

The cultural pride of Khikhy

Scholarly sources:

Haynes, Joyce and Santini-Ritt, Mimi (2012). Women in ancient Nubia. In M. Fisher, P. Lacovara, S. Kram, & S. Auria (eds.) *Ancient Nubia: African kingdoms on the Nile*. Cairo, Egypt. The American University in Cairo Press. Pp 157-169.

Lacovara, Peter (2012). Daily life in ancient Nubia. In M. Fisher, P. Lacovara, S. Kram, & S. Auria (eds.) *Ancient Nubia: African kingdoms on the Nile*. Cairo, Egypt. The American University in Cairo Press. Pp 125-144.

Meet Khikhy

Khikhy was a fifteen-year-old girl living in ancient times. She lived in the black African Kingdom of Kush (also known as Nubia) in the 8th century BC.

Khikhy would soon learn just how important her Nubian traditions were to her. But we'll get to that in a minute. First, let's learn a bit about her world.



Khikhy's world

Kush was located in Northern Africa just south of Egypt. Today that area is known as the Sudan.

During the 8th century BC, the city of Napata was the government center of Kush and the city of Thebes was the religious center of Egypt. As you look at the map, you'll see that all the cities of Egypt and Kush were located on the Nile River. Why do you think cities would be built on rivers?



At the time of this story Khikhy lived in Napata. Napata was a great old African city, and it was where the Nubian Pharaoh and his court resided.



You might think that pharaohs were just in Egypt. Well, there had been quite a few ruling pharaohs in Egypt.

In fact, for a long time, Egypt and its pharaohs ruled all of Kush.



But things were different now. Today Kush was the great empire and had conquered Egypt a few years before Khikhy was born.



In fact, Khikhy was actually a member of the royal family of the Kingdom of Kush.



That's because the new Pharaoh at Napata was a distant cousin of hers.



But even though Khikhy was technically a member of the royal family, her people were not rich. The family would be considered middle class by today's standards. Khikhy's parents and older siblings supported the household by making pottery.



Their pottery was some of the most beautiful in Kush and kept the very high standards of even more ancient Nubian pottery.

Some of the pieces were in the palace at Napata.



Khikhy's family lived in a modest house. They had two part time servants that helped the adults with their work.

Khikhy was generally a happy teenager and liked her life in Kush. But there was one problem.



Three years ago she had lost her best friend. This was Abalo, a distant cousin of Khikhy's and the daughter of the new pharaoh.



Khikhy had last seen Abalo at the coronation of the pharaoh. She remembered Abalo's grandmother—now the Mistress of Kush—saying those mystical words that would make her son the pharaoh. To become a pharaoh, she had to declare him the son of Amun-Re, the great god of Kush and Egypt.

She said, "I have come before you, O Amun-Re, Lord of the Thrones. May you establish your beloved son, living forever in this chief office of Re so he might be greater in it than all the gods."



While Kush had other gods besides Amun-Re, these gods were said to be just symbols of the power of Amun-Re. In Kush, Amun-Re was sometimes shown in the shape of a ram. But over all, the people of both Kush and Egypt at this time believed in just one supreme god—and of course they also believed the pharaohs were gods, because they were the sons of Amun-Re.



But the great god Amun-Re could also have a wife. It was common at this time for the pharaoh to make one of his daughters the wife of Amun-Re. Hence shortly after his coronation, the new pharaoh of the Kingdom of Kush made Khikhy's best friend Abalo the god wife.



Becoming the god wife put Abalo in an extremely important position. She was not only to be the priestess devoted solely to the service of Amun-Re, but she now had the highest office in the Egyptian religious center of Thebes and ruled that city and a large area around it.

Abola was only sixteen when she was sent to Thebes to carry out her mission.



At first, Khikhy was so proud of Abalo. She was very pleased that Kush would be well-represented in Egypt. After all, Amun-Re was worshipped in Kush even longer than he'd been worshipped in Egypt. It was fitting that Amun-Re's wife and head priestess would be a Nubian.

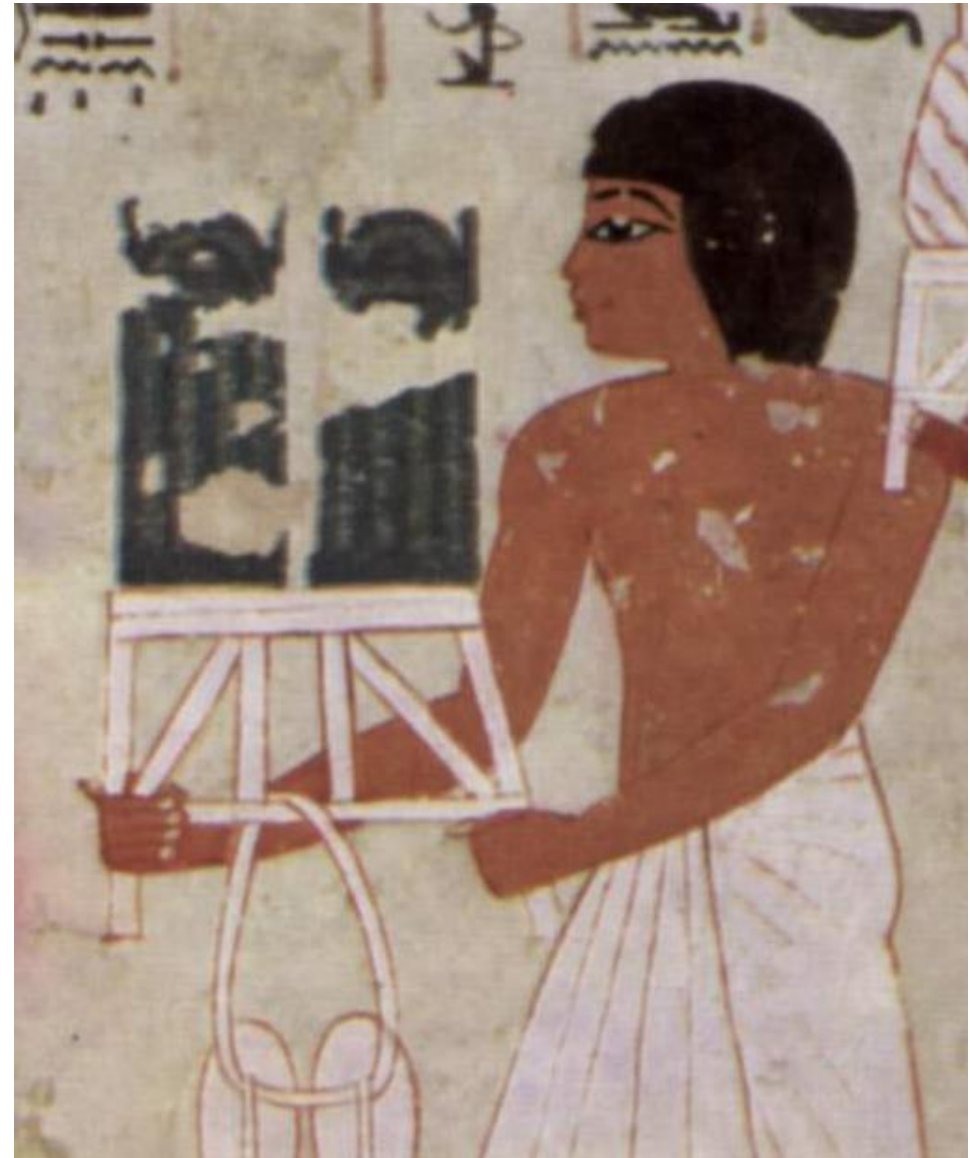
But as each year went by Khikhy missed her friend more and more.



Finally, when three years had passed and Khikhy still moped about the house, her oldest brother Kashta came to her with an idea.

"Sister," he began. "I have been wanting to take a trip to visit the Temple of Amun at Jebel Barkal since it has been restored. I would not mind also going north into Egypt where you could visit your old friend at Thebes, That is, if you wish."

"If I wish!" screamed Khikhy. "Oh thank you, thank you!"



The following week Kashta and Khikhy left Napata with their two servants. Kashta had already traveled throughout Northern Africa, so he knew his way around.

First the group traveled south to see the restored temple.



When they arrived at Jebel Barkal, the restoration was in its final stages. Khikhy noticed that some of the workers were Egyptian slaves. In ancient times, prisoners of war were often made into slaves. The Nubian leaders of Kush had also built a monument inscribed with 159 written lines at the site.

"I am so proud to be Nubian," Kashta exclaimed. "It is only Kush that honors Amun-Re in such a way."

Khikhy smiled.



The group then headed north.
Along the way they saw some
of the older architecture that
their Nubian ancestors had
built hundreds of years ago.



And they got to see some of the architecture their Nubians had recently built.



Some of this included pyramids.



And a few miles north they found the very ancient Nubian city of Kerma. The Kingdom of Kerma had ruled Northern Africa thousands of years earlier.

"Mother says that the style of pottery we make goes back to Kerma," Khikhy said.

"We are so lucky to have this history," added Kashta.



Khikhy's culture shock

And then the group sailed into Egypt.
They arrived several days later in
Thebes. Khikhy was so excited.

They found their way to Malkata
Palace where a guard took them to see
Abalo.



But when Abalo appeared, Khikhy gasped. She didn't look anything like herself. All her clothing was Egyptian. Her eye makeup was Egyptian. Her headdress—with its vulture—was Egyptian. Khikhy understood that Abalo was the ruler of Thebes and had to make some adjustments, but she had not expected to see anything like this.

They talked. Abalo told Kashta and Khikhy about her duties in Thebes and the siblings told Abalo about life back in Napata. Abalo introduced Kashta and Khikhy to her many scribes and chamberlains, and a body of priestesses called "the Inner Abode of Amun."



That night Abalo treated her friends to an evening of music and dance.

"No 'ud? No tabla?" questioned Khikhy, referring to the musical instruments of Kush. "This is all so different." Khikhy was feeling more and more uncomfortable by the minute.

Kashta just patted Khikhy's shoulder. He'd been to Egypt before and knew about the cultural differences.



The next day, Abalo taught Kashta and one of the servants the Egyptian board game of senet.

Khikhy sat out. She knew enough Nubian games. Why would she care about an Egyptian game?



The following day, Abalo told two of her scribes to take Khikhy and Kashta on a tour of Thebes. They visited the tomb of Nebamun and saw the artwork on the walls that was over 700 years old. It was a banquet scene.

"It does not look like life has changed that much in Thebes, does it?" Kashta noted.

"Well, you might want to visit the tomb of Huy," one of the scribes suggested. "We can take you there."

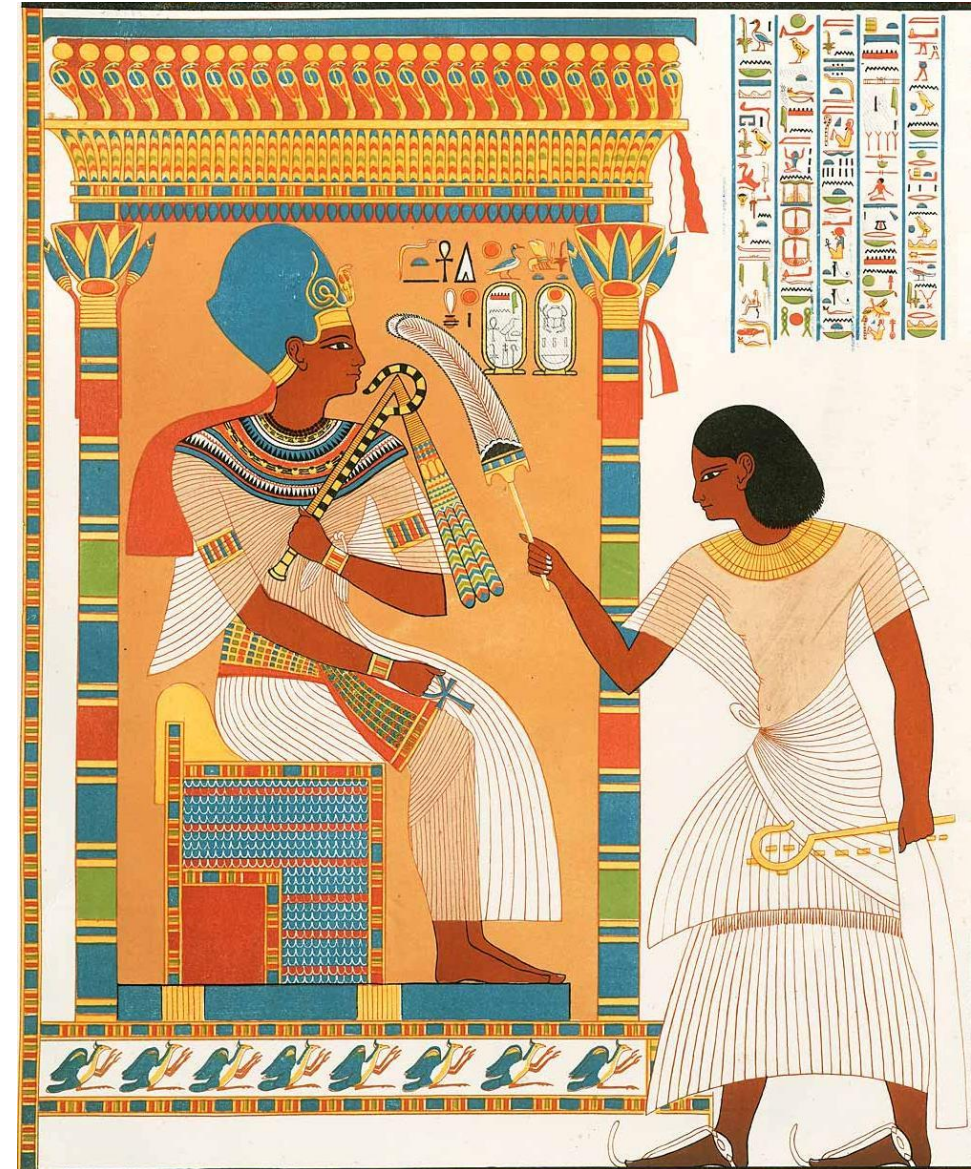
"I don't think so," Khikhy wanted to say, as she felt that she'd already seen enough. But she did not want to seem impolite, so agreed.



That afternoon Kashta and Khikhy followed the scribes to the burial site of Huy.

Inside the small tomb were walls of beautiful art—also over 700 years old.

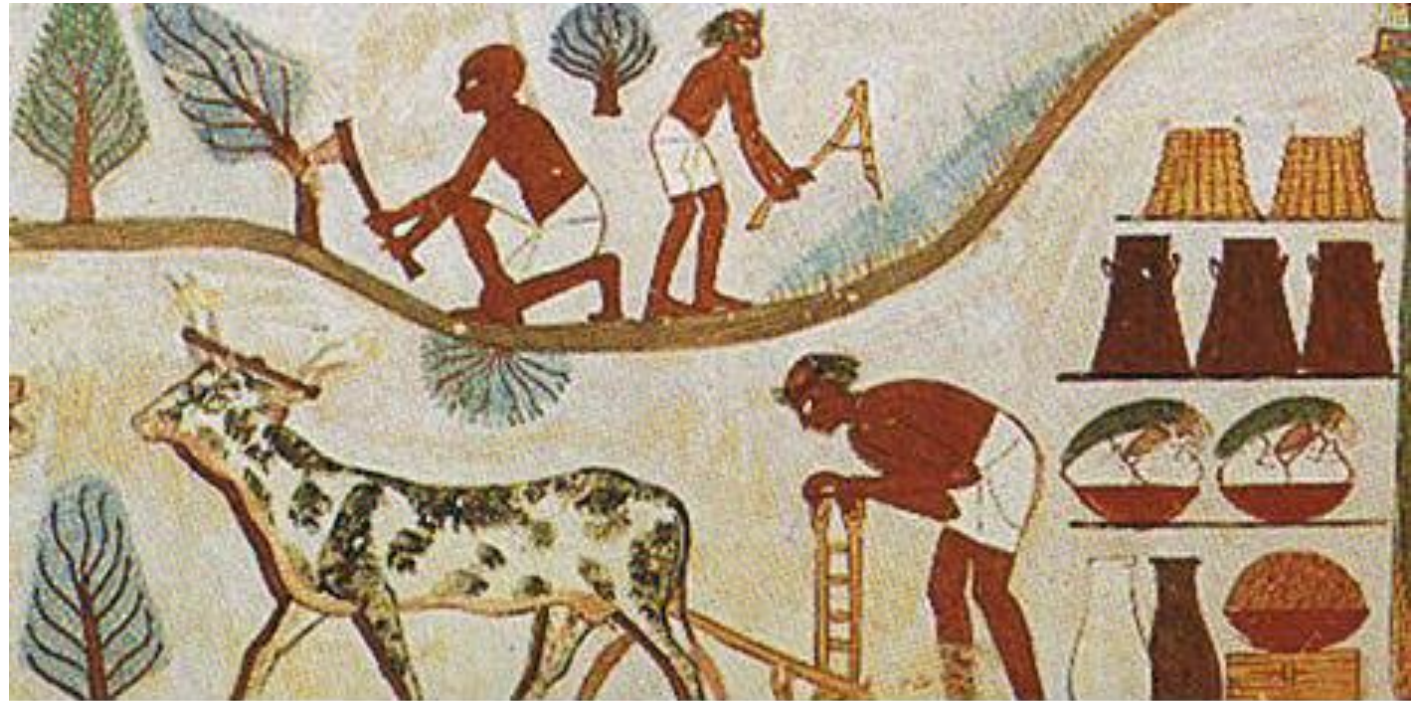
“See, way back then, Egypt controlled all of the North,” the first scribe said. “Huy was the Nubian viceroy who had to report directly to the Egyptian pharaoh.”



"And here are some of their Nubian slaves," added the scribe. "Today you Nubians have Egyptian slaves."

The second scribe pointed to the painting. "You can see how hard they had to work."

And Khikhy began to cry.



"What's wrong?" asked Kashta,
leading her away from the scribes.

"I just want to go home," Khikhy
sobbed.

"But don't you want to say goodbye to
Abalo?"

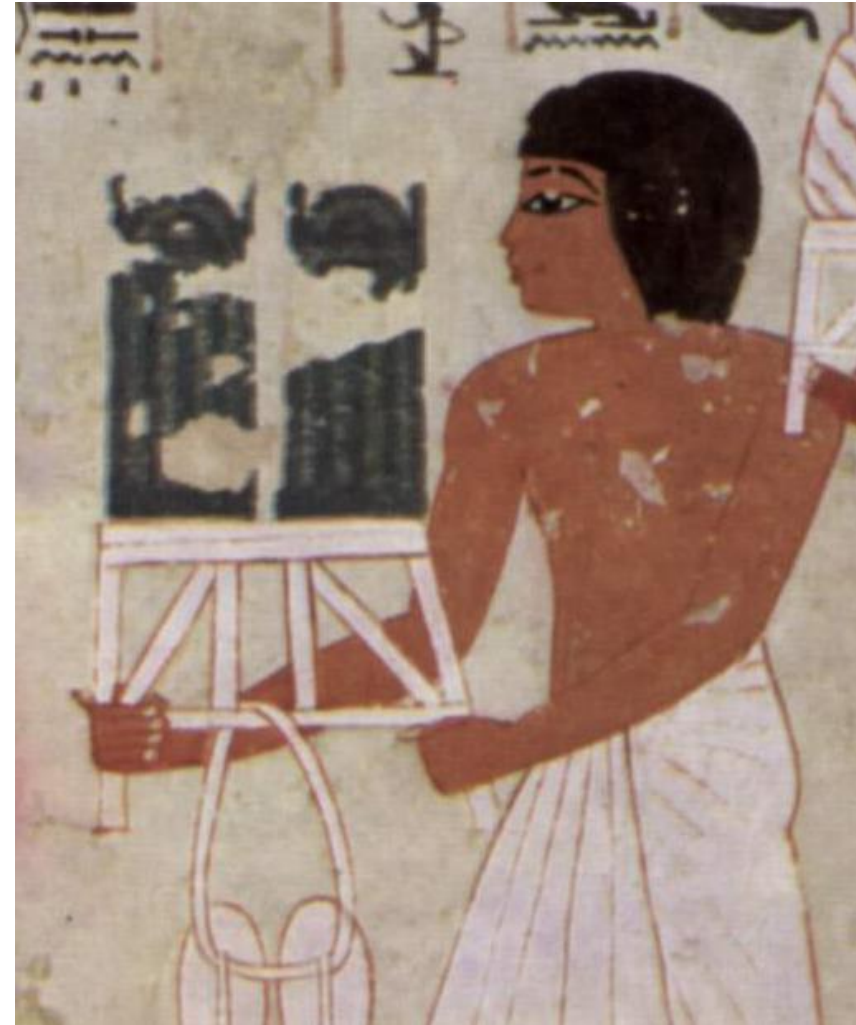
"No, she is no longer Nubian. She isn't
the friend I once had. And these
scribes here want us to believe that
everything Egyptian is superior to
everything Nubian."



"Well, little sister, I felt the way you do the first time I came to Egypt too." He put his arm around Khikhy's shoulders.

"But what changed you?"

Kashta thought for a moment. "I began to understand that that's what living in a culture is all about. Most of us love our own more because we have been raised with those traditions. Our traditions give us comfort. Difference can sometimes be frightening."



Khikhy considered what her brother had said. Then she began to feel shame. "I think you are right," she admitted. "I was acting prejudiced just because the culture here was different."

Kashta smiled.

"But I am still very, very proud of all our Nubian traditions!" declared Khikhy.

"Me too!" agreed Kashta.



The end

Let's talk!!!!!!