

Strabo

Roman Historian

Excerpts from his writings "Geography," c. 22 CE

The mode of life of the Ethiopians¹ is wretched; they...wander from place to place with their flocks. Their flocks and herds are small in size, whether sheep, goats, or oxen; the dogs also, though fierce and quarrelsome, are small...They live on millet and barley, from which also a drink is prepared. They have no oil, but use butter and fat instead. There are no fruits, except the produce of trees in the royal gardens. Some feed even upon grass, the tender twigs of trees, the lotus, or the roots of reeds. They live also upon the flesh and blood of animals, milk, and cheese. They reverence their kings as gods, who are for the most part shut up in their palaces.

Their largest royal seat is the city of Meroë. [The region surrounding it] is very mountainous, and contains great forests. The inhabitants are nomads, who are partly hunters and partly farmers. There are also mines of copper, iron, gold, and various kinds of precious stones. It is surrounded on the side of Libya by great hills of sand, and on that of Arabia by continuous precipices. In the higher parts on the south, it is bounded by the rivers Astaboras [modern Atbara], Astapa [the White Nile], and Astasobas [the Blue Nile]. On the north is the continuous course of the Nile to Egypt...

Kings are appointed from among persons distinguished by their personal beauty, or by their breeding of cattle, or by their courage, or their riches. In Meroë the priests anciently held the highest rank, and sometimes sent orders even to the king...At last one of their kings abolished this custom...

¹The Greeks and Romans referred to the people of Nubia as Ethiopians.

This primary source document is available online at Fordham University's site *Ancient History Sourcebook* at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/nubia1.html>