

Ancient Egypt: The Kushite Period **The British Museum**

The Twenty-fifth Dynasty comprised the kings Piye (Piankhy), Shabako, Shabitku, Taharqa and Tanutamun. With the breakdown of Egyptian sovereignty in Egypt at the end of the Libyan period, the Nubian kings began to look north. The Kushite king Piye's conquest of Egypt is dramatically described on a stela which he set up at the Temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal, a religious site in Upper Nubia. Piye returned to Kush, a region of Nubia to the south of ancient Egypt, but left his sister in an important religious office at Thebes. This was typical of the transmission of power among the Kushite kings, who succeeded fraternally rather than by descent. The Kushite kings ruled remotely from their capital at Napata, using Egypt as a buffer against the Assyrian empire. They were finally forced to abandon Egypt when the Assyrian army sacked Thebes.

Several Kushite kings carried out building projects within Egypt. The art of this period looked back to the Old Kingdom (about 2613-2160 BC) for inspiration, showing the kings as powerfully built. However, kings of this period wear two rearing cobras, or *uraei*, instead of one, and display southern physical traits. Although the kings were represented within the conventions of Egyptian art, they were buried according to their own traditions in the cemeteries around Napata. Taharqa introduced several Egyptian elements into the funerary practices of the Kushite kings, including the provision of *shabt* figures. These and other Egyptian motifs were retained during the later Meroitic period.