

# Shepenwepet II - Nubian Priestess and Princess

About 700 years before Christ, B.C., the land of Kemet (Egypt) was ruled by Nubian Kings along with the land of Kush. Kashta and Piye (Piankhy), father and son kings of Kush, helped to create a united country that consisted of Kush (in today's Sudan) and, first Upper Kemet, then all of Kemet.

In particular King Piankhy established rule and set up governance of this new kingdom, from his home base in Napata in today's Sudan.

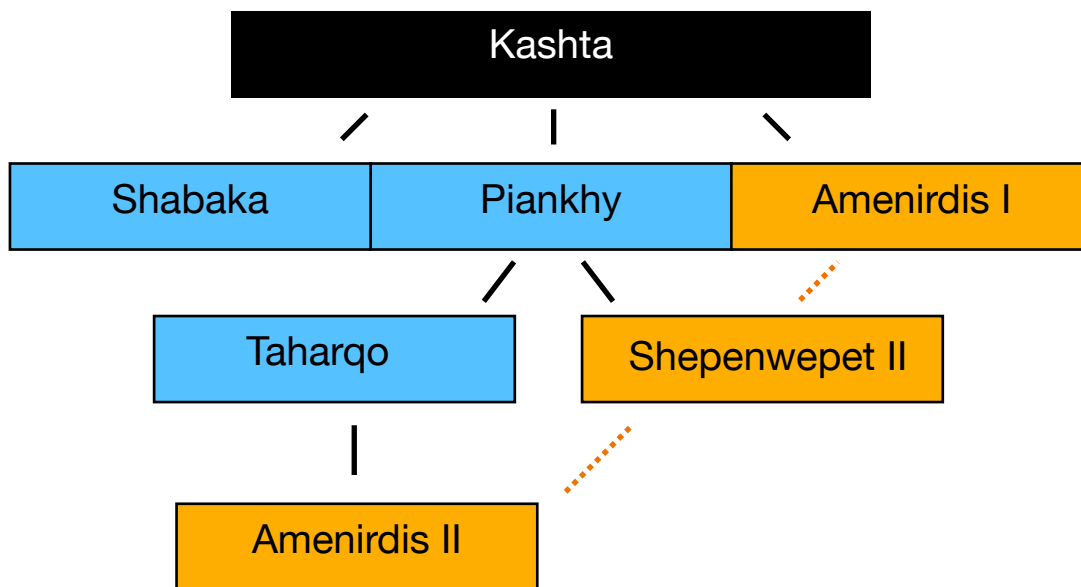
When Piankhy established his rule, he placed his sister in a very important role, that of "God's Wife of Amen," in the temple of Amen at Karnak.



God’s Wife of Amen was a very important position that essentially gave the woman, to whom it belonged, an incredible amount of power.

Every king needed to be legitimized on the throne and the God’s Wife of Amen did that for each king during his reign—he needed political and religious efforts in order to rule. The God’s Wife of Amen also provided prayers for the king’s success and for protection of the country. She further went on to perform rituals, dances and songs that were in support of the primary deity, at that time, Amen.

King Piankhy, naturally wanted his family member in that role and he, therefore, assigned his sister to that position. His sister was Amenirdis I and she had to be “adopted” by the previous holder of that title, in order to be legitimate.



Once Amenirdis I ascended to her role, she adopted her niece, Shepenwepet II, to be the next God’s Wife of Amen. Shepenwepet II,

when she became the next God's Wife of Amen, inherited thousands of acres of land that were used to provide her, and her staff, with regular resources. She had monthly and daily gifts of food, wine, bread, cakes, vegetables, oxen, geese, etc...also given to her by cities throughout the northern and southern areas of Kemet. In addition, she had daily and monthly resources given to her from the priests who served at the temple of Amen and regular resources sent to her from at least 15 temples, including Memphis, throughout Kemet.

This put her in charge of a vast amount of wealth and made her one of the most influential people in all of Kemet. She too had to adopt the successor, in order for the successor to be legitimate—she adopted her niece, Amenirdis II (King Taharqo's daughter). Political tides changed, however, and Amenirdis II never ascended to that title.

The 26th Dynasty came to power in Kemet and its new ruler, Psamtik I, wanted his daughter, Nitocris, to be the next God's Wife of Amen to solidify his rule.

He couldn't just force his way in and destroy the temple to make this happen—he had to be a ruler whom the populace respected and would follow. This meant that Shepenwepet II (and her niece Amenirdis II) had to participate in the adoption of his daughter, in order to make this legitimate. This gives you some indication that in Kemet, at this time and in Kush, women held traditional roles of power that were a part of the necessary functions of their societies, according to the people who lived at that time.

Psamtik I's reflections on this event can be found in a stela that commemorates his daughter's adoption:

### **The words of Psamtik I**

“I am his son, first in the favor of the father of the gods, offering to the gods; whom he begat for himself, to satisfy his heart.

I have given to him my daughter, to be Divine Consort, that she may invoke protection for the king more than those who were before her; that he may indeed be satisfied with her prayers, and that he may protect the land of him who gave her to him.”

“Lo, I have now heard saying, a king’s daughter of Taharka triumphant, is there whom he gave to his sister to be her ‘Great Daughter’ who is there as ‘Divine Votress’ (Ntr-dw’ t). I am not one to expel an heir from his place, for I am a king who loves truth; my particular abomination is lying; (I am) a son protecting his father, taking the inheritance of Keb, uniting the two portions as a youth. Hence I give her **(Nitocris)** to her **(Shepenwepet II)** to be her ‘Great Daughter’ as her father **(Piankhy)** (once) conveyed her to (his) sister **(Amenirdis I)**.”

As you can see, the God’s Wife of Amen was a respected title in Kemet and Shepenwepet II, when she held it, was one of the most powerful people in Kemet.

### References and further reading:

Breasted, Jame Henry, Ph.D. *Ancient Records of Egypt: Vol. 4* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1906). pp. 477-488.

“Kushite Kingdom,” Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, The University of Chicago, <https://isac.uchicago.edu/museum-exhibits/nubia/kushite-kingdom>

“God’s Wives of Amun,” Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, The University of Chicago, <https://isac.uchicago.edu/museum-exhibits/nubia/god’s-wives-amun>

*Images:*

Egyptian. Relief Fragment of Shepenwepet II, ca. 700 B.C.E. Sandstone, Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 74.99.2. Creative Commons-BY

Family Diagram of Kashta, Pianky, Shepenwepet II, and Taharqo, Red and Black Ink, LLC. Danita Smith, 2023.

North Side of the West Wall of Nakht's Offering Chapel, Norman de Garis Davies (1865–1941) and Others, Met Museum, Rogers Fund, 1915.