

# The Blood Brothers - Kush Origin of Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk and Bari of South Sudan(Part 2)

By Joe Mabor



Figure 1: Statues of various rulers of the late 25th Dynasty–early Napatan period: Tantamani, Taharqa (rear), Senkamanisken, again Tantamani (rear), Aspelta, Anlamani, again Senkamanisken. Kerma Museum (Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org>)

*“There is an exigency to go back to our historical roots, back to historical Sudan from the dawn of humanity to the present time. ... The first thing to be said is that we in the SPLM/SPLA go as far back as we can in the history of the Sudan. According to recorded and unrecorded history, archaeological and written history, human civilization started right here in the Nile Valley—in the Sudan and Egypt”, Dr. John Garang de Mabior*

Many South Sudanese tribes especially the Nilotic speaking people such as Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk and others have oral stories that suggest their own is in the North of Africa from around Northern Sudan and even Southern Egypt. Some people even trace their origin apparently to “Noi” great flood. Growing up as a Dinka (Jieng), I was intrigued by these stories, but I thought they were fanciful and imagined. Anthropologists and scholars, notably Stephanie F. Beswick and Lew Anei have done a great work to document these stories. Beswick in her book, used a lot of proofs to assert that the original home of the Nilotes, especially the Western Nilotes, is in Gezira region in Sudan or even more in the North, and that they migrated southward to South Sudan and the rest of East Africa due to drought and hostile people from the West and East of Sudan.

Western Nilotes were the last to move out of Suda with Dinka migrating out of Gezira region in 13<sup>th</sup> century AD. With the advancement of technology and interest in the history of the Nile Valley, these oral stories are increasingly supported by scientific research.

In Part 1 of *The Blood Brothers* series, I explored the shared identity and ancestry of South Sudanese peoples based on linguistic and genetic evidence. In this second part, I present research findings from various scholars that trace the deeper origins of this shared identity, focusing on the Nilotic South Sudanese peoples—such as the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Bari, Acoli, and others. Not only can this origin be traced back to the ancient Nile Valley, but the ancestors of the South Sudanese also played a significant role in the formation of Nile Valley civilizations—especially in the establishment of the Kushite Kingdom of Napata (circa 800 BC), alongside other African communities. Although the focus will be Nilotic communities in South Sudan, it is generally the history of all Nilotic populations in East Africa like Uganda , Kenya and Tanzania.

To support this argument, I will draw on linguistic, archaeological, anthropological, and genetic evidence produced by experts on Nile Valley history.

Research indicates that the Nilotic culture of cattle pastoralism and deep reverence for livestock began in southern Egypt during the onset of arid conditions in the eastern Sahara. As desertification intensified, these groups migrated with their herds toward the ancient Wadi Howar River in Sudan. When that river too began to dry up, they moved further east toward the banks of the Nile in Upper Nubia, where they contributed to the formation of the Kingdom of Kush at Napata. What follows is a presentation of the evidence from these studies.

This is going to be a long tale, grab a cup of coffee and read on!

## **Introduction: A Brief History of the Nile Valley**

The ancient Nile Valley refers to the region surrounding the Nile River, stretching from the highlands of East Africa to the Mediterranean Sea, and has been a cradle of human civilization for millennia such as the renowned Ancient Egypt in the North and later on Ancient Nubia to the South. Its fertile banks and predictable flooding patterns made it an ideal location for early agricultural societies. Evidence suggests that the region was inhabited as far back as 700,000 years ago by Neolithic and Paleolithic humans.

This area include from modern-day Egypt in the north through Sudan and into parts of Ethiopia and Uganda in the south.

During the last Ice age from around 115,000 to 11,700 years ago, much of humanity migrated out of Africa due to extreme climatic conditions on the continent.

Nevertheless, some population remained on the continent perhaps on some small patches of land that could still support lives and adapted to climate changes that transformed Africa's heartland. The climate started to improve again during the African Humid period that began around 14,600-14,500 yeags ago. This transformed what is modern Sahara dessert into grassland with trees, rivers and Lakes such as Lake Chad. Between 10,000 and 3,000 BCE, the Sahara—now a vast desert—was a lush savanna

with rivers, lakes, and forests. This Green Sahara sustained early hunter-gatherers and pastoralists who thrived in its fertile lands.

However, the climate started to change again as the Green Sahara dried up and aridity increased which forced the populations to move over time. They migrated toward the Nile River and probably mixed with some population who migrated back to Africa in later periods. These communities did not merely settle the Nile—they shaped its history. They formed complex communities and cultures such as A-Group, B-Group, C-Group and Pan-Grave in Upper Nile Valley (Upper/Southern Egypt and ancient Nubia) and the Lower Nile Valley (Lower/Northern Egypt) cultures such as Badari and Naqata, giving rise to some of the most ancient civilizations in the world. The ancient Egyptian civilization of Pharaonic Egypt emerged from Naqata cultures from around 3100 BC in the Lower Nile Valley and the Kingdom of Kerma emerged in the Upper Nile Valley from 2500 BC to 1500 BC. The Kush Kingdom later emerged from around 800 BC from more southern region of the Upper Nile Valley.

The Upper Nile Valley region is generally called Nubia by scholars, and the first civilization to emerge here was Kerma believed to have been in the present-day city of Karima, followed by Kush Kingdom of Napata (circa 800 – 300 BC) and Meroë (300 BC to 400 AD). The Kingdom of Kush was one of the ancient world powers. At its peak it ruled over the great Ancient Egypt as 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty for almost 100 years. The emergence of the Kush Kingdom was made possible, for most part, due to the unity of the African clans or communities in the region that include the Nilotic ancestors.

The word “Nilotic” or “Nilote” is a made up. The people in this region were called Kushites and at later times Nubians by the other ancient Kingdoms. “Nilotic” was previously used as racial subclassifications due to distinct body morphology of Nilotic people. This has been largely discarded and is now used as linguistic group belonging to Nilo-Saharan of Eastern Sudanic.

### **Linguistic Evidence: Languages of the Kushites**

Nilotic languages are part of Eastern Sudanic languages which include Nubian, Nara and Daju languages spoken in Sudan, Southern Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Chad. Meroitic language which was a written and spoken language in the Kush Kingdom is largely undeciphered. However, based on small number of deciphered words, experts such as French Egyptologist, Claude Rilly, and Canadian archaeologist and anthropologist, Bruce Graham Trigger, clarify it as an Eastern Sudanic language. This positions the Kushites and Nilotic peoples within a single linguistic ancestry, suggesting not only shared origins but cultural and linguistic exchange. At least the language experts agree that the Kush Kingdom was multilingual with elites in Meroe later using Meroitic as official language. The birthplace of Nilotic languages according to linguistic evidence points to South-East of present-day Khartoum during Neolithic times. One of the words that has been deciphered that Rilly says meaning child or youth is “mte” (t is pronounced as th) and it is usually “tii/ti” when used in combination with words. Rilly compared it with related Nubian words but if one look in Dinka language, one finds similar words. The word for a child in Dinka is “meth”. Nyir-thii would mean young girls. Riiny-thii means youth or young people. So lexically, these words would be considered similar. But I am not linguistic experts. I just wanted to give an example.

The question to be asked then is what the birthplace of Eastern Sudanic languages? This question can be answered by two important experts on Eastern languages namely Prof. G. Dimmendaal at Afrikanistik of Cologne University and Claude Rilly already mentioned here. According to Prof. Dimmendaal, Eastern Sudanic languages developed at Wadi Howar, an ancient River stretching 110km from Chad through North Darfur and joining the River Nile at the Great bend opposite Old Dongola in Sudan. He argued that the speakers of Eastern Sudanic split into three: Nilotic and Surmic in the Lower Wadi Howar, Northeast Sudanic (Such as Nubian) in the Middle Wadi Howar, and Temein and Daju in the Upper Wadi Howar". Rilly classifies Eastern Sudanic languages into two: Northern or NES (E.g Nubian, Nara Nyima and other) and Southern (E.g Nilotic, Surmic, Jebel and others).

Although Rilly agree that the population of Lower Wadi Howar were proto.Kushites, he argue that the Eastern Sudanic family was developed from Southern Egypt, and that these populations migrated from the North to South in Wadi Howar as cattle herders already after densification had started in Egypt from 6<sup>th</sup> millennia BC. This argument is also supported by archaeological evidence that will be discussed in the next section. These experts argue some of the populations from Lower Wadi Howar migrated to riverbank in Upper Nile Valley where they later form the Kush Kingdom. What recent studies suggest is that Lower Nubia cultures such as C-Group and the Blemmyes spoke Cushitic languages before Eastern Sudanic languages spread from Upper Nile Valley.

Another indicator of Nilotic languages being spoken in the Kush Kingdom can be found in the Dinka-Nubia linguistic connection. Language expert, Robin Thelwal, in his studies has found that Nobiin, which is the modern descendant of classical Nubian, share upto 27% vocabulary with Dinka. What is important to mention here is that NES languages such as Nubian, were not spoken in the Nile Valley, especially in Upper Nile Valley until towards the decline of Kushite empire. The ancestors of Nubians, Noba people, are believed by the experts to have come to settle along the bank of the Nile River only during the decline of the Kush Kingdom of Meroë. The Noba people(Nubians) are mentioned by Kushites to have fought with them from time to times, and have actually contributed to the fall of The Kush Kingdom when they waged war together with Blemmyes against the Kushites. The Kingdom of Axum took advantage of Kushites wars with Noba people and Blemmyes to attack and capture Meroë in 330 AD. The descendants of Blemmyes are believed to be Beja. The Dinka-Nubian linguistic relationship is attributed to this time and perhaps during the Gezira periods of the Kingdom of Alodia where they could have interacted with the Nubian speakers. Nubian languages became to dominate Nubia around perhaps first millennium AD. Here is some quote from Claude Rilly:

*"The original split into three main branches (Eastern, Taman, Nyima) might have occurred at the beginning of the third millennium BCE. The Eastern branch was probably settled in the eastern parts of the riverbed that were still habitable at this time, namely the Middle Wadi Howar. As aridity increased, this branch split into three groups: the Kushites, the Proto-Nara, and the Proto-Nubians. The Kushites (the ancestors of the Meroites) headed to the banks of the Nile, where they took part in the founding of the Kingdom of Kerma (2500 – 1500 BCE)"(Rilly,2016)*

I would like to take a detour from expert studies and add personal opinion and provide further context on the founders of 25th Dynasty Kushite Kings that ruled Egypt. I am not linguistic or anthropological experts but being born in a cattle camp and living there most of the times until I could go to school, I have strong understanding of Dinka language and culture, given that Dinka people are considered to have the most pure ancient Nilotic culture. Just like other experts suggest, I personally believe the 25th Dynasty rulers had nilotic roots. Their names, customs and even physical appearances are very “nilotic”. The founder of the Kush Kingdom is called Alara which is believed to be the great chief who united different clans or communities in ancient Nubia to form the Kush Kingdom. He is believed by South Sudanese scholar, Lewis Anei, to be of Luo origin. The names of 25th Dynasty Pharaohs and the Kushite Kings from first to last were: Piankhi, Shabako, Shebitku and Taharqa. Piankhi, also called Piye, and I would like to call Piengke/Piengka because of its resemblance with nilotic names, invaded Egypt, especially the Lower Egypt and established the 25th Dynasty. Any variant of Piankhi name in Dinka would mean “to listen”, “To be listen to” or “to be heard”. He had married the daughter of Alara, Queen Tibry, and had son named Taharqa who later became the last Pharaoh of the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The Taharqa itself looks like a misspelt Dinka name “Tharyakua”. He also appears to have Nuer and Dinka Agar scarification marks in his head in some of his statues. The origin of the name “Kush” itself is unknown but the linguistic experts say it is a local name, perhaps of a person, as it sometimes appear in Kushite names such as in Kashata, the Nubia King that preceded Piengke. Nilotes still have such names. For example, Dinka still use the name Kuc(c is pronounced as sh/ch in English).

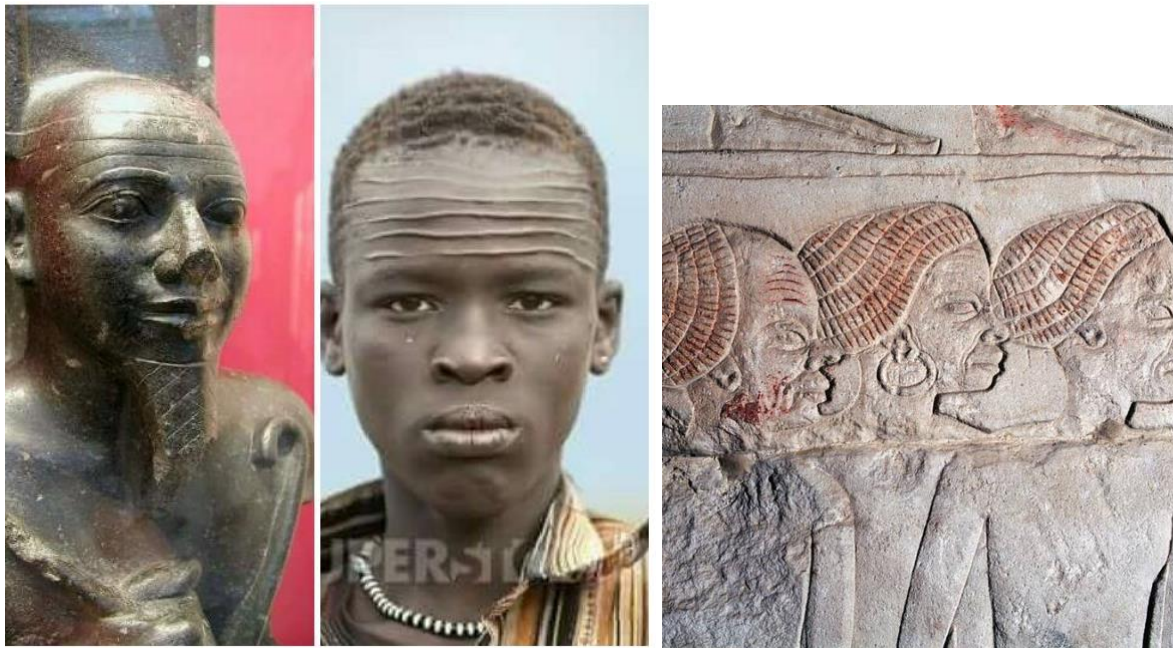
Tharyakkua in Dinka literary mean “to spear our cattle” or “to fight for our cattle”. “Thar” means to spear and yak-kua means “our cattle”. In Dinka and Nuer, plural of cow is yok and becomes yak when combined with possessive pronoun like kua(ours). The meaning of “to fight for our cattle” is self-explanatory but “to spear our cattle” meaning needs context of Nilotic custom still practiced by Dinka and Nuer. This is a custom where young men own prestigious colorful bulls which he they sing to and parades. The horns of these bulls are modified to artificial shapes and later pierced at the tip to hold what are called “dhuor”(Usually made from buffalo or giraffes tails) in Dinka. There are important events an owner of a bull must kill(spear) cattles: when one buys the bull, when one starts the artificial modification of the horn(ngäät) and when one pierced the horn(piau). One usually kill cattle of close relatives such in honour of these events. So one get a nickname that is used officially by his age-groups and others to refer to him. This is the most important name among Dinka in the cattle camp is used. For example, you would have names like “Thar-yar”(speared a white cow), Tharyakkua(speared our cows – if you have kill many cows of relatives, siblings or father). Since this kind of bull beautification and artificial horn modifications has been documented in old Egyptian dynasties and in Nubia too, I wouldn’t be surprised if the most powerful and famous Kushite King was named in this kind of way.

*“The first artistic depictions of cattle with deformed horns are found in elite tomb scenes dating to the Old Kingdom (c. 2686-2160 BC).<sup>8</sup> These representations of horn deformation are not unique to Egypt. They are depicted in rock art throughout the Sahara region, with the earliest examples dating from the seventh millennium BC in Algeria and Libya.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, zooarchaeological*

*evidence in the form of bucrania with modified horns has been found at the sites of Kerma and Faras in Nubia.10)”(Laura Harris, 2023)*

When I read the victory Stela of Piankhi after taking over the Lower Egypt, I got goosebumps because of sheer nilotic resemblance I found in it. First, one of the commanders of the Kushite army who was stationed in Egypt and led the the conquest of Lower Egypt is called “Pawerem” which resemble again nilotic name. In Dinka and Nuer language, an army is called “rem/ rem”. I wonder if “rem” comes from this ancient Kushite legendary commander, “Pawe(r)-rem”. Secondly, what Piankhi did after the victory whenever he visited different provinces of Egypt was according to experts “un-egyptian” but very particular to these Kushite Kings. Everytime he went to different provinces, he surficed cattles and fowls/chickens in the temples. From personal experience, this is always the case among Dinka(and perhabs other Nilotes) whenever there is a victory in a war or when an important elder(or spearmaster) visit some place. Sacrifice is always done with either chicken, goat or cow depending on the scale.

*“Hear what I have done in exceeding the ancestors. I am the king, the representation of god, the living image of Atum, who issued from the womb marked as ruler, who is feared by those greater than he, [whose father] knew and whose mother perceived even in the egg that he would be ruler, the good god, beloved of the gods, the Son of Re, who acts with his two arms, Piankhi, beloved of Amon.”( Piankhi, 725 BC)*



*Figure 2: Tarhaqa and Nuer/Dinka Agar young boy iniated into adulthood with sacrifice marks. On the right Kushites that seems to have V-shaped Dinka sacrifice marks.*

## **Archaeological Evidence: The bones that lies in the Valley**

This is the most exciting part for me because it is amazing the work these experts have done using our existing technologies and their skills to reveal the past stretching to even thousands or million of years. Many archeological excavations done in the Nile Valley

region reveal hunter-gathering, farming and pastoralism/ agro-pastoralism cultures and of course trading between different groups in the region. Nilotic people generally practice agro-pastoralism/pastoralism and is basically the main marker of identifying Proto-Nilotes in the Nile Valley. Central Sudanic people have always lived in the Nile Valley too mostly as farmers along side the pastoral communities. Pastoral communities were farmers too before adapting pastoralism during the onset of aridity. Although like most Bari speakers don't herd a lot of cattles today, Bari did have large herds of cattles even in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century BC as reported by Samuel Baker.

The discovery of first traces of animal domestication in Africa is found in Libyan deserts near Sudanese border where Nabta Playa is found. Remains of domesticated cattle at Nabta Playa date to 8000 BC. When aridity started and the green Sahara started drying up, it is here at Nabta Playa region that experts believe the specialised cattle husbandry and cult started, leading to cattle reverence which can still found among Nilotic communities today, such as the Dinka, Nuer and Maasai. At Nabta Playa people lived in small hut, relying on deep wells for water, and cultivated legumes, millets and sorghums.

An amazing study done by the team of Cologne University in Germany led by Rudolph Kuper and Stefan Kröpel in 2006 has shown the pastoral communities that lived in the region of Nabta Playa and Gilf Kebir migrated south to Wadi Howar and some other regions in Northern Sudan. This migration started from 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC when desertification occurred around Egypt. Many archaeologists analysed the remained in this area and mostly conclude the people there were related more to sub-Saharan. One of the beads discovered in one of the graves greatly resemble the ancient Dinka bead called "Guit-jang" or just "Jang" which literary means "people necklace". Dinka call themselves Jang/Jieng and is how other Nilotes like Luo and Nuer know them too. Jang is also just a generic word for person.

If you have seen Ancient Egyptian paintings, you would notice a lot of affinities of Egyptian pastoral culture with the Nilotes such as the Dinka. In my opinion, I think that it is probably from this time at Nabta Playa, that ancestors of Nilotes interacted a lot with the predynastic Egyptians or perhaps they had one origin. It is important to note Kushites were not in Egypt during the formation of Dynastic Egypt from 3100 BC. The ancestors of Kushites had already migrated to Wadi Howar in north Sudan. However, the fact that Southern Egyptians called for the Kushites' help to defeat the Libyans during the second intermediate period which basically led to the Kushite control over Egypt indicates that there must have been some kind of link, that perhaps in the distance past in pre-dynasty Egyptian, these people were brothers. The 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty also revived the Egyptian "old" ways of pyramid building and worship of God Re as done by the Egyptians in the old Dynasties.

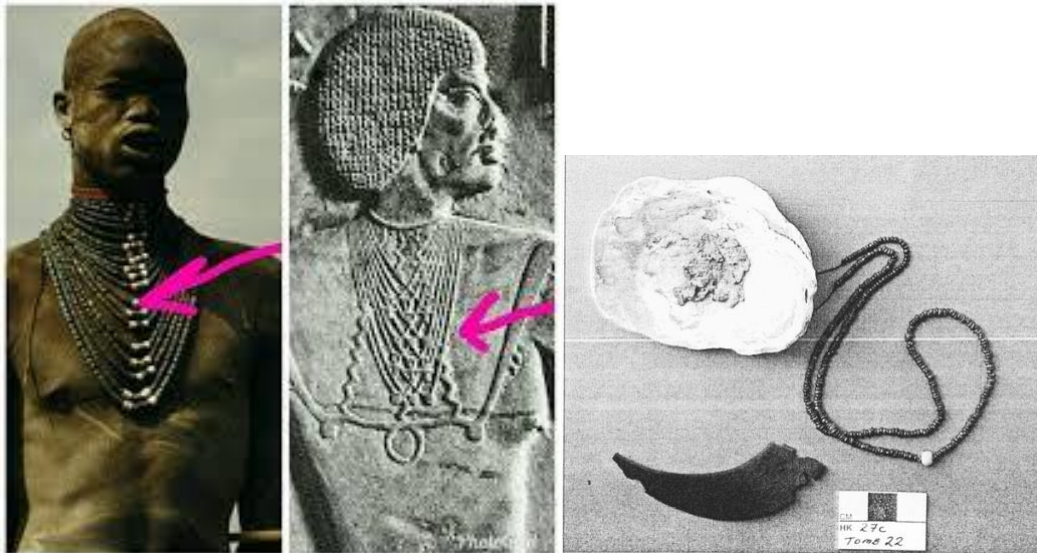


Figure 3: To right, Items discovered in ancient grave in el-Barga(circa 7000 BC) - Etheria shell(Or thial in Dinka), beads that resemble Dinka beads(guinjang/jang) and polished cow horn. To the left, Dinka man wearing "guinjang and an ancient Egyptian man



Figure 4: Young Dinka man with his bulls wearing Bell(löth) in belt around thier necks(Ariith in Dinka). On the right ancient Egyptian painting of a man with a cow wearing Bell in Ariith

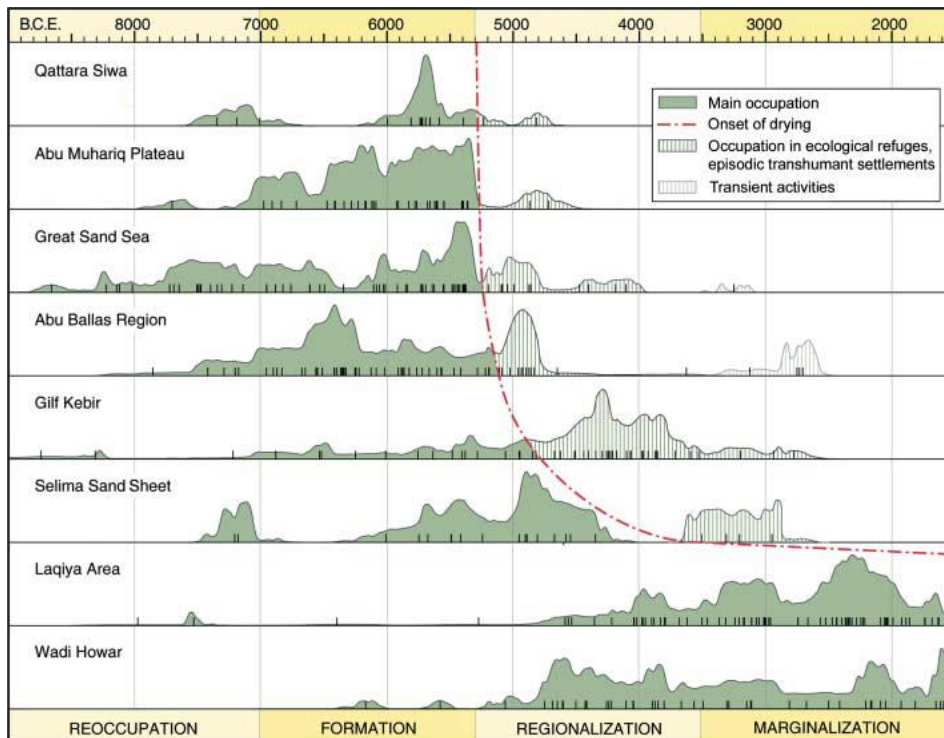


Figure 5: Major stages of early and mid-Holocene occupation in the Eastern Sahara (Source: Kuper – Kröpelin 2006)

At Wadi Howar, the cattle-herding populations interacted with the original population that were hunter-gatherers and probably observed some of them. The Proto-Nilotic populations were in Lower Wadi Howar as has been indicated by the studies. The anthropological study of human skeletal remains found in archaeological sites in Lower Wadi Howar concluded that these people resembled most of the cattle herding populations in South Sudan and some people from Chad.

*“When the Wadi Howar remains were positioned in the context of the selected prehistoric (Jebel Sahaba/Tushka, A-Group, Malian Sahara) and modern comparative samples (Southern Sudan, Chad, Mandinka, Somalis, Haya) in this fashion three main findings emerged. Firstly, the series as a whole displayed very strong affinities with the prehistoric sample from the Malian Sahara (Hassi el Abiod, Kobadi, Erg Ine Sakane, etc.) and the modern material from Southern Sudan and, to a lesser extent, Chad.” (Becker, 2011)*

The aridity started to affect Wadi Howar and the Proto-Nilotic speakers migrated to Riverbanks in Upper Nubia from circa 2500-1500 BC. Others migrated west to towards Chad. According to Rilly and other experts, the migration of Lower Wadi Howar pastoral populations to Upper Nubia led to the formation of Kush Kingdom of Napata. At the time the Proto-kushites migrated to the Upper Nubia, Lower Nubia was controlled by the Egyptains of the New Kingdom dynasties. The Proto-Kushites quickly absorbed the the population in Lower Nubia and became independence state after which they formed the Kush Kingdom. The populations in Lower Nubia at that time were Cushiting speaking groups like Blummyse, and C-Group. C-Group has been demonstrated to resemble Etirean populations of today.

Kadero archeological sites excavations led by Lech Krzyżaniak of the Univesity of Warsaw date to circa 4010 to 3080 BC. They discovered that the economy of these

people was that of extensive pastoralisms. This is the earliest evidence of that pastoralisms in the Upper Nubia. It is possible this site was populated by some of the people who migrated from Nabta Playa as most Proto-Nilotic populations were still in Wadi Howar. Or perhaps there was some kind of seasonal settlement as it has been shown in the studies. It is here in Upper Nubia that the nilotic languages were born.

*“The Proto-Kushite migration from the Wadi Howar to the Nile took place roughly at the same time as the migration of the Proto-Nara. It seems the Proto-Nara later split into three groups. A first group, the ancestors of the modern Nara, went upstream along the Nile and its tributary, the Atbara River, to Western Eritrea, where they settled, probably during the second millennium BCE, and The second group settled in Lower Nubia. This population of semi-nomadic cattle-herders was labelled C-group by early archaeologists. They were rapidly incorporated into the successive kingdoms of Kush (Kerma, Napata, Meroe), and later into the early Nubian kingdoms. Cultural links between the C-group and the early population of Eritrea have been demonstrated by Fattovitch (1990) with evidence from ceramic analyses. A third group merged in historic times with a Nubian tribe, speakers of a mixed language which included specific non-Nubian basic words that are close to Nara, which was to become medieval Old Nubian and today’s Nobiin (Rilly 2014)”.*(Rilly, 2016).

There are a lot of other archeological sites in Upper Nubia which I will not talk about as this article could easily turn into a book. However, there is one interesting site excavated by the Swiss Nubiologist, Prof. Charles Bonet at Doukki Gel in Sudan that I want to mention. This site dates to 1800 BC, just after the population of Wadi Howar migrated to Upper Nubia. Bonet spent about 20 years in Sudan studying ancient Nubian history. This site is very important as it hosted a holy shrine used by the Kushites to plan their battles against the Egyptians. It has a circular and rounded plan/architecture which is different from the Egyptian architecture but very common among Nilotic and other Sub-Saharan African populations. But what I found the most interesting about this site is that Bonet and his team discovered the shrine to have been continuously renewed at intervals every few years, and their reconstruction of the shrine matches pretty much holy shrines of Dinka and Nuer. Dinka (e.g. the shrine of Mayual) and Nuer holy shrines are renewed exactly every 8 years. The reason for 8-year renewal is not known. The explanation by the Dinka elders and priests is shrouded in some form of myths and legends which cannot really be proved.



Figure 6: Prof. Bonnet team's reconstruction of Doukki Gel Holy shrines and Mayual Holy Shrine in Rumbek



Figure 7: To the right, Nuer Prophet and spearmaster Ngundeng Buong. To the left Dinka Spearmaster and Chief, Der Makuer with elders, during the last ceremony after the renewal Mayual Holy Shrine in Rumbek(2024).

Overtime, the desertification increased and reach Sudan and so the majority of Nilotic population, gradually migrated Southwards starting with Southern(E.g Kalegin) and Eastern Nilotes(E.g Bari and Masaai). It is not clear when the first Nilotes left Sudan but some linguists argue Southern Nilotes moved southward from around second Millenium BC and that Eastern and Southern nilotic languages diverged around 1000 BC in Sudan. However, the archeological studies done in South Sudan really gives different results. The findings at archeological excavation sites done in South Sudan at Rumbek, Dhang Rial and Debbat Bangdit have shown that region was inhabited by Central Sudanic people at around 500 BC.

The first traces of nilotic people who were pastoralists and made twisted cord rouletted pottery was from 500-400 AD. These Nilotes were probably Eastern or Southern Nilotes. The appearance of Western Nilotes, especially Luo speaking people in South Sudan was from around 700 AD. The Dinka reached South Sudan from around 1300-1400 with some reaching Rumbek in 1650AD. Dinka were the last Nilotes to leave Gezira region in 13<sup>th</sup> Century AD after the fall of Alodia Kingdom. The Dinka introduced humped cattle and draught resistance sorghum to South Sudan(Keec in Dinka). The humped cattle appeared in South Sudan from 1500s.

Some of the Nilotic populations especially in the cities like Meroe probably remained and assimilated with incoming populations such as Nubian and Afro-Asiatic speakers who later found the Kingdom of Makuria and Dongola after the fall of Meroe. The population with probably nilotic roots founded the Kingdom of Alodia with capital in Sobat which basically included Gezira. This is basically evidences of Nilotic presence has been discovered a lot in Alodia Kingdom such tooth avulsion, sorghum cultivation and pastoralism. I would like also to mention here that the Sultan of Funj Sultanate which was formed after the fall of Alodia claimed that Shilluk, Dinka, and Kira, the ruling elites of the Funj Sultanate, shared the same ancestor. Some experts theorize that the Funj people were originally Shilluk (i.e Luo speaking people), and other argue they were Alodian who left the Kingdom earlier. The last Nilotic Kingdom was Shilluk Kingdom from circa 15<sup>th</sup> Century to 1861.

Date	Sites east of Rumbek		Dhang Rial		Jebel Tukyi		Nyany
	Pottery	Other	Pottery	Other	Pottery	Other	Pottery
'Modern'	Rouletted, Dinka	Cattle-camps					
A.D. 1500			?	?	Woven-mat impressions		
A.D. 1000	Hiatus in Settlement?		Twisted-cord rouletted	Humped cattle figurines, no structure in centre of site			Horizontal grooves (date?)
A.D. 500	Woven-mat impressions	Pole-and-daga structures	Twisted cord rouletted	Burials, iron jewellery, humplless cattle figurines, structures in centre of site			
	Woven-mat impressions	First iron-working? Burial					
'0'	Undecorated bowls (date?)						
500 B.C.	Comb impressions, zigzag motif (date?)	Cattle	Comb-impressions (rocker stamped) (date?)	No bones preserved	Comb-impressions	Cattle	Comb-impressions (date?)

Fig. 2. Upper Nile basin prehistory.

## Anthropological Evidence: The faces of Kush

Anthropologists have long noted the striking physical resemblance between the skeletal remains from ancient Nubian kingdoms and today's Nilotic peoples. Studies of Nubian cemeteries at Kerma and Napata reveal tall, slender bodies with elongated limbs and distinct cranial features—traits common among the Nilotics especially in South Sudan, most notably, among the Western Nilotes such as Dinka, Shilluk and Nuer.

The paintings of the Kushites by themselves and ancient Egyptians show people with yellowish afro-haired with small knots and dress style that closely or exactly resembles that of Nilotes like Dinka and Mundari. yellowish afro-haired is called "dul" in Dinka language is done that way using "arop" (cow dung ashes) with color bleach done using cow urine.



Figure 8: Representation of Kushites in the tomb of pharaoh Tut(Tutankhamun) giving tributes. This was during the New Kingdom when Lower Nubia was ruled by Egypt.

The Kushites didn't only look like Nilotes but their cultural patterns match as well. These cultural patterns include deep reverence for cattle, divine kingship, scarification, and tooth avulsion. Anthropologists who dedicated their lives to study the ancient Kush peopling argue that such cultural and biological continuities point to more than influence but direct descent. British archaeologist and Nubiologist, Peter Lewis Shinnie, who spent years excavating ancient sites in Sudan, affirmed that cattle were very important to the Kushite elites as seen in the Kushitic art especially in the reliefs on the pyramid of Meroe. He argued since the cattle wealth was a source of power, the ruling elites must have come from herds of cattle owning families or clans. Here is his quote:

*"There are sufficient representations of cattle in Meroitic art, particularly in the reliefs on the walls of pyramid chapels, to make it clear that they played a large part in Meroitic life, and the present writer's discovery that a large percentage of the animal bones from domestic refuse in the town at Meroe were of cattle confirms their importance in Meroitic life and diet. Analogy with many of the modern peoples of the Sudan suggests that cattle may have been one of the main sources of power and wealth, and, if this was so, the possibility of maintaining large herds in the Island of Meroe would certainly have recommended such a region to rulers who may already have been the owners of herds before permanently moving their place of residence."*

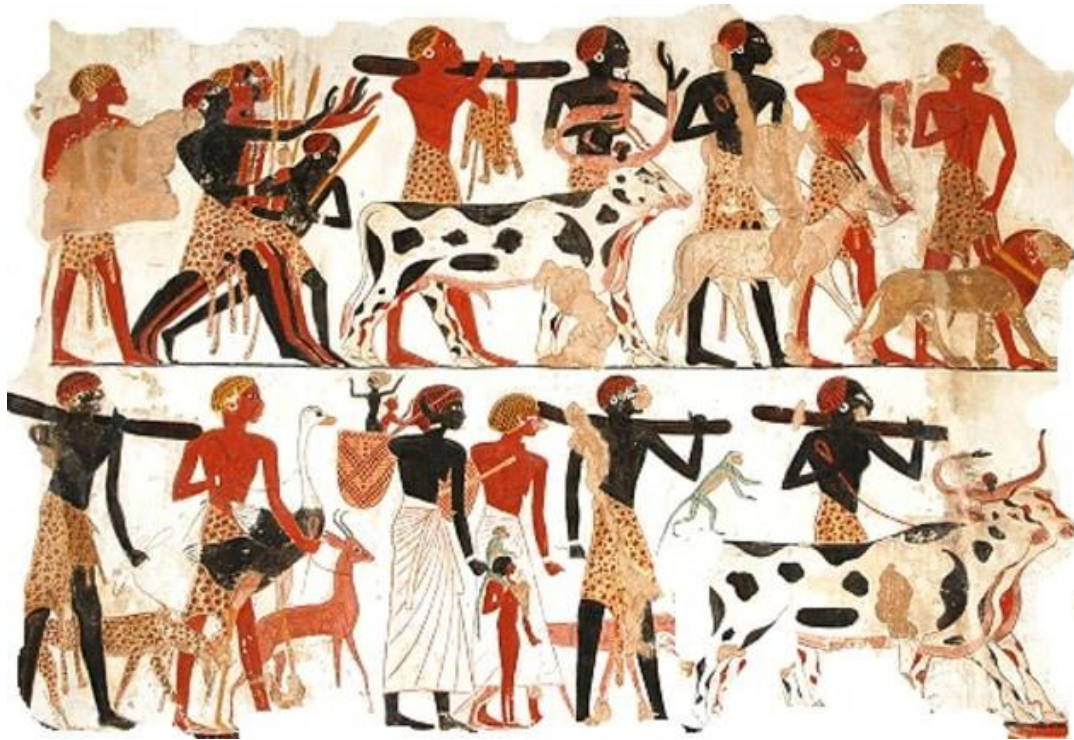


Figure 9: Paintings of the Kushites at Beit el-Wali, Lower Nubia. Look at colourful Bull(Mangar in Dinka) with deformed horns. Are the red Kushites perhaps forefathers of Masaai?



Figure 10: Painting of Kushites in the Book of Gate scene at Ramesse III Tomb(1184-1153 BC)

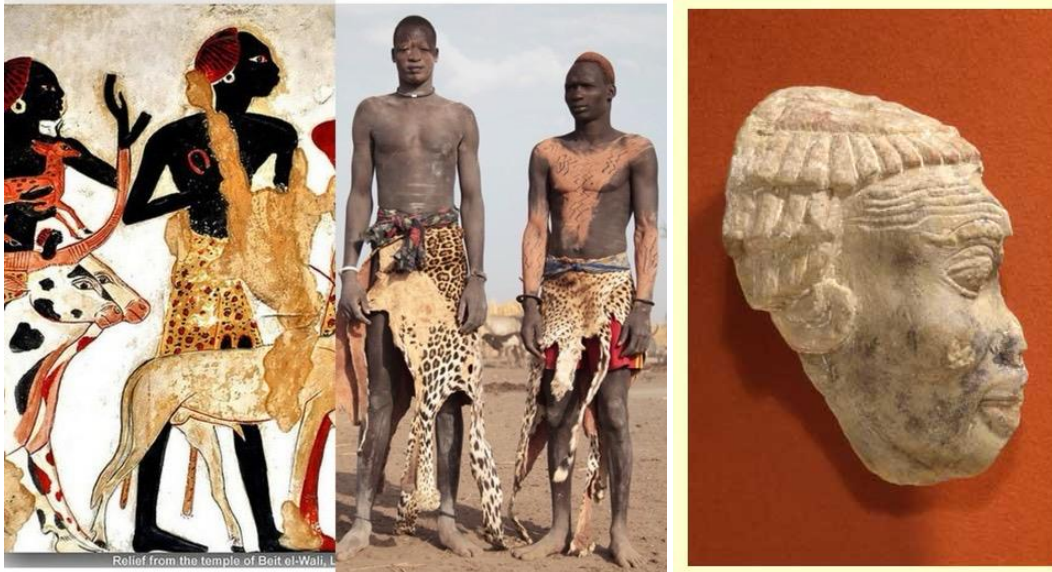


Figure 11: Kushites and modern Nilotics(Dinka men). Right Nubian head that with Nuer/Dinka Agaar marks(1184-1153 BC)

When we look to ancient literary sources like The Bible, we also get the idea of the Kushite physical appearances was like. For people who reads the bible, 8th century BC Prophet, Isaiah, talked about Kush (Cush) as “a nation of tall and smooth skin people” when he prophesied or called on Israelites to send messengers to Kush for help against Assyrians. “Woe to the land of whirring wings along the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water. Go, swift messengers, to a people tall and smooth-skinned, to a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers.”(Isaiah 18). This was around time the Kushite kings were trying to unite all of Egypt which they succeeded to form the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty of Egypt in 744. In around 722 bc, Taharka(probably a military general then), son of Piankhi(the founder of Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt) indeed came to aid of King Hosea and Hezekiah of Israel against Assyrians by leading huge army from Egypt to Palestine. This huge army was mostly composed of Nilotic people as it can be seen in the Assyrian paintings of Jew and Kushite army they fought. Nilotic people especially Dinka and Shilluk are currently one of the tallest people in the world averaging 181-182cm according to research done in the 90s. The Kushites were renowned warriors and gaints by the ancient people.

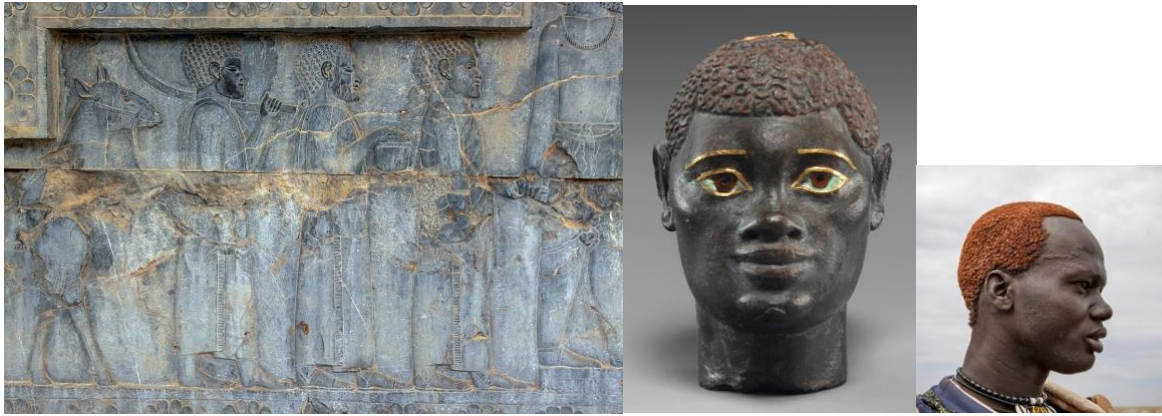


Figure 12: Kushite diplomats visiting Persian King in circa 520 BC. Right: Nubian head(332-330 BC), Dinka men

## Genetic Evidence: One Blood

Genetic studies also offer perhaps the strongest evidence of the Nilotic origin in the Nile Valley and that the people of ancient Kush and modern Nilotes are one and the same. Nilotic population of South Sudan on average have 33-62% A-M13 which is generally considered a Y-chromosome for Nilotic people. Dinka have the highest at 62% on average followed by Shilluk at 53%. The other Y-chromosome of Nilotics on average are B-M60(23-50%) and E-M78(15-20%). E-M78 is the common marker in Egyptian and North Africa populations and indicate northern origin or an interaction which has been shown by in the studies discussed above. A-M13 is one of the oldest Y- chromosome and has been discovered in some part of Europe and Asia. A-M13 is also found to be 46.4% among our brothers in Nuba Hills. It is very common too among Ethiopians. It seems to have been the main Y- chromosome in Sudan before the admixture occurred in the region. Dinka are considered to be largely unadmixed, so they still possess high percentage of A-M13.

A DNA study by Yousif Hisam and Eltayeb Munstaser detected A-M13 with high frequencies from skeletal remains in Nubia in neolithic period during the formation of the Kush Kingdom. However they found that there was a different gene flow during Meroitic, Post-Meroitic and Christian periods. This study indicates the dominance of Nilotic populations during the Kush state formation and probably during the Napata time. However, speakers of Afro-Asiatic and Nubian languages started to be dominant as the state thrived. This perhaps can also be explained by change in the royal clans or elites or perhaps vast majority of Nilotics moved South after the sacking of Napata or due to drought as the aridity had increased. B-M60 was not observed in the study which indicates that Dinka and Shilluk got this Y-chromosome from Niger-Congo speaking populations after they moved South.

*“Afro-Asiatic speaking groups appear to have sustained high gene flow from Nilo-Saharan speaking groups. Mantel test reveal no correlations between genetic, linguistic ( $r = 0.12$ ,  $p = 0.14$ ), and geographic distances ( $r = -0.07$ ,  $p = 0.67$ ). Accordingly, through limited number of aDNA samples, there is enough data to suggest and to tally with the historical evidence of the dominance by Nilotic elements during the early state formation in the Nile Valley, and as the states thrived there was a dominance by other elements particularly Nuba/Nubians.”( Hisham & Munstaser, 2009)*

Owing to Dinka being considered mostly unadmixed, they have been used a proxy for Nilotic studies for many DNA studies. The recent DNA studies generally shown that Nilotes are related to current Nubians although the later have admixture that dates to the time of Arab penetration into the Nile Vallley in aroud 651 AD. Dobon, B and et found that “Darfurians and Nubians are related to Nilotes of South Sudan, but not to other Sudanese populations or sub-Saharan populations”. I should note that Stephanie F. Beswick in her book about Dinka history assert that the Dinka were not in Gezira region before 900 AD. This means that the migration of Dinka and probably Nuer to Gezira corresponds to roughly about the same time of Arab expansion into Sudan from 651 AD thus avoided the admixture with the Arabs.

Although, most of the Nilotic population had migrated South during Meroitic and Post-Meroitic periods, a landmark study by Sirak & et of human sketal remains in Kulubnarti during Christian Period(i.e During the Kingdom of Makuria, Dongola and Alodia) of Nubia has shown that the population of that Island in North Sudan had ~43% Nilotic-related ancestry. Dinka was used as a proxy of Nilotic population in this study. The other remaining ancestry was mainly from Egypt. It should be noted that Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk have 15 to 20% E-M78 which has been found in an ancient Egyptian mummies and is a common Y-chromosome among populations in North Africa, especially in Egypt. This would probably mean that Nilotes had more E-M78 before B-M60 replaced it some of it. Some study of Nuer in Ethiopia have even shown they have high E-M78.

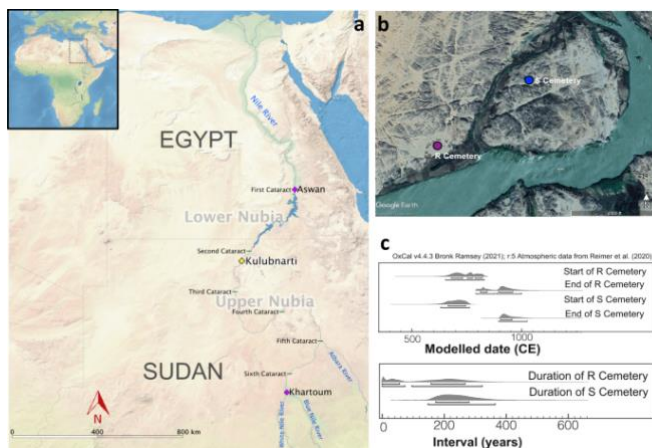


Figure 13: Map showing Kulubnarti between Lower and Upper Nubia and time period of the studies human remains

## Reflection and Conclusion

In this length article, I have present findings from various studies on the history of the Nile Valley to trace the origin of Nilotic people from southern Egypt at Nabta Plata to ancient River of Wadi Hower before moving to the Nile Riverbanks of in Upper Nubia. They then gradually migrated Southward with Eastern and Southern Nilotics being the first to leave their homeland in the North. The last Nilotes to leave Sudan were Western Nilotes. Dinka arrived in Gezira region between 900-1000 AD before they embarked on their last journey out of Sudan from Geriza to South Sudan starting 13th AD after the fall of Alodia Kingdom. Why must we know all this? You may ask. Well, it is important to know your history whether it is bad or good because only then can you have a good foundation to build the future you want. While we are fighting senselessly, killing ourselves, we have learned from the past that our ancestors were building empires, and

fighting the Assyrians in Asia, for some reasons, in support of the Israelites in 7th century BC. More recently our parents or grandparents were fighting for freedom and independence of South Sudan. It is disheartening to see both South Sudan and Sudan tearing apart in the hand of their own citizens although this region has so much history and has been very important part in human civilization since the beginning of humanity. We must therefore learn from our past in times difficulty and challenges to guide us. The question then is what will you do as young South Sudanese intellectuals in your period to improve the status quo? Young people across ethnic groups in South Sudan complain rightly about corrupt and nepotistic government but I have seen the same people participating in divisive activities, irrationally supporting tribal allegiances, which actually cause more harm to the general population, and help the political elites to stay in power. The lesson we must learn from our past is that without unity among ourselves we can never build a prosperous South Sudan. Without the unity of the African communities (which included our forefathers as the major elements) in the ancient Nubia, they would have never established the Kush Kingdom. Without the unity of all South Sudanese communities during the 21-years war of liberation, we would have never have South Sudan today. Our strength lies in our unity, for in diversity can we find talents and skills to develop our nation. What are we really fighting for as brothers? For the jobs, food? Even the Dinka are fighting among themselves as can be seen recently in Warrap. The population of South Sudan is roughly 12 million which is about 7 times smaller than population of Germany, but Germany is almost 2 times smaller than South Sudan by land area. So we have more land and material resources than Germany. And you know what? Germany still have labor shortage that it imports talent abroad. If we unite and use of talents and skills to develop South Sudan, we will have more than enough jobs and food for everyone. We should proactively use our shared past and origin as a path towards peace, unity and national reconciliation, and springboard national development. Peace in South Sudan is possible in all communities, at small scale, Lt. Gen. Rin Tueny Mabor Deng, the governor of Lakes State, has done that in the state which should be appreciated and perhaps replicated. And finally to our leaders, the future of South Sudan lies in uniting South Sudanese communities, emphasizing on the shared history, providing security and rule of law, educating the population, and encouraging competition among the citizens based on meritocracy to bring out the best of South Sudanese. The legacy of those leaders who will inspire masses of South Sudanese to develop a prosperous nation for every citizen will be heard across millennia like Piankhi of Kush and his son Tharyakkua.

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