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Development of Royal Funerary Traditions
along the Middle Nile Valley during the Napatan Period
Studien zu den Ritualszenen altägyptischer Tempel
Horst Beinlich / Jochen Hallof (Hg.)

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DEVELOPMENT
OF ROYAL FUNERARY TRADITIONS
ALONG THE MIDDLE NILE VALLEY
DURING THE NAPATAN PERIOD
(in the 7th century BC)
Interest to this volume

Meroitistic
Egyptology
Nubian Studies
Sudanarchaeology
Africanistic
Theology
Ethnography
CONTENTS

List of Tables, Illustrations and Appendices ................................................................. 9
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... 13

1. Introduction .............................................................................................................. 15
   1.1 Historical Background ..................................................................................... 15
   1.2 A short history of the discipline ...................................................................... 16
   1.3 Who were the people along the Lower and Middle Nile? Questions of ethnicity .... 18
   1.4 Goods, People and Ideas ............................................................................... 19
   1.5 Boundaries .................................................................................................... 20
   1.6 Egypt and Nubia during the New Kingdom and its aftermath ....................... 21

2. Research Models and Questions ............................................................................. 25
   2.1 Cultural Mixtures – Creolisation, Syncretism and the Function of Archaism .......... 25
      2.1.1 Creolisation .......................................................................................... 25
      2.1.2 Syncretism ......................................................................................... 27
      2.1.3 Archaism ............................................................................................ 31
   2.2 “Egyptianisation” in Royal Funerary Practice and Defining the Problem .......... 32
   2.3 Three Big Questions about the External Influence on Napatan Burial Customs ...... 35
   2.4 Source material ............................................................................................. 36

3. Napatan Funerary Amulets and the “Egyptianisation” of Beliefs .......................... 39
   3.1 Amulets in Egypt and Napata ......................................................................... 39
   3.2 Problems with and limitations of source material ........................................... 41
      3.2.1 Imbalance of evidence from Egypt and Nubia ....................................... 41
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5.3 North Wall</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.4 West Wall</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.5 Summary of Nu.24 and a brief analysis of the texts in Nuri</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Other decorated royal tombs of the Napatan Period</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Emerging Pictures – first steps towards decoding Napatan tomb decoration</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.1 El-Kurru and the “Resurrection of Osiris”</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7.2 The Book of the Dead in Nuri</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use and Function of Shabtis in Napatan Royal Tombs</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Origin and Function of Shabtis in Egypt</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Shabtis in Napata</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Shabtis – a reflection of economy?</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Shabtis – a substitute for human sacrifice?</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Shabtis – an expression of status?</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Shabtis as protectors</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Some observations on the representation of food offerings in Napatan royal tomb complexes</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Identifying royal funerary rituals in Napata</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Identifying funerary rituals</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 The Tomb Complex – Development of Architectural Elements and</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual Space from the Ramesside Period onwards</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Funerary literature and Funerary liturgies</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 The “Stundenwachen”-ritual</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 Understanding the Napatan Royal Tomb Complex</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5.1 Rituals in the “public” sphere</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5.2 “Inaccessible and secret”</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Conclusions, Answers and Final Discussion</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Conclusions</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Illustrations, Tables and Appendices

Illustrations

Fig. 1.1: Map of Egypt and Nubia (Davies and Friedman, Egypt 1998: 8) .................................................185
Fig. 1.2: El-Kurru cemetery (Google Earth) .................................................................................................186
Fig. 1.3: Nuri cemetery (Google Earth) ......................................................................................................186
Fig. 2.1: Nuri 8, tomb of Aspelta (Dunham, RCK II: fig. 52) .................................................................187
Fig. 3.1: Number of burials with amulets compared with total number of burials per cemetery ..........188
Fig. 3.2: Burials with amulets in percent of total number of graves ...........................................................189
Fig. 3.3: Burials with amulets in percent of total number of graves per age group ...............................190
Fig. 3.4: Material distribution ....................................................................................................................191
Fig. 3.5: Colour distribution .......................................................................................................................192
Fig. 3.6: Types: animals and bird ...............................................................................................................193
Fig. 3.7: Types: hieroglyphs, symbols and insignia ....................................................................................194
Fig. 3.8: Types: deities ................................................................................................................................195
Fig. 3.9: Types: other ..................................................................................................................................196
Fig. 3.10: Most common amulets ..............................................................................................................197
Fig. 3.11: Frequency analysis .....................................................................................................................198
Fig. 3.12: Comparison Matmar with Nubian non-royal cemeteries ............................................................199
Fig. 3.13: Comparison Matmar with Nubian royal cemeteries .................................................................200

Fig. 4.1: Visibility of hieroglyphs in Ku.5 – Burial chamber west wall
(all photographs of the tombs of el-Kurru by Prof. D. Fuller, unless otherwise stated) ......................201
Fig. 4.2: Schematic representation of decoration and texts in Ku.16 ......................................................202
Fig. 4.3: Ku.16 – Antechamber south wall – scene a, complete view .....................................................203
Fig. 4.4: Ku.16 – Antechamber north wall – scene g, complete view .....................................................203
Fig. 4.5: Ku.16 – Antechamber south wall – scene a, south-east corner ................................................204
Fig. 4.6: Ku.16 – Antechamber south wall – scene a, south wall centre ................................................204
Fig. 4.7: Ku.16 – Antechamber south wall – scene a, south-west corner ...............................................204
Fig. 4.8: Detail of coloured hieroglyphs in the tomb of Ramses IV, KV 2.
(image ex www.thebanmappingproject.com) .......................................................................................205
Fig. 4.9: Detail of coloured hieroglyphs in Ku.16 .......................................................................................205
Fig. 4.10: Ku.16 – Antechamber west wall – scene b, View towards burial chamber ............................206
Fig. 4.11: Ku.16 – Antechamber north wall – scene g, north-west corner ...............................................207
Fig. 4.12: Ku.16 – Antechamber north wall – scene g, Duamutef and king ............................................207
Fig. 4.13: Ku.16 – Antechamber north wall – scene g, Hapy leading the king towards the tomb entrance .................................................................207
Fig. 4.14: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber south wall – scene c, complete view ..............................................208
Fig. 4.15: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, complete view ..............................................208
Fig. 4.16: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber south wall – scene c, south-east corner ........................................209
Fig. 4.17: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber south wall – scene c, centre ............................................................209
Fig. 4.18: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber south wall – scene c, centre right ..................................................209
Fig. 4.19: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber west wall – scene d, complete view ..............................................210
Fig. 4.20: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber west wall – scene d, top register .....................................................211
Fig. 4.21: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber west wall – scene d, second register left .......................................211
Fig. 4.22: Qalhata with vulture headdress as shown in the antechamber of Ku.15 ...............................212
Fig. 4.23: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, north-west corner .................................................. 213
Fig. 4.24: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, centre ................................................................. 213
Fig. 4.25: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, north-east corner ................................................ 213
Fig. 4.26: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber east wall – scene f, north-east corner .................................................... 214
Fig. 4.27: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber east wall – scene f, south-east corner .................................................... 215
Fig. 4.28: Schematic representation of decoration and texts in Ku.5 Qalhata ...................................................... 216
Fig. 4.29: Ku.5 – Antechamber south wall – scene a, complete view ............................................................. 217
Fig. 4.30: Ku.5 – Antechamber north wall – scene e, complete view ............................................................ 217
Fig. 4.31: Ku.5 – Antechamber south wall – scene a, south-east corner ....................................................... 218
Fig. 4.32: Ku.5 – Antechamber south wall – scene a, The Queen led by Kebsensuuf and Hapy .................. 218
Fig. 4.33: Ku.5 – Antechamber south wall – scene a, south-west corner ....................................................... 218
Fig. 4.34: Ku.5 – Antechamber north wall – scene e, Imsety ................................................................. 219
Fig. 4.35: Ku.5 – Antechamber north wall – scene e, Qalhata ................................................................. 219
Fig. 4.36: Ku.5 – Antechamber north wall – scene e, Duamutef ................................................................. 219
Fig. 4.37: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber south wall – scene c, complete view ....................................................... 220
Fig. 4.38: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, complete view ....................................................... 220
Fig. 4.39: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber south wall – scene c, south-east corner ................................................... 221
Fig. 4.40: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber south wall – scene c, centre ................................................................. 221
Fig. 4.41: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber south wall – scene c, south-west corner ................................................... 221
Fig. 4.42: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber south wall – scene c, Qalhata's mummy on the lion bier ....................... 222
Fig. 4.43: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber west wall – scene d, complete view ........................................................ 223
Fig. 4.44: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, detail centre .......................................................... 224
Fig. 4.45: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, Caption (image magnified detail from Dunham, RCK I: pl. IX) ................................................................. 224
Fig. 4.46: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, Deity extending w3s-sceptre and 3nh ..................... 225
Fig. 4.47: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, mummy on lion bier ............................................ 225
Fig. 4.48: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, Genii at the foot-end (north-east corner) of the funerary bier on the south wall ................................................................. 225
Fig. 4.49: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber north wall – scene e, Staves, sceptres, bows, arrows, ritual garments and royal crowns underneath the lion bier ................................................................. 226
Fig. 4.50: Ku.5 – Genii at the foot-end (north-east corner) of the funerary bier on the north wall ............... 226
Fig. 4.51: Ku.5 – Genii at the foot-end (south-east corner) of the funerary bier on the south wall ............... 226
Fig. 4.52: Ku.5 – Burial Chamber west wall – scene f, Sun-boat above the doorway to the antechamber ...... 227
Fig. 4.53: Ku.5 – Doorway between chambers A and B viewed towards the tomb entrance.
   a: north - Nephthys (images courtesy Dr. D. Welsby) ........................................................................ 227
   b: south - Isis (images courtesy Dr. D. Welsby) ................................................................................ 227
Fig. 4.54: Ku.5 – Doorway between chambers A and B viewed towards the tomb entrance.
   (after Doll, Sarcophagi of Anlamani and Aspelta 1978: 374-376) ....................................................... 230
Fig. 4.55: Nuri. The “Kings’ Row” viewed from south-west ................................................................. 228
Fig. 4.56: South-west corner of Nu.8 ........................................................................................................ 228
Fig. 4.57: Schematic representation of Nu.8 ............................................................................................ 229
Fig. 4.58: Schematic representation of the distribution of spells on the Sarcophagus of Aspelta (image magnified detail from Dunham, RCK I: pl. IX) ................................................................. 224
Fig. 4.59: Ku.16 – Burial Chamber in relation to chamber C ................................................................. 231
Fig. 4.60: Hypothetical placement of the sarcophagus of Aspelta in chamber B of Ku.16 ....................... 232
Fig. 4.61: Schematic representation of Nu.24 .......................................................................................... 233
Fig. 4.62: Plan of Nu.1 – Burial chamber as copy of Osireion/Abydos (Dunham, RCK II: 6) .................... 234
Fig. 4.63: Nu.1 – Alignment and extension of superstructure (Dunham, RCK II: 6) ......................... 234
Fig. 4.64: Schematic representation of Nu.5 and Ku.16. Summary of narrative .................................... 235
Fig. 4.65: Schematic representation of Nu.8. Summary of narrative ....................................................... 236

Fig. 7.1: Schematic representation of Ku.5 and Ku.16 with stages of “Stundenwachen” as per CT 62 (Assmann, Ägyptische Totenliturgien 2002: 40ff) ................................................................. 237
Tables

Table 1.1: Timeline Egypt - Napata ..................................................238
Table 3.1: Distribution of burials with amulets per cemetery ..................239
Table 3.2: Correlation of coffins and burials with adornments
  in the Anubieion cemetery in Saqqara ........................................240
Table 3.3: Amulets listed by materials per cemetery – counted numbers ........241
Table 3.4: Number of amulet per individual class in proportion of
  total number of amulets per cemetery .........................................242
Table 3.5: Colour distribution .........................................................243
Table 3.6: Colour distribution in proportion to total of cemetery .................243
Table 3.7: Amulet count by cemetery and amulet type ..........................244
Table 3.8: Amulet count by type expressed in percent of total per cemetery ....246
Table 3.9: Frequency counts ..........................................................248
Table 3.10: Frequency in proportion of total number of graves with amulets ...248
Table 3.11: Frequency of some amulets in Nubian royal and non-royal cemeteries
  compared with Matmar/Egypt of the Third Intermediate Period ............249
Table 4.1: Decorated burials in el-Kurru, Nuri and Meroe .........................250
Table 4.2: Comparison of genii in scenes (c) and (e) in the burial chambers of Ku.16 and Ku.5 ..252
Table 4.3: Comparison of statements in the „Negative Confession“ ................254
Table 4.4: Book of the Dead: sequences with spells 43, 89, 90 and other spells ...255
Table 5.1: Shabtis from Napatan burials ............................................260
Table 6.1: Napatan and Meroitic offering tables ..................................264
Table 6.2: Napatan and Meroitic offering stelae ...................................267

Appendices

Appendix 3.1: Amulet assemblages el-Kurru ........................................268
Appendix 3.2: Amulet assemblages Nuri ............................................271
Appendix 3.3: Amulet assemblage Beg. S ...........................................274
Appendix 3.4: Amulet assemblages Beg. W adults – Napatan Period ..........278
Appendix 3.5: Amulet assemblages Beg. W children – Napatan Period ........289
Appendix 3.6: Amulet assemblages Beg. W adults – Meroitic Period ..........293
Appendix 3.7: Amulet assemblages Beg. W children – Meroitic Period .........296
Appendix 3.8: Amulet assemblages Beg. W – undated ............................297
Appendix 3.9: Amulet distribution across cemeteries ............................298
Appendix 3.10: List of Sanam burials with amulets
  (compiled on basis Lohwasser, Friedhof von Sanam 2008 II: Anhang 4: Tomb Charts) ....300
Appendix 3.11: Amulet distribution by number of tombs .........................300
Appendix 3.12: Sanam amulet groups (compiled after Lohwasser, Friedhof von Sanam 2008) ....305
Appendix 3.13: Late Period Amulet assemblages ................................307

Appendix 4.1: Texts of Nu.8 – Tomb of Aspelta ..................................318
  4.1.1. Antechamber A – south wall – BoD 145 gates 2-11 .....................318
  4.1.2. Antechamber A – north wall – BoD 145 gates 13-21 ..................324
  4.1.3. Antechamber B – east wall, south of doorway – BoD 125 (a) ........328
  4.1.4. Antechamber B – north wall – BoD 125 (b1) ............................330
  4.1.5. Antechamber B – south wall – BoD 125 (b2) ............................331
4.1.6. Antechamber B – east wall, north of doorway – BoD 125 (c) ................................................332
4.1.7. Burial Chamber C – south wall ..............................................................................................334
4.1.8. Burial Chamber C – north wall ..............................................................................................337

Appendix 4.2: Texts of Nu.24 – Tomb of Nasalsa ..............................................................................341
4.2.1. East Wall ................................................................................................................................341
4.2.2. South Wall ..................................................................................................................................342
4.2.3. North Wall ................................................................................................................................346
4.2.4. West Wall ..................................................................................................................................349

Appendix 4.3: The Hour Texts on the sarcophagus of Aspelta ........................................................352
4.3.1. Hours of the Day .......................................................................................................................352
4.3.2. Hours (Portals) of the Night .....................................................................................................353
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1. Introduction

1.1 Historical Background

Egypt's relations with the people to its south at times were friendly, with trade and exchange flourishing between communities; but other periods were times of aggression, warfare and conquest. In the early second millennium BC, Kerma, at the third cataract, became a powerful trading partner and Egypt's first significant political rival in the south. Although at times the rulers of Kerma posed a real threat, especially to Upper Egypt, at the beginning of the New Kingdom, around 1550 BC, Egypt subdued the Kerma people. Over the next decades Egypt conquered parts of the Middle Nile Region possibly as far upstream as the fifth cataract (fig. 1.1).

The Middle Nile Region is also called Nubia, the area between the first cataract and the confluence of the Blue and White Niles at modern Khartoum, just south of the sixth cataract. The Egyptians called these lands during the Middle Kingdom Wawat and Kush. Wawat was the area between the first and second cataracts, which in modern terms is also referred to as Lower Nubia. Kush started at the second cataract, and in Egyptian thought comprised all lands south, or upstream of it, whereas in modern terms this is defined as Upper Nubia, covering the area between the second and fourth cataracts, and Southern Nubia between fourth and sixth cataracts. By the end of the New Kingdom Kush became the term for all lands south of Egypt. The people who lived in these areas are referred to in modern times as Nubians, or Kushites, using these terms according to their geographical distribution rather than the similar ethnic or linguistic terms. We do not know how these people referred to themselves in antiquity, and their ethnicity is far from clear.

Although we can observe Egyptian material culture in the archaeological record of Kerma before the Egyptian conquest, burial customs and religious ideas were largely untouched by Egyptian influence. Neither were Egyptian writing and language adopted to any discernible extent. However, this situation changed during the New Kingdom occupation, when we can observe a clear spread of Egyptian and Egyptianising features in Nubia. Officials of the Egyptian administration lived, worked and died in Nubia, and were buried according to their native Egyptian customs. We know from Egyptian sources that sons of local Nubian rulers were educated at the Egyptian court – in a way held as hostages – and possibly trained to be subjects loyal to their Egyptian overlords once they were sent back to their native lands. These princes also adopted Egyptian religious ideas. In many cases burials of Nubian elites are difficult to distinguish from those of Egyptians. But it seems that this process of Egyptianisation during the New Kingdom was confined to the highest elites, while the customs of ordinary people remained largely untouched by foreign influence.

Egypt held a firm grip on Nubia for the next 500 years. It seems that during that time Lower Nubia was governed by Egyptian officials, the head of which was the Viceroy of Kush, while the region of Upper Nubia above the third cataract was largely left to local vassal rulers, with little interference by Egyptian administration. However, at Gebel Barkal at the fourth cataract, a Temple of Amun, possibly founded during the reign of Thutmosis III, became one of the most important religious and administrative centres in Nubia. At the end of the New Kingdom, around 1070 BC the political situation in Egypt changed. The once unified state split into small kingdoms in the Nile Delta, which were ruled by a family of kings of Libyan descent. Upper Egypt was under the control of the High Priest of Amun at Thebes, usually a relative of the royal family. Thus somehow weakened through internal problems, contacts with Nubia diminished and Egypt lost control of Nubia.

For the following 300 years not much is seemingly known about Nubia. Especially Lower Nubia appears to have been abandoned not only by

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1. O’Connor, Ancient Nubia 1993: X.
Egyptians but also by indigenous populations, with the possible exception of Qasr Ibrim. This period is frequently referred to as the “Dark Ages” of Nubia, owing to the apparent almost complete lack of archaeological evidence datable to that period. In the 9th century BC, however, we can observe the rise of another power – the Kingdom of Napata – seemingly out of nowhere, and modelled on the Egyptian example. Its capital may have been the town of Napata, hence the modern name for that period, located at the foot of Gebel Barkal, or somewhere near it. This kingdom shows such strong Egyptian influence that early explorers regarded it as an offshoot of its northern neighbour. Once its ruling dynasty had established itself, it turned north towards Egypt, which it conquered and ruled. In Egyptological terms this dynasty is referred to as the 25th, or Nubian dynasty, sometimes also called Kushite dynasty.

In contrast to previous Egyptian rulers of foreign descent (e.g. the Hyksos of the Second Intermediate Period and the kings of Libyan origin of the Third Intermediate Period) who had been buried in Egypt, these Nubian rulers were buried in their native lands near Gebel Barkal, in the royal cemeteries of el-Kurru (fig. 1.2) and Nuri (fig. 1.3). They had pyramids built as their funerary monuments, with offering chapels at the eastern side. The subterranean burial chambers sometimes were decorated in Egyptian style with hieroglyphic inscriptions in Egyptian language. The assemblage of grave goods shows strong Egyptian(ising) features, both in type of objects used and in stylistic features.

Nubian rule of Egypt only lasted for about a hundred years when the onslaught of the Assyrians forced the Nubians to retreat back into their homelands. The descendants of these Nubian kings continued to rule the Middle Nile Region. Napata remained the Nubian capital until it was apparently sacked by an Egyptian campaign in the 6th century BC, probably during the reign of King Aspelta. It seems that after this event the royal residence was moved further upstream to Meroe, although Napata continued to rule the Middle Nile Region. Napata became the capital of the Kingdom of Kush, and we speak of the following period as the Meroitic Period. However, the influence of ancient, as well as contemporary Hellenistic and Roman, Egypt remains clearly visible also during the Meroitic Period, and indeed, some aspects of Egyptian culture and religion lived on in the Middle Nile Valley until after the rise of Christianity in the 6th century AD.

The Napatan Period is the link between Egypt and Meroe, in time, in space, and in culture. Stimuli from Egypt had been adopted to express and formulate indigenous ideas, which developed their own dynamics and eventually become recognisable as the distinctive Meroitic culture. This thesis may perhaps pave the way for a better understanding of the inter-societal transfer of religious ideas and symbols, as well as their role in Nubian state formation.

1.2 A short history of the discipline

Ancient Egypt, one of the “pristine” civilisations of antiquity, has attracted travellers and writers of ancient Greece and Rome, such as Herodotus, Diodorus, Strabo, and Pliny, who also wrote about what they heard of the lands further south, the country they called Aethiopia, termed Kush by the Egyptians and later on referred to as Nubia, forming today the northern part of modern Sudan. But while European interest in ancient Egypt never completely disappeared, and in fact was greatly revived due to the influence of the Napoleonic expedition in the late 18th century, interest in the cultures of the areas south of Egypt appears to have been limited. That is not to say that travellers at that time did not venture up the Nile or did not record their impressions about land, people and monuments, but their interest was focused on the remains of pharaonic culture. Influential in this respect was the Prussian expedition under R. Lepsius in the 1840s which went as far as Soba. The drawings of the Middle Nile Region published in the resulting volumes of "Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien" show mainly monuments dating to the Egyptian domination of Nubia, and Lepsius’ work on languages (civilized Hamitic/Egyptian versus primitive Negro/Nubian) laid the foundation for the frequently racist interpretations of the following generations of resear-
chers.\textsuperscript{14} The early to mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century view of Nubian culture as “a clumsy imitation of superior models (from Egypt) by an inferior African culture” was followed by G.A. Reisner, another major figure in Sudanarchaeology.\textsuperscript{15} Quite in accordance with the views of his time, he explained the monuments and material culture of the Nubian royal cemeteries of el-Kurru, Nuri and Meroe as the products of “Egyptianized Libyans” who had fled Egypt during political unrest at the end of the New Kingdom,\textsuperscript{16} without considering the possibility of indigenous developments and “African” input.

While the extensive archaeological exploration of Lower Nubia during the UNESCO salvage campaign made this part of the Nile Valley one of the archaeologically best documented areas in Africa, this work was carried out under the paradigms of New Archaeology, which did not put enough emphasis on the interpretation of textual sources. This led to the resulting split of Nubian research into the text-centered Egyptologists’ quarter and the archaeology-focussed Sudanarchaeology.\textsuperscript{17} This is probably due to “professional chauvinism”, as Török recently put it.\textsuperscript{18} Egyptologists on the one hand — traditionally working on the large amount of textual material from Egypt — seemingly were not interested in yet another copy of texts already well known from Egypt, especially since texts from Egypt’s southern neighbour are very often corrupted and sometimes difficult to read and understand. Furthermore, it appears that there was little expectation that these texts from Nubia actually could improve their understanding, especially in an Egyptian context. Archaeologists working in Nubia, on the other hand, frequently feel not sufficiently acquainted with ancient Egyptian language and would have to rely on translations produced by Egyptologists. This, apparently, causes some uneasiness among them, and was nicely expressed by Adams, who admits the indispensability of textual sources, the reliability of whose translations he cannot judge, and who admits that he actually puts greater trust in the archaeological record,\textsuperscript{19} and, of course, “Nubiologists” want to get away from the “Egyptocentric” interpretation of their field of study.

One of the pitfalls of isolated Nubian and Egyptian studies is that this can lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations. In his comment on the importance of weaponry and archery equipment in Meroitic ideology, Lenoble mentioned their abundant representations on chapel walls in Meroe, as well as “…the first ones are even present at el-Kurru”.\textsuperscript{20} He refers to the main scene in the sarcophagus chambers of Ku.16 and Ku.5 (figs. 4.40, 4.42, 4.49) which, as I will show, belongs to the context of funerary rituals and ideas, but is in no way related to the warrior status of living kings or queens.

While Reisner’s Libyan hypothesis has been discredited, the interpretation of Nubian/Kushite culture as an off-shoot of ancient Egypt lasted until fairly recently.\textsuperscript{21} Equally, the term “brutal realism”, initially used to describe the archaism in Kushite, Libyan and Saite art, was dropped for the latter two, but retained to characterise Nubian artistic achievements, still implying somewhat racist views.\textsuperscript{22} Although the variety of Nubian cultures was recognized from early times onwards, research of the last few decades has increasingly shown that they were largely a result of indigenous developments, albeit with periods of stimulus from Egypt. O’Connor was among the first to view Nubia as a rival to Egypt rather than her dependant\textsuperscript{23} and Edwards called for the introduction of “Sudanic models” for the study of Nubian archaeology, culture and history.\textsuperscript{24} Williams\textsuperscript{25} has even suggested that he may have found the roots of pharaonic kingship at the site of Qustul in Lower Nubia, although the evidence to that end appears rather inconclusive.\textsuperscript{26} However, work like that of Williams and others, makes it clear that Egypt and Nubia did not exist in isolation,\textsuperscript{27} but were part of a supra-regional network, where ideas, customs, and material culture were exchanged over wide areas.

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1.3 Who were the people along the Lower and Middle Nile? Questions of ethnicity.

In order to identify the different populations along the Nile Valley we need to consider “ethnicity”, a term used in the social sciences and archaeology since the mid 20th century. Different views and models of ethnicity are available in the literature. Frequently it is used in a racial sense, but generally it describes a group of people with common interest, who generate a common identity, often based on shared kinship, culture, language and customs as well as residence, with the intention to differentiate themselves from other groups. At the same time one or more of these aspects may be shared by neighbouring groups, although they still set themselves apart from others. And, to complicate the picture further, ethnicity and identity may be actively manipulated as a response to special circumstances and to gain political or economic advantages. Ethnicity furthermore can be self-ascribed/emic or ascribed by outsiders/etic. In archaeology, ethnicity is, if not impossible, difficult to recognize, especially in non-literate societies. In this case, groups of populations sometimes can be discerned through the occurrence of the same or similar styles of material culture or burial forms, if compared to neighbouring groups. But stylistic differences can also be due to erroneous replication of cultural practice, and it is not always clear which traits of material culture are the conveyors of ethnicity. Along the Lower and Middle Nile Valley we have, broadly speaking, two groups of peoples, referred to by the modern geographical and political distribution as “Egyptians” and “Nubians”. These distinctions are used here for the sake of convenience and were not used in antiquity by these peoples themselves.

For the identity of ancient Egyptians we have a wide range of sources available: the archaeological evidence of funerary and material culture is complemented by artistic creations and literary sources of monumental inscriptions as well as every-day administrative records. The Egyptians referred to themselves as “rmt n kmt”, “People of Black Land”, or simply “People” while they used the general expression “nhsy”, “Nehesy”, for people from the south, but they also used a wide range of more specific names for people and places up the Nile, many of which have not yet been clearly identified. Although the population of Egypt was quite diverse, leading different lifestyles as pastoralists in the Delta and agriculturists in Upper Egypt, and even speaking different dialects which may have made communication within the country difficult, “official” sources, such as royal monuments and tomb paintings transmit the idea of a homogenous population. In artistic representations we can identify Egyptians by skin colour, dress, hairstyle and adornments, while other sources inform us about the importance of speaking Egyptian, adhering to Egyptian customs, living in the Egyptian Nile Valley, and emphasise the importance of a “proper” burial in Egypt (all elements can be found in “Sinuhe”). Foreigners living in Egypt are attested at all periods (see below) although very often they are difficult to distinguish, because of their acculturation.

In Nubia we have to rely almost solely on archaeological evidence such as burial structures and customs, which are considered to reflect ethnicity although this is not without pitfalls. The New Kingdom cemetery at Tombos, where graves indicated a mainly Egyptian occupation, the recent study of skeletal material showed a mixed Egyptian-Nubian population, where the latter group had adopted burial customs of the immigrant community and thus in this case the fluidity of ethnicity was demonstrated. Nevertheless, the archaeological record shows us not only changes throughout time, but also the co-existence of different peoples through distinctly different cultures, but with some shared traits. We speak of the A-Group, followed by the C-Group in Lower Nubia, which was contemporary with the Kerma-Culture in Upper Nubia, and the Pan Grave People of the

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28 Barth, Introduction 1969; Carter Bentley, Ethnicity and Practice 1987; Hall, Approaches to Ethnicity 1995; Emberling, Ethnicity in Complex Societies 1997; Epstein, Ethos and Identity 1978; Jones, Archaeology of Ethnicity 1997; Jones, Discourse of Identity 2000.
31 Shennan, Approaches to cultural identity 1994.
33 Emberling, Ethnicity in Complex Societies 1997: 311.
38 Moens and Wetterstrom, Agricultural Economy of an Town in Egypt’s West Delta 1988.
39 Referred to in the story of Sinuhe; Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature 1975: 225.
42 Buzon, Bioarchaeological Perspective 2008.
Eastern Desert. From the first millennium BC, after Egyptian occupation, we distinguish between the Kushite Period – split into Napatan and Meroitic Periods – Qustul and Ballana Cultures (or X-Group) followed by the Christian and Islamic Periods. Many of these "Periods" and "Cultures", for some of which we have written information, are associated with specific peoples coming into Nubia, although anthropological studies have shown for Lower Nubia (little evidence is available for Upper Nubia) little variety or discontinuity in population after 3000 BC.\(^4\) Nubian language, attested in written form for the Christian Period, may have come to the Nile Valley at around 2000 BC from the Kordofan-Darfur area. Meroitic speakers may have originated in the northern Butana. Their language became the official and written language of the Meroitic Kingdom from the second century BC.\(^4\) The Beja of the Eastern Desert spoke a Cushitic language for which there is scant written evidence.\(^4\) Of all the names listed above, the only possible ethnonym is "Kush/Kushite", already used during Middle Kingdom Egypt to refer to people south of the First Cataract, while the rest are modern designations, some of which refer to archaeological sites and ancient capitals which yielded the most characteristic finds of material culture of the respective periods. Therefore, what we refer to as “Nubians” is a variety of people living along the Middle Nile, whose ethnicity we can determine only with difficulties.\(^4\)

### 1.4 Goods, People and Ideas

Contacts of peoples along the Nile Valley have a long history, attested both in archaeology and textual sources and can be observed in a variety of ways. Exchange of goods – through trade and gifts of prestige goods – can be seen from material remains, such as Egyptian pottery in Nubian A-Group burials, Kerma and el-Kurru tumuli; trading expeditions are attested during the Egyptian Old Kingdom in the inscriptions of Harkhuf;\(^4\) and tomb and temple paintings in Egypt show goods being brought as tribute from the south.\(^4\)

People, were also “exchanged”: some of them would have been slaves, such as those brought from Nubia to Egypt under the reign of Snofru in dyn. 4 but also much later;\(^4\) other Nubian groups lived in Egypt with settlements close to important towns and their own discrete cemeteries;\(^5\) while yet others were employed as mercenaries, desert hunters and patrols, as attested from Middle Kingdom tomb models and the "Semna Despatches".\(^5\) Egyptians living south of Elephantine/Aswan, the traditional frontier between Egypt and Nubia, are rarely attested before the New Kingdom, although remains of an Egyptian settlement dating to the Old Kingdom at Buhen were discovered,\(^5\) and the Middle Kingdom fortresses along the second Nile cataract were manned by garrisons who very likely interacted with local people. During the New Kingdom Egyptian presence is attested as far upstream as Kurgus,\(^5\) but disappears virtually completely with the political changes in Egypt towards the end of dyn. 20, around 1070 BC.

This frequent exchange of goods and people one would expect to lead also to the exchange of ideas and customs. If we believe Egyptian texts of the New Kingdom and earlier, this type of exchange with Nubia was apparently a one-way traffic. Of course these writings were composed with a certain ideological background, which at times appears xenophobic, and anything un-Egyptian out of necessity either was bad, even vile, or simply ignored, and therefore could not be accepted into Egyptian concepts. However, some deities in the Egyptian pantheon may have their roots in Nubia. Dedwen, an ancient deity already mentioned in the Pyramid Texts\(^5\) and usually in connection with Nubia,\(^5\) as well as Bes and other dwarf-gods, and especially the ram-headed form of the Egyptian state god Amun\(^5\) may have been imported from the south. Not until later, during dyn. 25 with a line of kings probably originating in Napata, does Nubian influence in Egypt become more clearly visible in artistic representations and this has been investigated and commented upon by numerous scholars.\(^5\)
In spite of the fact that ideas are difficult to detect in the archaeological record, and belief systems can be only partly recovered, in the first place from funerary remains, what we see in Nubia during the Egyptian domination is a virtual “Egyptianisation” of the indigenous population. Frequently the burials of local elites are indistinguishable from those of Egyptians, like those of Djehuty-hetep and Amenemhet. Although the material culture in the local C-group burials of ordinary people was largely untouched by Egyptian influence, Bearing in mind the stability/type, their burial customs were largely untouched by Egyptian influence.

1.5 Boundaries

Traditionally the boundary between Egypt and Nubia is drawn at Elephantine/Aswan. But actually we cannot be certain whether our understanding of this frontier conforms to that of ancient times, in spite of the suitability of the 1st cataract as a natural boundary. The term “Ta-Seti”, “Land of the Bow” was used from the Middle Kingdom onwards as a name for the first Upper Egyptian nome, but also referred to Nubia. Apparently during the Old Kingdom this nome was not included within Egyptian administration, although it covered the entire area south of Gebel el-Silsila without its southern boundary defined. Elephantine, during the Old Kingdom, appears therefore rather as a trading outpost in Nubia than a frontier town. Not until the Middle Kingdom do we have a firmly established, more physical boundary, represented by the fortresses along the 2nd cataract, and clearly described in the Semna Stelae of Sestostris III. This boundary was a political one, incorporating Lower Nubia into Egypt, but also an ideological one, separating the ordered Egyptianness from the chaotic “otherness”, from “Wretched Kush”. But while royal dogma and inscriptions want to make us believe that this boundary was impermeable, in reality people from both sides crossed it, maintained contacts, intermingled and mixed. Mattingly, on researching the Roman Empire in North Africa, makes the observation that “…frontiers can be highly mobile up to the point where the expanding state reaches a zone that is totally alien to its culture and lifestyle, at which point the frontier becomes more static and politically volatile”, which can equally be applied to Egypt and Nubia.

That political boundaries do not necessarily coincide with cultural ones can be observed on the evidence of Lower Nubia, which appears to have shared some aspects of culture with Upper Egypt, reflected in the history of the Egyptian-Nubian boundary. In fact, the existence of a substratum of shared religious ideas and traditions had already been put forward by Frankfort and Seligman in their studies of Egyptian religion and divine kingship, covering the entire area of northeast Africa. During the pre-dynastic period in Egypt, in the 4th millennium BC, we can observe from funerary customs in Naqada I and II in Upper Egypt, and A-Group burials in Lower Nubia, that even if they had different traditions in ceramics and material culture they were close in their systems of religious ideas. Although mainly distinguished through common traits in ceramics, the C-Group horizon consisting of the Lower Nubian C-Group – whose origins are obscure – the Upper Nubian Kerma-Culture, and the Pan-Grave-Population of the Eastern Desert points to the existence of wider regionally shared traditions during the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC. The underlying stratum of shared religious ideas in the Nile Valley, as pointed out by Williams have must have existed throughout the period and remained until much later. In this light, the appearance of the Egyptian White Crown on the Qustul incense burner, dated to the Terminal A-
Group, does not seem surprising, and I think that throughout time Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia were considered as a cultural (but not necessarily political) unit. Some Nubian rulers of later periods were shown wearing the White Crown, and Piye, at the beginning of dyn. 25, receives on the “Sandstone Stela” from the ram-headed Amun of Napata the Kushite Cap Crown and the Lower Egyptian Red Crown, but neither the White nor the Double Crown, which could indicate that Upper Egypt may have been considered part of Nubia at that time, in ideology as well as politically.

Boundaries are even more difficult to identify during the Egyptian New Kingdom. While in the north the boundary of Egypt proper was at the Mediterranean shores, politically Egyptian hegemony included the Sinai, Palestine and parts of Syria. To the east Egypt stretched to the Red Sea Coast. To what extent the inhabitants of the oases in the Libyan Desert were regarded as Egyptians is not quite clear, since in some representations they are shown as tribute bearers, just like those of other foreign domains, which leaves us somewhat in the dark as to where in the ancient mind Egypt extended to the west. A southern boundary was established by Tutmosis I, dyn. 18 at Kurgus, upstream of the 4th cataract. However, while there is ample evidence for Egyptian colonies in Lower Nubia, beyond the 3rd cataract only little influence is attested.

At the other end of the time spectrum, Fattovich considers it likely that the Kingdoms of Kush, Napata and Meroe shared a number of traditions with cultures from further south and east of the Nile Valley. Certainly, people in the Nile Valley had longstanding, and at times intense, contact. They moved along the river and adjacent areas, and with them travelled their stories and ideas.

1.6 Egypt and Nubia during the New Kingdom and its aftermath

Earlier views on Egyptian behaviour towards her neighbouring territories presented a picture of respectful cooperation with the Levant and Syria/Palestine, leaving these lands largely under the authority of vassal-rulers, while Nubia was considered a colony under Egyptian authority and administration. More recent interpretations, however, show that this may not have been the case entirely. Local Nubian princes, often held as hostages and educated at the Egyptian court, just as Asiatic ones, came into positions of authority in their native countries, and, although we know of numerous Egyptian officials acting in Nubia, with time Nubians, or offspring of mixed Egyptian-Nubian unions, would have been in charge. During that period we can observe a clear spread of Egyptian and Egyptianising features in Nubia, especially in the mortuary sphere which is generally thought to be the result of the adoption of foreign customs and religious ideas by the indigenous Nubian elites, and the presence of Egyptian “colonies”, consisting of officials, priests and craftsmen.

At the end of the New Kingdom, around 1070 BC, a number of changes become visible both in Egypt and in Nubia. During the reign of the kings of Libyan descent, the royal burial ground was moved from what is now known as the Valley of the Kings in Upper Egypt to within the enclosed temple precincts of the capital in Lower Egypt. The need for protection of deceased royalty, after the tomb robberies of the previous decades, very likely was one reason for this change, as well as perhaps the wish to be spatially closer to the sanctuary of the state deity Amun. Large family tombs, sometimes used over several generations, become more common, as opposed to the single (generation) burials of earlier periods, and the assemblage of burial goods changes. The number of funerary amulets, which could be easily attached to the body of their owner, rises drastically, and also a great variety of new styles and motives were introduced. Although visually material culture, temples, monuments and burials still were purely Egyptian in character, these changes in constellation and use can be attributed to Libyan influence. When after about 300 years Egypt came under Nubian rule, the 25th dynasty, this Libyan influence had naturalized into Egyptian culture.

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74 Williams, Lost Pharaohs of Nubia 1980.
79 E.g. tomb of Rekhmire; Davies, Tomb of Rekhi-mi-re 1943.
80 Davies, Kurgus, the Pharaonic Inscriptions 1998; Kendall, Origin of the Napatan State 1999: 50.
81 E.g. Tombos, Kawa, Gebel Barkal; Smith, Wretched Kush 2003: 94.
84 O’Connor, Ancient Nubia 1993: 59.
During the apparent “Dark Ages”, Lower Nubia gives the impression of complete depopulation, which was explained originally by Egyptians going back to Egypt, and the retreat of indigenous populations into the “wilderness of Upper Nubia”. Economic decline and/or the taking up of a nomadic lifestyle have been offered as alternative suggestions. One of the major problems here is, as Williams remarked, the difficulty of creating complete archaeological sequences in any part of Nubia in order to observe developments. One piece of evidence that this period may not have been that “dark” after all is the inscription of Queen Katimala (or Kadimalo) from Semna. Without entering into more controversial aspects here, the text is dated to dyn. 21/22 (= post New Kingdom), shows the existence of some kind of chiefdom, describes a struggle among (local) people, and the triumph of the queen with the help of Amun, the latter confirming the continuing importance of this deity in Nubia, but also confirming the continuing importance of this particular New Kingdom temple in the Middle Kingdom fortress at Semna.

The evidence for Upper Nubia is not more revealing. There, Egyptian influence never seems to have been as strong as in Lower Nubia, and still, by the 9th century BC we can observe the emergence of a kingdom seemingly modelled on the Egyptian example. Important evidence comes from the royal cemetery at el-Kurru near Gebel Barkal at the 4th cataract. A number of questions surround this cemetery. While we know from inscribed material of the latest burials that they were those of the Napatan kings and many of their wives of the 25th dynasty, we can only assume that the earlier burials without inscribed evidence were those of their ancestors. We do not know who they were and where they came from. Earlier researchers assumed that owing to the difficult political situation in Egypt, refugees, descendants of the Libyan ruling family and priests of Amun, arrived at Napata where they established themselves as a new ruling elite over the local population. While this “Libyan theory” has been discredited, it was suggested that these people came from further south, or areas without or only little contact with Egypt because of the absence of Egyptianisation. The dating of these earliest burials has led to fierce discussions. Reisner’s original calculation based on the length of generations, and now followed by Kendall, led to around 860 BC. The problem here is that it leaves a gap in the chronology of the area. Based on pottery in the graves, which was imported from Egypt and conforms in style to the late New Kingdom, Török and Morkot argue for a long chronology, which would provide cultural continuity over the period from 1060-860 BC. This seems to be supported by more recent finds at Hillat el-Ab, where burials of presumably local elites were uncovered, with Egyptian style wall paintings, and which date to roughly the same period. In this light, Morkot is probably right in stating that too much emphasis has been put on the importance of el-Kurru cemetery to explain the rise of the Kushite/Napatan kingdom. Nevertheless, the rise of Napata is not well understood. The political situation after Egyptian withdrawal is very unclear; we do not know how many chiefdoms emerged, or what their territorial extent was, although some inscriptions of the succeeding Napatan period appear to refer to some sort of “feudation” of territorial units, perhaps a situation similar to that mentioned about 1500 years earlier in the inscription of Harkhuf. Dafa’alla suggested the existence of five such chiefdoms in Upper Nubia and adjacent areas: Napata, Kerma-basin, Blemmyes-country, Island of Meroe and Kordofan. Research of the last 15-20 years has shown that the “Dark Ages” of the Middle Nile Valley may not have been that dark after all: the inscription of Queen Katimala, the evidence from the cemetery of possibly local leaders at Hillat el-Ab, and the “Long Chronology” of el-Kurru as suggested by Morkot and Török.
show that the kingdom of Napata did not arise from a vacuum.

Another, commonly accepted line of thought puts the rise of Napata down to the survival of Egyptian priestly influence in the Amun temple at Gebel Barkal. The importance of the cult of Amun within the Kushite state and kingship cannot be denied. But, as Edwards rightly puts forward, one must ask the question as to how Egyptian the cult of Amun really was by the time of the emergence of the Napatan ruling family, after about 300 years of possibly scant contact with Egypt. Egyptian priests, usually thought to come from the Theban temple of Amun, are usually held responsible for the spread of Egyptian religious ideas and the maintenance of Egyptian traditions as encountered in royal and non-royal burials of the Napatan Period.

There is no doubt that the cult of Amun played an important role in the formation of the Kingdom of Napata. Especially during and after Nubian rule of Egypt there was continuous exchange between Napata and Thebes, the two most important sanctuaries of the god. But neither the influence of people from the south, nor the importance of the cult of Amun takes sufficiently into account the role of existing local elites, the descendants of the former Egyptian vassal rulers. I think there is no need to write Egyptian individuals as initiators of the rise of Napata into history. The rise of the Kingdom of Napata can be demonstrated as the consequence of Egyptian domination. At the end of the period of Egypt’s domination of the Middle Nile the Egyptian temples were still visible; some of them built as places of worship for the god Amun as well as the king (e.g. Abu Simbel for Ramses II, or Soleb for Amenhotep III), but they would also have functioned as administrative centres and collecting points for revenue. Local elites had every interest in continuing the cult of Amun: while during the colonial power the collected goods were passed on to their Egyptian overlords, now they could use this income to further their own aspirations to status and wealth. At one point in time, usually ascribed to Alara, the founder of the Nubian dynasty according to later texts at least parts of the Middle Nile Valley were unified and thus the foundation for the new kingdom was laid. Unfortunately due to the lack of evidence for the continuing use of temples such as Kawa, Kerma/Doukki Gel or the temples at Gebel Barkal during the period between the 20th and the 25th dynasty this hypothesis cannot be tested in our present state of knowledge.

While we know very little about the earlier rulers of this new kingdom, from the time of Piye onwards the apparent modelling of this new kingdom on the Egyptian example becomes clearly visible. Deviations from known Egyptian patterns were explained by early excavators as due to insufficient understanding of the original, or, in the case of artworks, it was maintained that Nubian artisans were less skilful than their Egyptian counterparts. When objects of high artistic quality were encountered, these were ascribed to superior Egyptian craftspeople such as mentioned in an inscription of King Taharka in Kawa. More recent research has shown, however, that on closer examination these Egyptian stylistic means were used to express indigenous ideas, such as about cosmology and kingship and the role of royal women. The royal funerary complexes of Napata also show strong Egyptian influence, and it was pointed out that “An analysis of the royal burials of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty and Napatan Period as evidence for Kushite religion is still wanting”. With this study I hope to fill, at least partly, this gap in our knowledge of royal funerary ideas and mortuary customs as practised in the Middle Nile Valley.

110 Often based on an indigenous deity, e.g Amun of Pnubs; Kormysheva, Origin of the Amun Cult 2004.
111 Frandsen, Egyptian Imperialism 1979; Morkot, Economy of Nubia 1995: 176-177.
112 Stela Kawa VI, Taharqa, Khartoum 2679; “Enthronement Stela” of Aspelta, Cairo JE 48866.
113 E.g. Dunham, Shawabti Figures from Napata 1951: 43.
114 E.g. Reisner, Kings of Ethiopia 1918: 76.
118 Lohwasser, Queenship in Kush 2001a; Lohwasser, Königlichen Frauen von Kusch 2001b.
119 Török, Kingdom of Kush 1997: 327 note 682.