

The Kushite Nature of Early Meroitic Mortuary Religion: A Pragmatic Approach to Osirian Beliefs.

This is offered in recognition of the
pioneering work of Steffen Wenig
in the field of Meroitic Art

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As our understanding of Kushite culture deepens, the view promulgated by early scholars of Meroe, many of whom trained as Egyptologists, that Kushites follow Egyptian cultural traditions as closely as possible is increasingly revealed as flawed. Innovative re-workings of Egyptian sources, including images, and the introduction of Kushite ideas can be identified through a careful comparison of Egyptian sources and Meroitic use of them. A close analysis of early Meroitic pyramid chapels reveals that the priests who selected images for these monuments acted with comprehension of and an unexpected independence from Egyptian religion. They chose and sometimes manipulated Egyptian vignettes to express a combination of Kushite and Egyptian mortuary beliefs and also included scenes of Kushite libations and processions on chapel walls. Their program of decoration reveals focused beliefs based on an Osirian afterlife and a pragmatic sometimes non-Egyptian approach to providing for it. A desire for clarity of expression (with its attendant magical powers) appears to be the rationale for the content of the chapel decorations.

Introduction¹

The author's analysis² of early Meroitic pyramid chapels in the Southern and Northern Royal Cemeteries³ reveals that, as with previous inquiries into Kushite uses of Egyptian texts and materials,⁴ the Kushites used Egyptian religious texts and images to express their own interpretation of Egyptian religious ideas and that this interpretation is shaped by indigenous beliefs. This is a practice that can be

traced back to the Kushite conquest of Egypt in the eighth century BCE when Kushite elites were in a position in which they could at last freely access, more or less on their own terms, the same temple archives of Egyptian religious art and texts used by Egyptian priests. Dynasty 25 tombs of the Asasif are decorated with older images and texts in new contexts and combinations that change their original meanings to express Kushite ideas.⁵ Libraries are taken to Napata⁶ so that even after the Kushites lose Egypt, the Napatans continue to reference Dynasty 25 and earlier materials for their burials and to create new religious texts, such as those on the sarcophagi of Anlamani and Aspelta and for a funerary liturgy based on the Ritual of Royal Ancestors,⁷ by re-

1 I am indebted to Dr. Susan K. Doll, Boston MA, for her generous sharing of ideas derived from her research on Napatan religion and mortuary texts that have informed this article. The uses to which they have been put are entirely the responsibility of the author.

2 Hinkel – Yellin (forthcoming), Chapter B.IV, C.II.

3 Chapels belonging to late Napatan/ early Meroitic period in the Southern Cemetery are: BEG S 007 the soldier Hor-teby, BEG S 010, non-ruling Queen Karatari, BEG S 006 King Arqamaniqo, BEG S 005 King Amanislo and BEG S 004, Amanislo's queen, Batäre. Based on their pyramid construction and chapel decorations the first burials in the Northern Cemetery, among them BEG N 004 King Amanitekha and BEG N 003 unknown queen, also belong to this group of pyramids (Yellin 2009, 24-28, figs. 13, 14). While small in number, a coherent belief system is revealed by the general consistency in the content of their decorations.

4 For a foundational inquiry into this issue, see Török 2001 and for investigations into the use of Egyptian textual sources as they might reveal Dynasty 25/ Napatan thinking cf. Gozzoli 2010, 183-207 and Doll, 2007.

5 Pischikova identifies the way in which individual images from the Old Kingdom are appropriated and whose meaning reflects Dynasty 25 and Dynasty 26 ideas through the use of new combinations of images and objects in new contexts (Pischikova 1994, 63). Her observations are very similar to those made by S. Doll to describe later Napatan practices, see Doll 1978.

6 Török 1997, 402-403, note 309.

7 Cf. Sarcophagi of Anlamani and Aspelta (Doll 1978) and a Ritual of Royal Ancestors that appears on several Napatan funerary stelae from Nuri (Doll 2008). What survives of the pyramid chapel decorations at Nuri such as NU 6 (Dunham 1955, Pl. XX A, C) indicates that this was also true for visual texts.

purposing and re-combining elements from older Egyptian ones. Napata, long an epicenter of Egyptian religious institutions, was home to a priesthood and population steeped in centuries of Egyptian religious influences, but what of Meroe? What happens when the royal court and their priests leave Napata, the ancient home of Egyptian traditions?

The Kushite Nature of Early Meroitic Mortuary Religion: A Pragmatic Approach to Osirian beliefs.

The first royal tombs in Meroe generally reflect Napatan practices in the construction of burials and the texts (both literary and visual)⁸ used in them, which is in keeping with the findings that the pyramid builders of Arqamaniqo's (BEG S 006) predecessors' (BEG S 007, BEG S 010) belonged to the highest circles of the Napatan Court and that workmen who came from Napata worked on the pyramids and their chapels.⁹ The decoration of their burial chambers appears to be more traditional than that of their chapels. What survives of their decoration indicates that the burial chambers are the locale for NN's passage into the afterlife at the time of burial and that, as in Egypt, the tomb represents the cosmos¹⁰ including the underworld. Mortuary texts with vignettes of funerary gods and demons painted on the chambers' walls provide NN with a guide to successfully navigate through the underworld including the Judgment before Osiris. Important to this journey is help from Isis and Nephthys who are depicted equipping the dead on this journey with the symbolic offering of funerary bandages.¹¹ Thanks to these texts and images, NN reaches the presence of Osiris, having successfully passed through the Osirian Judgment as demonstrated on the west wall of burial chamber B in BEG S 503. There the Queen, with hands raised in salutation, stands in the presence of Osiris and Isis.¹²

The decorations in these burial chambers indicate that the Kushite narrative for rebirth follows the

Egyptian Osirian myth. However, the decorations of the mortuary chapels, in which the transfigured tomb owner is worshipped as an Osiris with his/her own mortuary cult¹³ appears to be driven by their understanding of what is fundamentally needed to insure that NN is well served in his/her afterlife and a pragmatic willingness to focus on what is deemed essential. This leads first to a focus on what are logically the three basic requirements for an Osirian afterlife and second to the sometimes non-Egyptian ways the Meroitic priests devise to meet them. These aspects of Kushite thinking are notable throughout these chapels. Because the requirements they established for the afterlife are so fundamental and universal they could as easily be Kushite in origin as Egyptian. Indeed, Kushite Neolithic graves have features that in their own ways address the same needs.¹⁴ For each of the chapel walls, Meroitic priests select and, in some cases manipulate,¹⁵ images from Egyptian sources¹⁶ whose individual meanings combine to fill *as expeditiously as possible* one of the three needs they have identified as fundamental to NN's afterlife:

1. The need to protect NN in the course of his/her transfiguration into a divine being and during NN's on-going existence. (east walls).
2. The need for NN to be transfigured into a divine being capable of sustained existence in the afterlife. (west walls).
3. The need to establish a viable mortuary cult for the transfigured NN to nurture him/her in the afterlife. (north and south walls).

1. The need to protect NN: The Egyptian-derived images on the east walls (= back of pylons) provide protection for NN in the course of his/her transfi-

8 Texts as used in this article will refer both to written as well as visual expressions of religious concepts.

9 For the dating and context of Late Napatan/ Early Meroitic pyramid chapels see Yellin 2009, 8-28.

10 As indicated by a ceiling painted with the goddess Nut (BEG S 010, burial chamber A) and another painted with an astronomical text (BEG S 503, burial chamber B) (Yellin 1984, 577-852).

11 BEG S 010 and BEG S 503 burial chamber decorations recall burial chamber A, NU 53 (daughter of Taharqa, Dunham 1955, Pl. IX C).

12 See Hinkel – Yellin (forthcoming), Chapter E.I, Doc. 11.a for an unpublished drawing by Reisner or Dunham.

13 In Egypt gods offered to divinized kings in the kings' mortuary temples beginning with the New Kingdom, i.e. Mortuary Temple of Ramesses II at Medinet Habu (Stadelmann 1980, 1262-1267), a practice that was adopted by non-royals by the end of the New Kingdom (Pischikova 1994, 68).

14 I.e. late Neolithic burials at Kadruka in which dogs were buried at the four cardinal points of the cemetery (for protection), the presence of hearths for funeral rites at burial or beyond and various gifts indicate the need for on-going provisions. The calciform libation vessels found at Kadruka speak to the long and important history of this ritual, foreshadowing by millennia its importance in the Meroe (Reinhold 2004, 42, 45-48).

15 For example the Meroitic iconography of the Sun Bark discussed *infra*.

16 Hinkel – Yellin forthcoming, Chapter C.IV.3 for J. Hallof's discussion of orthographic writings of texts in these chapels indicating the use of papyri written in hieratic, texts from Ptolemaic temples and older Egyptian materials.

guration into a divine being and on-going existence, which is an overarching concern. Aside from gods offering or traveling in the sun bark, the only other ones chosen for depiction in the chapels are those who can offer protection. Aside from Nephthys and Isis, who stand behind NN on the north and south walls offering NN general protection, the gods on the east walls are apotropaic figures that flank the entrance to protect NN against intruders. Two of the Sons of Horus (two chapels)¹⁷ and knife-bearing demonic guardians (four chapels)¹⁸ protect NN both during the night and at the vulnerable moment of his/her transfiguration as the rising sun shines upon the west wall's Sun Bark.¹⁹

2. The need for NN to be transfigured into a divine being: The task of the west walls is to provide the means through which NN will become a transfigured deity who is fully functional in the afterlife. To insure this, Meroitic priests cut through the complex body of myths, texts and imagery associated with an Osirian afterlife to focus only on what they consider its two most important aspects – transfiguration (Re) and sustenance (Osiris). In each case NN must be in the presence of the god to receive the benefit. Therefore on these walls, NN travels with Re in his bark to be reborn and stands in the presence of Osiris to entreat Osiris for essential sustenance.

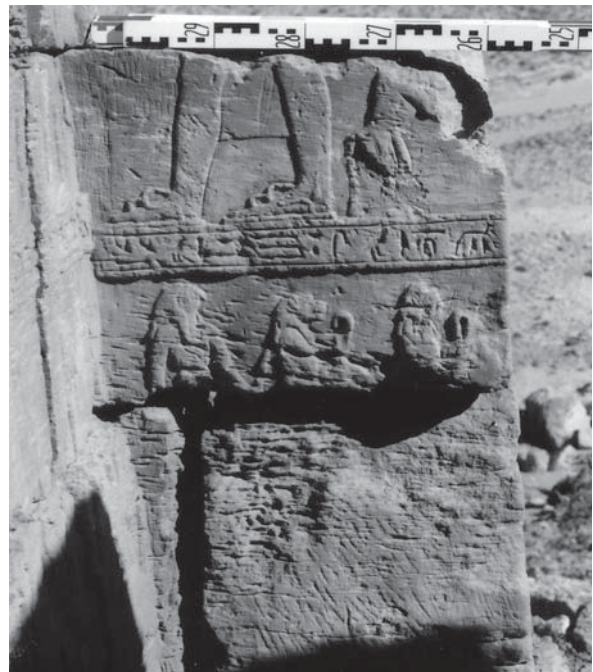


Fig. 1: BEG S 005, east wall, north side (Photograph F. W. Hinkel 802/27 (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Friedrich-Hinkel-Forschungszentrum, Berlin))

NN's transfiguration occurs through his/her presence in the Sun Bark of Re since those who accompany Re are reborn at dawn. To allow NN to pass successfully from the underworld (=burial chamber) to the chapel and its offerings²⁰ Re's daily circuit across the sky and through the underworld is referenced through his bark's depiction above the west wall's funerary niches and by the presence of baboons saluting it at dawn²¹ on the east walls (Fig. 1). The Meroitic Sun Barks are different from usual depictions, including those from Napata²² (Fig. 2, col. fig. 11) because the Meroites selected specific Egyptian

17 Amset, Hapi, two of Horus's Four Sons, holding s3-knots appear on the east wall of BEG S 005. The falcon-headed figure behind them is not squatting and holds a knife, so is more likely a protective guardian than Kebhehewse-nuef (see Fig. 1). Amset appears alone as a mummiform figure on the east wall of BEG S 007. In the Dynasty 25 Theban tomb of Mutirdis, the owner begs the Four Sons for protection demonstrating that their role as protectors of Osiris has expanded to protecting NN (also an Osiris) (Assmann 1977, 32-34, 59-64). On the east wall of BEG S 007, Isis offers looped funerary bandages for the protection of NN, (el-Saady 1994, 213-217).

18 Their placement at the entrance to the mortuary chapel suggests that the Kushites are referencing chambers in Ptolemaic temples in which demons fight on behalf of Osiris, e.g. Chapel of Osiris-Sokar at Denderah (Cauville 1997, 49). In the Chapel of Sokar at Edfou these demons defend sacred places during the night (Goyon 1985, 73). It is less likely that the demons on the east walls originated from mortuary texts such as in the *Book of the Dead* Spells 144 - 147 or in *Gates of the Underworld*. Without the magical spells in these texts, they become a threat to NN because they guard the sequence of gates that NN must pass through in order to reach Osiris. Furthermore, when these texts are used in Egyptian tombs, it is at or near Egyptian burial chamber entrances, which are equated with the Gates of the Underworld (Assmann 1989, 147).

19 Assmann 1989, 147, note 68.

20 Use of the Sun Bark in tomb and mortuary temple contexts has a long history of Egyptian, Dynasty 25, and Napatan antecedents. Thomas placed Napatan and Meroitic Day Sun Barks in her Type B in which barks are shown making a circuit of their rooms; for example, at Thebes - Tomb of Harwa, Dynasty 25 and the Tomb 132, reign Taharqo and at Napata - KU 16 (Tanutamani), Burial Chamber B, east and west walls and on the Sarcophagi of Anlamani (NU 6) and Aspelta (NU 8). Sun Barks are also found in pharaonic temples such as the Temple of Amenhotep III at Luxor and the Temple of Ramesses II at Medinet Habu as well as in Ptolemaic temples such as at Philae and Kom Ombo (Thomas 1956, 68-69).

21 Teeter 1994, 255-265.

22 The Sun Barks painted on the west walls of Tanutamani's (KU 16) (Fig. 3) and Qalhata's (KU 5) Napatan burial chambers are simpler. They contain a sun-disc rising over the horizon being adored by two baboons on each side. Their imagery, like the Meroe examples, refers to the day rather than night journey of Re.

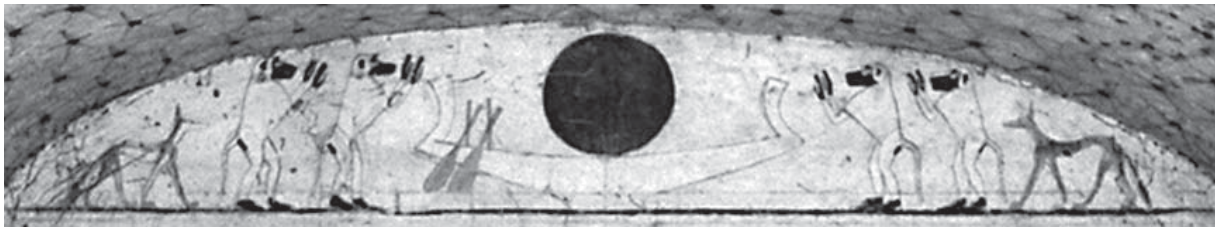


Fig. 2: Tomb of Tanutamani, KU 16

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components for their basic meaning to create a new “text”. The iconography they chose represents Re’s Bark at the most important hour in its twenty-four hour journey, the first hour of the day when Re and NN rise on the horizon and are reborn. The bark’s main elements, a sun-disc wearing a *hemhem*-crown²³ in the center and a mat hanging from its prow with the infant Harpocrates on it indicate it is almost certainly a Day Bark (Figs. 3, 4).²⁴ Although the west wall is usually reserved for a Night Bark,²⁵ the Day Bark was carved there to allow for the actual enactment of its purpose – Re and NN are illuminated and so reborn each dawn by the sun rising²⁶ through the chapel entrance that is opposite it. In Egypt, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Isis, Horus, Thoth, Hathor and Ma’at typically accompany Re, but the Meroitic examples have Anubis, Harpocrates, Horus, Isis,

Mert, Nefertem, Nephthys, Sekhmet, Taouris²⁷ and a figure in an *atef*-crown appearing in their barks, a further indication that the Day Bark and its meaning was re-thought by the Meroitic priests.

In selecting these particular traditional and new features for the Sun Bark, the Meroitic priests created one that was empowered to fulfil its actual role in their mortuary narrative. Its new iconography refers specifically to the first hour of the day, when Re and NN are reborn. Its location on the west wall allows the sun’s rays, necessary for NN’s transfiguration, to really fall upon the bark at dawn explaining its very pragmatic, but un-Egyptian, placement on the west rather than the east walls.

Since the funerary niche below the bark is the gateway between the living and the dead (Fig. 2, col. fig. 11), NN has been given, through the transformative rays of the sun, the magical means for emerging from the underworld when called to come forth from the niche by the officiant(s) to receive the offerings that are at the heart of ceremonies performed in the chapels.²⁸ In addition to being the portal to the underworld, the niches held a funerary stele, a raised relief figure of Osiris, or a triad of Osiris flanked by Isis and Nephthys. BEG S 005 and perhaps BEG S 004 have niches that look like they have one doorway placed within another representing a sequence of rooms creating a “false temple”.²⁹ The figures of Osiris or Osirian triads carved into niches represent the culmination of NN’s journey through the temple

23 The *hemhem*-crown is often worn by gods associated with solar birth (= dawn) myths. The crown is associated with: Harsomtous (Derchain-Urtel 1984, 1081), Rat-taui (Gutbub 1984, 152) and Horus (Kormysheva 1992, 55 ff.). Where preserved (BEG S 006, BEG S 005) (Figs. 2, 4), sun-discs surmount the three *atef*-bundles in the *hemhem*-crown’s center, an addition that, when worn by later Meroitic kings such as Arnekhamani, depicts them as Horus incarnate (Žabkar 1975, 103–104). There is a good deal of inconsistency in the use of characteristic features in Egyptian depictions of Day and Night Barks even if this bark is a *mélange* of Day (i.e. its iconography) and Night (i.e. its orientation) Bark features, it then represents both aspects of the sun’s daily journey within a single scene to depict, as would be the case of the Meroitic barks, the moment when the bark emerges to be reborn at dawn (Teeter 1994, 261, fig. 19.4).

24 The ceiling of the *wabet* at Edfou shows the day journey of the Sun Bark and its iconography like those at Meroe show Re in a sun-disc and a mat hanging from the prow with Harpocrates on it (Cauville 1984, 46–48, fig. 9). The image accompanying the First Day Hour in the pronaos, interior south wall at Edfou likewise shows the god (Harpocrates) in a sun-disc with a mat and another Harpocrates on it (Kurth 1994, 133–136, Abb. 48).

25 Egyptian representations of Night Barks on west walls are typically oriented north, but there are examples in which Day Barks, like these, also face north (Thomas 1956, 77–78).

26 Assmann 1989, 153.

27 While unusual in the Barks, Taouris has an apotropaic function concerning births including those divine births associated with the Sun’s rebirth each morning (Gundlach 1986, 494–495). Her presence not only in the Southern Cemetery chapels’ sun barks, but on many later west walls in Northern Cemetery chapels suggests that she may be associated with an indigenous god.

28 Cf. The Ritual of the Royal Ancestors, Section VIII (Doll 2008, 26).

29 In BEG S 005 the cobra goddesses, Nekhbet and Wadjet replace the *imy-wt* symbols on other chapel niches. These non-funerary goddesses are found on the jambs of Ptolemaic temple shrine entrances, i.e. door to the Ptolemaic Sanctuary at Deir el Bahari (Laskowska-Kusztal 1984, fig. 7).

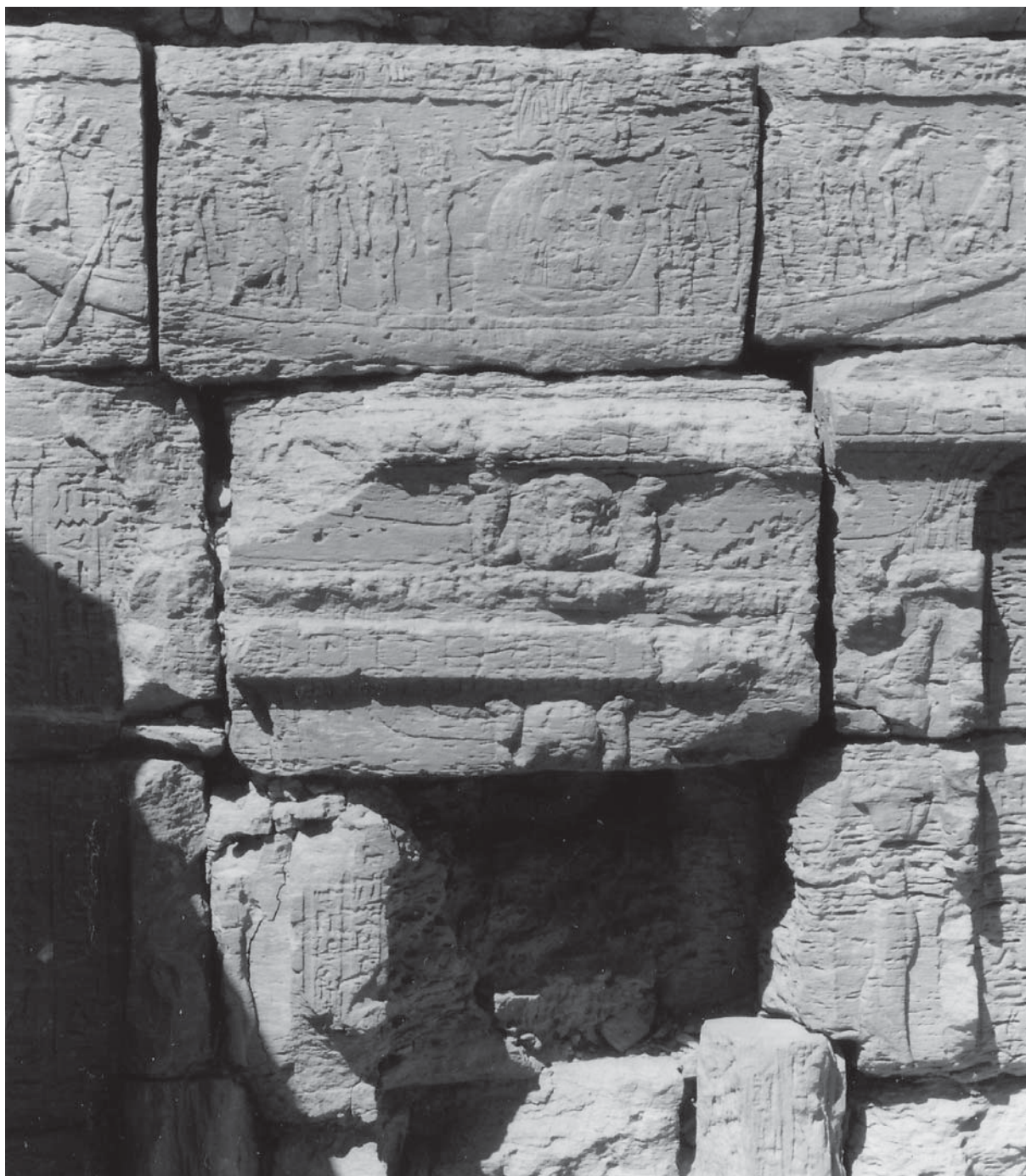


Fig. 3: BEG S 005, west wall (Photograph F. W. Hinkel 710/18 Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Friedrich-Hinkel-Forschungszentrum, Berlin)

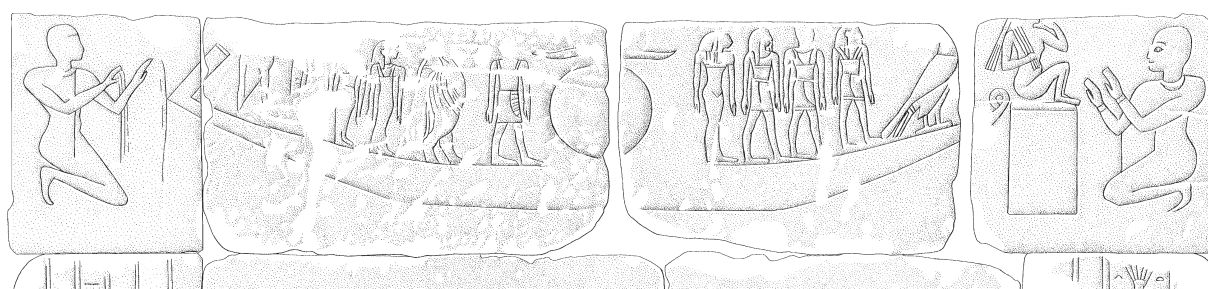


Fig. 4: BEG S 010, west wall, detail (Hinkel – Yellin, forthcoming, Chapter F.III)

(=Underworld) and his encounter with Osiris in its inner sanctuary (= last of these overlapping false doors)³⁰ to entreat the god for offerings that would sustain NN. In juxtaposing these two narratives, the Meroitic priests insure that NN has access in the appropriate mythic contexts to the two gods necessary for his afterlife, Re and Osiris.

3. The need to establish a viable mortuary cult: Protected on the east walls, transfigured and called forth from the underworld on the west walls, the north and south walls provide the offerings now needed by NN to sustain eternal life (Fig. 5). Meroitic priests visually communicate significant aspects of their *actual* mortuary practices. Because they exercised great restraint among a wealth of possibilities, the rationale underlying their selective use of Egyptian ideas and imagery can be seen clearly. Among the many Egyptian gods, rituals and ritual objects that the priests could have chosen, the *only* ritual action involves the making and giving of offerings by *only* two identifiable goddesses (Isis, Nephthys) and five identifiable gods (Anubis, Thoth, Horus, Geb, Khnum).³¹ Anubis³² is by far the most frequently depicted god (twelve times) typically giving a libation while consecrating offerings. The importance both of the libation offering and Anubis's role in providing it are expressed by virtue of his size and placement directly before the seated tomb owner. Thoth³³ is the only god to be shown nearly as frequently (eight times) as Anubis. He is also the only one who is not actively involved in either preparing or giving offerings. Reading from a scroll in his role as the divine scribe,³⁴ he is responsible for seeing that the offerings provided for NN are properly recorded and proclaimed on his/her behalf. Isis or a priestess impersonating her, appears five times,³⁵ and is far less important than Anubis as an offering giver, a fact also reflected by the number of her appearances with

Anubis, which are less frequent than with Nephthys on later Meroitic offering tables. Finally, Horus (four times) plays quite a limited role in the funerary cult. He always appears in the company of Geb, Khnum and a few unidentified gods.³⁶

The choices of offerings also reflect specific Kushite preferences and their depictions leave little doubt as to which ones are important or as to how and by whom these offerings are to be provided. Drinks (twenty-nine times),³⁷ elaborate offerings on an altar (eighteen times, always with lotus blossoms),³⁸ bread (thirteen times), cattle/ meat offerings (one or two times per wall where preserved), fowl (two times), and incense (three times certain, four times probable) make up the offerings. Libations, the single most popular rite, are typically Egyptian in appearance. Libations that have inscriptions are usually identified as a cool water offering (*kbhw*), but wine is also given. Although drink, bread and meat are most desired, other needs are met by well provisioned altars at the beginning of registers and by a type of temple scene showing row(s) of gods, recognizably Horus, Khnum and Geb with occasionally other unidentified gods, behind large offering tables or jars (*collège des dieux*). These provide the variety of offerings given in an *hpt di nsw* while also underscoring that NN is a god receiving the same rites given to other gods in *their* temples.³⁹

The givers and types of offerings reveal definite Meroitic preferences, yet there is an even more original Meroitic element – the representation of

30 Bianchi 1988, 149.

31 See Hinkel – Yellin, (forthcoming), Chapter C.II, Table 2 for a complete overview of the iconography used in these chapels. In a few instances several other unidentifiable male gods libate offering tables along with Horus, Khnum and Geb.

32 He is rarely shown engaged in other activities and his role as one who brings funerary offerings with particular responsibility for water, milk and cattle offerings are the basis for his cult in Meroe (Yellin 1978).

33 Lewczuk 1983, 62.

34 A traditional role also known from the "Ritual of the Royal Ancestors" found on Napatan funerary stelae (Doll 2008, 8).

35 Only once with her crown (south wall, BEG S 007) and several times as a priestess (BEG S 004, 005 (Fig. 7), 006) to be understood as impersonating her, see discussion below.

36 Horus offers four times, but always with other gods including Khnum and Geb. Khnum gives offerings four times with Horus. Geb gives offerings twice with Horus and Khnum. In addition to their inclusion in the company of Re in his Day Bark, these three gods always occur together when making offerings. Although Horus is referred to individually in inscriptions on the chapel walls, he is never depicted acting alone. (cf. Hinkel – Yellin (forthcoming) C.II Table 2).

37 Drink offerings include water libations that serve the dual purpose of supplying drinking water and consecrating the other offerings upon which the water is poured.

38 The lotus offerings that are shown on top of the heaped offering tables are typically the lotus bouquet (*Stabstrauß*) and rarely as single lotus blossoms. These lotus bouquets are a typical Dynasty 25–26 feature. The frequent presence of lotus offerings (twenty-one) may be the result of their renewed popularity in Late Dynasty 25 when they came to symbolize NN's revival and the blessing of Osiris (Pischikova 1994, 70–73).

39 Such as gods whose task it is to service the *wdbw*-altar(s) in front of the sanctuaries of the main god(s) in Ptolemaic temples such as Kom Ombo, Edfou, and Denderah (Gutbub 1973, 240; Simonet 1994). The south wall of Hadrian's Gate at Philae has a row of divinities with offering tables that closely resemble the Southern Cemetery at Meroe examples (Lyons 1896).

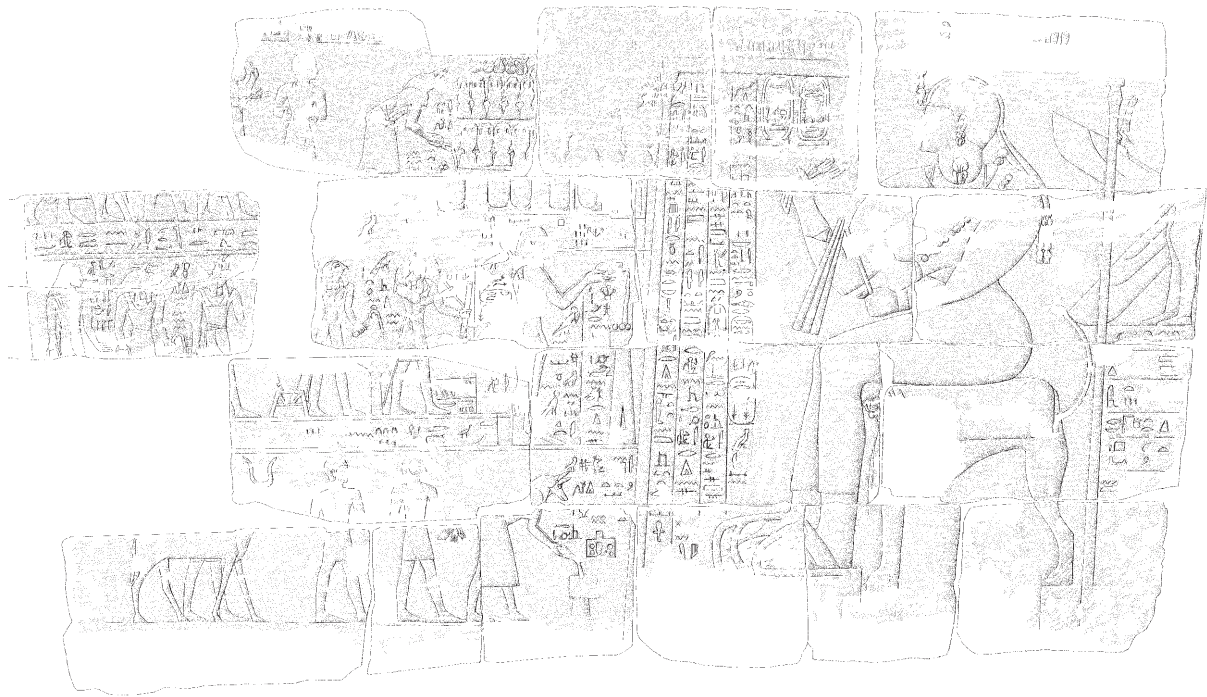


Fig. 5: BEG S 004, south wall (Hinkel – Yellin, forthcoming, Chapter F.III)

actual mortuary practices. Processions of court/family members appear in BEG S 010 (Fig. 6) and, with the exception of BEG N 007 and N 001, are also in all the mortuary chapels in the Northern Cemetery. By the first century CE, images of these processions dominate the chapels' north and south walls. In the case of BEG N 007 and BEG N 001, their very thoughtful, scholarly approach to Egyptian sources may have precluded the inclusion of a Kushite motif.⁴⁰ In addition to these processions, actual libation offerings given as part of the mortuary cult by priests impersonating Anubis and Isis are indicated by a strikingly original piece of visual communication.⁴¹ Priests impersonating Anubis and Isis are the only figures naturalistically rendered, i.e. as they would have looked in reality – in full profile and in action, leaning deeply while pouring libation. The Anubis-figure also always wears a long kilt as would be worn by a priest (Fig. 7).⁴² On the other hand, mythic representations of gods are shown as stiffly upright and rendered using the unnatural canonical Egyptian combined viewpoint (compare the different gods in Figs. 5, 7). On BEG S 004 south wall (Fig. 5) the female pouring the libation at

the beginning of the middle register wears no divine insignia, but the inscriptions between her and the queen indicate that the offerings she is giving come from Isis.⁴³ Finally, since the priests impersonating Anubis are always depicted at the beginning of the registers with scenes of cattle herding⁴⁴ and workers preparing offerings, these too might be actual events in the mortuary rites.

40 For the decoration of these chapels, cf. Chapman – Dunham 1952.

41 For a fuller discussion of the role of priests and priestess as divine impersonators in Meroe, see Hinkel – Yellin (forthcoming), Chapter C.II.

42 When Anubis is shown as a god in the Egyptian combination of views, he wears a short kilt (Yellin 1978, 96-99).

43 Hallofin Hinkel – Yellin (forthcoming), BEGS004.B.V.1.4, south wall.

44 E.g. in the Papyrus Jumilhac (Ptolemaic Period), Anubis is identified as the "chief of sacred cattle" (Vandier 1962, 116). For further discussion of Anubis and cattle see Yellin 1978, 77-79. For a discussion of cattle offerings during the Meroitic period, see Lenoble 1994, 269-283. For the types of cattle (meat, milk cows) and their importance, see Hofmann – Tomandl 1987, 135-144, 157-158.

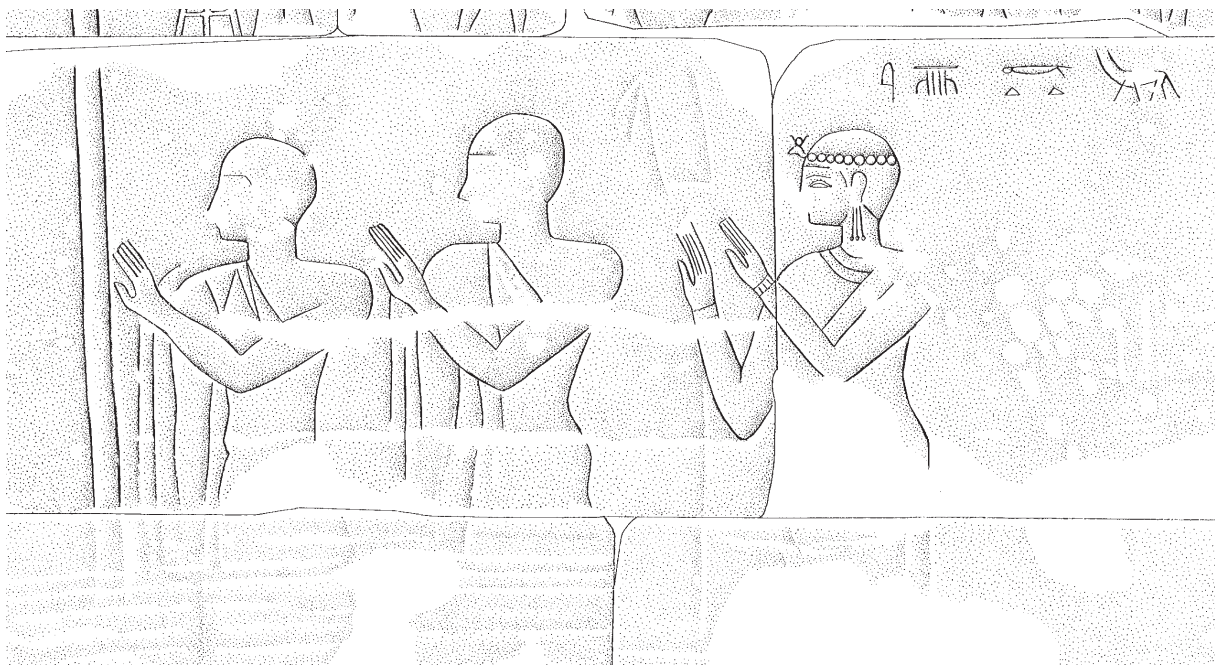


Fig. 6: BEG S 010, north wall, detail: east end of bottom register (Hinkel – Yellin, forthcoming, Chapter F.III)

Summary⁴⁵

The priests at Meroe demonstrate creativity with and less “reverence” for Egyptian materials than the Napatans, while still retaining an admirable grasp of the meaning of the Egyptian materials. Supple in their use of Egyptian concepts and its visual language, Meroitic priests are more direct in expressing ideas and less interested in the building of complexity that is so much part of Egyptian and Napatian theology. Osirian beliefs, with their vivid imagery, their tangible rewards, and their offer of a clear path to the afterlife, frame their mortuary narratives, but the Meroitic priests responsible for the decoration of the first royal chapels were extremely direct and concrete in their use of this narrative. A pragmatic desire for clarity of expression (with its attendant magical powers) appears to govern the underlying rationale of the chapel decorations.

The imagery carved on the interior walls of the Meroe chapels reflects a dynamic process in which

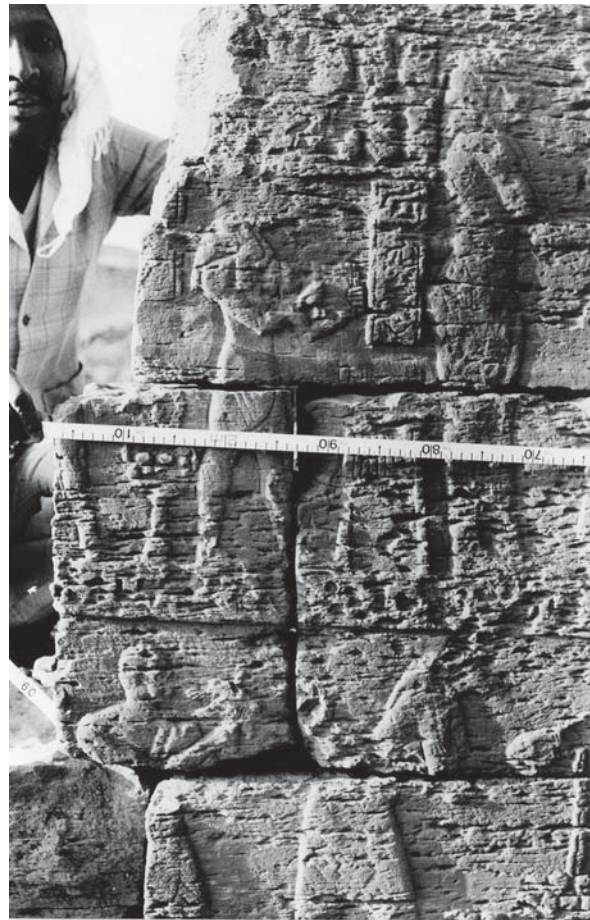


Fig. 7: BEG S 005 south wall, detail: beginning of middle register (Photograph F. W. Hinkel 380/45 Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Friedrich-Hinkel-Forschungszentrum, Berlin)

⁴⁵ Looking forward, this understanding of the earliest Meroitic mortuary beliefs and their relationship to Egyptian ideas and imagery will provide baseline for on-going work that explores the ebb and flow of Egyptian influences in Kushite religion and, by extension, within the Kushite state through the study of the Northern and Western Cemetery mortuary chapels at Meroe. For preliminary investigations of the Egyptian sources and the meanings of individual scenes in these two cemeteries at Meroe see: Wenig 1971; Yellin 1979, 157-164; Yellin 1990, 362-374; Yellin 1995, 2869-2892.

priests would search for, and if need be combine from different sources, specific images or texts that could as clearly and directly as possible express their thinking. Dynasty 25 and Napatan priests were reluctant to change a particular text or the appearance of an image once it was chosen to help build the desired Kushite theological construct, perhaps because to do so would have been felt to compromise its magical efficacy. The Meroitic priests are freer in their approach to using Egyptian sources. While they also left borrowed material unchanged even when it was re-contextualized (i.e. guardians, east walls) and recombined with materials from other sources, the Meroitic priests appear to have been willing to exploit the associative meanings of Egyptian materials more freely by reworking individual components of a motif to express a particular idea. For example, putting the Day Bark on the west wall, the only location within the chapel where the rays of the sun can *actually* fall on it to potentiate its magical power demonstrates their focus on what for them are practical matters – identifying what they considered the basic needs for an Osirian afterlife and effectively meeting them. Their primary desire, as evidenced by these chapel decorations of precisely chosen, lucidly organized images, was to insure NN's afterlife as efficaciously as possible. This goal led Meroitic priests to elevate actual, important Meroitic rites to the divine sphere by portraying them on the chapel walls alongside Egyptian-derived mythic ones. Thus through the images they chose and organized, Meroitic priests not only created a meaningful Kushite mortuary liturgy, but offered us glimpses into a Kushite funerary religion whose language may be Egyptian, but whose substance reflects, in the face of the ineffable, what is most meaningful to them.

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ANGELIKA LOHWASSER & PAWEL WOLF



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TITELBILD: Säulenbasis mit Löwe, Große Anlage von Musawwarat es Sufra, Raum 108
(Foto: Claudia Näser)

FRONTISPIZ: Der Jubilar im Garten seines Hauses in Berlin-Karow
(Foto: Jane Humphris, Bildbearbeitung: Frank Joachim)

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