

**Trigger, B. (1976) 'The Rise of an African Civilization' In *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 9:1, pp. 1-21**

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Within this paper Trigger layouts the long development of Nubian society with a particular focus on the Kerma Basin and its interactions with Egypt. He states that "The floodplains along the Nile constitute an important but as yet little utilized series of laboratories for the comparative study of the origins and interaction of ancient civilizations." (P. 1) The scope of this paper is vast stretching from around 6000 BCE and the early Khartoum Mesolithic to the middle of the New Kingdom. As we have seen with other papers we have the situation where the upper Nubian chronology is defined with reference to Egypt, thus in this paper we finish with the domination of Kerma by the Pharaohs of the New Kingdom. There could be some rational for this division, after all it was at this point that Egypt gained direct control over Kerma, yet it also reinforces the idea of Egyptian Imperialism verses Kerman weakness. Surly, it would be more interesting to look at the ways that Egyptian domination changed the Kerma culture, as a recursive relationship between colonizer and colonized (although this article was written in 1976 lest we not forget).

Within the very large chronological sweep of the article, Trigger presents a largely narrative and synthetic approach to the development of the Kerma culture. However, we should also note Trigger's strongly economic and trade centered approach the development of the Kerma culture and its interactions with the Egyptian state (and inter-states). This approach is typified by the schematic diagram of models of trade between Egypt and Nubia (Pg. 6). It is an interesting way to visualize the dynamic systems of trade that existed, however, as all unilinear representations of inter-polity dynamics tend to do, it suffers by simplification.

Given that Trigger was an archaeologist who could be termed a 'moderate relativist' and also the profound influence of V. Gordon Childe on his intellectual development, it becomes no surprise that he favored a type of analysis based on larger scales of analysis and broader reaches of time. This paper does not really engage in detailed analysis, in the way the O'Connor article for this week did, but rather we are looking at a sketching of the broader trends in the political economy of this region, with the driving motor being the socio-economic modes of production and exchange, which condition the relationship between Egypt and Nubia. An example of this approach can be seen in the section dealing with retainer sacrifice of the classic Kerma period. In this section Trigger suggests that the reason we see increases in the number of retainers in these grave contexts is primarily functional and economic "This increase [in human sacrifice] maybe correlated with the need to control a growing slave population, whose surplus numbers were not being absorbed by the Egyptian market." (Pg. 17) Therefore, within this analysis retainer sacrifice is not primarily ideological (though it may still have ideological elements) but rather economic, an issue of supply-and-demand.

We also see this type of analysis in the conclusion "the Kerma state would have been impossible had it not been for the ecological potential of the Kerma Basin" (Pg. 21), thus, the success of the Kerma polity becomes an issue of ecological potential. This assertion might have some truth to it, however, it can never be this simple, humans form complicated relationships with the landscapes they inhabit, which are both co-dependant and exploitative, yet to suggest that a culture may only have existed based on ecological factors is to commit the error of reductive analysis based on purely environmental factors.