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At a very early date in their history, the Nubians began to import from central and southern Africa certain fruits and melons, whose seeds were often ground up for soups or used to manufacture medicines. As these contacts increased, the Nubians soon developed agriculture and eventually domesticated a variety of long-horned cattle, which became the primary source of their wealth. These cattle provided meat and milk, as well as leather from their tanned hides.

More importantly, the Nubian and central African merchants soon realized that the luxury product of Africa – elephant ivory, ebony, gold, the pelts of leopards and other exotic big cats, and even the feathers and eggs of ostriches – were prized not only by the Egyptians to the north but also by the people of the islands in the Aegean Sea and the Mesopotamians, who lived in the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Because the Nubians controlled the corridor to Africa, they soon became prosperous merchants. Through their kingdom passed the riches of Africa in exchange for wine, olive oil, linen, grain, and bronze objects.