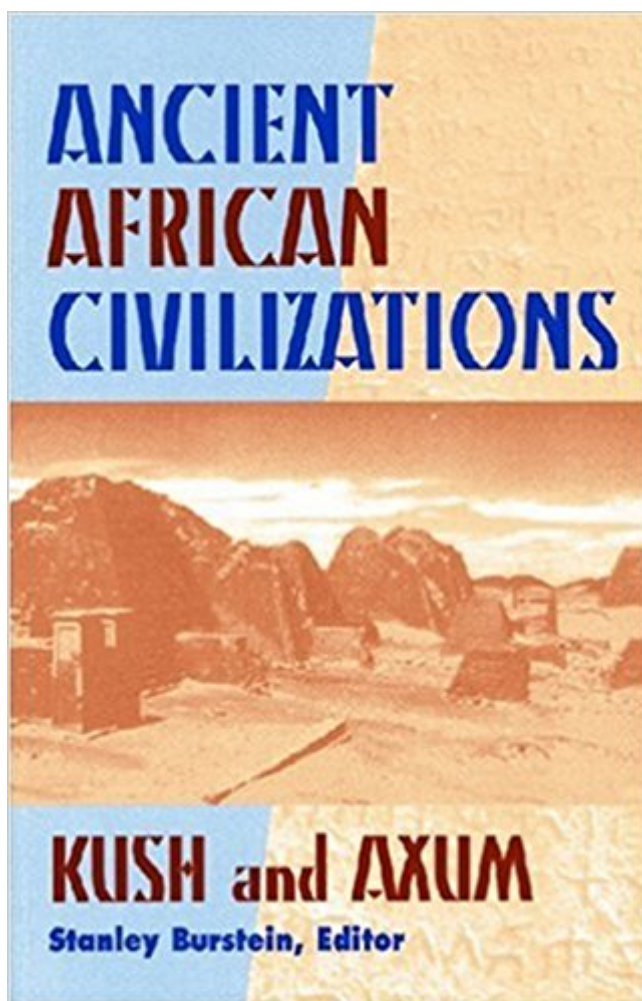


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Ancient African Civilizations: Kush And Axum



Synopsis

Stanley Burstein has researched, compiled, and translated with commentary the most significant Greek and Roman sources concerning black Africa. The result is this work about the people of the southern part of the Nile Valley, the gold mines of Nubia, the Hellenistic city of Meroe, capital of the Ethiopian Empire of Kush with its own highly developed culture (300 BC to 300 AD). Burstein opens the volume with a brief survey of the two kingdoms of Kush and Axum. With introductions and notes he then presents the ancient literary and epigraphical testimony for this region.

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Customer Reviews

The region [of Kush and Axum] is known for antiquity only from dispersed written testimonies and from archaeological remains; it is a region for which connected political narrative is impossible. For many years...Stanley Burstein has worked to bring to scholarly and public attention the little that is known about it. The present volume, *Ancient African Kingdoms*, offers lightly annotated translations of twenty-seven texts concerned with the geography, ethnography, and history of the ancient equivalents of the modern nation-states of Sudan and Ethiopia. It aims to be useful to a wide audience... The texts are scattered over a thousand years (from the third century B.C.E. to the eighth century C.E.)....In a deft, twenty-page introduction, the editor sketches the histories of Kush and Axum. Burstein's collection gives the most important pieces of information about Kush and Axum that are preserved in writing--apart from the hieroglyphic Egyptian inscriptions that (mainly) document the history of Kush before the third century B.C.E. Unless, or until, the Merotic language is deciphered, it includes all the basics for later Kushite history. --Classical Bulletin vol. 75, no. 2 -

Stanley Burstein, California State University at Los Angeles, is also the co-editor of *Land of the Enchanters* (p.22).

This gives the history (it's weak on legacy) of ancient Sudan and Ethiopia starting with Menelek reputed son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Kushites ruled Egypt as the 25th dynasty from 734 to 664 BC. It relates African to world history with the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses in 525BC. It covers relations with Egypt, Persia and later Rome. Carthaginians are strangely absent, perhaps being a bit west of the action herein. Scholarship is established with copied, out of context, fragments of stelae and other documentation. Most interesting is the accounts of burning, looting and raping from the Axumite king, boasting of his conquests in the manner of an Assyrian conqueror. The book describes trade, with African goods flowing to Rome. Conversion to Christianity occurred in the 4th century CE. It's a very spotty history with the expedition on behalf of Nero, prefects under Diocletian and Justinian and not much in between. Conquest of Kush by the rising Axumite kingdom moving westward occurred in the 4th century CE. There's bits about language and religion, not much of culture. A chronology or king list would have been welcome. Besides no inclusion of Carthage, there is no mention of the later African kingdoms that preceded the colonial era. The book ends, or rather peters out, with the conquest of Egypt by the Arab general Amr Al-As and the attempt of his brother to pacify Numidia. There is next to nothing of any legacy of either civilization. The book doesn't leave me with the feeling that I learned very much history, but it does give clues for further research.

This book is a collection of some 27 historical documents that deal with the ancient and medieval African nations of Kush and Axum. The first two documents are drawn from Strabo's *Geography*, while later ones are from similar Greek, Roman and Christian travelers, and also various letters, treaties and inscriptions. Also, there is even a contract for the sale of a Nubian slave girl! As one might expect from the nature of this book, it is a mixed bag. Some of the documents are quite fascinating and informative, while others did not interest me in the least. So, if you are looking for a book on the history of Kush and Axum, you will need to look elsewhere. But, if you are interested in historical documents on these nations, then this would be an excellent book for you to read.

This rather misleading book is merely a collection of translated Greek, Roman and Arabic texts that consider aspects of these two ancient civilizations. There are also a few from the cultures themselves. The trouble with this account is that it takes many passing comments on Kush and Axum and lets them speak for themselves. The trouble is, they don't say much! What we have here is a rather banal, disinterested collection of secondary texts that give a very blurry picture of the two civilizations. The idea of using textual sources to present an 'authentic' vision of a culture is admirable, but it must be done carefully. This book needs work.

"Stanley Burstein has researched, compiled, and translated with commentary the most significant Greek and Roman sources concerning Black Africa. The result is a fascinating book about the people of the southern part of the Nile Valley, the gold mines of Nubia, the Hellenistic city of Meroë, capital of the Ethiopian Empire of Kush with its own highly developed culture (300 bc to 300 ad). This book is a masterpiece of scholarship and historical research."-Midwest Book Review

"The ancient kingdoms of Kush and Axum were reflections of ancient Egypt to the north, but with the collapse of Egypt, Kush flourished and then gave way to Axum. . . . Burstein opens the volume with a brief survey of the two kingdoms; with introductions and important notes he then presents the ancient literary and epigraphical testimony for this region. . . . A brief bibliography and photographs aid this significant volume."-Choice

. . . an important contribution to Black Africa."-Choice

"Kush (Nubia) and Axum have received less attention from ancient historians than the other African civilizations with whom the Greeks and Romans came into contact (and conflict). This source book of ancient texts in English translation will help students become better aware of how the so-called Aethiopians who lived in Northeast Africa differed from their better-known neighbors the Egyptians. The twenty-six texts collected here are all readily accessible to students with a basic knowledge of ancient Egyptian, Greek, or Roman civilization. . . . Each text is presented with a brief introduction setting it into its historical context, and additional essential information is provided in endnotes, where the names of the authors and their dates are given There is a useful select bibliography."--Classical World 92.4 (1999)

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