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THE HORSES OF KUSH*

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CHARIOTRY and cavalry superiority were essential to success in military battles of the first millennium B.C. The Assyrians left numerous records concerning the incorporation of foreign chariotry and cavalry units into their army. These texts make especially frequent mention of Kushite horses. In this article, the textual, representational, and archaeological evidence for horses in the Kushite realm will be examined. The cuneiform evidence for the presence of Kushites and Kushite horses in Assyria during the reigns of several Neo-Assyrian kings will also be discussed.¹ The evidence for the breeding of horses in the Dongola Reach area of the Third Cataract during the medieval period and later will also be reviewed. It will be posited that this region was already an important horse-breeding center during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty and perhaps earlier.²

I. THE KUSHITES AND THEIR HORSES

According to the victory stela from Napata, when the Kushite king Piye (747–716 B.C.) entered the stables of the defeated ruler of Hermopolis around 728 B.C., he became outraged at the sight of the neglected horses stabled in them. It was distressing to him that

* This article was initially presented as a paper at the American Research Center in Egypt meeting held in Boston, in April 1991. I wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Steven Cole, of Harvard University, who collated the cuneiform sources, checked the Assyriological references, and edited the final draft. For recent works dealing with related topics, see S. Bökönyi, "Two Horse Skeletons from the Cemetery of Kurru, Northern Sudan," *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 45 (1993): 301–16; Laszlo Török, "Iconography and Mentality: Three Remarks on the Kushite Way of Thinking," in W. V. Davies, ed., *Egypt and Africa: Nubia from Prehistory to Islam* (London, 1991), pp. 195–204; and Robert G. Morkot, "Economic and Cultural Exchange between Kush and Egypt" (Ph.D. diss., University College, London, 1993), pp. 256–65. For a discussion of the significance of horse and camel sacrifices in connection with royal tombs dating between the eighth century B.C. and the fifth century A.D. in the Sudan, see Patrice

Lenoble, "Une monture pour mon royaume: sacrifices triomphaux de chevaux et de méhara d'El Kurru à Bal-lana," *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 6 (1994): 107–30.

¹ This article builds upon the research of S. M. Dalley, "Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry in the Armies of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 31–48, and J. N. Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription in the Assyrian Empire*, Studia Pohl: Series Major, no. 3 (Rome, 1974). See also the reference to Postgate's work in Piotr Scholz, "Pferd," in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 4 (Wiesbaden, 1982), cols. 1010–12, n. 18.

² The earliest horse skeleton known in either Egypt or the Sudan was discovered at Buhen in an archaeological context dated to the destruction of the Middle Kingdom fortress around 1675 B.C. (200 years before the earliest known horse remains from Egypt); see D. M. Dixon, J. Clutton-Brock, and R. Burleigh, "The Buhen Horse," in W. B. Emery, H. S. Smith, and A. Millard, *The Fortress of Buhen: The Archaeological Report*, Egypt Exploration Society Memoir, no. 49 (London, 1979), pp. 191–95. The excessive wear on the one remaining lower molar showed that the horse had been ridden or driven with a bit in its mouth. Radiocarbon dating was attempted on this skeletal material, but the collagen in the bones was too degraded to be measured; see R. Burleigh, "Attempted Radiocarbon Dating of the Buhen Horse," in Emery, Smith, and Millard, *Buhen*, p. 195.

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these horses had been allowed to starve during his siege of the city of his rebellious vassal.³ Piye seems to have had a great admiration for horses. He had them depicted atop this victory stela at Napata⁴ and on reliefs on the walls of the temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal.⁵ He also initiated the custom of burying a team of horses in a cemetery near his tomb at El Kurru, the earliest of the Gebel Barkal royal cemeteries.⁶ This practice was followed by three of his successors.⁷ A relief block from the temple of Taharqa at Kawa depicts a rider on a horse wearing a sun-hat.⁸ Also, the excavator of the Kushite site of Sanam speculated that a series of rooms comprising the so-called "Treasury" could have been stalls for the stabling of horses, although the surviving reliefs on the temple at Sanam depict mules—not horses—either being ridden or pulling chariots and wagons.⁹ Finally, a Ptolemaic or Roman period relief from Temple 250 at Meroe shows horsemen with lances.¹⁰

II. KUSHITE HORSES AND THEIR HANDLERS IN ASSYRIA

By the late eighth century B.C., the Assyrians had also developed a deep appreciation of horses. Cavalry and chariotry forces were of utmost importance to Assyria's strategy of

³ N.-C. Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi(ankh)y au Musée du Caire: JE 48862 et 47086–47089*, *Etudes sur la Propagande Royale Egyptienne*, vol. 1 (Cairo, 1981), pp. 68–69, §13, ll. 64–67.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pls. 1 and 5. For the shape of the head and the elongated body conformation, see C. Rommelaere, *Les chevaux du Nouvel Empire égyptien: Origines, races, harnachement*, *Connaissance de l'Égypte Ancienne*, Etude no. 3 (Brussels, 1991), pp. 34–37, 44–46.

⁵ Smith, *Art and Architecture*, p. 397, fig. 390, and D. Dunham, *The Barkal Temples* (Boston, 1970), pl. 50.

⁶ Dunham, *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush*, vol. 1, *El Kurru* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), pp. 116–17.

⁷ Shabako, Shebitku, and Tanwetamani all had horses buried in Cemetery 200 at El Kurru; see *ibid.*, pp. 110–16. But, in fact, only two of the rows of horse burials at El Kurru were actually dated by inscribed objects found in them. These were dated to the reigns of Shabako and Shebitku. Because Piye preceded these kings in burial at El Kurru and because Tanwetamani was the next ruler buried there, however, scholars have ascribed the horse burials to all four rulers; see G. A. Reisner, "The Discovery of the Tombs of the Egyptian XXVth Dynasty at El-Kurru in Dongola Province," *Sudan Notes and Records* 2 (1919): 252–54. Taharqa was buried at Nuri, but no horse burials were identified at that site.

According to G. M. Allen of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, the skeletal remains in these horse graves were of a "short, rather small breed, not unlike the Arab"; see Dunham, *El Kurru*, p. 111. The publication states that no skulls were found in these graves, and it was thus assumed that the horses were decapitated before burial. Bökönyi, however, found skull fragments and teeth when he stud-

ied the two horse skeletons at Harvard University in 1986; see "Kurru Horse Skeletons," pp. 302, 303, and 305. Bökönyi states that the horses had very slender limbs and wide, flat hooves and that they were "large animals [over fifteen hands], of a much greater size than the average oriental horses of their time. . . ."; see *ibid.*, p. 307. According to Bökönyi, there is no evidence that they were castrates.

Another horse grave—perhaps dated to the mid-seventh century B.C.—was found in the South Cemetery at Meroe; see Dunham, *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush*, vol. 5, *The West and South Cemeteries at Meroe* (Boston, 1963), p. 441 (S 193). Since no objects were found in this tomb, the dating remains uncertain.

⁸ M. F. Laming Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa: History and Archaeology of the Site* (London, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 75 and 136 (object no. 0796), and vol. 2, pl. 1b (Ashmolean 1931.551).

⁹ F. Ll. Griffith, "Oxford Excavations in Nubia," *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* (Liverpool) 9 (1922): 99–100, pls. 31–34 and 117–18, pls. 50–53. More evidence for the riding of horses is found in an inscription on the stela of Nastasen from the second half of the fourth century B.C., wherein the king states that he mounted a "great horse" to ride to his coronation ceremony at Gebel Barkal; see T. Eide et al., *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*, vol. 2, *From the Mid-Fifth to the First Century B.C.* (Bergen, 1996), pp. 477–78, l. 12.

¹⁰ S. Wenig, *Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan*, vol. 2, *The Catalogue* (New York, 1978), pp. 59–61, fig. 36. Wenig, while noting the possibility that these reliefs may date to the Merioteic period, believed that the battle reliefs from the south wall stemmed rather from the reign of Aspelta in the early sixth century B.C.; see *ibid.*, p. 63, n. 16.

controlling trade and politics throughout the Near East. The Assyrians obtained their horses as booty and tribute, and by trade. Tiglath-pileser III, who ruled from 744 to 727 B.C.,¹¹ claims to have taken Egyptian horses as booty after his victories over the Mediterranean coastal cities of Kašpūna (modern al-Minā³) and Tyre.¹² The Egyptians also sent horses to the Assyrian kings. Sargon II (721–705 B.C.) states in an inscription that Šilkanni (= Osorkon IV, 730–715 B.C.) sent him “twelve large horses of Egypt, the like of which did not exist in . . . [his] country.”¹³ Other inscriptions of Sargon mention gifts of “large Egyptian horses trained to the yoke” (i.e., trained as chariot horses), which were presented to him upon the inauguration of his new capital, Dūr-Šarrukīn.¹⁴ Sargon’s successor, Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.), claims that when he defeated the Judean king, Hezekiah, and his Egyptian and Kushite allies at the Philistine city of Ekron (Eltekeh) in 701 B.C., he captured Egyptian and Nubian charioteers.¹⁵ Horses are listed among the booty which Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.) took from Egypt in the course of his campaigns there and are also counted among the annual tribute payments which he imposed on that land.¹⁶ In addition, Esarhaddon carried off to Assyria numerous captives from the palace at Memphis, including the crown prince of the Kushite king Taharqa, his other sons, his daughters, his wives and concubines, and his palace attendants.¹⁷ Ashurbanipal (668–627 B.C.) also includes “large horses” among the booty he claims to have taken from Egypt when he reconquered it in ca. 663 B.C.¹⁸

While these inscriptions do not specifically mention “Kushite” horses, there are numerous references to Kushites and Kushite horses in other Neo-Assyrian documents. Stephanie Dalley assembled much of the relevant data, noting that,

. . . [T]he late eighth century was a time when the Assyrians were increasingly aware of the importance of equestrian technology. Suddenly during that period cavalry in particular developed into

¹¹ Regnal years for the Assyrian kings are taken from J. A. Brinkman, “Mesopotamian Chronology of the Historical Period,” in A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, rev. ed. completed by E. Reiner (Chicago, 1977), p. 346. Those for the Egyptian and Kushite rulers are taken from K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 BC)*, 2d ed. with supplement (Warminster, 1986), pp. 588–89.

¹² H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, King of Assyria* (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 176 (Summ. 8), l. 7⁺ and 188 (Summ. 9), rev. 8 (both contexts partially restored).

¹³ E. F. Weidner, “Šilkann(he)ni, König von Mušri, ein Zeitgenosse Sargons II., nach einem neuen Bruchstück der Prisma-Inschrift des assyrischen Königs,” *Archiv für Orientforschung* 14 (1941–44): 42, ll. 8–11.

¹⁴ A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen, 1994), pp. 80, ll. 66–67, 186, l. 450; and 245, ll. 183–84; also D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 2, *Historical Records of Assyria from Sargon to the End* (London, 1989), pp. 39, §74 and 44, §87.

Sargon II seems to have been allied with the Kushite king Shabako (716–702 B.C.). After the king of Ashdod fled from the Assyrians to Meluḥḥa (perhaps another name for Kush or Nubia) in 711 B.C., the king

of Meluḥḥa (i.e., Shabako) had him returned to the Assyrians; see Fuchs, *Inschriften Sargons II.*, pp. 76, ll. 11–14 and 220, ll. 100–222, l. 111; also Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. 2, pp. 32, §63 and 40, §§79–80.

¹⁵ Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, Oriental Institute Publications, vol. 2 (Chicago, 1924), p. 32, ll. 3–5; see also idem, *Ancient Records*, vol. 2, p. 120, §240.

¹⁶ See, for example, R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien*, Archiv für Orientforschung, Beiheft 9 (Graz, 1956), pp. 99, §65, l. 44 and 114, §80, col. ii 16; see also Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. 2, p. 227, §580.

¹⁷ The crown prince was named Ushanahuru according to the Zinjirli and Nahr el-Kalb inscriptions of Esarhaddon; see Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, pp. 99, §65 ll. 43–44 and 101, §67, ll. 12–13; see also Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. 2, p. 227, §580 and 228, §585.

¹⁸ This campaign was fought against the last Twentieth Dynasty king, Tanwetamani (664–656 B.C.); see M. Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Niniveh's*, Vorderasiatische Bibliothek, vol. 7 (Leipzig, 1914), pp. 14, col. ii, ll. 28–16, col. ii, l. 48; see also Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. 2, pp. 295–96, §776–78.

a newly powerful weapon of war. Innovation in the form of breeds of horses, methods of harnessing and of importing foreign experts, in particular from Nubia and Samaria for chariotry, from Urartu for cavalry, contributed to that development.¹⁹

The earliest mention of Kushites in Assyrian administrative records is in one of the Nimrud Wine Lists, dating to 732 B.C., during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III.²⁰ The text records the rations given to various groups of foreigners at the royal capital and includes rations of wine given to Kushites.²¹ The text also mentions an official (*mušarkisu*) who was thought to have been involved in the supply of horses for the army.²² These Kushites, therefore, were probably involved in the care and handling of horses in the royal stables.

Virtually all the chariot horses mentioned in the documents known as the Nineveh Horse Reports are designated as Kushite.²³ These texts, which are believed to date to a three-month period during the reign of Esarhaddon,²⁴ are daily reports of the numbers and types of horses received by a governmental department in the capital from other cities or provinces in the Assyrian empire.²⁵ Until recently Assyriologists have put the number of Kushite horses mentioned in these documents in the hundreds, but Nicholas Postgate, who edited the texts, counted around one thousand.²⁶ There were, in fact, even more, since the cuneiform numbers were often broken in these texts.

A fragmentary inscription from the reign of Esarhaddon also seems to mention horses in the same context with Kush and the black Meluḥḥans.²⁷

There was some reluctance on the part of earlier scholars to equate the gentilic *kūsaya* with people from the land of Kush, since neither Egypt nor Kush was believed to have been important horse-breeding centers. Instead it was suggested that this country lay somewhere in

¹⁹ Dalley, "Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry," p. 47.

²⁰ The Kushites are not identified in the texts by name but by the gentilic *kūsaya*. See text no. 9 (ND 10048 [C]) in J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud Wine Lists: A Study of Men and Administration at the Assyrian Capital in the Eighth Century B.C.*, Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud, vol. 1 (London, 1972), pp. 91–93, 138 rev. 21', and pl. 20 rev. 21'. The text is dated to 732 B.C.; see Dalley and Postgate, *The Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser*, Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud, vol. 3 (London, 1984), p. 22.

²¹ Six liters (*qū*) of wine were issued to men of Kush. One liter was a daily ration of wine for ten men at basic rates, or for six skilled or professional men; see Kinnier Wilson, *Nimrud Wine Lists*, pp. 4 and 117. From these figures, we can perhaps assume that thirty-six to sixty Kushites were included in this ration list.

²² See Kinnier Wilson, *Nimrud Wine Lists*, p. 56, and Dalley and Postgate, *Fort Shalmaneser*, pp. 28–29.

²³ KUR *kūsaya* or simply *kūsaya*; see Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription*, pp. 11–12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11. The homogeneity of the archive led Postgate to date them all to the same year (unspecified). The clustering of the dates in the early part of the year may reflect the assembly of cavalry and chariotry horses needed for a summer campaign; see *ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18. The nature of the contributions from these places is unclear. Postgate notes that they

were not tribute payments, however, since none of these deliveries came from outside the empire.

²⁶ Postgate counts 929+; see Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription*, pp. 8–9 (S. W. Cole, however, counts 1,028+). The reports mentioning Kushite horses were originally published in R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunlik Collection(s) of the British Museum* (London and Chicago, 1892–1914), specifically no. 60, ll. 7–8; no. 61, ll. 8–9, rev. 1, 5; no. 63, l. 7; no. 64, ll. 8, 15–rev. 1; no. 372, ll. 7, 9, rev. 1–3, 9, 18; no. 373, ll. 7, 9, 11, 13; no. 374, ll. 7, 9, 11–12; no. 376, ll. 7–9, 12, rev. 1; no. 393, ll. 8–9, rev. 1–2, 4, 10; no. 394, ll. 7, 12, 14, rev. 4; no. 538, ll. 8–9, rev. 3–4; no. 575, ll. 7, 9; no. 601, ll. 4–5, 11–12, 14; no. 649, ll. 2–3, 11–rev. 1; no. 684, rev. 1; no. 686, rev. 3–4; no. 973, ll. 3, 5, 7, 9–10; no. 1159, rev. 5–6; no. 1379, ll. 7, rev. 2. Note the large numbers of Kushite horses compared with Mesean horses "trained to the yoke" (85+): approximately ten Kushite horses to each Mesean horse delivered.

²⁷ See Borger, *Inschriften Assarhaddons*, p. 111, §75, rev. 3–4. This text can be compared with an earlier Amarna-period letter from the reign of Akhenaton in which horses seem to be mentioned in association with men from Egypt and Meluḥḥa; see W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, 1992), p. 186 (EA 112, ll. 16–24). For the dating of EA 112, see *ibid.*, pp. xxxv–xxxvi.

Iran²⁸ or in Anatolia.²⁹ But Postgate, citing the lack of evidence for another country with this name, noted that this breed of horse was identified by the Assyrians with the African land of Kush. He cautioned, however, that “this would not imply that all the horses of this kind . . . were bred in Nubia, any more than today Arabian horses come from Arabia. All that is necessary is that the type of horse was, rightly or wrongly, associated with that country.”³⁰

In a letter dated to around 669 B.C., it is reported that an attempt was made to return the statues of the gods Bēl and Zarpanītu from Assyria to Babylon—the city from which these images had been plundered in the course of Sennacherib’s general sack of the Babylonian capital in 689 B.C.³¹ For reasons not concerning us here, the journey was aborted. The horse pulling the cart, however, is described in the letter as a “strong horse harnessed in the trappings of the land of Kush.” Because the animal pulling the sacred load is not identified as Kushite, it has been suggested that the designation “Kushite” in the Nineveh Horse Reports was not a breed identifier, but rather the type of trappings the horses wore.³² But the Nineveh Horse Reports specifically mention “horses of Kush,” not “Kushite trappings.”

The references to Egyptian and Kushite horses in Neo-Assyrian texts indicate that the two North African countries actively bred horses, and that the horses of Kush were a breed prized by Assyrian charioteers. Dalley suggested that the markets established by the Assyrians in the territory of Gaza and on the eastern border of Egypt, which are mentioned in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II, respectively, were involved in the horse trade between Assyria and Egypt. She noted that most Assyrian merchants at this time were either explicitly labeled “horse-traders” or can be shown to have been involved in the horse trade, and she was therefore inclined to believe that Tiglath-pileser and Sargon established these markets to encourage trade with Egypt in order to acquire Nubian horses for their chariotry.³³

Several documents mention Kushite horse-experts living in Assyria. Dalley cites a Neo-Assyrian text mentioning a Kushite holding the high military office of “chariot driver of the Prefect of the Land.”³⁴ Also, in a loan document dated by its eponym to sometime between 648 and 612 B.C., a man called *kūsaya*, who perhaps worked in the king’s stables, was responsible for delivering bales of straw and measures of grain.³⁵ Finally, one of the

²⁸ A. Salonen, *Hippologica Accadica*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, Series B, vol. 100 (Helsinki, 1956), p. 36.

²⁹ M. Elat, “The Economic Relations of the Neo-Assyrian Empire with Egypt,” *JAOS* 98 (1977): 24–25.

³⁰ Postgate, *Taxation and Conscriptio*n, p. 11.

³¹ Dalley, “Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry,” p. 43. The letter in question has been newly edited in S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, State Archives of Assyria, vol. 10 (Helsinki, 1993), p. 19 (see no. 24, ll. 13–15).

³² See Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, vol. 5/2 (Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1983), pp. 33–34, note to ll. 13 ff. The passage in question reads (*ina muḫhi*) *šisē danni ša tallultu ša māi Kūsi tallulūni*.

³³ Dalley, “Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry,” pp. 46–47. According to his inscription, Tiglath-pileser III created an Assyrian market (*bit kāri*) in the territory

formerly controlled by the ruler of Gaza; see Tadmor, *Tiglath-pileser III*, p. 188 (Summ. 9), rev. 16. It is uncertain whether this was the “sealed” quay (*karri kangu*) on the border of Egypt to which Sargon later referred or whether it was another emporium.

³⁴ Dalley, “Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry,” p. 45. The text has been reedited recently by F. M. Fales and J. N. Postgate, *Imperial Administrative Records*, pt. 1, *Palace and Temple Administration*, State Archives of Assyria, vol. 7 (Helsinki, 1992), p. 42 (see no. 30, ll. 23’–24’): “15 corral-men, at the disposal of Kūsayu, chariot driver of the Prefect of the Land.” The document, which stems from the royal archives of Nineveh, may date anytime between the reign of Sargon II and 612 B.C.; see *ibid.*, pp. xiii–xiv.

³⁵ A. Ungnad, *Die Inschriften vom Tell Halaf*, *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Beiheft 6 (Berlin, 1940), p. 57, no. 108, ll. 1–16. The text, which is dated by the post-canonical eponym *Sîn-šarru-ušur*, is also cited by Dalley; see “Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry,” p. 46.

Nineveh Horse Reports in which a delivery of Kushite horses is mentioned contains an order from the king concerning horses in the palace and for the “settlement of Kush.”³⁶ This settlement, which was presumably located close to the capital, may have been inhabited by Kushites engaged in the care and handling of horses in the Assyrian army. Unfortunately, the text is broken and the precise information concerning the king’s wishes is lost.

If we consider only the Neo-Assyrian evidence, then, Kushites were employed in the Assyrian army as horse-experts from at least the reign of Tiglath-pileser III down into the reign of Ashurbanipal—that is, from the mid-eighth century B.C. until almost the end of the third quarter of the seventh.

III. OTHER KUSHITES IN ASSYRIA AND ASSYRIA’S INTEREST IN MELUḪḪA AND KUSH

Neo-Assyrian texts also mention Kushites working in other jobs in the empire. An economic document mentions two Kushite eunuchs, with Assyrian names, collecting personal debts.³⁷ And fifteen Kushite women are found on a list of foreign female workers that included musicians, temple personnel, scribes, smiths, stone-workers, a barber, and a baker.³⁸ Both these texts come from archives in Nineveh and may date from anytime between the beginning of Sargon II’s reign in 721 B.C. and the fall of Nineveh in 612.

Nubians were also familiar to Assyrian artists, who, beginning in the eighth century B.C., depicted them on art objects and wall reliefs.³⁹

Many of the references to Kushites and Kushite horses in Assyria are from the reign of Esarhaddon. In fact, this king’s interest in Kush is attested in a number of texts. Esarhaddon apparently meant not only to conquer Egypt but to extend his control to the southernmost limits of the known world. On one of his later campaigns, he claims to have departed from Egypt towards MeluḪḪa.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the account of this expedition is fragmentary and seems to describe an expedition (perhaps in Arabia?) that was unrelated to his southern foray. But in another fragmentary inscription Esarhaddon mentions a “city of Kush which none among [his] fathers [had ever seen],”⁴¹ which possibly refers to the Kushite capital or a major city in Kush (although no other inscriptional evidence indicates that Assyrians ever traveled to Kush or MeluḪḪa). “City of Kush” in this context might also refer to a major settlement of Kushites within Egypt.

IV. AFRICAN HORSEMEN DURING THE CLASSICAL PERIODS

Evidence for the association of black Africans—perhaps Nubians—with the care and handling of horses extends both back into the late second millennium B.C. and forward into

³⁶ Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters*, no. 575, rev. 4–8 (URU *Ku-si*). Note that another occurrence of URU *Ku-si* is found in the annals of Esarhaddon; see n. 41 below.

³⁷ Fales and Postgate, *Palace and Temple Administration*, pp. 55–56 (no. 47).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33 (no. 24, l. 2). The dating of these two texts is discussed in *ibid.*, pp. xiii–xiv.

³⁹ See P. Albenda, “Observations on Egyptians in Assyrian Art,” *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 4 (1982): 5–23. Albenda comments also on the Egyptian materials found at Nimrud and Nineveh, which included

seals inscribed with the name of Shabako, statuary and objects with Taharqa’s name (from Nineveh), and ivories with depictions of Africans (from Nimrud); see *ibid.*, pp. 6, 9–10.

⁴⁰ Borger, *Inschriften Assarhaddons*, p. 112, §76, l. 15; also Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. 2, p. 220, §557.

⁴¹ Borger, *Inschriften Assarhaddons*, p. 115, §82, l. 11. Luckenbill’s translation omits any reference to a “city” of Kush ([. . .]URU *Ku-u-si*); see *Ancient Records*, vol. 2, p. 223, §571.

later times.⁴² During the Greek and Roman periods Africans were frequently represented as grooms, charioteers, or riders.⁴³

A number of royal tombs at Meroe, located between the Fifth and Sixth Cataracts and dating to the late first millennium B.C. through the early first millennium A.D., exhibit horse remains on the stairs leading into the tombs,⁴⁴ seemingly anticipating the later horse sacrifices in the X-Group royal tumuli at Qustul (fourth–sixth centuries A.D.) in Lower Nubia.⁴⁵

V. MEDIEVAL NUBIA AND THE DONGOLAWI HORSE

While the evidence cited above suggests a close association between blacks and the training and handling of horses, early textual evidence for the actual practice of horse-breeding in the Sudan is sparse. Such evidence is, however, substantial from the medieval period to the recent past.⁴⁶ When John Burckhardt traveled to the region in the early 1880s, he found that the Dongola horse was famous throughout the Sudan, Ethiopia, and the rest of the Near East.⁴⁷ He stated that the breed was originally from Arabia, and that it was one of the finest he had seen: “the horses possess all the superior beauty of the horses of Arabia, but they are larger.”⁴⁸ Burckhardt also noted that five to ten slaves were

⁴² See, for example, A. R. Schulman, “Egyptian Representations of Horsemen and Riding in the New Kingdom,” *JNES* 16 (1957): 264, figs. 1, 5 and p. 266, nn. 23–24.

⁴³ F. M. Snowden Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), pp. 167–68, figs. 50, 63. See also idem, “Iconographical Evidence on the Black Populations in Greco-Roman Antiquity,” in L. Bugner, ed., *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol. 1, *From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), pp. 184–85, figs. 231–33 (302–3, nn. 156–57); p. 210, fig. 275; and p. 224.

Note also the fifth century B.C. reference to thirty thousand “Black Horses” in Aeschylus’s play *The Persians* (Aeschylus *Persae* 315); see *ibid.*, pp. 148–49. According to Snowden and most other scholars, this phrase refers to Africans in the Persian army. See n. 54 below for reference to the “Black Horse” of the Sudanese kingdom of Funj during the medieval period.

⁴⁴ Dunham, *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush*, vol. 4, *Royal Tombs at Meroe and Barkal* (Boston, 1957), pp. 105, 119, 125, and 185. Horse bones and an iron chariot wheel were found in Begrawiya North 2 (43–26 B.C.). In addition, there were horse bones in Beg. N. 1 (A.D. 25–41); and perhaps Beg. N. 5 (A.D. 25–41) and Beg. N. 28 (A.D. 246–66). For a review of the substantial evidence from the later periods, see Lenoble, “Une monture pour mon royaume,” pp. 107–30, where the author presents horse and horse-related remains from the tombs at Meroe, Qustul and Ballana, El Hobagi, and elsewhere from the late first millennium B.C. through the mid-first millennium A.D.

⁴⁵ Where skeletons of sacrificed horses and their trappings were found; see W. B. Emery and L. P. Kirwan, *The Royal Tombs of Ballana and Qustul* (Cairo, 1938), vol. 1, pp. 251–71; vol. 2, pls. 55–63. The tomb

owner’s horses, camels, donkeys, and dogs, together with grooms and handlers, and possibly soldiers, were sacrificed in the courtyards and ramps before the blocked tomb entrance; see *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 26.

For a description of the animal pits near the royal tumuli at Qustul, as well as the skeletons and riding equipment, see B. B. Williams, *Nubadian X-Group Remains from Royal Complexes in Cemeteries Q and 219 and from Private Cemeteries Q, R, V, W, B, J, and M at Qustul and Ballana*, Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition, vol. 9 (Chicago, 1991), pp. 26, 119–27; see also the index on pp. 405–7. The horses in the animal pits were decapitated before burial, and their heads were missing.

⁴⁶ For a reference to Nubian horses during the seventh century A.D., see Y. M. Kobischtschanow, “Agriculture and Economic-cultural Types in Medieval Nubia: On the Cultural Heritage of Meroe in the Middle Ages,” in *Meroitische Forschungen 1980*, *Meroitica* 7 (Berlin, 1984), p. 479. Kobischtschanow relates a story by the biographer of the Coptic Patriarch Michael in which it is said that in A.D. 750 the Nubians rode to battle in Egypt with 100,000 stallions and 100,000 camels. The horses which they brought with them were trained to kick the enemy with their front and hind legs. This story is similar to a later account in which the Shaiqiyya tribe of Dongola and areas north of Sennar were said to fight “mounted on Dongola stallions, and are as famous for their horsemanship as the Mamelouks were in Egypt; they train their horses to make violent springs with their hind legs when galloping . . .”; see J. L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*, 2d ed. (London, 1822; repr., New York, 1978), pp. 64–65.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴⁸ It should be noted that the Dongola horse is not originally an Oriental, or Arab, breed. H. Epstein maintains that the “original breeding center of the Dongola

paid for one prime stallion, and that the Mamluks in Dongola were all mounted on these horses.⁴⁹

Other late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travelers in the Sudan noted that the horses of Dongola were a fast-moving trade item in the markets of Berber, Shendy, and Sennar, along the middle Nile, and in Suakin, on the Red Sea coast.⁵⁰ The demand for these horses was widespread, and in 1769 James Bruce purchased a horse of Dongola in one of the markets of Tigré.⁵¹ Bruce was very much impressed by the breed and remarked that, north of Khartoum,

begins that noble race of horses justly celebrated all over the world. . . . What figure the Nubian breed would make in point of fleetness is very doubtful, their make being so entirely different from that of the Arabian; but of beautiful and symmetrical parts, great size and strength, the most agile, nervous, and elastic movements, great endurance of fatigue, docility of temper, and seeming attachment to man, beyond any other domestic animal, can promise any thing for a stallion, the Nubian is, above all comparison, the most eligible in the world.⁵²

Bruce also noted that Dongola, and the dry area near it seemed to be “the center of excellence for this noble animal.”⁵³

The Funj kingdom centered at Sennar was one of the main suppliers of horses for the cavalry of the Ethiopian kingdom.⁵⁴ Bruce reported that in the 1770s the local ruler in Dongola was nominated by the Funj king and that the tribute imposed on the area included horses, which he called “the great strength of Sennar.”⁵⁵

The power of the neighboring kingdom of Darfur was also dependent on its cavalry. Two breeds of horses were known in the area: a smaller-sized horse from Kordofan—a region just to the east of Darfur—and the larger Dongolawi horse.⁵⁶ The latter breed was preferred for use in war due to its height and strength.⁵⁷ The size and health of these horses, however, could be maintained only by continuously importing horses from elsewhere.⁵⁸

horse in the Sudan forms an enclave in an otherwise purely Oriental horse-breeding country. For this reason the Dongola breed has absorbed a considerable share of Oriental blood”; see *The Origin of the Domestic Animals of Africa*, vol. 2 (New York, 1971), p. 453. The Dongolawi horse is, in fact, closely related to the Barb horse of North Africa, which is an Occidental breed.

⁴⁹ For the high prices of these horses, see n. 57 below.

⁵⁰ See R. Pankhurst, “Ethiopia’s Economic and Cultural Ties with the Sudan from the Middle Ages to the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Sudan Notes and Records* 56 (1975): 75. This article is in part concerned with the horse trade in the region during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries A.D.

⁵¹ James Bruce, *Travels between the Years 1765 and 1773 through Part of Africa, Syria, Egypt, and Arabia, into Abyssinia, to Discover the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh, 1790), vol. 3, p. 98.

⁵² *Ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 521–23.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 522.

⁵⁴ Abyssinian troops were stationed on the border of the Funj kingdom to assure the safety of those who supplied the king with war horses; see O. G. S. Crawford, *The Fung Kingdom of Sennar* (Gloucester, 1951), p. 147. The Funj kingdom, which lasted from the six-

teenth through eighteenth centuries A.D., relied heavily on its cavalry to maintain power. When James Bruce visited Sennar in the late eighteenth century, he saw “about 1800 horse, all black, mounted by black [Nuba] slaves”; see *Source of the Nile*, vol. 4, pp. 480–81. Earlier in his account, Bruce observed that these cavalry horses were tall, beautiful, and nimble, and were “mostly black, some of them black and white”; *ibid.*, p. 438. He later reported that the route from Gerri (north of Khartoum) across the Bayuda Desert to Old Dongola was impassable because of the presence of tribes which had fled northern Kordofan for fear of the black horse, i.e., the cavalry force of the Funj kingdom; *ibid.*, p. 520.

⁵⁵ Bruce, *Source of the Nile*, vol. 4, pp. 480, 515.

⁵⁶ S. C. J. Bennett, “Animal Husbandry,” in J. D. Tothill, ed., *Agriculture in the Sudan* (London, 1948), pp. 646–49.

⁵⁷ R. S. O’Fahey, *State and Society in Dar Fur* (New York, 1980), p. 96. The scarcity of these horses and the difficulty of their importation meant that they fetched very high prices compared with slaves; see *ibid.*, p. 97 [diagram 8].

⁵⁸ See, for example, H. J. Fisher, “‘He Swalloweth the Ground with Fierceness and Rage’: The Horse in

Burckhardt observed that the Sherif of Yemen also relied heavily on the horses of Dongola for his cavalry.⁵⁹ He stated that every caravan from Suakin purchased a number of Dongola horses in the markets of Shendy which “they sell to great advantage in Yemen . . . [in markets] as far south as Mokha”⁶⁰ and that “. . . a horse worth about twenty-five dollars at Shendy is sold . . . [in Yemen] at one hundred or one hundred and fifty [dollars].”⁶¹ But many of these horses died during the sea voyage, due to a lack of adequate facilities on what he described as “small country ships.”

Burckhardt noted that various tribes of the Sudan bred or used these Dongolawi horses.⁶² The Shaiqiya tribe, who were located along both sides of the Nile from southern Dongola to the Fourth Cataract about ancient Napata, like the other Sudanese tribes and Middle Eastern cavalry units of the time, fought on horseback in heavy coats of mail. They were mounted on the powerful stallions of their region and were as famous for their horsemanship as were the Mamluks in Egypt.

Giovanni Finati, a traveler in this region in the early nineteenth century, observed that Dongola horses were more serviceable than handsome and that they were almost always black with white legs.⁶³ Burckhardt noticed the same coloration in his account;⁶⁴ and O. G. S. Crawford pointed out that horses represented on the walls of Christian churches in Nubia are of similar color and markings.⁶⁵

the Central Sudan. Part I,” *Journal of African History* 13 (1972): 385. Fisher cites G. Nachtigal, who says that in Darfur “the local breed can be maintained only by continuous imports from other countries”; see A. G. B. and H. J. Fisher, trans., *Sahara and Sudan*, vol. 4, *Wadai and Darfur* (London, 1971), p. 254. Twice in his accounts Nachtigal notes that Dongola horses were imported into Darfur from the upper Nile for breeding purposes; see *ibid.*, p. 345. Horses bred in poor climates like that of Lower Egypt, which is humid and warm, become “long-legged and weedy”; see, for example, the comments by Epstein, *Animals of Africa*, p. 428. Some experts believe that horses become dwarfed if raised in regions which are subject to climatic extremes; see Roger Blench, “Ethnographic and Linguistic Evidence for the Prehistory of African Ruminant Livestock, Horses and Ponies,” in Thurston Shaw et al., eds., *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals, and Towns* (London, 1993), pp. 89–92. On horse-breeding schemes to improve the Kordofani horse during the early nineteenth century, see Bennett, “Animal Husbandry,” pp. 648–49.

Officers of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium in the Sudan reported that horses were susceptible to diseases carried by the tsetse fly in certain regions, but that the Abyssinian and Dongolawi breeds were the most resistant; see Lord Edward Gleichen, ed., *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan: A Compendium Prepared by Officers of the Sudan Government* (London, 1905), vol. 1, p. 98 (Kassala province). Bruce reported that no horses could live in Sennar, but were kept at places “a small distance [from the capital] . . . free from the plague of the fly”; see Bruce, *Source of the Nile*, vol. 4, p. 402.

⁵⁹ See Burckhardt, *Travels*, pp. 286–87. The horses

were shipped from Dongola through the markets of Shendy. See also Frédéric Cailliaud, *Voyage à Méroé, au Fleuve Blanc, au-delà de Fazoql* (Paris, 1826), vol. 3, p. 120.

⁶⁰ Burckhardt, *Travels*, pp. 286–87.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 398. Four centuries earlier Ibn Battuta (mid-fourteenth century A.D.) described the export of Arab thoroughbreds by sea from Yemen to India, a passage which took one month with favorable winds; see H. A. R. Gibb, trans., *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325–1354* (London, 1969), p. 113.

⁶² *Travels*, pp. 64–65.

⁶³ See Crawford, *Fung Kingdom*, p. 269, where he describes the two types of horses observed by Giovanni Finati. Finati also remarked that the Dongola horse was more common at Berber and in the region of the Shaiqiya tribe than at Dongola.

⁶⁴ Burckhardt, *Travels*, p. 61. Burckhardt was told that few of these horses were without the distinctive mark of four white legs. See also Cailliaud, *Voyage à Méroé*, vol. 2, pp. 108–9.

⁶⁵ Crawford, *Fung Kingdom*, p. 269, n. 13. For examples of such horses in the wall paintings of Nubian churches, see Griffith, “Oxford Excavations in Nubia. XLIII: A Symbol of Isis,” *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* (Liverpool) 13 (1926): pl. 58:1 (Riverside Church, Faras); and *idem*, “Oxford Excavations in Nubia: LVI: The Church of Abd el-Gadir near the Second Cataract,” *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* (Liverpool) 15 (1928): pl. 35 (Church of St. Mercurius; example shown in fig. 11), pl. 43 (Church of St. George), and pl. 45 (Church of Abd el-Gadir near the Second Cataract, dated probably after A.D. 1000).

In this century, during the period of the Anglo-Egyptian administration of the Sudan, horses were bred along the northern stretches of the Nile and in southern Darfur and Kordofan. These areas produced both Dongolawi and Kordofani horses.⁶⁶ The Dongola horse was still the prized breed of many connoisseurs, although due to its scarceness more inferior horses from Abyssinia had to be imported.⁶⁷ Again, breeders were said to prefer horses with four white legs and a white face.⁶⁸

The importance of equid sports in the modern-day Sudan is also emphasized in a recent *New York Times* article.⁶⁹ The tradition of horsemanship among the Sudanese is realized even in the Gulf States, where Sudanese horsemen are “recruited by wealthy stables . . . because of their agility and knowledge.”⁷⁰

VI. CONCLUSION

The evidence presented above is by no means comprehensive. It is clear, however, that the Sudan was known as a horse-breeding region in recent centuries and that the Dongola Reach—the area of ancient Kush—had a long tradition as the home of the country’s finest breed. This tradition seems to have extended back into the early first millennium B.C., when the Kushites also bred and trained horses, which Assyrian chariot forces used to subjugate Western Asia for more than a century.

⁶⁶ The main breeding area of the Kordofani horse was actually in Darfur; see Bennett, “Animal Husbandry,” pp. 647–48.

⁶⁷ Gleichen, *Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, p. 182 (preferred by the Baggara tribe of Kordofan). One description of this breed of horse from the middle part of this century, however, harshly states that the large size of the Dongola horse (up to 15.2 hands high) and its dark

color were its only redeeming features; it was “large, flashy, ugly, and useless . . .”; see Bennett, “Animal Husbandry,” p. 647.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Chris Hedges, “In Sudan, All the Horses Run under a Handicap,” *The New York Times*, 12 December 1994, p. 5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*