- MacGaffey, Wyatt. "Concepts of Race in the Historiography of Northeast Africa," Journal of African History, VII (1966), 1-17.
- Sanders, Edith R. "The Hamitic Hypothesis, Its Origin and Function in Time Perspective," Journal of African History, X (1969), 521-532.
- Trigger, Bruce G. "The Languages of the Northern Sudan: An Historical Perspective," Journal of African History, VII (1966), 19-25.
-

- Trigger, Bruce G. "The Royal Tombs at Ballana and Qustul, and their Meroitic Antecedents," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, LV (1969), 117-128.
- Turner, E. G. "Papyrus 40, 'Della Rocolta Milanese,'" Journal of Roman Studies, XL (1950), 57-59.
- Wainwright, G. A. "The Date of the Rise of Meroe," Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, XXXVIII (1952), 75-77.
-