The ancient geographic area known as Kush (also called Nubia) lies to the south of Egypt, and is today the Sudan. The land is rich in resources, especially gold. As a rite of passage upon their accession to the throne, ancient Egyptian kings would undertake military expeditions into Kush to establish their dominance of this area. Due to the constant influx and influence of the Egyptian kings and their culture throughout the centuries, the Kushites appear to have adopted some aspects of ancient Egyptian culture as their own, including aspects of religion and elements of the political framework. Thus, the Kushite Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt, which ruled both the lands of Egypt and Kush from circa 750 BCE to 655 BCE, in many ways, exhibited an ‘Egyptianised’ version of their own identity.

Taharqa was the fourth king of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, acceding to the throne of the ‘Double Kingdom’ in circa 690 BCE.¹ He was the son of the great Piankhy,² who had conquered Egypt and became ruler of both lands. Taharqa’s accession came at a time of relative peace in Kush and Egypt, when the established Kushite rule was at its height; an era which was considered to be ‘the golden age of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty.’³ Evidence from texts commissioned by Taharqa during his rule depict a young king at the height of his physical and military power,⁴ supremely wealthy and confident in his

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1 Pope 2014, 3.
2 Jansen-Winkeln 2003, 153; Török 2002, 69; Vittmann, 2007, 143. Abalo (J-bA-rw), one of Piye’s wives, is thought to have been Taharqa’s mother. See Laming Macadam 1949, 121.
3 Lobban 1999, 337.
4 Taharqa is referred to as a ‘goodly youth’ in the text of Stela Kawa IV. See Laming
divinely ordained position as king of both Egypt and Kush.

Taharqa is the focus of the current exhibition at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, curated by Dr. Tine Bagh, Carlsberg Scholar at the Glyptotek. The aims of this display of late Nubian material culture are twofold. Firstly, to publicly present for the first time the entire Nubian collection of the Ny Carlsberg foundation as a cohesive whole. Secondly, to highlight that while ancient Egypt was for centuries the dominant civilisation in North Africa, the Nubian kings (with Taharqa as their culmination) became wealthy and powerful in their own right after circa 750 BCE, rivalling the ancient Egyptian pharaohs themselves. The juxtaposition of the uniquely African Kushite culture and its Egyptian heritage is a thread which is discernible throughout this exhibition. The presentation features items from the golden reign of Taharqa, as well as other Nubian artefacts excavated from sites in the Sudan in recent decades. The exhibition aims to educate historians and a general audience alike.

While the exhibition is not large, it has some of the most interesting and unusual artefacts from the late Nubian period. The exhibition rooms feel uncluttered and composed, and the lighting for each separate area is appropriate for the items on display. The Glyptotek is a beautiful building, designed as a museum with sculpture as its focus; hence it is the ideal setting for a historical display such as this. The rooms are sufficiently spacious to facilitate the construction of an intimate exhibition without being echoing halls of impersonality. The visitor is moved smoothly from room to room by the design of the layout of the museum, without feeling hurried or like something has been overlooked.

Transitioning through the doorway into the enclosed exhibition area from the relative spaciousness of the Egyptian hall inside the Glyptotek is an effective way of drawing the visitor forward. A circular antechamber—a bright, acces-

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Macadam 1949, 15.
sible area that gives vital basic information regarding ‘Nubian Landscapes’, (that is, the physical and historical context of the culture at the heart of this exhibition)—greets you. You are immediately drawn to a trio of Taharqa’s relics: a statue of the king holding an offering table (ÆIN 1706), an inscribed monumental column (ÆIN 1711) and a baboon statue (ÆIN 1705), which sets the scene for the curiosities to come. This leads into a slightly darkened chamber, where some of Taharqa’s major monumental texts, including Stele Kawa III, V and VIII (respectively: ÆIN 1707, 1712 and 1708) are arranged against the walls. In pride of place in the centre of the room is the carved stone leonine sphinx of Taharqa (on loan from the British Museum, EA 1770). This gorgeous piece, with its distinctively Kushite facial characteristics, is one of the highlights of the exhibition. Another star piece is the stone head of king Taharqa (ÆIN 1538, dated circa 675 BCE). The features of this fine piece minutely depict his African heritage, but the solemn and dignified expression caught by the artist who carved it intimately reminds us of the regal nature of this black Pharaoh.

As compelling counterpoints, an extensive variety of Nubian finds from Meroë and Kawa by John Garstang and Francis Llewellyn Griffith have been arranged near the royal items of Taharqa. Included among these are non-royal items, such as the fascinating stone thumb-rings of Meroitic archers. The range of antiquities presented here by the curator provides an opportunity to compare and contrast non-royal with royal, and also to compare the relics of different geographic areas, giving a holistic impression of late Kushite culture. The context of these items is never forgotten, with information boards readily available. It is fascinating to see the development of the Meroitic civilisation (circa 300 BCE to 300 CE) demonstrated here through its material culture. Of particular interest is the Meroitic sandstone statue called ‘The Reclining Man’ (ÆIN 1484, circa 300 BCE) which demonstrates first-hand the Hellenistic influence on this North African society.

Additional information boards relating to the period between the Napa-
tan and Meroitic eras in Kush (with material covering the importance of the Kushite royal women, and the decline of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty and the Kushite rule in Egypt, for example) would have been a nice transition between the Taharqa collection and items from Kawa and Meroë. Unless you have some background knowledge of these time periods and their contexts relative to each other, the transition between the two collections is not smooth. Additionally, the conclusion of the exhibition is not indicated; you are suddenly and simply ejected out into a hall of Greek statuary. This can be quite confusing when you have just been in the Nubian zone.

Given the compact size of this exhibition, the quality of the artefacts on show is exceptional, as is the design of the exhibit as a whole. As an added bonus, the excellently presented catalogue to the exhibition is available in the Glyptotek museum shop, and is a steal at DKK129 (around NZ$25). The catalogue is not only a wonderful souvenir but is also an integral factor in enhancing the visitor's understanding of the exhibits.
Bibliography


