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AMUN IN MEROTIC NUBIA: THE CASE OF THE HAMADAB STELA

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The Egyptian god Amun had a preeminent role in the Nubian pantheon since the rise of the Napatan-Meroitic kingdom in the 8th century BCE. The diffusion of his cult during the Meroitic period (270 BCE–mid-4th century CE) finds a significant evidence in the two stelae flanking the entrance of the city temple at Hamadab (Fig. 1), nearly three kilometers to the south of the capital, Meroe. They bear the longest known inscription in Meroitic cursive script, which allowed the building to be attributed to Queen Amanirenas and Prince Akinidad, likely ruling in the second half of the 1st century BCE. The meaning of the text is still unclear owing to the incomplete decipherment of the Meroitic writing; nevertheless, the name of the god was clearly recognized.

The forty-two-line inscription on the larger, better-preserved stela names him eleven times in variant lexical forms (Fig. 2). The first mention, in line 18, uses the usual theonym 𐦠𐦩(𐦪) (*amn*), whereas in four occasions the form 𐦠𐦩𐦪𐦨 (*amnp*) was employed; in line 19 it is preceded by the attributes 𐦩𐦰𐦣 (*mlo* = good)[1] and 𐦰𐦱 (*lẖ* = great).[2] *Amnp*, also used in line twenty, between lines thirty-nine and forty, and in line forty as well,[3] was identified with Amun of Luxor[4] or Amun of Napata;[5] in the latter case, *Amnp* would be a variant of 𐦠𐦩𐦪𐦨𐦹 (*Amnpte*), which is attested in line 37 and identified the Napatan god by virtue of the association between theonym and placename.[6] According to Kormysheva,[7] the reading of *Amnp* as Amun of Napata is justified by a feature of Napatan inscriptions in Egyptian hieroglyphs, which sometimes indicated Amun of Napata as *Imn Np*, replacing the more common *Imn Npt*; the final *-t*

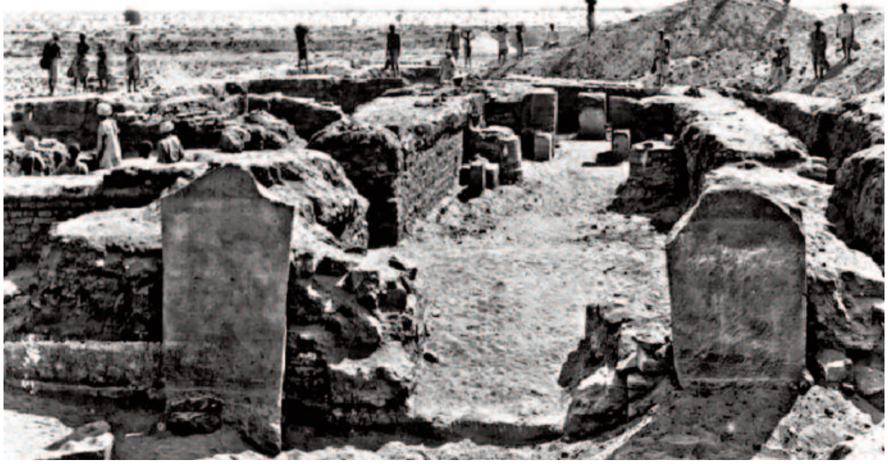

FIGURE 1: Hamadab: the discovery of the temple in 1914 (after S. Wolf, P. Wolf, H. Onasch H., C. Hof, and U. Nowotnick, "Meroë und Hamadab—Zwei Städte im Mittleren Niltal in den Jahrhunderten um die Zeitenwende: Bericht über die Arbeiten zwischen 1999 und 2007," *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 2 [2008]: abb. 62).

FIGURE 2: Hamadab: one of the stelae found flanking the entrance of the temple (after Wolf et al. 2008, abb. 70).

was omitted following a practice of neo-Egyptian writing. The application of artifices of neo-Egyptian to the Meroitic writing, however, appears unlikely, whereas the more pragmatic approach by Hallof,[8] whose opinion can be shared, excludes that two different terms indicate the same form of a god in a single inscription: the identification of *Amnpte* with the Napatan god is generally accepted; therefore *Amnp* indicated Amun of Luxor, whose cult is known for the Meroitic world.[9]

In line twenty of the inscription *Amnp* is followed by the verb 𐦤𐦢𐦬𐦣𐦮 (*yiroh̲*), translated as "protects,"[10] and by the term 𐦩𐦸𐦡𐦥𐦢 (*mdewi*), which was recognized as a placename and hypothetically identified with Meroe by Hofmann.[11] The capital was more commonly read in 𐦦𐦡𐦸𐦡𐦥𐦢 (*bedewi/bedewe*),[12] as well as in 𐦦𐦡𐦬𐦣 (*bero*) by Griffith.[13] Nevertheless, inscriptions accompanying wall reliefs of the Amun temple in Naga report both Amun of Medewi and Amun of Bero; this excludes that both of placenames referred to Meroe and leaves doubtful the identification of *mdewi* in the Hamadab text.

Another form of the god is in the locution 𐦠𐦩𐦪𐦢 𐦠𐦬𐦬𐦡𐦲 (*amni arrese*), which was used twice—in lines twenty-nine and thirty-nine—in the larger stela of Hamadab and may be translated as "Amun living in Arre."[14] According to Griffith, the Meroitic Arre corresponds to the placename *ʿrrꜣsꜣ*,[15] reported in a stela of the Napatan king Nastaseñ in Egyptian hieroglyphs[16] and hypothetically indicating the area including the Lower Nubian site of *Mḥt*,[17] where the king put down a rebellion and took the local prince prisoner. Török drew on other evidence for Arre[18] and identified it as a site featuring an Amun temple under the *qore* Tañyidamani, maybe Wadi es-Sebua.[19]

Furthermore, the god is invoked as 𐦩𐦪𐦣(*mno*) three times in a row between lines twenty-seven and twenty-eight.[20] The repetition of the expression 𐦩𐦪𐦣 𐦪 𐦭𐦢 𐦡𐦴𐦡 𐦵𐦯𐦫 (*Mno n li eqe tẖñ*), although of unclear meaning, and the inclusion of the term 𐦠𐦪𐦵 (*ant* = prophet[21]) in the same sentence could suggest ritual acts by Akinidad quoted with his titles. The reasons for use or omission of the prefix *A–* in the name of the god are unknown: there is neither chronological discontinuity, as the two solutions are attested in contemporary texts, nor a stylistic element, as some texts report both forms.[22] Scholars consider them, however, substantially equivalent.[23]

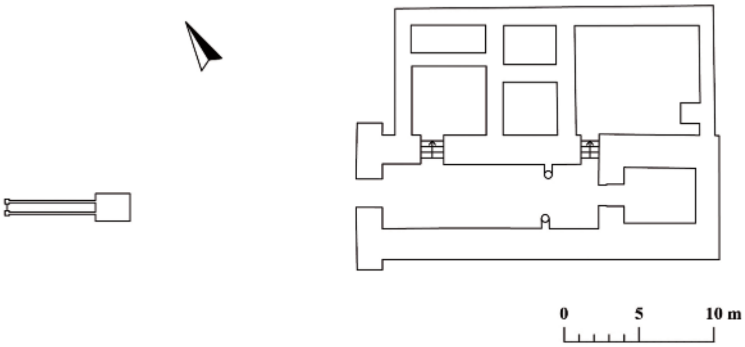

FIGURE 3: Hamadab: temple (drawn by Baldi after P. Wolf, U. Nowotnick, and F. Woß, "Meroitic Hamadab—A Century after Its Discovery," *Sudan & Nubia* 18 [2014]: fig. 1).

In summary, the inscription from Hamadab is very relevant because it stresses the devotion to different hypostases of Amun in a single sacral complex, according to a rarely attested selection, for which more evidence is found in the Amun temple at Naga.[24] He is the only deity mentioned in the text,[25] suggesting the consecration of the complex, whose unusual plan, formed of a longitudinal core enriched by a southern annex, cannot with certainty indicate a temple the god (Fig. 3): the setting of monumental stelae in only Amun temples confirms its attribution to the ram god.

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[1] F.L. Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1911), 41 note 1.

[2] Griffith 1911, 10, 23, 96.

[3] For other documents reporting *Amnp* see J. Leclant, A. Heyler, C. Berger-el Naggar, C. Carrier, and C. Rilly (eds.), *Répertoire d'épigraphie méroïtique*, 3 vols. (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 2000), nn. 0702, 1044, 1141, 1157, 1361B.

[4] Griffith 1911, 55; L. Török, *Der meroitische Staat 1* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1986), 111 ff.; C. Rilly, "L'Obélisque de Méroé," *Meroitic Newsletter* 29 (2002): 141; J. Hallof, "Yesbokheamani: der Löwe von Qasr Ibrim," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 89 (2003): 253–254.

[5] I. Hofmann, "Die meroitische Religion. Staatskult und Volksfrommigkeit," in H. Temporini, and W. Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der romischen Welt* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1995), vol. II, 2812 ff.; L. Török, *The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art: The Construction of the Kushite Mind, 800 BC–300 AD* (Leiden—Boston—Cologne: Brill, 2002), 316; E. Kormysheva, *Gott in seinem Tempel*: *Lokale Zuge und Agyptische Entlehnungen in der geistigen Kultur des alten Sudan* (Moscow: Institut für Orientforschungen, Russiche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 91.

[6] For other evidences of *Amnpte* see Leclant et al. 2000, 0407, 0672, 1044, 1072.

[7] Kormysheva 2010, 94.

[8] Hallof 2003, 253–254.

[9] For Meroe see Leclant et al. 2000, 1041; for Soleb see Leclant et al. 2000, 1035; for Faras see Leclant et al. 2000, 0521, 0534; for Arminna see Leclant et al. 2000, 1063; for Qasr Ibrim see Leclant et al. 2000, 0321, 0361, 1075–1080, 1082, 1142, 1149; for Karanog see Leclant et al. 2000, 0206, 0219, 0221, 0226, 0289, 0303, 0305, 0310, 0324, 0325; for Wadi es-Sebua see Leclant et al. 2000, 1044.

[10] C. Rilly, "Deux examples de décrets amulétiques oraculaires en méroitique: les ostraca REM 1317/1168 et REM 1319 de Shokan," Meroitic Newsletter 2007 (2000): 1108, note 15.

[11] I. Hofmann, *Material für eine meroitische Grammatik* (Wien: Afro-Pub, 1981), 309; Hofmann 1995, 2813. For other evidence for the term see Leclant et al. 2000, 0029A, 1044.

[12] Leclant et al. 2000, 0103, 0521, 0657.

[13] Griffith 1911, 64.

[14] The suffix *-se* has a locative function (Kormysheva 2010, 93).

[15] F. L. Griffith, "Meroitic Studies IV: The Great Stela of Prince Akinizaz," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 4 (1917): 172.

[16] T. Eide, T. Hägg, R. H. Pierce, and L. Török (eds.), *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum II: From the Mid-Fifth to the First Century BC* (Bergen: University of Bergen, Department of Classics, 1996), n. 84 l. 53. The stela, found at Dongola, had been originally set in the temple B 500 in Jebel Barkal (see Eide et al. 1996, 494).

[17] Identified with Abu Simbel by K. Zibelius, *Afrikanische Orts- und Völkernamen in hieroglyphischen und hieratischen Texten* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1972), 126 ff.

[18] In the Tañyidamani stele in Jebel Barkal (Leclant et al. 2000, 1044), as well as in a stele from the temple T in Kawa (Leclant et al. 2000, 0619D) and in two ostraca from Arminna West (Leclant et al. 2000, 1097) and Wadi el-Arab (Leclant et al. 2000, 1016). See also F. Hintze, "Die Struktur der "Deskriptionssätze" in den meroitischen Totentexten," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 9 (1963): 26; F. Hintze, "Some Problems of Meroitic Philology," in F. Hintze (ed.) *Sudan in Altertum 1. Internationale Tagung für meroitistische Forschungen in Berlin 1971* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 324.

[19] This site houses an Amun temple erected under Ramesses II; nevertheless no data on the Meroitic phase of the building are available.

[20] For other evidences of *mno*, see for example Leclant et al. 2000, 0405, 1044.

[21] From the Egyptian *ḥm-nṯr* (see Griffith 1911, 57; Hintze 1963, 10, n. 51; L. Török, "Some Comments on the Social Position and Hierarchy of the Priests on Karanog Inscriptions," in E. Endesfelder, K.H. Priese, W.F. Reineke, and S. Wenig (eds.), *Ägypten und Kusch* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1977), 416.

[22] In addition to the Hamadab case, in the quoted stela of Tañyidamani.

[23] Kormysheva 2010, 91.

[24] The inscriptions in Meroitic hieroglyphs flanking the wall reliefs report four forms of the god: Amun of Thebes (Leclant et al. 2000, 0023, 0025, 0036, 0038), Amun of Naga (Leclant et al. 2000, 0024, 0027, 0035, 0037), Amun of Bero (Leclant et al. 2000, 0031), Amun of Medewi (Leclant et al. 2000, 0029). This temple was built under Natakamani, whose reign can be likely dated to an unidentified period between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE.

[25] Hofmann 1995, 2840; M. Zach, and H. Tomandl, "Bemerkungen zu den Amunheiligtümern im Süden des meroitischen Reiches," *Beitrage zur Sudanforschung* 7 (2000): 132.