

BLACK HISTORY MONTH – Week 1

#BlackHistoryMatters

African Civilizations



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WEEK 1: AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS

Africa is the cradle of humankind and Nubia, an early African society, is the oldest civilization in the world. Nubia was also the very first kingdom in human history to be ruled by a monarchy. The civilization grew along the Nile River in the country now called Sudan. Nubia was referred to as “Ta-Seti” by Ancient Egyptians. Ta-Seti means “land of the bow” which described the skilled archers that lived there. Ancient Egyptians likely called Nubia the name we now know it as because it had a wealth of gold. The Egyptian word for gold was nbu (pronounced nub).

Nubia and Egypt had a very close relationship. They both fought for control over the other’s territory and ruled each others’ kingdoms at various times in their histories. Both societies traded goods and services with each other. Nubian soldiers served in the Egyptian army and Egypt hired Nubian labourers. Nubians were painted in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Aspects of Egyptian culture and religion were adapted by the people of Nubia.

Kush was a kingdom within Nubia that emerged around 850 BCE. Kush ruled Egypt during the 25th dynasty (746 – 656 BCE) beginning with the reign of King Piye (747 – 716 BCE). His son Taharqa (690 – 664 BCE) was the last Kushite ruler in the dynasty of “Black Pharaohs” who ruled ancient Egypt for almost 100 years before the kingdom of Egypt came under control of the Assyrians. The Old Testament of the Bible mentions King Taharqa leading an army in support of the kingdom of Judah during its revolt against Assyria. Over time, the name Kush came to replace the name Nubia when referring to the civilization.

One way historical information has been learned about the African kingdoms of Nubia and Kush is through archaeology. Some artefacts that archaeologists have found where Nubia was once located include pottery, an ancient grooming set, sculptures, and pyramids. Nubia had nearly twice the number of pyramids as Egypt. The pyramids were used as royal tombs and monuments. The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto has an interesting connection to artefacts of Nubia and Kush. Archaeologist Krzysztof Grzymalski, Senior Curator of Nubia and Egypt at the Royal Ontario Museum and professor at the University of Toronto, has been unearthing the remains of Kush and other lost civilizations of ancient Nubia, in what is now northern Sudan.

Some of the artefacts he recovered during the thirty years he has worked in that region of Sudan make up the ROM’s Nubia gallery and others were donated. The Nubia Gallery, which opened in 1992, is the first of its kind in North America. The artefacts in the modest collection include a blue glass vase, a white glazed ceramic charm, and a sculpture of a human head, all dating back to the turn of the Common Era. Grzymalski has also made another fascinating find. He has located what he believes are the remains of a Kushite palace and a colonnade in the royal city of Meroë.

African kingdoms like Nubia, Egypt, and Kush, Mali, and Axsum have influenced early societies that came after them in the areas of culture, architecture, engineering, astronomy, medicine, mining, philosophy, international, trade, and art. The contributions of their knowledge, talents and skills, resources, and ideas have contributed greatly to the advancement of civilization.



ACTIVITY

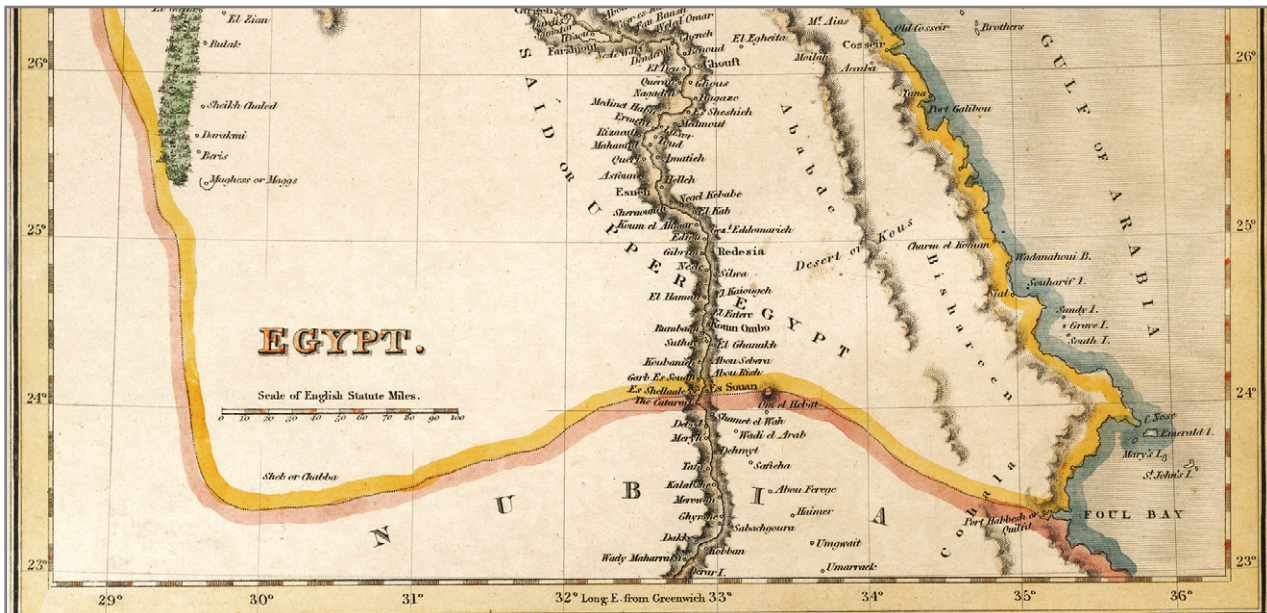
Read the background on African Civilizations and watch the The Story of Nubia video, ROM <http://tinyurl.com/romstoryofnubia1>

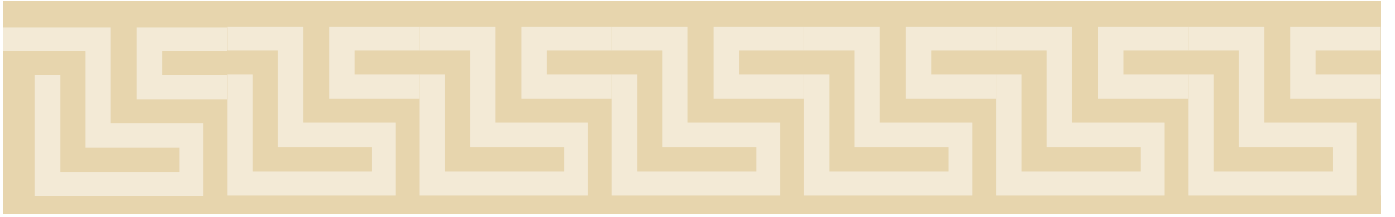
Use the words in the Word Bank to complete the sentences:

Word Bank

(pyramid, excavating, Egypt, civilization, gold, Kush, Sudan, Meroë, artefacts, ROM)

- 1) Nubia is the oldest in the world.
- 2) The kingdom of Nubia is in the present-day country of
- 3) was a state in Nubia and was one of its capital cities.
- 4) Archaeologists began in 1909 with help from local workers.
Some of the were donated to the in Toronto.
- 5) Italian traveller and tomb raider Giuseppe Ferlini found lots of treasures in the royal of Queen Amanishakheto in Kush.
- 6) Nubia and were very closely connected.





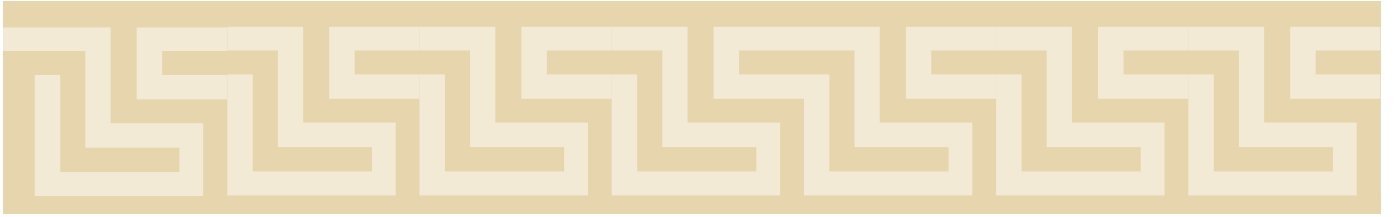
Studying Nubian Artefacts

Examine the images of artefacts in the ROM's Ancient Egypt and Nubia collection using the link below. Select one of the artefacts and complete the Artefacts Analysis Worksheet on page 5 to help you learn more about it.

Read the details on the image pages to gather information to record on the Artefact Analysis Worksheet:

<http://tinyurl.com/romnubial>





Artefact Analysis Worksheet

PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE ARTEFACT

Describe the material from which it was made: bone, pottery, metal, wood, stone, leather, glass, paper, cardboard, cotton, wood, plastic, other material.

SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE ARTEFACT

Describe how it looks and feels: shape, color, texture, size, weight, movable parts, anything printed, stamped or written on it.

USES OF THE ARTEFACT

A. What might it have been used for (sitting, sleeping, storing objects inside, cooking, eating/drinking, keeping clean, fighting/hunting, building, making crafts or other tools, farming, fishing, animal care, holidays/rituals/religion, communicating, making clothes, lighting, medical/dental use, other)?

B. Who might have used it?

C. Where might it have been used?

D. When might it have been used (dates or historical period)?

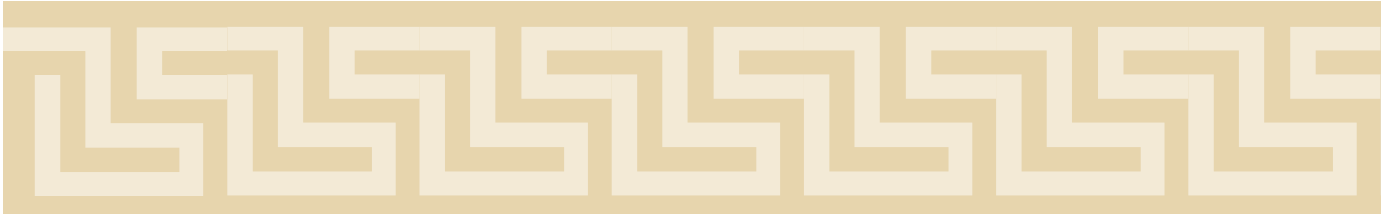


Photo: Tristan Samuels

Tristan Samuels

Tristan Samuels is currently an MA student in Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of Toronto's Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations Department. His civilizations of interest are Kemet (ancient Egypt) and ancient Nubia. His research focuses on the cultural connections between Kemet and Nubia and emphasizes their commonalities in an African cultural context.

Archaeology and archaeologists play an important role in uncovering evidence on the lives of people of African descent.



Photo: Timothy Hudson at York

Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost, Archaeologist and Historian

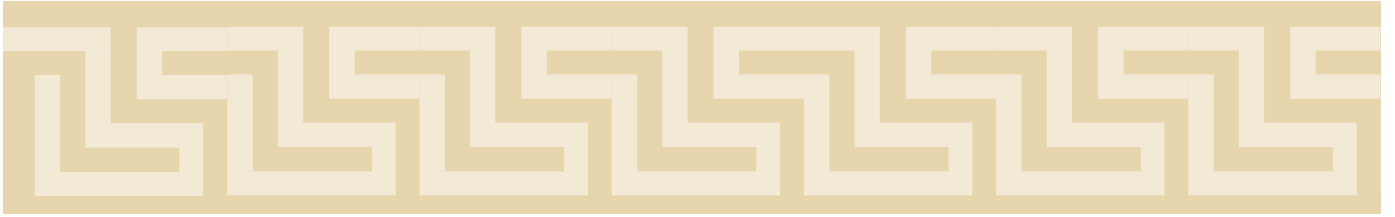
Historian and archaeologist Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost excavated the first Underground Railroad site in Canada. In 1985 Smardz Frost led a dig in the schoolyard of Inglebrook Community High School in downtown Toronto. Her team uncovered the remains of the Blackburns' home and discovered clues that revealed the area served as a terminal for the Underground Railroad when it was inhabited by Lucie and Thornton Blackburn between 1834 and 1890. They excavated some broken household items, horseshoe nails, a dog collar, and bricks heaped in a pit. She wrote a book about the Blackburns called *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (2007). It was the first book on African Canadian history to win the Governor-General's Literary Award for Non-Fiction.



Photo: Marishana Mabusela

Marishana Mabusela, Archaeologist

Toronto-born Marishana Mabusela is an archaeologist. She has worked as a Field Technician and Laboratory Technician in Canada, Jordan and England. As a Field Technician, she uses a variety of survey and excavation techniques. She systematically walks ploughed fields. She also test-pits lawns and woodlots in the search for artefacts to assess the land and gather GPS coordinates. In both Canada and Jordan, Mabusela excavated sites and processed the material in a laboratory. As a Laboratory Technician, she washed and sorted recently excavated artefacts in preparation for analysis, and organized archaeological collections for safe and sustainable storage. As with all fieldwork, she completes field records and paperwork. She graduated from the University of Toronto with an Honours Bachelor of Arts Degree as an Archaeology Specialist and Anthropology Minor. She is currently completing a Masters Degree in Archaeology at University College London and works in the Finds Department at an archaeology company in London, England.



Activity:

You have been assigned to interview Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost, Marishana Mabusela, and Tristan Samuels for an article on archaeology and Black history. List 3 – 5 questions you would ask each person.

Tristan Samuels

Dr. Karolyn Smardz Frost

Marishana Mabusela

Additional resources:

“Nubia,” Firsts, Sankofa Black Heritage Collection by Natasha Henry

Early Civilizations of Africa, Sankofa Black Heritage Collection by Adrienne Shadd