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Pamela F. Service. *The Ancient African Kingdom of Kush.* New York: Benchmark Books, 1998. 80 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7614-0272-5.

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Kush: An Ancient African Civilization

There has currently been an upsurge of interest in the ancient civilization of Nubia (or Kush), that is the region between Aswan in Egypt and Khartoum in the Sudan (called Ethiopia by the classical authors and in some older publications, not to be confused with the modern state of Ethiopia). Many exhibitions have been running and various books–both of scholarly and popular nature–have recently appeared. Scholarly publications include David O'Connor's *Ancient Nubia: Egypt's Rival in Africa*[1] and general overviews include Joyce Haynes' *Nubia. Ancient Kingdoms of Africa*[2] and John Taylor. *Egypt and Nubia.*[3]

Service's book is similarly to Robert Bianchi's *The Nubians*[4], and divided into five chapters: "History"–dealing with the environment and main historical lines; "Cultural History"–lifestyles, housing, pottery, women and language; "Belief System"–religion and deities; "Beliefs and Society"–temples, the cult of the dead, pyramids, and popular beliefs; and "Legacy"–Kush in legend, from the classical authors to Verdi's Aida, and the use of iron in Africa. The author is well acquainted with her subject and has had first-hand experience excavating at the last capital of Meroe (p. 80).

The Ancient African Kingdom of Kush gives a good introduction to Nubian culture, but there are some mistakes, as well: Napata is shown on the wrong side of the Nile on the map, for instance (p. 18). Also, the author might have said more about the trees that grow in the region of Nubia (p. 7) and could have emphasized that the Nubians produced the oldest pottery in the world (p. 26). Finally, she points out that *maat*, the concept of order, is similar to present day African beliefs, but does not explain why (p. 34).

The book is lavishly illustrated with colour photographs with captions (but note that on p. 19 a dog, and not a lion, is depicted with the smiting prince). One photograph shows the beautiful Kerma and Meroitic pottery being lackered (p. 26) and in another the "very ample" Nubian queens (p. 29) appear. There are some excurses in table form which explain various concepts: Nubian archery (p. 10), candace or queen (p. 17), entertainment (p. 24), Meroitic writing (p. 33), frogs (p. 37), the life cycle (p. 50), horses (p. 58), huts (p. 64), and Verdi's Aida (p. 67). There is also a chronological table (p. 73) and a glossary defines central concepts (pp. 74-75). The bibliographies are fairly up to date, although some new books are omitted.[5] Women receive attention on pages 27-29.

This book succeeds in putting ancient Africa on the map of the ancient world, as indicated by the adjective "African" in the main title. The author did her best to compare the ancient Kushites with contemporary Sudanese (especially pp. 20, 24, 25 and Chapter Five). Overall, I recommend it.

Notes:

[1]. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1993.

[2]. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1992 and John Taylor.

[3]. London: British Museum, 1991.

[4]. Brookfield, Conn.: Millbrook, 1994 (intended for children ten to twelve years).

[5]. E.g. Peter Shinnie. *Ancient Nubia.* London: Kegan Paul International, 1996; David Welsby. *The Kingdom of Kush. The Napatan and Meroitic Empires.* London: British Museum, 1996 and Laslo Toeroek. *The Kingdom*

of Kush. Handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic Civilization. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

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