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CLAUDE RILLY

GRAFFITI FOR GODS AND KINGS

THE MEROITIC SECONDARY INSCRIPTIONS OF MUSAWWARAT ES-SUFRA:  
A PRELIMINARY STUDY

The Meroitic graffiti from the Great Enclosure in Musawwarat es-Sufra rank among the first Meroitic texts ever recorded in publications, starting with F. Cailliaud's *Voyage à Méroë* and C. R. Lepsius' *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*. Cailliaud himself and his fellow Frenchman Linant de Bellefonds even added to the corpus in 1822 by engraving two large graffiti in French in the southern wall of Complex 100. The Great Enclosure is a vast architectural complex that has been variously interpreted: a training centre war elephants, a royal residence in the middle of a hunting "paradise" or a temple compound that was at some periods of the year a pilgrimage centre.<sup>1</sup> It is this latter hypothesis, defended first by Fritz Hintze and more recently evidenced by Pawel Wolf, which seems more likely and the present article is a further contribution to this theory.

The Great Enclosure is stunningly rich in both iconographic and scriptural graffiti. Among the latter, many languages are attested, namely Meroitic, Greek, Latin, Old Nubian, Arabic, French and unexpectedly, Provençal in a brief inscription left by a medieval visitor. Meroitic is present in 131 graffiti, to which five from the Lion Temple can be added. Only twenty-five of them have been published.<sup>2</sup> As the excavations of this site were carried out since the end of the fifties by the team of the Humboldt-Universität in Berlin, its director, Fritz Hintze, himself the foremost expert of his day on Meroitic language, planned a thorough publication of these texts. A small black notebook entitled *Musawwarat Sekundär-Inschriften MS 1 ff* is kept in the archives of the mission. For each graffiti, it includes one or two photographs, a hand-copy of the text when it is legible, occasionally, a real facsimile,

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<sup>1</sup> For the interpretation as a religious centre, see Wolf 1999b: 47-48. For the interpretation as a royal residence (including nonetheless some sacred places), see Török 1997: 511.

<sup>2</sup> REM 0042-44 (Griffith 1911), 1034, 1045 (Hintze 1960: 391), 1051-1054 (Hintze 1962: 45-46), 1111, 1112 (Hintze 1968: 676, 679-680), 1142 (Hintze U. 1972: 263), 1164-1167 (Hintze U. 1979), 1283-1288 (Wolf 1999a: 47-52). In Hintze's notebook, the inscriptions from Musawwarat were given a number preceded by the initials MS. The REM number is the registration number in the *Répertoire d'épigraphie méroïtique*, which is the catalogue of the published inscriptions (Leclant *et al.*, 2000). For example, MS 14, the first graffiti ever published by Cailliaud in 1826, is REM 0042. The unpublished graffiti, which make up the majority of the inscriptions, are designated by their MS number only. Some inscriptions that were recently discovered are provisionally registered after the wall number on which they are engraved, after a prefix IA for the Great Enclosure: so IA 529/526-03 is the third graffiti located at the angle between wall No 529 and wall No 526 in Complex 500 of the Great Enclosure.

and finally a transliteration and some brief remarks. As it is, this notebook cannot be considered a publication draft but it includes invaluable data on Meroitic graffiti. Unfortunately, Hintze never found the time to make this sketch the final monography he planned on these graffiti. A handful of them was published as an addendum to the study of the Egyptian texts from the Lion temple (Hintze 1962, Hintze & Priese 1993). Several other were published by his wife Ursula Hintze (1972 and 1979). Later on, two articles by Pawel Wolf (Wolf 1999a and b) marked the resumption of the study of the graffiti from the Great Enclosure. A photographic survey was conducted, including aluminium foil impressions and Optical 3D Measuring.<sup>3</sup> More recently, a complete photographic covering, including orthophotos and photogrammetry, was performed, resulting in an extensive iconographic databank which is priceless for the epigraphic study.<sup>4</sup> The iconographic graffiti are currently surveyed by Cornelia Kleinitz, who is presently directing the mission of the Humboldt-Universität. I am very grateful to her and to Pawel Wolf for entrusting me with the publication of the Meroitic graffiti of this site.

### **1. Meroitic graffiti classification**

However, this study is a difficult task. Unlike the Meroitic written material found in excavations, graffiti are in open air and exposed to erosion, which is particularly harsh in northern Sudan because of sand storms and extreme temperature variations. Consequently, a great number of the inscriptions are badly weathered: 32% of the graffiti that could be spotted are illegible and 23% are just partly legible. We can nevertheless count ourselves lucky that the walls of the Great Enclosure were not, unlike the brick temple of Amun in El-Hassa, covered with a thick plaster that fell off in the course of time, taking with it the pilgrims' graffiti, from which only small fragments were uncovered in the excavations. Another good point in Musawwarat is the solid, fine-grained reddish sandstone which contrasts with the soft white sandstone used in Nubia, particularly in Kawa, where the preservation of the numerous graffiti published by Macadam was so poor that he produced only facsimiles and in many cases, merely the transliteration of the inscriptions in Latin letters.

A second hindrance to the study of graffiti is the lack of lexical and syntactic benchmarks such as can be found for instance in funerary inscriptions, which make up the greatest part of the published Meroitic texts. An exception is the small corpus of 22 late Meroitic graffiti engraved in the temples of Philae and other places from Lower Nubia. They follow the same pattern as Demotic and Greek graffiti found in the Dodecaschoenus and are therefore relatively well understood.<sup>5</sup> The secondary inscriptions from the temples located south of the second cataract, namely Kawa, Dukki Gel, Meroe and

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<sup>3</sup> See Wolf 1999a. Note that the correct reading of the sequence *dqebese* in MS 57 (see below) was made possible thanks to Fig. 15 from this article.

<sup>4</sup> See Kleinitz 2014 and the Internet site <https://musawwaratgraffiti.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/graffitidb>.

<sup>5</sup> In Philae, REM 0095-96, 0112-125 (cf. Griffith 1912 : 33-51): in Medik; REM 1046 A & B; in New Aniba, REM 1108B, 1109; in Qasr Ibrim, REM 1170 and 1171. All these graffiti are late, dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. AD. These graffiti claim that the "adoration" (Mer. *tewiseti*) or the "feet" (Mer. *st qo*) of the pilgrim are there in presence of the deity, principally Isis. See Török 1984:173-181, Rilly 2007: 201-203, Rilly 2010: 93-94.

Musawwarat are generally earlier than those from Lower Nubia and follow specific Meroitic patterns. The number of Meroitic graffiti from all the sites amounts to approximately 270 texts, about half of which have been published. A first classification of these texts was produced by Török and resumed with updated data by the present author.<sup>6</sup> The corpus was divided into ten categories:

- (1) name and descriptive elements of the visitor;
- (2) god's name in vocative + personal name + additional text;
- (3) god's name in vocative ± additional text + sequence *ydxno*;
- (4) personal name + title with article *-l(w)* + sequence *yerehlo* ± series of vertical strokes;
- (5) text + sequence *yerehlo* + sequence *ydxno*;
- (6) prayer
- (7) text with sequence *aleqese*;
- (8) *tewiseti* ("adoration") + personal name + text
- (9) *st qo* ("these feet") + personal name + text
- (10) miscellaneous

The graffiti from Musawwarat fall into categories (1), (2), (6) and (10). Surprisingly, category (4), which is overwhelmingly present in the corpus from Kawa, is not attested in Musawwarat. I suspect that *ere-h-l-o* (later *yere-h-l-o*) means something like "is the name of...", as the proto-Nubian word for "name" can be reconstructed as \*er-i.<sup>7</sup> It would explain why this category of graffiti does not begin with an invocation to the deity, but with the name and title of the pilgrim. In Kawa, the first category, where the visitor's name and title are mentioned without the sequence *erehlo*, is restricted to a single instance (REM 0611). In contrast, this category is represented by 11 occurrences in Musawwarat, at least among the inscriptions whose beginning is preserved. In two of them, the sequence *-s-o* "it is from..." is added at the end (MS 10 and 80) but it is possible that this phrase has disappeared from several other inscriptions belonging to the same category.

Conversely, category (3), which is attested in Kawa by seven inscriptions only,<sup>8</sup> is widely represented in the Musawwarat corpus, with a total of 28 graffiti. The deity who is invoked at the beginning is generally Apedemak, but in two cases, maybe three originally, the visitor addresses the deified king Talakhamani (see below). Unfortunately, the meaning of *ydxno* is obscure. It is likely a verbal compound that includes in final position the copula *-o* used as an auxiliary.<sup>9</sup> Because of this copula, an imperative or optative form such as "listen to me!" or "answer (my prayer)!" is unlikely. It might rather be something like "I made offerings to you" or the like.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Török 1984: 173-18; Rilly 2007: 195-204.

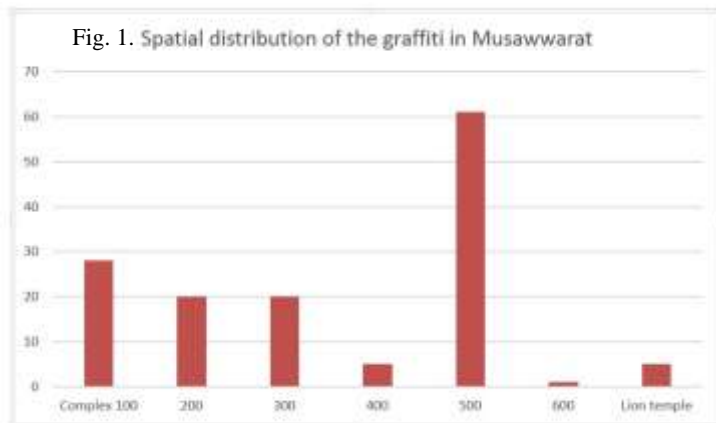
<sup>7</sup> Rilly 2010: 486 [124]. The word is reconstructed \*(η)er-i in Proto-Northern East Sudanic, with a velar nasal absent in the Eastern group to which Meroitic, Nubian and Nara belong. The element *-h* in *erehlo* is so far unexplained.

<sup>8</sup> REM 0615, 0616, 0658, 0661, 0664, 0666A, 0693A.

<sup>9</sup> In MS 70, one of the prayers to king Talakhamani, a rare variant *dexn*, without the copula, is attested.

<sup>10</sup> The initial *y-* is very stable and remarkably appears even in archaic texts (MS 12, 19a, 19c, 58b), unlike the phrase of Category (4), which is *erehlo* in archaic texts vs. *yerehlo* in later inscriptions. It might be the 1<sup>st</sup> person

## 2. Location of the graffiti



Graffiti can be found nearly everywhere in the Great Enclosure. This ubiquity differs from the location of these secondary inscriptions in traditional temples such as Kawa, Dukki Gel or El-Hassa, or even the Lion temple in Musawwarat. On the latter building, five graffiti were engraved only on the outer side of the

southern wall, between the figures of the deities. In his publication of the graffiti of Philae, Cruz-Uribe noticed about the mammisi:

Surprisingly, or maybe not so surprisingly, none are found in chambers 2 and 3 (the sanctuary). This, for the most part, paralleled what happened in the main temple (Naos area) and all of the subsidiary chapels on the island and confirmed that those who wrote the Demotic texts respected the sanctity of the interior portions of the temple and chapels. (Cruz-Uribe 2015: 21)

In the temple of Amun at Kawa, the 101 graffiti surveyed by Macadam were distributed in four places: the western kiosk outside of the entrance, the entrance pylon and the first court, the doorway to the hypostyle and the side-rooms D and E, on the right side of the sanctuary. None was engraved in the sanctuary itself or in the chapel of Taharqo which is now in the Ashmolean Museum. Apart from the side-rooms, all these places of the temple were open to the visitors, who could have their graffiti inscribed in their presence. In Dukki Gel, few graffiti were discovered because the Napatan temple was made anew in the first century AD. Henceforward, it comprised brick walls covered with a thick plaster that crumbled in the course of time, so that graffiti, if any, were destroyed. Only three secondary inscriptions, engraved prior to the restoration of the temple, were found on sandstone blocks from the Napatan temple.<sup>11</sup> Here again, these blocks belonged to places open to the public, namely the entrance pylon and its doorway. The same location for visitors' graffiti was evidenced in the temple of El-Hassa, where tiny fragments of thick mortar, bearing some scratched Meroitic signs, were discovered in the surroundings of the pylon.

In the Great Enclosure, graffiti are found nearly everywhere, not only at the main entrance and the forecourts. In addition, as we will see below, they were engraved during the main periods of activity of the religious compound. This shows that the greatest part of the enclosure, at least in Meroitic times, was open to the public, which is possible only if it was designed to welcome pilgrims and celebrate

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pronoun that occurs under the forms *e-*, later *ye-* in royal inscriptions (Rilly 2010:78). If so, the orthographic standards attested in the temple graffiti diverged from the conventions used by the royal scribes in official texts.

<sup>11</sup> Rilly, *in print*, in the forthcoming publication of the late temples of Dukki Gel.

religious festivals. The number of graffiti however varies depending of their location in the enclosure (Fig. 1). They are absent from the inner walls of Temple 300 and very scanty in the interior of complex 100.<sup>12</sup> Only one clear graffito was uncovered in the western yard 600 and five in complex 400, these two places being far from the centre of the enclosure. Complex 200 in the north and temple 300 harbour 20 graffiti each, including three long texts. The central part is conspicuously the richest in Meroitic graffiti: 28 of them were engraved in Complex 100, mainly on the outer walls. They include five long texts. Complex 500 harbours no less than 61 inscriptions, seven of which are fairly long. The abundance of graffiti in this place may be due to the high and long walls that characterise this part of the enclosure and where there was plenty of space for inscriptions, but it is also possible that Complex 500 was intended to host the crowds of private pilgrims who took part in the sacred festivals.

Calligraphy was not a major concern for Meroitic scribes, so that the inscriptions – unlike some iconographic graffiti – rarely display artistic talents, but those that are well preserved show a good mastery of engraved writing. The signs generally match the canonical ductus of the Meroitic cursive at its successive stages and were doubtlessly traced by professional hands. In addition, it has been previously noticed that the spelling of words followed strict standards that only learned people could know. It is therefore obvious that the graffiti were not engraved by the pilgrims themselves, but by priests or scribes attached to the religious compound. They were paid for that work and could probably choose or negotiate the places where these graffiti were to be engraved. Beside these private inscriptions, there were of course official and royal texts, as we will see below.

### **3. Chronological distribution of the inscriptions**

Graffiti rank among the earliest Meroitic inscriptions. Two of them, published by Macadam (REM 0648A and 0642), even include the name of Amun in Napatan Demotic, which is the source of the Meroitic cursive. An additional instance from the temple of Dukki Gel (REM 1378), this time with the Napatan Demotic signs for Horus and Amun, was published by the present author.<sup>13</sup> We had then suggested, from their paleographical features, that these texts were the first known evidence of the Meroitic cursive and placed them at the beginning of the second century BC. The first part of this statement is still valid, but an unexpected discovery has meanwhile added half a century to the date of appearance of the Meroitic cursive script.

In 2015, a splendid sistrum in gilded bronze appeared in the antiques market in Belgium. It was remarkably well preserved and unquestionably authentic, but its provenance was unknown. The instrument bears on the loop the cartouches in Egyptian hieroglyphic of the Meroitic king Arnekhamani, “beloved of Isis”. This ruler, best known for his intense architectural in Mussawarat, reigned approximately from 240 to 215 BC. The mention “beloved of Isis” instead of “beloved of Amun”

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<sup>12</sup> See Kleinitz 2014: 99-100 for the avoidance of the inner temples of the Great Enclosure

<sup>13</sup> Rilly 2007: 262; Rilly 2003: 44.

attested at the beginning of his reign, probably matches the same change between the cartouches of Ptolemy III Euergetes and Ptolemy IV Philopator, who ascended the throne in 222. The sistrum can therefore be dated, with some degree of accuracy, from about 220.



Fig. 2. Early graffito MS 49 from the Great Enclosure

The Meroitic inscription is engraved on the handle.<sup>14</sup> According to my analysis, it mentions a secondary wife of Arnekhamani and an offering made to the goddess Isis. This discovery is of great interest to the chronology of Meroitic script. The earliest graffito of the Great Enclosure in Musawwarat (MS 49, Fig. 2), was found in a level dated to the third century BC but this seemed too early for a Meroitic inscription.<sup>15</sup> Actually, the striking paleographical similarities between the text of the sistrum and MS 49 confirm that this inscription dates from the reign of Arnekhamani, who also commissioned the construction of the Lion Temple on this site.

Moreover, the two inscriptions show that, at this time, the inventory and the general ductus of the signs were already set and that the conventions of the alphasyllabic system were established. This tends to suggest that the development of the Meroitic script took place some decades earlier and was therefore one of the innovations brought by the dynastic change which founded the kingdom of Meroe, around 270 BC.

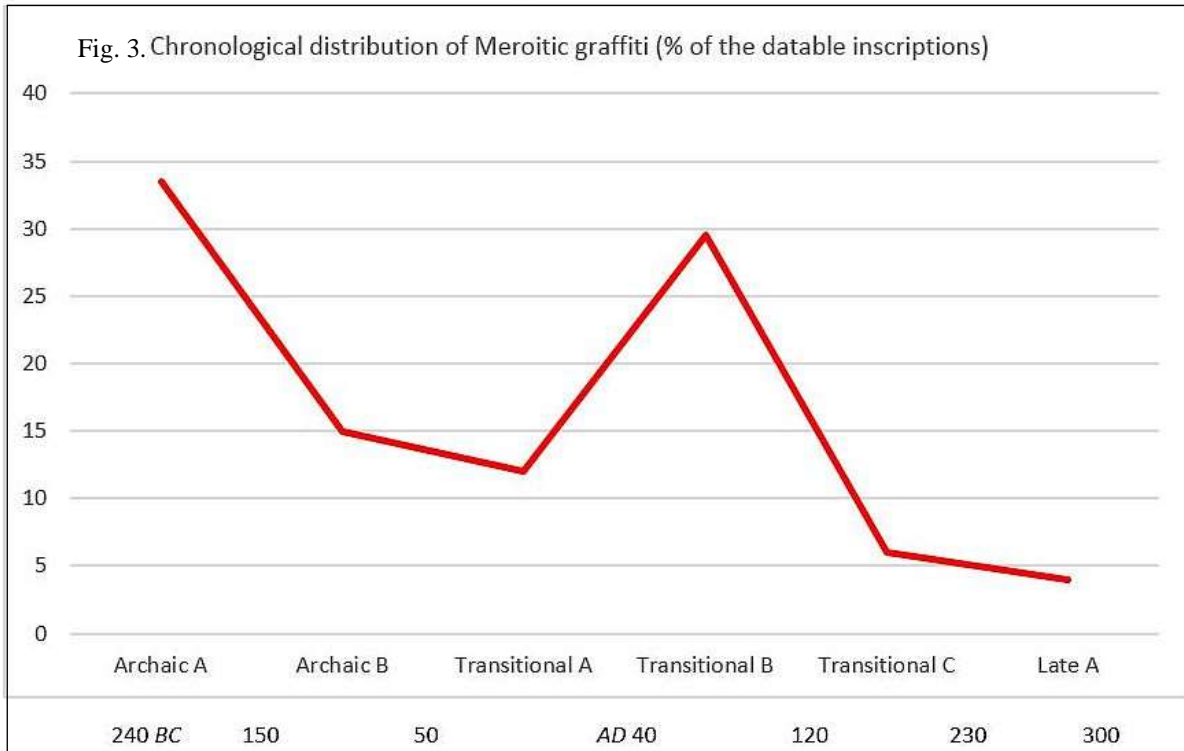
Taking into account these recent chronological changes in the Meroitic paleography, it is possible to examine the chronological distribution of the graffiti of the Great Enclosure and the Lion temple (Fig. 3). From the 131 inscriptions that could be identified as Meroitic, 114 are clear enough to enter the corpus used for this investigation. The paleographical classification of the texts was based on the categories established in Rilly 2007: 340-351, which are just a more detailed version of the three categories defined by Griffith 1911: 17-21, namely Archaic, Transitional and Late. The dates of the first period were of course extended to adjust it to the recent discoveries mentioned above. In addition, the graffito REM 0117 from the mammisi of the Isis temple in Philae is now considered the last Meroitic inscription and dated to 452 AD, so that the last period also was extended.

Archaic A	<i>ca.</i> 270 – 150 BC
Archaic B	<i>ca.</i> 150 – 50 BC
Transitional A	<i>ca.</i> 50 BC – AD 40

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Rilly 2019: 142, Fig.4.

<sup>15</sup> About the block with graffito MS 49: “Since it is covered by the filling of the terrace abutting chapel 107, it must predate or be coeval with the building period 6c, which Priese/Hintze assigned to Arnekhamani” (P. Wolf, 2016, p.c.).

Transitional B	<i>ca.</i> AD 40 – 120
Transitional C	<i>ca.</i> AD 120 –230
Late A	<i>ca.</i> AD 230 – 300
Late B	<i>ca.</i> AD 300 – 450



In Musawwarat, the Archaic A period has the highest representation with 36 inscriptions. The total for Archaic B amounts to 15. For 5 inscriptions, it was impossible to choose between these two categories.<sup>16</sup> Transitional A is represented by 9 inscriptions, Transitional B by 26 inscriptions and Transitional C by 4 inscriptions. There are 9 graffiti that can be ascribed either to A or to B and 6 either to B or to C. The Late period is restricted to Late A with 4 instances.

These results shed an unexpected light on the periods of activity of the Great Enclosure. Far from displaying a constant and regular influx of visitors, the engraving of graffiti was mainly concentrated on two periods, the reigns of king Arnekhamani around 240/215 BC and of Natakamani around AD 60/90. It is of course no coincidence that these two rulers were involved in the building of new structures in the site: Arnekhamani for the edification of the Lion temple and parts of the Great Enclosure, as shown by graffiti MS 49 and Natakamani in the central terrace, particularly for the décor

<sup>16</sup> In Fig. 2, the instances for which it was impossible to decide between two categories have been included half in the first, half in the second. The figures used for the diagram are percentages of the 114 legible graffiti from Musawwarat.



of the columns.<sup>17</sup> A third king, Taneyidamani, around 170/150 BC, might be added to the previous pair in view of the good representation of the Archaic B period in the corpus and of the inscription MS 57 which explicitly mentions him. It has been suggested that the Great Enclosure was the imposing scene of specific events during the reigns of the kings of Meroe and was each time hastily redesigned for these particular occasions.<sup>18</sup> Even if the chronological study of the graffiti is not accurate enough to substantiate this hypothesis, it shows however a direct connection between the engraving of graffiti and some specific periods.

Another surprising result of this survey is the sharp decline in the engraving of graffiti that took place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. One of the last text written in the late second century is MS 25, on the walls of Complex 100. It looks like a visitor's inscription rather than a pilgrim's since it just gives the name and title of Datasmarula, a great-priest of Amun, who is possibly mentioned in the funerary texts REM 1090/1091 as the uncle of Natemakhora, governor of Sedeinga.<sup>19</sup> At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, some decades before the fall of Meroe, the Meroitic graffiti disappear completely and the site is abandoned.

#### **4. The deities mentioned in the graffiti**

##### **4.1. God Apedemak**

In an article published two decades ago, Pawel Wolf reviewed Hintze's theories about the gods worshipped in the Great Enclosure (Wolf 1999b). He principally used the graffiti for that purpose and showed that only one god, Apedemak, was mentioned in these texts. The cult of Amun, suggested by Hintze, at least for the central Complex 100, is never evidenced in the graffiti, where the only occurrences of *Amni* take place in the names of Napatan and Meroitic kings and are therefore no direct references to this god. Wolf's observations are excellent and I can add only a few details on this matter.

The greatest part of the graffiti in the Great Enclosure are of two kinds: the mention of the name and titles of the pilgrim, followed possibly by *-s-o* "this is from..." or a direct address to the god, followed by the sequence *ydno*, whose meaning may be "I offered to you" (28 occurrences) or accompanied by the sequence *p-inni /y-inni* and variants, maybe "shower your gifts (on me)" (4 occurrences).<sup>20</sup> As noticed above, in the graffiti from Kawa, the first category is always followed by *(y)erehlo*, possibly "this is the name of...", which is not used in Musawwarat. The second category is restricted in Kawa to the *ydno* formula which follows the name of Amun in three inscriptions (REM

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<sup>17</sup> See Näser 2011: 319-323. The cartouche Kheperkare that appears on one of the columns of the central terrace is the Egyptian throne name of both kings Arnekhamani and Natakamani. It was assigned to Arnekhamani by Hintze. Näser suggests that it was rather Natakamani and presents additional arguments for this identification.

<sup>18</sup> Näser 2011 : 337-338.

<sup>19</sup> Rilly 2013 : 141.

<sup>20</sup> This tentative translation is of course deduced from the archaeological context but is also based on the comparison with Proto-Nubian \*eeṅ, Birgid Nubian *iiḡin* "full", Nara *in-* "pour in" (Rilly 2010: 500 [147]).

0615, 0661, 0664). This name is much more present in Kawa than the four occurrences reported by Wolf in his article. In all cases, it appears as *Amnpte* and variants “Amon of Napata”. It is also attested, without any visible sequence *ydjno*, in REM 0617, 0620, 0653, 0672, 0675, 0686 and 0697. In REM 0615, 0617, 0661 and 0664 the vocative suffix is preserved: *Mnpt-i*, *Amnpt-i*, *Amnept-i* “O Amun of Napata!”. Similarly, each time the sequence is complete, the name of Apedemak is followed by the vocative suffix in Musawwarat: *Apedemk-i*. There is no doubt that Apedemak in the Great Enclosure had the same role as Amun in Kawa: he was the master of the temple compound, to whom all the prayers of the visitors and the pilgrims rose up.

#### 4.2. King Talakhamani

However, three long graffiti from the Great Enclosure (MS 28, 70, 132) are addressed, not to Apedemak, but to the Napatan king Talakhamani, who reigned in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, more than three centuries earlier. This detail has not received all the attention it deserves. It is one of the rare pieces of evidence for the cult of deceased rulers in Kush. It probably went unnoticed because this is a common feature of the Egyptian religion. Senusret III for example was worshipped in several temples of the New Empire in Lower Nubia (Ellesiya, Semna, Kumma). Nevertheless, there are significant discrepancies between the Kushite and the Egyptian kingship, starting with the succession rules. In the royal stelae from the 25<sup>th</sup> dynasty and the kingdom of Napata, the rulers of the past are fairly often cited: Alara in two stelae of Taharqo from Kawa and much later, in the stela of Nastasen, Alara again and Kashta in the wall inscription of king Amannote-erike in Kawa.<sup>21</sup> In none of those texts does the present ruler address the deceased king. He always asks Amun to grant him what this god granted to his glorious ancestors. Therefore, there are no actual instances of deified kings in these passages. The texts from the Great Enclosure are in this regard quite different. The name of the king is followed by the vocative suffix *-i*, which forms, with the final *-i* of the name, a long vowel conventionally written *-eyi*; *Tlxmneyi* “O Talakhamani!”<sup>22</sup> It is followed, like in the prayers to Apedemak, by the sequence *ydjno* in MS 25 and its rare variant *dexn* in MS 70. In MS 132, it may have been originally in the central part of this graffito which was completely erased over the course of time.

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<sup>21</sup> FHN I: 141, 173 ; FHN II: 409, 418, 419, 478.

<sup>22</sup> In MS 28 and 132. In MS 70, it is spelt *Tlxmnyi*. Similarly: *Asoreyi* “O Osiris!” from *Asori* “Osiris”: see Rilly 2007: 533.

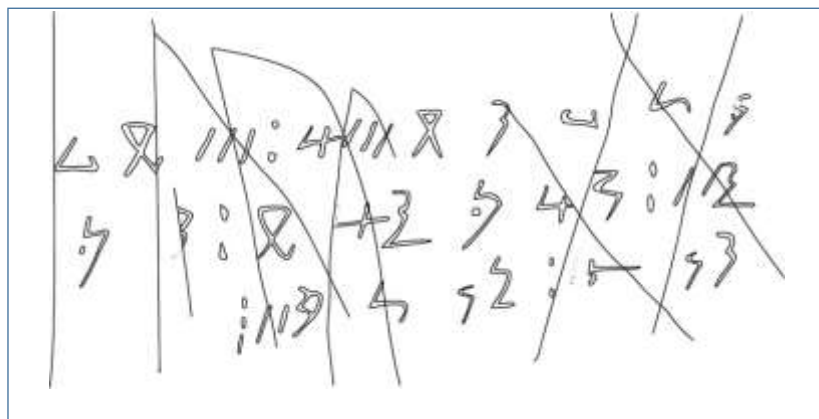


Fig. 4-5 : orthophoto and facsimile of inscription MS 28

The inscription MS 28 (Fig. 4-5) is one of the two prayers to Talakhamani that were engraved in the outer walls of the temple in Complex 100. The third is on the outer wall of Complex 300. MS 28 is located on the right side of the modern inscription of Prince Pückler-Muskau. The paleographical style is Archaic B, around 150 BC. The inscription reads: <sup>1</sup>*tlxmneyi: ydx<sup>2</sup>no: ſitkid: m<sup>3</sup>meṭe: pilqo.* Due to deep strokes carved later upon this inscription, several letters (here marked with dots) are of uncertain reading. Just the beginning of the text can be tentatively translated: “O Talakhamani, I offered to you (?) ...”.

The origin of this devotion to the Napatan king Talakhamani is unknown. Hintze supposed that he was the first to build a temple in Musawwarat, becoming this way a kind of patron saint of the site. This is a plausible explanation, considering there are no less than three prayers addressed to him at different periods according to their palaeography, even though the reign of this ruler, as far as we know, was in no way remarkable.<sup>23</sup> He is the owner of a very small pyramid in Nuri (Nu. 16), curiously located behind the western row of monuments. The size of his pyramid is probably indicative of a short reign.

<sup>23</sup> See FHN II: 393.

He was succeeded by his brother's son Amannot-erike, who mentions, at the beginning of his long inscription in Kawa, his uncle's passing with the usual euphemism "the falcon went forth to heaven".<sup>24</sup>



Fig. 6. graffito MS 5 in early morning



Fig. 7. graffito MS 5 in the afternoon

### 4.3. King Aspelta

Talakhmani is not the only Napatan ruler commemorated in the Great Enclosure. On the southern outer wall of the chapel in Complex 200, a small graffito, hardly legible, yields the name of King Aspelta. Its paleography is quite early and strongly resembles MS 49 and REM 1377 from Dukki Gel, which are both dated to the reign of Arnekhmani. The inscription passed unnoticed, probably because of a strange feature that is common among the inscriptions of the Great Enclosure. The second sign looks different according to the light. In the early morning, it looks like the letter  $\text{𐎓}$ , reading *s* (Fig. 6). During the rest of the day, a lower stroke appears at the base of the sign, making it resemble the letter  $\text{𐎓}$ , reading *k* (Fig. 7). In Hintze's notebook, the sign was read "k", so that the name of Aspelta was not recognisable. According to Cornelia Kleinitz's expert eye for rock art and graffiti, the lower stroke was traced by the same hand and at the same time as the rest of the sign. However, there is evidence that this stroke is probably accidental. First, the two semicircles that make up the sign can fit an archaic "s" but are too large for an archaic "k". In MS 49, which has the same paleographical features (see Fig. 2), a sign "s" can be seen in the first line and a sign *k* in the second line, making it easy to grasp the difference between the two letters. Second, the name of Aspelta is followed by a word which is undoubtedly *qore* "king". There is absolutely no chance that a king "Askelta" has ever reigned over the kingdom of Kush.

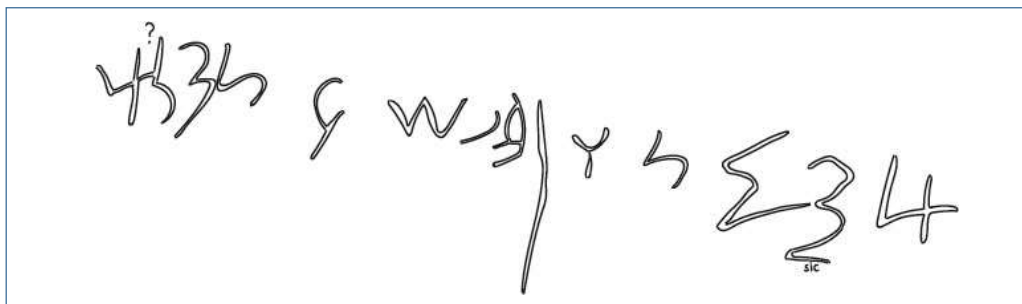


Fig. 8. Facsimile of graffito MS 5 mentioning the name of king Aspelta

<sup>24</sup> FHN II: 401.

Once this first hurdle is cleared, the rest of the graffito remains difficult to read because of the numerous secondary stokes that defaced the original engraving. In my facsimile (Fig. 8), I read: *isplto: qorelhli* “the great king Aspelta” but I must confess that, after the first “l”, the signs are guessed rather than actually read. The name *Isplto* is the Meroitic rendering of the royal name which is written *Jsplt* in Egyptian hieroglyphs and was transcribed “Aspelta” by Dunham. It probably means “another was given” and was a fit name for a younger brother who succeeded his older brother Anlamani at a tender age.<sup>25</sup> If my reading is correct, the name and its epithet can be in the vocative: the final article *-li* can be, either a long form of the simple article *-l* or this simple article followed by the vocative suffix *-i*. For instance, *mk-lh-l-i* can be either “the great god” or “o great god!” In any event, there is no sequence *yxno* or *pinni* in the rest of the graffito, so that Aspelta may be invoked, but he is not worshipped in the same manner as Talakahamani or Apedemak. His presence here can be explained by the fact that he was the first ruler, after the trauma of the Egyptian raid under Psammetichus II, to establish his residence in Meroe. This decision gave the Butana, which was hitherto a remote territory of the crown, primacy over the other regions of the kingdom.

### 5. The inscription of King Taneyidamani

The only living king attested in the graffiti of Musawwarat is Taneyidamani, whose reign was recently re-dated to approximately 170/150 BC.<sup>26</sup> His name is mentioned in the inscription MS 57 (Fig. 9-10). This official graffito is engraved in five lines on a loose block, which was found several decades ago by the archaeological mission in front of Temple 300. It was brought back to Berlin, where it is now kept in the archaeological collection of the Humboldt-Universität.

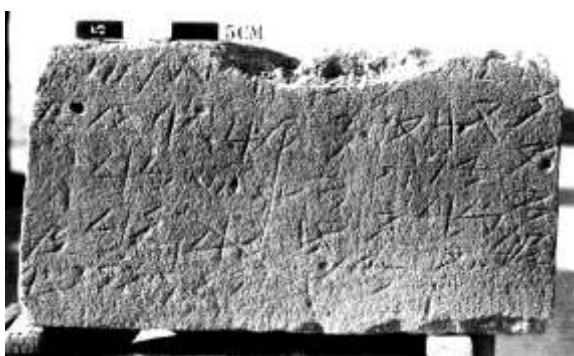


Fig. 9. Graffito MS 57 (Berlin, Humboldt-Universität)

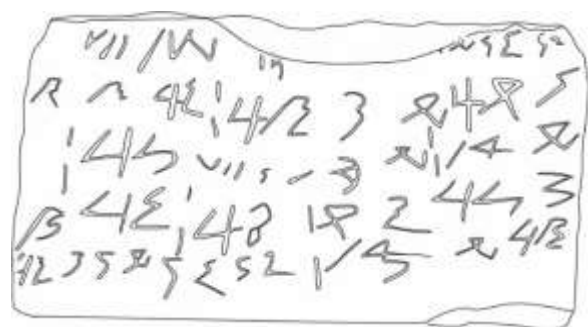


Fig. 10. Facsimile of graffito MS 57

<sup>25</sup> The first element, *is*, is probably cognate with Old Nubian *eis* “other” (Nobiin *icci*). The verb *pl* or *ple* “offer” is attested in the funerary benediction D (Rilly 2007: 173). The final suffix *-to* (var. *-te*), presumably a passive marker, is found in royal names such as Napatadakheto (Takideamani’s mother), literally “born of (the goddess) Napata”, or Amanishakheto “procreated by Amun”.

<sup>26</sup> Rilly 2017 : 236-238.

Its paleographical style (Archaic B) point to a date in the first half of the second century BC and this was precisely the time in which Taneyidamani lived. The inscription reads:

<sup>1</sup>*apedemk[i :] mse qo* <sup>2</sup>*rose* <sup>2</sup>*tneidmni* : *pinni*<sup>3</sup>*dte* : *dqeseli* : <sup>4</sup>*sliknewi* : *pin*<sup>5</sup>*nidte* : *apedemki*

Unexpectedly, the title that precedes Taneyidamani's name is not *qore* "king" but a compound word which is half erased, but can be confidently reconstructed *mse qorose* "royal son". This phrase was used later for local officers, a little like the Egyptian *s3 nsw* "royal son", which had become a title for the governors of the fortresses and the viceroys of Nubia. However, in this early period, it still designates the actual crown-prince. The text was therefore engraved at the time when he was still an heir to the crown, a date confirmed by the archaic spelling of his name, *Tneidmni*, and not *Tneyidmni*, like in the inscriptions dated to his personal reign. A tentative translation of the graffito MS 57 could be: "O Apedemak! Shower your gifts upon the royal prince Taneyidamani! Shower your gift upon the ??? of his house (?), O Apedemak!".

The verbal form *p-inn-id-te* was translated by using the Nubian languages: its root, *inn-*, can be found in some dialects with the meaning "to fill".<sup>27</sup> Taneyidamani is therefore asking Apedemak to "fill" him with benefits, in other terms "to shower his gifts upon him". The second part of the graffito cannot be completely understood. The word *d-*, pronounced /da/, "house (?)" in *d-qese-li* "his house (?)" is translated thanks to the mention of a raided territory in REM 1003/14 (*d-qebese-wi* "their houses"?) and through the linguistic comparison with Dongolawi Nubian *daa* "residence" and Nara *dà* "village". Unfortunately, the sequence *slikne-wi* is still not understood and parallels in other texts or in related languages are missing. As the philological study of Meroitic graffiti is virtually a novelty, it must be stressed that the tentative translations suggested in this article have a moderate degree of reliability.

This preliminary survey shows that the study of scriptural graffiti, although it bristles with difficulties, can significantly improve our knowledge, not only of the Meroitic language and script, but also of the society and the religion in the kingdom of Meroe. The link between the Meroitic religion and the royal ideology is clearly shown by the fact that the engraving of graffiti was directly connected with particular reigns and, perhaps, particular moments of these reigns. These inscriptions also provide for the first time evidence for the cult of ancestor kings in Meroe. Finally, the impact of this corpus for the study of Meroitic writing is enormous. In his introduction to the third volume of the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*, L. Török wrote in 1998: "the earliest preserved document in the cursive writing (...) similarly dates from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC" (FHN III: 732). Twenty years later, not only has the appearance of

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<sup>27</sup> See n. 20 above. A variant *yinnidte* occurs repeatedly in REM 1001 (Turaiev stela), which includes a long prayer to several deities. The prefixed element *p-* might be a variant of the causative *ps-*, well attested in funerary benedictions (cf. Rilly 2010: 69 and n. 95). Here and in several other instances, it is impossible that *p-* could be the form of *ps-* after assimilation of the consonant *-s*, as assumed in Hintze 1979: 71-72, because the verbal stem clearly includes an initial vowel /i/. The element *-id* is known, particularly in royal names (such as Taney-id-amani), as a verbalizing suffix (cf. Abdalla 1977: 157, 165, 172 and n. 41). Finally, the suffix *-te* is the marker of the second person singular of the imperative or the optative (Rilly 2010: 98).

the cursive script gone back a century and a half, but thanks to the graffiti of Musawwarat, many early texts that date from the reign of king Arnekhamani are now available, which was unthinkable just five years ago.

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