In 1978 an aquarelle showing a man carrying (or lifting?) two miniature elephants by means of a carrying pole was published in the catalogue of the Brooklyn Museum exhibition dedicated to arts of the Ancient Sudan (Fig. 1). The short description of this drawing by Steffen Wenig stated that it had been found in the archives of the archaeological expedition of the University of Liverpool, which had carried out pioneering excavations at Meroe between 1909 and 1914, under the directorship of John Garstang (1874-1956). The rendering was evidently a copy of a wall painting found in the so-called Royal City, one of the major districts of the site, where the expedition had focused its operations.

Addressing the subject of the drawing, Wenig observed that while the “motif is unknown in Egyptian or Meroitic art”, there was a possible parallel to it in a bas-relief on a stone window grill in the temple of Qasr Ibrim, showing a man with a small elephant on his shoulders. Due to the seeming semantic similarity of these compositions, he proposed that both of them might have illustrated a scene from some ancient folk tale, for which no other evidence presently survives.

In 1998 the Liverpool aquarelle was re-interpreted by Eugenio Fantusati, who pointed out the similarity of the scene to a popular composition in Graeco-Roman art, known in many variations, which shows Herakles carrying two kerkopes, twin brothers captured by the hero when they attempted to steal his weapons while he was asleep (and who, one of the versions of the myth maintains, were later turned into monkeys by Zeus). Typically they appear bound and suspended head-downwards from opposite ends of the carrying pole which Herakles carries on his shoulder.

According to Fantusati, it is only the presence of the elephants on the Meroe painting that might complicate the otherwise plausible identification of its main personage as Herakles (whose worship did indeed exist at Meroe, as some classical writers report). Elephants, after all, do not figure in any of the “standard” Graeco-Roman descriptions of this hero’s deeds. From this, it might be surmised that a local version of the myth of Herakles had developed in Kush, or alternatively, that the Greek epic hero and demigod was here identified with one of the native deities, such as Apedemak who seems to have been associated with elephants in Kushite mythology and iconography.

Such an interpretation of the Meroe fresco (the precise location and state of preservation of which is...
at present unknown) appears to have become generally accepted, and it was but late in 2011 that a new reason to continue the discussion came to light. In the Archive of the Griffith Institute at Oxford, the present writer found a second copy of the same fresco among several drawings presented to the Archive in 1941 by the widow of Charles Seligman (1874-1940), the distinguished British anthropologist.

The newly recovered Oxford copy of the painting differs from the Liverpool copy in some points. For instance, the former does not show the bent left hand of the personage, holding some long object (Fantusati interpreted this object as a club, which, of course, would be an important iconographical attribute of Herakles).\(^{11}\) It also lacks the strange little creature, perhaps a monkey, who sits on the carrying pole. These and several other “blanks” suggest that the drawing from Seligman’s collection was made earlier than the published Liverpool copy, when some essential details of the original wall painting had not yet been properly perceived.

Paradoxically, the Oxford copy, in spite of its omitting several rather important details, has some advantages in comparison with the Liverpool. Being a line drawing of a slightly smaller size than the latter, made by a fine brush with a black pigment (perhaps,}

\(^{11}\) Fantusati, ‘Remarks’, p. 252.
drawing ink), it shows much more clearly some particulars of the original wall painting which are difficult to discern in the reproduction of the watercolour.

The newly-found second copy of the Meroe fresco will be discussed by the writer in some detail in a forthcoming paper devoted to the graphical material from Seligman’s archive now kept in the Griffith Institute. The focus of the present article is on one aspect of the theme, the portrait features of the central figure of the composition (Fig. 2).

First, we should note that the person shown in the Oxford line drawing does not seem to be a “thickset youth”, as Wenig described him in his comment on the Liverpool copy, nor a “young man”, as Fantusati later stated, but rather an adult man with a beard marked with several curls (which are, again, difficult to make out in the published coloured reproduction). Such a feature is rather rare in representations of men or gods in the Egypto-Kushite culture area in pre-Hellenic period. The fact that the person represented in the Meroe wall painting is bearded would thus seem to support Fantusati’s identification of him as Herakles, since a beard is one of the commonest iconographical attributes of the latter.

Second, the two oblique strokes on the man’s cheek are worth observing. The lower of these lines could be understood as the nasolabial fold (although such anatomical particulars were rarely reproduced in flat representations of people in Egypt and Kush) or for the upper line of the man’s moustache, but what then could the higher stroke, almost parallel to the previous one, mean? It is doubtful that the draughtsman would have attempted, by it, to depict the man as hallow-cheeked, because such anatomical

12 Fragment of the photograph by Jennifer Navratil. Published by courtesy of the Griffith Institute.
15 I do not mean the ritual, artificial beard, often seen on the representations of kings and certain gods in Egypt and Kush, neither the accurately trimmed hair on the chin shown on some Egyptian paintings, particularly of Old Kingdom (L.D II, 58 a; 59 b; 64 a; 69; 71 e; 74 e).
16 Beard of “natural” shape appears on some representations of gods deviating from Egyptian traditions, perhaps displaying some foreign influence (e.g. L.D V, 64 a, b). The same probably holds true with the iconography of the god Bes (cf. L.D V, 68) whose provenance is rather difficult to establish.
17 See e.g. the illustrations in Fantusati, ‘Remarks’, p. 253, Figs. 5, 7, 8, 9.
18 In Egyptian drawings (there is no relevant material from Kush that I know of), a very short stroke, or sometimes a dot, can occasionally be seen at the corner of the represented person’s mouth (e.g. W. Forman, H. Kischkewitz, Die Altägyptische Zeichnung (Prague, 1971), nos. 21, 22, 25, 30, 32, 33; cf. dot in 27, 37, 47). In most cases it abuts the person’s lower lip, which means that it was not the nasolabial fold but simply the person’s cheek that the draughtsman wanted to mark. The only example of the opposite I can refer to is L.D, Ergänzungsband (Leipzig, 1951), Taf. XLVIII, b: third figure from right), but since the plate reproduces a drawing made by the XIXth century artist, there are some doubts as to the adequacy of this copy (cf. the other figures in Taf. XLVIII, b and c).
nuances are highly irregular in the art of the Nile Valley kingdoms in antiquity. Besides, it is fatness rather than thinness that would have been stressed by the artist (when it was appropriate), apparently due to certain socio-cultural implications of such corporal particulars. It is much more likely that the strokes on the man’s face are cheek scars, which are well known from African anthropology. The practice of ritual scarification, connected with the rites of initiation, has been well attested (from ancient times until the present) in many societies of the Sudanese part of the Nile Valley [19] (Fig. 3),[20] some similar (as e.g. tattooing) or related practices (circumcision, excision, extraction of teeth, etc.) having been attested in many other parts of African continent as well.

A third peculiar detail on the portrait of the “Elephant-Bearer” is the inverted curve, broken in two places (obviously due to the lacunae on the wall-painting), on the upper part of his chest. This semi-circle, hardly traceable in the aquarelle copy because of the low contrast of the colours used, is very distinct in the Oxford line drawing. There seems a strong likelihood that it marked a necklace. Moreover, the (convention) radius of this semi-circle suggests that the artist probably meant the so-called Wesekh-collar (from eg. w3kh)[21] rather than a simple necklace, a decoration which is very well known from numerous representations in Egypt and Kush,[22] from archaeological finds,[23] and even from hieroglyphica (e.g. ꜵ). The upper edge of this (supposed) collar may have disappeared in the lacuna which is indicated by two short strokes across the man’s neck in the Oxford line drawing and by the horizontal white strip in the Liverpool aquarelle.

To sum up, the portrait of the “Elephant-Carrier”, as reproduced in the Oxford copy of the wall painting at Meroe, gives a somewhat strange impression, for pictured is a person who appears to have:

a) features of face which do not seem to be negroid;
b) relatively light skin (obsidian, according to the description in the Brooklyn Museum catalogue);[25]
c) a beard;
d) possible cheek scars;
e) an Egyptian/Egyptianized type of necklace.

If these observations are correct,[26] we may conclude that the subject of the painting reflects a mixture of different cultural and ethnic traditions. The painting may represent a fictionalized foreigner at Meroe, perhaps a Mediterranean type, with some particulars making him look like a local. In other words, what we see here is probably an “Africanized European”.

These considerations do not negate Fantusati’s suggestion that the subject is Herakles. As he reasonably remarked, “we know that Herakles, the warrior fighting against death to secure immortality, from the fourth century BC changes into a benefactor


[21] LD II, 2c; 3; 8a, b; III, 1, 2b, c, d; 4e; IV, 1 a, b; 2a, b, c; 2b; 2c; 1a, c; 2a, b, 4b; 5.


[23] See Gardiner’s Sign-List: S11 (A.H. Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar (3rd ed.; London, 1957), p. 505). Cf. the Win ✡ Glyph signs - (S11A), (S11B), (S11C), (S11D). Also note (S12) and (S12A) for nfr(jt)-collar (LD II, 237, 10) and (S188), (S188A), (S189), etc.


[25] It should be taken into account that the considerations brought forward above are based on the divergences between the two copies of the wall painting in Meroe City, made about a century ago. Which of the two is more precise is difficult to establish today due to the inaccessibility of the original, if it still survives.
becoming a civilizing hero. During his pilgrimages he founded new towns and, most of all, became their protector <…>\textsuperscript{27}. It is thus tempting to suppose that the two elephants on the carrying-pole were meant by the artist as a curious “transformation” (or maybe as a somewhat ironical\textsuperscript{28} replacement?) of the two brigands of whom Herakles, according to the Greek myth, once relieved the kingdom of Lydias’ Queen Omphale. The hero-demigod, thus would perhaps also have been represented as a benefactor of Meroe (rescuing it from rogue elephants?).

On the other hand, based on the above observations of the newly-recovered Oxford copy of the wall-painting, we probably should assume that the author of the fresco meant that in the course of the (apocryphal) “pilgrimage” of Herakles to \textit{Aithiopia}, his deeds were not confined to getting some new “hunting game”, represented by two elephants, but were supplemented by receiving some “acquisitions” of more general cultural value. The artist probably implied that here one of the most popular heroes of Graeco-Roman mythology was adopted into indigeneous milieu (by passing the rites of initiation?) and thus, in a sense, happened to be a “Kulturrezipient” and not only the “Kulturträger”.

Zusammenfassung

1978 wurde im Katalog einer Ausstellung im Brooklyn Museum, die die Kunst des antiken Sudan zum Thema hatte, ein Aquarell publiziert, das einen Mann, der zwei Miniaturelefanten auf einem Tragjoch trägt, zeigt. Die Zeichnung ist eine Kopie einer Wandmalerei, die im königlichen Bezirk in Meroe während der Ausgrabung der University of Liverpool (1909-1914) entdeckt wurde. Im Begleittext zur Abbildung bemerkt Steffen Wenig, dass das Motiv in der ägyptischen bzw. meroitischen Kunst unbekannt ist, jedoch verweist er auf eine mögliche Parallele in der ikonographischen Tradition im Tempel von Qasr Ibrim.


ist, oder dass der griechische Heroe hier mit einem der einheimischen Götter identifiziert wurde, wie Apedemak, der in der kuschitischen Mythologie und Ikonographie mit Elefanten assoziiert wurde.


Die Oxforder Kopie ist eine Strichzeichnung und zeigt viel deutlicher einige wichtige Einzelheiten der originalen Wandmalerei, die in der Reproduktion des Liverpooler Aquarells schwierig wahrzunehmen sind. Es scheint so zu sein, dass ein erwachsener Mann mit einem Bart (und nicht ein Jüngling, wie zuvor angenommen) auf dem Fresko in Meroe dargestellt wurde. Ebenso sind zwei schräge Striche auf der Wange des Mannes zu erkennen, die als rituelle Backennarben - gut bekannt aus der afrikanischen Anthropologie - zu interpretieren sind. Im oberen Teil der Brust des Mannes ist eine halbrunde Linie zu sehen, die möglicherweise einen Weschk-Kragen zeigt - eine Zierde, die gut von vielen Darstellungen aus Ägypten und Kusch bekannt ist.


\textsuperscript{27} Fantusati, ‘Remarks’, p. 254.
\textsuperscript{28} This aspect of the composition will be developed in the writer’s forthcoming study of Seligman’s archive in the Griffith Institute.
Sudanarchäologische Gesellschaft zu Berlin e.V.


Die Sudanarchäologische Gesellschaft zu Berlin e.V. setzt sich besonders für den Erhalt des Ensembles von Sakralbauten aus meroitischer Zeit in Musawwarat es Sufra/Sudan ein, indem sie konservatorische Arbeiten unterstützt, archäologische Ausgrabungen fördert sowie Dokumentation und Publikation der Altertümer von Musawwarat ermöglicht. Wenn die Arbeit der Sudanarchäologischen Gesellschaft zu Berlin Ihr Interesse geweckt hat und Sie bei uns mitarbeiten möchten, werden Sie Mitglied! Wir sind aber auch für jede andere Unterstützung dankbar. Wir freuen uns über Ihr Interesse!

Mitgliedsbeiträge jährlich:
Vollmitglied: € 65.- / Ermäßigt: € 35.- / Student: € 15.- / Fördermitglied: mind. € 250.-

ISSN 0945-9502

Der antike Sudan. Mitteilungen der Sudanarchäologischen Gesellschaft zu Berlin e.V.

Kurzcode: MittSAG

Heft 24 • 2013
Karte des Nordsudan ........................................................................................................................................ 4

Editorial .............................................................................................................................................................. 5

Nachrichten aus Musawwarat

Claudia Näser
Die Feldkampagne der Archaeological Mission to Musawwarat im Frühjahr 2013 ................................. 7

Claudia Näser & Malgorzata Daszkiewicz
New data from the ceramic workshop in courtyard 224 of the Great Enclosure in Musawwarat es Sufra ................................................................................................................................. 15

Fritz-Hintze-Vorlesung

Martina Ullmann
Von Beit el-Wali nach Abu Simbel: Zur Neugestaltung der sakralen Landschaft Unternubiens in der Regierungszeit Ramses’ II. ........ 23

Aus der Archäologie

Angelika Lohwasser & Tim Karberg
Das Projekt Wadi Abu Dom Itinerary (W.A.D.I.) Kampagne 2013 .......................................................... 39

Dieter Eigner & Tim Karberg

Friederike Jesse, Manuel Fiedler & Baldur Gabriel
A Land of Thousand Tumuli - An Archaeological Survey in the Region of El Gol, south of the 5th Nile Cataract, North Sudan .............................................................................................................. 59

Miriam Lahitte
Gala Abu Ahmed, Perlen und Fragmente aus Straußeneischale ................................................................ 75

Vincent Francigny & Romain David
Dating Funerary Material in the Meroitic Kingdom ......................................................................................... 105

Joanna Then-Obłuska
A Few Millimeters via Thousands of Kilometers: An Asian ‘Etched’ Carnelian Bead in Early Makurian Nubia, Sudan ............................................................................................................. 117

Alexander Gatzsche
Case study of an open source application for 3D acquisition of archaeological structures at the archaeological site Wad Ben Naga ............................................................................................... 125

Varia

Alexey K. Vinogradov
A New Glance at the Portrait of the “Elephant-Bearer” in Meroe ................................................................. 135

Artur Obłuski
Dodekaschoinos in Late Antiquity
Ethnic Blemmyes vs. Political Blemmyes and the Arrival of Nobades .................................................... 141