Egyptian civilization was in fact peculiarly resistant to outside influence, but many ancient people, including Africans, borrowed from it. This was not however indiscriminate borrowing from an overwhelmingly superior culture and was varied in its effects. The Greeks, for example, were impressed by Egypt; their statutory architecture were in turn strongly influenced by Egypt and, according to the Greeks themselves, some of their leading philosophers and scientists went to Egypt to study its ancient knowledge as well as the new learning established after 320 B.C. in the Hellenistic city of Alexandria. Yet developed Greek art and thought cannot be mistaken for Egyptian. Similarly, amongst ancient Black Africans there must have been varied reactions to Egyptian contact, affected both by the cultural strength of each African group and by the role in which the Egyptians appeared. Egyptians in Africa were sometimes traders and employers, sometimes conquerors and colonists, sometimes defeated enemies.

Physical hindrances to contact must also have affected the potential spread of Egyptian influence. It is generally agreed that in late pre-historic times, between 5000 and 3000 B.C., the chances for contact between the Egyptian Nile valley, the Sahara and Africa south of the Sahara and along the upper reaches of the Nile, were better than in later periods. The Sahara at this time had a moister climate and supported a comparatively large and mobile population which included Negroid and Negro physical types, as did the communities living near modern Khartoum. Certainly, domesticated animals appear to have spread during this period from Egypt (which had derived them from the Near East) throughout North Africa, deep into the Sahara and as far south as Khartoum; agriculture was established in Egypt at the same time but became more slowly. However, there was no comparable spread of Egyptian cultural influence. The many communities along the Egyptian Nile had no political or religious cohesiveness, and the common material culture and necrolithic economy that they shared was not very different in its nature from that of contemporary African cultures. The typical pottery and artifacts of prehistoric Egypt are not found outside of the Nile valley or south of the Second Cataract, and only along the upper Nile is some influence perceptible.

Between the Second Cataract and Khartoum at this time a typical product of the indigenous population, called the "Khartoum Neolithic," people, was pottery with impressed designs, a tradition inherited from their hunting and gathering predecessors. By contrast, the wares of contemporary Egypt were sometimes painted but rarely incised, while the commonest fabric was plain red polished, often with an added black top. This decorative idea was copied on a small scale in the Khartoum Neolithic and eventually became an important feature of later pottery styles in Lower and Upper Nubia. Otherwise, borrowing was restricted to a simple tool, the "gouge" found in fact throughout the Sahara as well as along the Nile.

The civilization of historical Egypt developed so rapidly in the first centuries of the third millennium B.C. that some have suggested that the creative inspiration came from the already developed cultures of Mesopotamia, literacy, centralized political control, an elaborate religious system, a metal (copper, later bronze) technology and a developed style in art and monumental architecture were firmly established in Egypt by 2700 B.C. However, it was just at this time that contact with other parts of Africa became more difficult. The Sahara was and by 2500 B.C. and while its retreating population introduced agriculture and domesticated animals into western and central Africa, the desert routes to Egypt became more difficult to traverse. Even the chief remaining corridor for human movement to the Nile valley, was to a large extent blocked in the south by a vast swamp, the Sudd.

Some scholars therefore doubt that there could have been any significant contact between Egypt and most of Black Africa after 3000 B.C. They suggest that apparent similarities such as the appearance of centralized political structures and divine kingship, which appear in some Black African groups in the first and second millennia A.D., are general and coincidental. Other historians believe such similarities are ultimately derived from ancient Egypt, probably via the "Egyptianized" kingdom of Meroe in the Sudan (591 B.C.-A.D. 320), and are perhaps linked to the diffusion of iron technology and the same source. Recently however the appearance of iron-working in western Africa has been dated to about 500 B.C., and is unlikely to have come from Meroe where iron was still rare at the same date. It can no longer be automatically assumed that the iron-working which appears in central Africa in the early first millennium A.D. was derived from Meroe, since an alternative source is known to have existed.

The controversy will be resolved only by extensive archaeological exploration, which so far has taken place only in the extreme west of the principal area, the modern Republic of the Sudan. Lower Nubia, the area between the First and Second Cataracts (now shared between Egypt and the Sudan), has been thoroughly explored; since 1900 it has served as an ever-
However, the accumulation of data over the last sixty years and its continuous reinterpretation have enabled us to study the earliest effects of ancient Egypt on its nearest southern neighbors, who included considerable numbers of Negro and Negro peoples, and to guess what the effect may have been on more remote Black Africans. For nearly 1500 years (3000-1570 B.C.) the indigenous cultures of Lower Nubia were markedly different from those of historical Egypt, and in Upper Nubia the distinctions carried on into the Merotic period. The differences are most easily be seen in the pottery, in which the varied and inventive traditions of the ancient Sudan contrast strikingly with the unimaginative wares of historical Egypt, but are to be found also in most other aspects of material culture, in language, and surely, in social and political organizations and in religious beliefs. These latter aspects are poorly documented, since the Sudan did not become literate in its own language until ca. 180 B.C. and even now the earliest script, Merotic, remains untranslatable.

Lower Nubia was unlikely to support a highly developed culture. It has access to some important resources (copper, gold and some valued types of stone) but only a small amount of cultivable land, and throughout history it has acted as a buffer zone between Egypt and the inhabitants of Upper Nubia. Nevertheless, the indigenous population of this region (which, certainly by 2200 B.C., consisted of a mixture of brown and black-skinned peoples, according to Egyptian depictions) was remarkably resistant to Egyptian cultural influence in spite of close and sometimes oppressive contact with the Egyptians. Already by ca. 3000 B.C. Egyptian expeditions had reached the Second Cataract while the people of the contemporary Nubian culture, labeled A-group by archaeologists, buried with their dead foods and liquids in imported Egyptian pots.

Model representing a group of Nubian mercenaries carrying bows, from an Egyptian tomb of ca. 2170 B.C. They may well be people from Wawat.
Upper Nubia. Eventually the C-group secured complete control of this trade and as a result, early C-group graves often contain Egyptian artifacts representing both booty and payment.

By ca. 1930 B.C. the Egyptians had reasserted their control over Lower Nubia, and consolidated it with a series of great forts eventually reaching to the southern end of the Second Cataract. These forts, with massive walls thirty to forty feet high, are eloquent testimony to the military threat offered by the C-group and the other African peoples in the general area. During the period of domination the C-group continued to live in hastily built settlements, to bury their dead in substantial and un-Egyptian tombs with circular stone superstructures and to produce a variety of distinctive artifacts showing no Egyptian influence. When Egypt once again underwent an internal decline, the Egyptians did not abandon the forts but the C-group clearly regained some economic and political independence. Late C-group graves are often rich and include a number of especially large examples which probably belong to chieftains; some Egyptian influence may have affected burial customs, but as a whole the native culture of Waset maintained its individuality.

At this point there was a dramatic incursion from Upper Nubia. Upper Nubia, with constan-

able amount of cultivable land, was capable of supporting a larger and more complexly organized population than Lower Nubia. Already in the mid third millennium B.C. an important chiefdom, called Yam, existed in the area; it was visited by Egyptian traders and it provided them with armed escort who protected the traders from the interference of the C-group people of Lower Nubia.

After the Egyptian re-occupation of Lower Nubia however, the relationship became more complex. Upper Nubia, now called Kush, was regarded as a military threat and the great forts were meant in part to prevent Kushite attacks. The Egyptians fought several campaigns south of the Second Cataract and a contemporary inscription, while contemptuous of the Kushites, reveals by its very vehemence a fear and respect for Kushite fighting ability. In a recent translation by Gardiner, the text reads, in part:

When one raises against him [the Nubian] he shows his back; when one retreats he starts to rage. They are not people worthy of respect; they are cowards, cowards, cowards, cruel-hearted.

But the Nubians were formidable enough for the royal author of the inscription to envision that his troops might fail to resist them:... he who shall destroy [the frontier] and fail to fight for it, he is not my son and was not born to me.

Despite the sporadic hostilities, trade continued to flow between Kush and Egypt, although the entry of Kushites into Lower Nubia was carefully regulated. Finally, in ca. 1650 B.C., the Kushites took the opportunity offered by declining Egyptian power, invaded Lower Nubia and occupied the Egyptian forts. Kushite political organization had reached the point where a single king, called by the Egyptians the "ruler of Kush," controlled not only Lower Nubia but probably Upper Nubia, the Kushite home-land, as well. Egypt by now was divided between an Asiatic dynasty in the north and an Egyptian dynasty in the south, and the Kushite and Asiatic rulers entered into an alliance against the Egyptian king. In a unique contemporary inscription, the Egyp-

1. The remains of an Egyptian fort at Shen, near the Second Cataract.

2. A "chieftain's" grave of the late C-group. The chapel attached to the circular superstructure is for offerings.

3. Artist's impression of a Kushite royal burial at Kerma. The funerary procession, including the coffin to be sacrificed, was entering the main corridor while workers completed the construction of the mound. The corridor which contained the sacrifices was filled in last of all.


The tand revealed the political reality of the situation by referring to the Kushite ruler as an equal of the Asiatic and Egyptian kings, in marked contrast to the Egyptian custom of referring to all foreign rulers as inherently inferior to the pharaoh.

Unfortunately, we cannot yet trace through archaeology the development of this important Kushite state, but in 1912-1914 a partially exca-

vated cemetery at Kerma revealed what are almost certainly the royal burials of the "rulers of Kush" of the period ca. 1670-1570 B.C. and some of their predecessors. The latter probably did not exercise as much power, since the Kushites we know were originally divided into a number of tribes and the consolidation of control must have been gradual. The latest royal burials are extraordinary structures. The king was placed, with rich funerary equipment, in a central chamber or pit, and at the same time large numbers of women, presumably from his family, were sacrificed and buried in a nearby corridor or chamber. Over the burial complex was heaped a vast earth mound, sometimes held together by a mud-brick framework and a brick paving over the surface; a large stone cone was sometimes placed at the top.

These Kushite rulers no doubt maintained control over Upper and Lower Nubia through their exalted positions within the community, with however the support of warrior retainers, whose burials are found in and around the royal tumuli. Typically a warrior's funeral equipment includes a formidable metal dagger and he is usually accompanied by two or three sacrificed women. There are also indications that the Kushites had a fleet of boats, which would have secured them control over the river.
Kushite culture was in essentials non-Egyptian. The Kushites were dark-skinned people with their own language or languages, and their burial structures and customs were, for the most part, unparalleled in contemporary Egypt. The great mass of the artifacts from Kerma are of Kushite manufacture; they include excellent pottery, mainly a very fine red polished black-topped ware in beaker and bowl forms, leather garments, and ivory and ivory inlays in animal or geometric form. Nevertheless, the long period of contact inevitably resulted in some cultural interaction with Egypt, the evidence for which needs to be carefully considered.

Hundreds of objects, mostly fragmentary but certainly of Egyptian origin, were found at Kerma, consisting of statues and statuettes of Egyptian kings and officials, faience and stone vessels, metal and wood objects, jewelry, and pottery. This led the excavator, Reiner, to believe that an Egyptian garrison and manufacturing center had dominated the Kushites, but it is now clear that some of these objects were plunder from Lower Nubia and the rest were secured through trade. The Kushites evidently were impressed by some aspects of Egyptian civilization; they collected Egyptian artifacts, refurbished some of the Egyptian temples in Lower Nubia and engaged the services of Egyptian scribes and craftsmen, some of whom must have been at Kerma. However, the technical knowledge of these Egyptians was applied to giving material form to Kushite conceptions and one may suspect that any intellectual influence from Egypt was similarly transformed. Thus, the knowledge of building in brick-mud may have derived from Egypt, but these massive brick structures found at Kerma are not of traditional Egyptian design. Their enormous walls take up between 80 and 90% of each structure and were meant to support an extensive second story, none of which survived. The ground floor rooms are quite small. One of these buildings, near the river, was perhaps the residence of the Kushite king; the two others, in the cemetery, were chapels and contained wall paintings in Egyptian style but of quite un-Egyptian content. Rows of painted hippopotami, giraffes and ships indicate a close connection with indigenous beliefs and experience.

In and around the denuded Kushite town at Kerma there was evidence for considerable industrial activity, including the making of pottery, faience and copper or bronze objects. The Kushites were skilled potters, but the faience-workers and metalurgists were probably Egyptian; their products however reflected Kushite culture. Faience (a powdered stone composition covered with a glassy glaze) occurs frequently but an un-Egyptian glazing of stone objects is also not uncommon, and some of the material produced, such as lions in blue faience or blue-glazed stone, are of Egyptian form but are not paralleled in Egypt itself. The famous Kerma daggers are based on an Egyptian prototype fitted however with a peculiarly Kushite pommel of ivory and tortoise shell, and there are occasional metal copies of typical Kushite pottery shapes.

The subsequent history of Kushite culture is not yet known. Between 1570 and 1200 B.C. the resurgent Egyptians rapidly re-occupied Lower Nubia and campaigned into Kushite territory until new Egyptians were established at Napata. For the next 400 years Wawat (Lower Nubia) and Kush were colonial possessions, governed by an Egyptian viceroy, receiving an annual tribute, primarily of gold, to Egypt. The Nubians of Wawat now became Egyptianized and their chieftains, absorbed into the admin-

1 A reconstructed section view of ‘VI. II,’ a brick chapel in the Kushite royal cemetery at Kerma. The ground floor chambers were roofed with wooden beams supported by wood columns, and the outer room had a stone slab floor. The painted walls were painted by Egyptian artists with scenes of Kushite inspiration. The details of the second story rooms are unknown.

2 Statue from Buhen in Lower Nubia of an Egyptianized chief of Wawat, Amenemhet (ca. 1500-1460 B.C.). He is depicted in completely Egyptian style and only his full official titles, found on another statue, reveal that he is Nubian.

The nile system is said to be completely Egyptian, but the Nile the transformation was probably even more radical and the resistance of the indigenous cultures to it even stronger.

Suggested Reading

meant that the southern lands played a role in Egyptian foreign policy approaching in importance that of western Asia. The cultural interaction between Egypt and her nearest Black African neighbors was then a complex matter from very early times; Egyptian influence was sometimes resisted and, if absorbed, underwent a transformation in the process. If it did penetrate into Africa beyond the Nile the transformation was probably even more radical and the resistance of the indigenous cultures to it even stronger.