



A Voice from the Past: Analysing a Meroitic Cursive Inscription from the Temple of Amun M.260.

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ABSTRACT

Unearthed from the sands of Meroe, a rectangular Nubian sandstone block, fractured into two fragments, preserves inscriptions in Meroitic cursive. The left fragment, bearing the inscription, is housed in London (Petrie Museum UC 44568), and the right fragment is preserved in Swansea (University of Wales, Egypt Centre EC 1304). This block was discovered by John Garstang during the 1909–1910 excavations in the Temple of Amun M.260. This study aims to decipher the Meroitic inscription by re-examining the text, analyzing its linguistic and stylistic features, and conducting a comparative analysis with other Meroitic texts to identify recurring symbols and phrases. Additionally, the block features a graffito depicting a prone figure, an animal's tail, and ankh symbols, which reflect Meroitic religious beliefs. The presence of finger-drilled holes suggests pilgrimage practices, while traces of textile designs provide insights into Meroitic artistic conventions. Through iconographic and comparative analysis, this research highlights the significance of the religious and ritual fragments within Meroitic society.

INTRODUCTION

During the Meroitic period, Kushite religion retained numerous practices from the Napatan era, many of which were derived from ancient Egyptian religious traditions. This included the upkeep of temples dedicated to Egyptian deities, such as Amun, the state god of Kush and protector of the royalty in Meroe as well as the preservation of burial customs rooted in Egyptian traditions, which featured invocations of underworld gods, notably Osiris (Yellin 2012; Yellin & Wellesley 1995, 2869-2870). In the Butana region, Meroe emerged as a prominent hub for the worship of Amun, hosting temples dedicated to various forms of Amun, including the Amun of Thebes, Amun of Meroe, and other regional variations. These temples became central to the religious and political life of the region, reflecting the importance of Amun in Nubian theology up until the Meroitic Kingdom's final days (Wolf 2006, 240). There were practical and direct forms of interaction between the gods and individuals, along with meaningful connections between temples and the broader society. The temples functioned as centers for preserving and promoting the historical memory and cultural identity of Kush (Török 2002, 264). Thus, there was no clear distinction between official religion and popular religion, as religious practices in both contexts overlapped in a harmonious and integrated manner (Victoria 2018, 185). People from all social classes in Meroitic society made pilgrimages to the various sacred sites, such as Amun temples. They inscribed messages on the

temple walls to express their faith and religious beliefs. These pilgrims sought divine guidance, healing, and spiritual growth through their journeys (Yellin et al. 2012, 14). Graffiti served as a common form of devotional expression, often depicting offerings and religious symbols. These inscriptions reflect cultural traditions and personal spiritual experiences associated with pilgrimages to sacred sites (Emberling & Davis 2019, xv-xvi). These temple graffiti represented personal religious devotion and served as one of the ancient forms of prayer. Pictorial graffiti were, therefore, a type of prayer that the nonliterate could leave. Literate worshippers left hundreds of short prayers, often including the supplicant's name in Meroitic and, in rare cases, Egyptian, addressing the god(s) of the site. (Yellin 2012, 138). The Temple of Amun M.260 in Meroe¹ is associated with the reigns of several Meroitic rulers, including Amanishakheto, Amanikhabale, Amanitore, and Natakamani.² They played significant roles in promoting the worship of Amun in the region (Rocheleau 2008, 41). The inscriptions of the temple likely reinforced the king's divine right to rule, referencing coronation rituals, or offerings to Amun, linking the temple to state ideology. Some inscriptions commemorate pilgrimage journeys, suggesting the temple's unique role as a departure point for coronation routes after Meroe became the capital. This refers to the temple of Amun Nete, which was a key religious site in Meroe. During Garstang's initial excavation season (1909 – 1910), a sandstone block featuring a carved graffito and Meroitic cursive inscription was discovered (Fig. 1) on the steps of Room M. 275 (Fig. 2) (Garstang et al. 1911, 70-71).

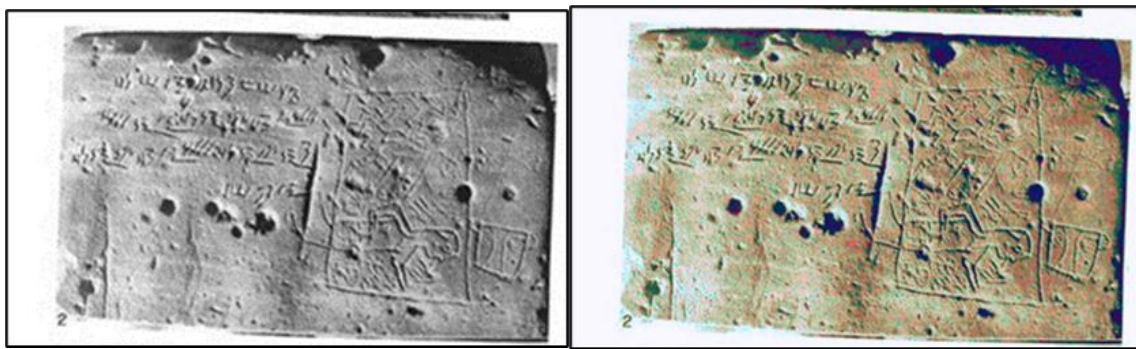


Fig.1 (a) Graffito and cursive inscription from the steps in the Temple of Amun, Spot No.275 (Garstang et al. 1911, pl. XIX.2). (b) DStretch for the Photo by Mohamed Ibrahim.

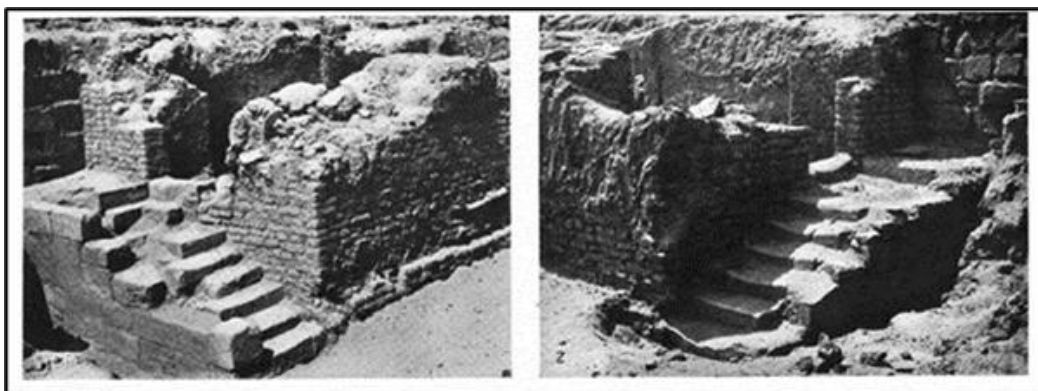


Fig.2 (a) Steps (L) leading to Hall 276. (b) Steps (R) Stuccoed panel, 276, (Garstang et al 1911, Pl. IX 1,2).

A rectangular Nubian sandstone block was found at Meroe in the Amun temple M.260, in room M.275. It was broken in two fragments, which were stored in two different museums. The larger left part (with the inscription) is exhibited in London (Petrie Museum LDUCE-UC44568 and P.DC-WEC9/S4) and the right part in Swansea (University of Wales, Egypt Centre EC

1304) (Fig. 3). At present, neither of the two fragments is on display; both are securely stored at their respective locations.³

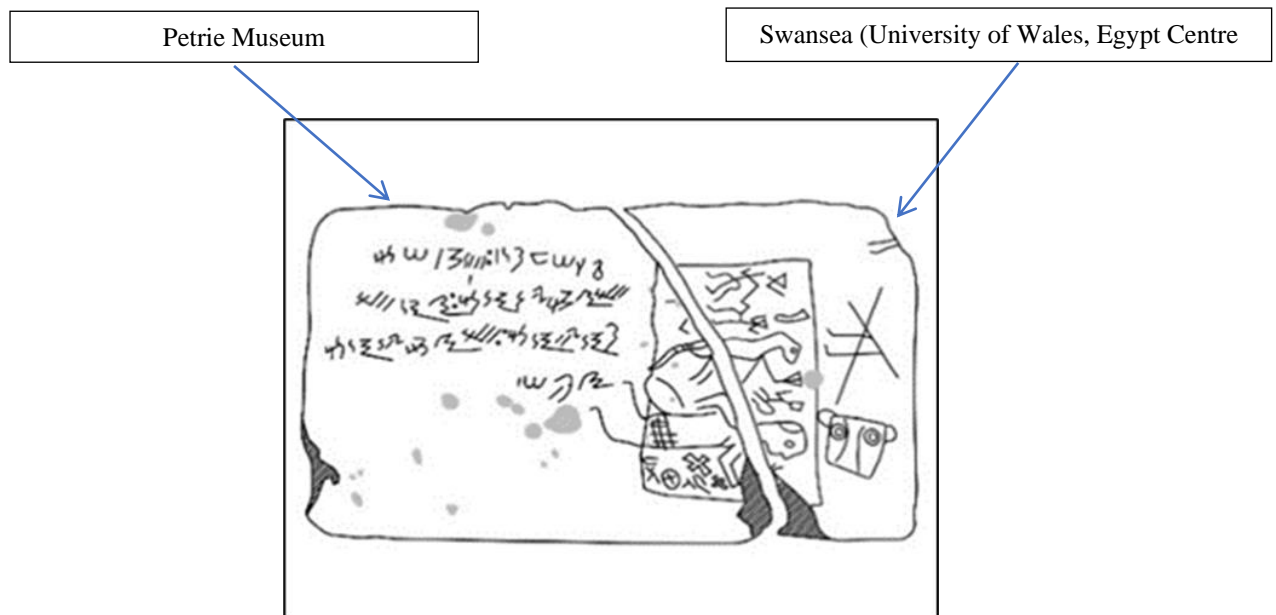


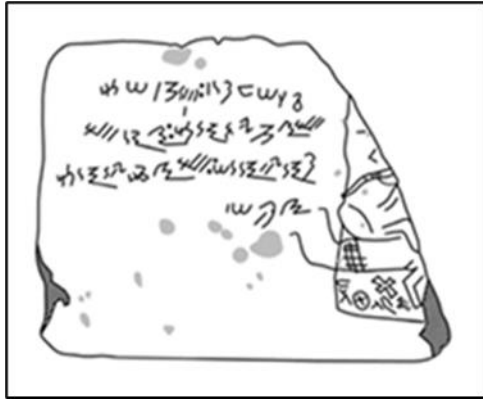
Fig. 3 Facsimile of the Block, composed of two fragments, by Mohamed Ibrahim.

1-THE PETRIE MUSEUM FRAGMENT (THE LEFT SIDE)

The fragment is referenced in the publication REM 0413. It measures 39.0 cm in height, 30.4 cm in width, and 7.3 cm in thickness. It has one flat, sawn side with two raised edges, creating a triangular section and a raised rectangular area. The opposite side, which is darker and weathered, bears horizontal lines of incised cursive Meroitic script on the left, while on the right, a fragment of a scene is faintly visible with light incising (Fig. 4).



Fig.4 (a) The back side of the block from the Petrie Museum database. (b) The front side of the block is from the Petrie Museum database.



(c)



(d)

Fig. 4 (c) The facsimile of the left fragment of the block by Mohamed Ibrahim. (d) The left fragment of the block now (Photo by the author).

TRANSCRIPTION

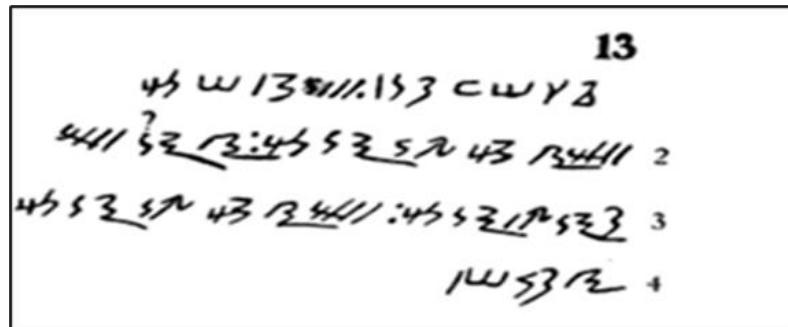


Fig.5 Griffith's Transcription (Garstang et al 1911, p. 71, pl. LXVIII, 13).

- ¹ 4 5 ω / 3 9 / / 1 : / 5 } < ω b 6
- ² 4 / / 1 9 3 1 3 : 4 5 9 3 9 2 4 3 1 3 4 / / 1 2
- ³ 4 5 9 3 9 2 4 3 1 3 4 / / 1 : 4 5 9 3 / 2 9 3 }
- ⁴ / ω 9 3 1 3

TRANSLITERATION

(1) According to Griffith (Garstang et al 1911, 70 –71, Pl. LXVIII, 13).

- ¹ *wbr ḥm lo: yesor li*
- ² *yinsidekeli: nkeyi*
- ³ *mkedokeli: yinsdekeli*
- ⁴ *nmero*

(2) According to Heyler (Heyler 1966-1967, 132 n.91, Haycock 1971, 309).

w-br ḥ-mlē-y šēre-i yi-nši- deke-li: nke-yi Mke- dēke-li: yi-nši-deke-li: nḥe-rē.

(3) According to Hallof (Hallof 2024, vol.7, 58).

¹ *wbrḥmlo: ye sorli*

² *yinsidekeli: nkeyi*

³ *mkedokeli: yinsidekeli*

⁴ *nmlro*

TENTATIVE TRANSLATION

(1) *wbrḥmlo* (Personal Name), Oh Osiris!

(2) It's satisfying the notable revered (Designation of *wbrḥmlo*), *Nkeyi* (Personal name).

(3) Oh Makedoke! It's satisfying the notable revered (Designation of *Nkeyi*).

(4) *Nmlro* unknown from other texts.

COMMENTARY

The translation of the text, beyond no doubt, proves challenging due to the lack of decipherable content. Singular forms in temple inscriptions are often interpreted as personalised prayers directed to individual deities (Rilly, 2020, 51). Amun and Osiris serve as good examples of deities represented in monumental art while also being objects of personal devotion through amulets and graffiti. These two deities hold substantial significance, reinforcing their connection to the primary religion and potentially indicating a fusion of worship and appropriation. Typically, the inscriptions begin with the name of the invoker, followed by an invocation to the funerary god Osiris (Yellin & Wellesley, 1995, 2873), emphasising his many positive attributes. This is succeeded by the name of the deity (Amun) and then another name, often that of the invoker's parent or ancestor. Based on this interpretation, the proposed translation seems plausible.

(1) *w b r ḥ*: Ⲙ ⲃ ⲛ Given the simple structure of the name.

w: Stele from Qasr Ibrim, REM 1141 [QI 1964/1] (Edwards 2007, 82-90, Hallof 2020, 11-12).

br: Ⲙ ⲃ ⲛ of Akinidad, *Inscr.* 92/6, 12, ci/ *Inscr.* 94/14, 20, 28, 29 *abr* "Man" (Griffith 1916, 123, Zyhlarz 1956, 25), *br*: a late equivalent (Rilly 2007, 292).

ḥ:⁴ value ya (Rilly 2011, 13), means "boon (?)" (Abdalla 1973, 21), *ḥ* (kh) (Griffith 1916, 112), Great, Offer alms (Winter 2000, 10). The word *ḥ* can only be a variant writing of the verb *ḥr* - "to offer", *ḥ* as a word in its own right because it must fulfil the function of a verb according to the Meroitic sentence schema.

m l o: ⲙ ⲗ ⲟ adj. "Good" and "nice" (Griffith 1911, 41 no.1, Priese 1971, 285, Lipiński 2011, 98), would sometimes be used as an equivalent of the Egyptian *m3^c ḥrw* (Griffith 1922, 574). It might be part of a name, whether human or divine (Rilly and De Voogt 2012, 18). The literal translation of this sentence would be "the good (person/object called) *w-br-ḥ*".

ye: Ⲣ /// prefix. Hallof noticed the misplacement of the prefix *ye-* and suggested a new transliteration *wbrḥmlo: ye* with *-ye* as a common ending for personal names (Hallof 2024, vol.7, 58). The word divider after *wbrḥmlo* is partially strange because the upper dot is melted with the first stroke of the letter *y*. This indicates that the word divider was wrongly chiselled

and later "hidden" by the stroke of the sign *y*. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the final *e* was carved later and positioned slightly higher. It appears that the scribe initially omitted the *-ye* ending and had to add it afterward. However, he did not have enough space to position it correctly.

wbrhmlo: / 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢 (REM 0413 is the only example): "personal name 'the good *wbrh*'".

The attached *ye* in *wbrhmlo*: *ye* is "a formative suffix for PN" (Hallof 2022, vol.2, 534).

sorli:⁵ 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢 also 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢 as theonym (Rowan 2006, 110). *sorli* means the (god) "Osiris". The inclusion of Osiris (*A*) *sor*, "Osiris" (Griffith 1912, 12). The earlier form *asori j/-us* /and

the later form *sori* (Rowan 2006, 197, Rilly 2007, 293). 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢: was first composed, then was changed by removing parts of it and making deeper cuts to 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢 (Garstang et al 1911, 70–71, Pl. LXVIII, 13). *li* is the determiner (singular), whereby it can be inferred that *yesor* is also a nominal form because this structure is a nominal phrase (Rilly 2016, 8). *sorli*: "oh Osiris!" *sor* (= *asori* – „Osiris“) + *l* (article) + *i* (vocative) (Hallof 2022, vol.4, 1189).

(2) *yinsidekeli* 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢: according to Abdalla *yinsidekeli* is a name containing the verb - *d* (i,o) "to give"; *yi-n--si--de-----ke-----li* (Abdalla 1973, 26). *yinsideke*, is the "designation of a person", i.e., of *wbrhmlo*, *yinsidekeli* is the "definite form" (noun + article *li*) (Hallof 2022, vol.2, 429). Formula E *nš -deke-l⁶* which is similar to this graffito *w-br h-mle-y šere-i yi-nš-i deke-li: nke-yi: Mke- deke-li: yi-nš-i-deke-li: nhe-re*, which is certainly addressed to Osiris, associated as always with Isis (Haycock 1972, 309). If the whole complex is regarded as substantivated verbal complex (Abdalla, Meroitic personal names, PhD. theses 1969, 4), (*yi-* verbal prefix + *nsideke* = *nse doke* = designation of the gift from the benediction formula E + *-li* the article) an interpretation of the word as "the *nse-doke*-performer" may be possible. Still, this suggestion is contradicted by the fact that there is no evidence of a variant writing of *nsi* instead of *nse* and no variant writing *deke* for *doke* (REM 0413 is the only example).

nkeyi 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢: "Personal name?", - *yi* Suffix of proper nouns (Meeks 1973, 6-8) (no other examples, only REM 0413) (Hallof 2022, vol.4, 984).

(3) *mkedoke* 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢: (Griffith 1911, 65, pl.XXIII), theonym "Amun". 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢 (Griffith 1916, 113, Meroe 13/3 Inscr.94/6.) *Mk*: God (Griffith 1911, 34, Griffith 1912, 68 (index, Zyhlarz 1956, 26, Hintze 1960, 146). *Makedoke* (name of a god), 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢 *mkedokeli* "oh Makedoke!" (Hallof 2022, vol.3, 906-908). The divine name *Makedeke* 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢 is interpreted as "the great god," being recognised as a form of the god Amun, often linked to the crown prince's name on the columns of Naga, *Inscr.* 34, and Amara, *Inscr.* 84, 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢 (Griffith 1912, 12). This suggests a religious context for this block. The Throne name with Amun, in contrast, establishes a connection with the conventional titles of "Son of Ra" that incorporate the dynastic god's name (Eide et al 1998, 911). In recent inscriptions, *mk* appears in the names of the Meroitic "Lion-Gods" *Apede-mak* and *Pede-mak* (Lipiński 2011, 97). 𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢: May the name of the lion; the word occurs, probably as that of a god, on the columns of Naga and Amara (*Inscr.* Nos.34, 84) (Garstang et al. 1911, 70–71, Pl. LXVIII, 13). It seems like a divine name (Hallof 2022, vol.3, 906). We can compare the title *MŠMKD𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢* related to high officials with *MK𐩧𐩨𐩠𐩣𐩪𐩬𐩪𐩠𐩢𐩪𐩠𐩢* from Kalabsha *Inscr.*

946-7 with Naga *Inscr.* 34, Amara *Inscr.* 84 (Monneret de Villard 1960, 118). Although the inclusion of *Makedoke* alongside Amun in the so-called royal protocol supports the view that *Makedoke* may be identified as an independent deity. However, the connection of the name to the god Amun in this inscription is a more acceptable interpretation.

(4) *nmlro* / ω ς β: it is more likely that a verb (more precisely a verbalised noun) is hidden in it. *nmlro* is the “last word of an invocation of the god Makedoke” (only REM 0413) (Hallof 2022, vol.4, 966).

The two sentences show a parallelism:

wbrxmloye sorli yinsidekeli -- nkeyi mkedokeli yinsidekeli

The three elements are: a personal name followed by the name of a divinity followed by a substantivated verbal complex. The grammatical function of the three elements is subject–object–verbal complex which follows the S-O-V schema of Meroitic sentence (Rilly 2020, Millet 2005). *nmlro* forms the final word. It must be a complete sentence: the only possible identification of the word is either an apposition (which needs the ending-li) or a verbal complex (which needs the ending -o, the copula). The latter is present suggesting that *nmlro* is a verbal form.

On the right side of this fragment, a lightly incised scene is visible, depicting the lower portion of a deceased or prone figure lying across a rough rectangular shape. Behind the figure is part of an animal's tail (armed serpent), and beside him are *ankh* signs. These signs symbolised a powerful life force, and often adorned the walls of Meroitic temples (Fig.6). These symbols are prominently displayed on the walls of the Temple of Amun at Meroe, representing a significant singular religious concept (El-Hassan 1997, 34). Drawing comparisons with medieval Nubia and Coptic Egypt, the finger-drilled holes in the block may have been connected to pilgrims consuming the powder, possibly for its magical healing or fertility-enhancing properties. These holes also served as marks for the pilgrims' presence. Most are perfectly circular, indicating they were created using a drilling technique (Fig.7). The fragment likely includes part of the fringe design of a textile depicted on the lower part of the man's body (Davis et al. 2019, 166-167).



Fig.6 The facsimile of the inscription on the Petrie Museum Fragment, by Mohamed Ibrahim.



Fig.7 Finger-sized holes, Graffito T41, El-Kurru Temple Ku.1500 (Davis et al. 2019, 162).

2 -THE EGYPT CENTRE FRAGMENT (THE RIGHT SIDE)

The fragment, catalogued as EC1304, (Fig.8) is currently stored at The Egypt Centre, Swansea University. Measuring 21.9 cm in height, 29.5 cm in width, and 7.5 cm in thickness, it features part of the graffito on the right side of the block. This includes the full face of a lion, the head of a deceased or prostrated man, and various religious motifs such as depictions of men and animals, offering a detailed representation of religious symbolism (Garstang et al 1911, 70-71, Porter and Moss 1975, 237).

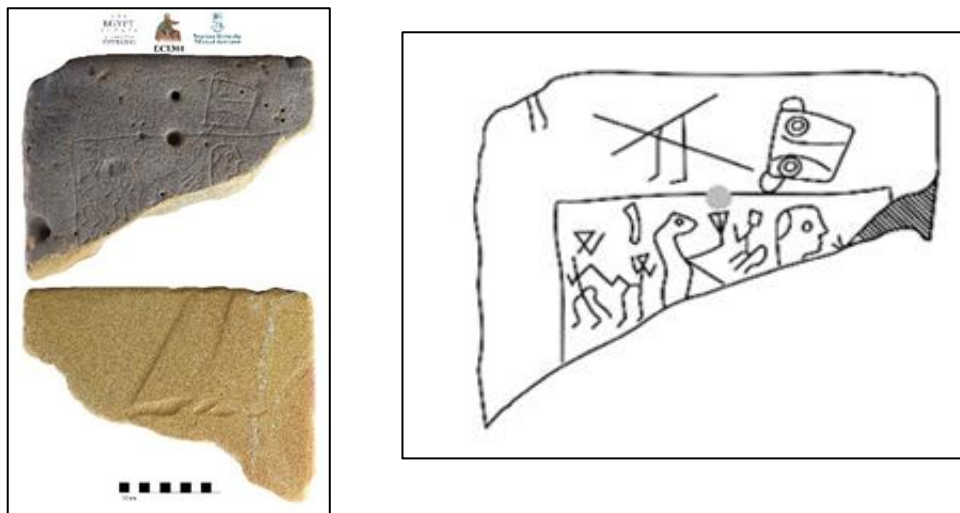


Fig.8 (a) The right fragment of the block (front and back) (The Egypt Centre's Photos). (b) Facsimile of the Fragment by Mohamed Ibrahim.

The position of the dead or prostrate man is interpreted by comparing this scene with another from the tomb of *Dhwty-hṯp* at Debeira (Säve-Söderbergh 1960, 38-39, fig.10, pl.XV B).

The figure of a dead or prostrate man from a comparative perspective, the sight of a dead man or someone lying on the ground can be mistaken for a man prostrated in worship. However, when comparing these positions, the position of the hands differs significantly. In prostration, the hands are placed on the ground, palms down. In contrast, the hands of a dead man or someone lying on the ground may be positioned in a variety of ways, such as by the side of the body or folded across the chest. Secondly, the head position also varies. In prostration, the forehead is placed firmly on the ground, while the rest of the face is raised slightly. In contrast,

the head of a dead man or someone lying on the ground may be tilted to one side or resting directly on the ground. Finally, the overall body posture provides further clues. In prostration, the body is kept straight and the back is arched. In contrast, the body of a dead man or someone lying on the ground may be slumped or twisted. By applying these observations to the two scenes, the man in the scene of the tomb is prostrating in worship (Fig.9) whereas the block shows a deceased or reclining man (Fig.1, 3).

Identifying the representation of a dead man on this block, which is considered to have originated from a religious context, leads to the consideration that this person might represent a human sacrifice.⁷ The concept of human sacrifice in Meroitic religious practices was first proposed by Garstang during his excavation of this temple (M.260), in which he uncovered a skeleton in the central sanctuary. He suggested that the position and context of the burial might indicate a human sacrifice (possibly representing Amun himself) during the temple's dedication. Alternatively, it could be the burial of a royal figure placed behind the high altar in the most sacred area of the temple. Two additional burials were found in chambers behind the shrines on either side of the main one (Zach 2010, 546-547). However, this interpretation cannot be applied to the block under study, as the posture of the figure makes the presence of holes indicating symbolic impalement nearly impossible.



Fig.9 A man is seen prostrated in the customary posture of showing respect to his superior in the context of tax or tribute delivery (Säve-Söderbergh 1960, p.38-39, fig.10, pl. XV B.)

Furthermore, graffiti appearing alongside a text also appear on block REM 1259 from temple M. 291 discovered during Garstang's excavations in the city of Meroe. This block is adorned with a pilgrim's graffito, featuring remnants of Meroitic cursive inscriptions, and an incised standing man of either a king or a god. However, the current whereabouts of this block are unknown and the relationship between the graffito and the text is uncertain (Fig.10) (Török 1997b, 144).

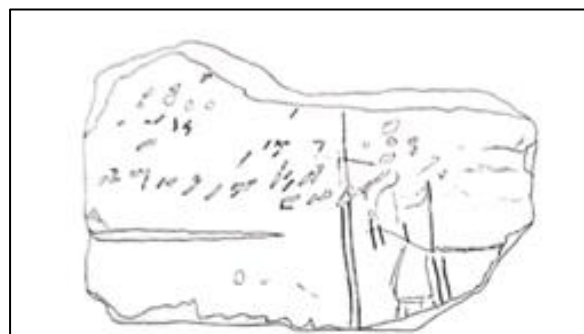


Fig.10 Graffito 291-8 (Yellen 2004, 416).

Although the connection between the graffito and the text is unclear, the motifs in this section of the block also carry religious significance. These motifs were commonly used in the decoration of pottery vessels from the same period, as well as in graffiti found in temples and pyramids. The winged or armed serpent behind the prostrate figure depicted standing vertically, may symbolise a lotus bud, in line with graffito T26 from the El Kurru temple Ku.1500, (Fig. 11). Above the serpent's head, there are finger-drilled holes. Two thin human figures are shown behind the serpent, carved with simple vertical lines to indicate the legs, torso, arms, and neck, standing in a worshipping pose. In front of the serpent, an animal is depicted standing with its arms raised in the same pose.

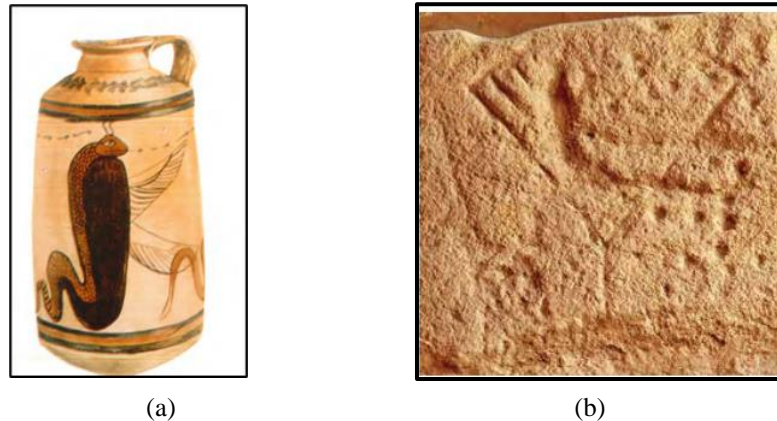


Fig.11 (a) The Winged Serpent on a Jug from Karanog (Woolley and Randall-Maciver 1910, PL 43, p.57, pl.49, no. 8168. G 301). (b) Graffito T 26, Temple El Kurru Ku.1500 showing a papyrus frond or lotus bud (Davis et al. 2019, p.156).

Outside the rectangle, there is a lion's head⁸ (Fig.12). Next to the lion's figure, an enigmatic geometric graffito resembles a pattern of X⁹, which could represent a human figure or perhaps indicate a votive altar (Fig.13) (Davis et al. 2019, 163).



Fig. 12 The motifs of the lion on the Pottery from Faras (Griffith 1924, Pl. L: 10; Table 16).

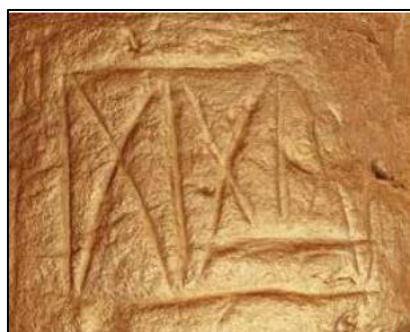



Fig. 13 Symbol – X in a Box, Graffito T42, Temple El Kurru Ku.1500 (Davis et al. 2019, 136).

3 – DATING

Tilted signs with lateral extensions are ubiquitous between 250 and 400 AD (Rilly and De Voogt 2012, 52). The secondary inscriptions from the temples located south of the Second Cataract, namely Kawa, Doukki Gel, Meroe, and Musawwarat are generally earlier than those from Lower Nubia and follow specific Meroitic patterns (Rilly 2022, 9). The shapes of certain characters in the block are unusual, such as the "d" which is depicted as  instead of the more common form dor λ ; this version of "d" is unfamiliar. Additionally, the writer sometimes used archaic epigraphy in character like "k" k, while characters like "h" \leftarrow , "l" \curvearrowright appear to be more recent. In addition, before the 1st century AD, specific linguistic forms were used in Meroitic inscriptions for the name of the god, *Soreyi-Asoreyi* for Osiris: this might suggest that the initial "a" vanished over time. Yet, it could also imply it served as a vocative or honorific particle (Aubin 2003, 20-23). Regarding the signs used as word dividers in Meroitic hieroglyphic and cursive texts, the three vertically aligned dots in "archaic" inscriptions are represented as ,, , whereas the two vertically aligned dots in "transitional" and "late" inscriptions are indicated in this text (Eide et al 1998, 763). Additionally, Grzymiski discovered a Meroitic graffito carved onto one of the gate's blocks in the same temple. It was analysed by Claude Rilly, who dated the text, which mentions Isis and Mut, to the mid-3rd century AD based on palaeographic evidence (Grzymiski 2017, 136). Due to these discrepancies, I propose for this Meroitic inscription the same date as Rilly and Hallof indicated (Hallof 2024, vol.7, 58) a later date or Tardif, specifically the 3rd century CE.

4- CONCLUSION

The Meroitic period preserved and adapted Egyptian religious practices, with the Amun worship central to Meroe's religious and political life (Yellin 1995, 2869-2870). Temples like Amun M.260 served as pilgrimage hubs, reflecting personal and cultural devotion through inscriptions and graffiti. The discovery of a sandstone block with a Meroitic cursive inscription during Garstang's excavations highlights the link between these religious practices and royal authority, reinforcing the king's divine right to rule. The Petrie Museum fragment from the Amun temple in Meroe highlights Meroitic religious practices through its structured inscription, combining personal names, deities like Osiris and Amun, and verbal complexes in a typical S-O-V format. Despite the challenges in deciphering the text, it reflects personalized prayers and a fusion of funerary and state religious traditions, providing insights into the spiritual and linguistic complexity of Meroitic society. The right side of this fragment reveals Meroitic religious symbolism, depicting a prone or deceased figure, ankh signs, and an armed serpent, highlighting themes of life and divine power. Finger-drilled holes suggest pilgrim rituals for healing or devotion, while the textile design adds insights into Meroitic cultural and artistic practices. The Egypt Centre fragment (EC1304) offers insights into Meroitic religious symbolism, depicting a lion, a deceased or prostrate figure, and other motifs. Comparative analysis suggests the figure represents a reclining individual, potentially linked to human sacrifice, though this remains unconfirmed due to a lack of symbolic impalement marks. The fragment highlights Meroitic funerary and spiritual traditions while leaving some interpretations open to further study. The depiction of the prostrate or deceased figure on the block suggests a distinction between worshipful prostration and a dead or reclining posture. Although the idea of human sacrifice in this temple, proposed by Garstang, is considered for this representation, the lack of symbolic impalement marks and the figure's pose make this theory unlikely. The REM 0413 is neither easy to read nor easy to interpret. The inscription consisting of four lines in a distinctive style might be associated with the invocation formula labelled as "style f"¹⁰ (Garstang et al 1911, 70-71) which is rare (Zach 2017, 267). The signs

are generally executed in poor style and their shape allows attribution to Meroitic Tardif (Hallos 2024, vol.7, 58). Nonetheless, the graffito appears to be of religious significance. However, the relationship between the graffito and the inscription is not clear. It must be denied, mostly because the inscription mentions not one but two individuals invoking two specific gods named in the text: Osiris and Amun. The graffito may be dated to the mid-1st century BC, which would link it to the construction date of the temple. On the other hand, the graffito is more ancient than the inscription, with the inscription likely to date to the 3rd century AD.

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NOTES

¹ The Amun Temple of Meroe, initially known as M.260, is the second-largest Kushite temple (Grzymski 2017, 134). In the mid-3rd century BC, Meroe City underwent significant architectural transformations. The old Amun temple from the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty was abandoned, and construction began on a new sanctuary, M. 260 (Török 1997a, 437), which was located near the Meroitic Palace (M.294) (Kuckertz 2019, 826). This temple featured a western naos and was enclosed by a 5-meter-thick temenos wall, covering an area of 200 by 400 meters. The enclosure separated sacred and royal structures, including a possible royal residence, from residential zones, marking a key shift in the city's urban and architectural landscape (Török 1997a, 437). It appears to have been built during the early Meroitic period. King Amanikhabale was initially dated by Dunham to around 50-40 BC, which aligns with the C14 date of 90 BC-AD 1 obtained from a sample in M.282. This suggests that he might have been the founder of the temple. However, more recent research has shifted the timeframe of Amanikhabale's reign to approximately AD 40-50, after the reigns of Teriteqas, Amanirenas, and Amanishakheto. The evidence suggests that the temple was most likely founded in the early to mid-1st century BC. (Yellin 2015, 14). It was discovered by John Garstang in 1909–1910 and has not been properly investigated (Garstang et al. 1911, 11-16). The second clearance occurred during the following season, and a new plan for the temple was drafted (Garstang 1912, 47). Ahmed Ali Hakem conducted extensive investigations on the Amun Temple grounds, resulting in Hakem's revised temple concept (Hakem 1988, 153). Friedrich W. Hinkel produced another plan nearly a decade later, modifying Garstang's plan (Hinkel, Abb. 52). During the two excavation seasons (January - February 2012; November 2014) conducted by Grzymski, he focused on studying the inner rooms of the Amun Temple and developed a confident new temple plan (Grzymski 2005, 51, Grzymski 2017, 136). Palace M.750, together with the Amun temple M.260 and the storage and granary complex M.740, formed a monumental architectural ensemble. This arrangement integrated religious worship, royal authority, and resource distribution both functionally and symbolically, offering a representative model of the state's organisational structure (Török 1997a, 518). The Amun Temple M.260 complex at Meroe included multiple surrounding structures classified as palaces, such as the M.900 series (923, 950, 995, 996, 998), M.294, and M.295. Additionally, M.750 was directly connected to the temple. The M.900 series' palaces, located in the northern section of the royal enclosure, lacked direct access to the temple but had two gates in the northern wall allowing the king to exit and approach the temple from the "port" side. Similarly, M.294 and M.295, situated in the southern part of the enclosure behind M.260, required the royal entourage to exit through a south-eastern gate and reach the temple from the "starboard" side (Schellinger 2017, 196).

² See: REM 1038 (Eide et al 1998, 837), REM 1041 (Eide et al. 1996, 723-724), REM 1252-1255 (Török 1997b, 126-127) and REM 0418, 0419 (Eide et al 1998, 902).

³ John Garstang's excavations at Meroe in 1909-1914 discovered numerous sandstone blocks, and some were repatriated to England. In 1959, David Marshall Dixon organised the Egyptian collection, highlighting Sudan's material importance. The findings were published in 1960 by Ken Griffin, and available online from 2020:

<https://egyptcentreollectionblog.blogspot.com/2020/03/reuniting-sandstone-blocks-from.html>.

⁴ Griffith does not specifically state what he thought to be the actual value of this sign. He only lists it as "guttural spirant" (Griffith 1911, 22).

⁵ Almost all funerary inscriptions contain an invocation to the gods, such as 'Oh Isis' or 'Oh Osiris,' which is placed at the beginning of the text. However, in a few cases, like REM 0331 and 0525, this invocation appears after the name of the deceased. This placement demonstrates its syntactic independence from the rest of the text, leading Griffith to identify these words as vocatives. Additionally, the invocation is frequently repeated in other places throughout the funerary text, especially toward the end (Rilly and De Voogt 2012, 10). For the full form *asori* with all its variants see (Hollof 2022, vol.1, 179-188).

⁶ Formula E is documented in fifteen examples, primarily originating from Karanóg and its surrounding areas, with two instances from Faras. Notably, two of these examples are found on epitaphs from Faras (REM 0129, 0528). The general formulation, quite uniform, is as follows: *nse doke-l: dole: /ol-k(e)te:* or *(y)i-dotedi-k(e)te*. The formula is uniform, consisting of two initial nominal phrases: *nse doke-l* and *dole*, followed by a verb complex with the roots *-/ol-* or *-dotedi-*. The first phrase includes a name *nse* and a positive adjective *doke*, while the second may involve a noun *do-* with a locative postposition. The verbal complex is frequent in two forms, and some texts, despite being late, display an archaic prefix *i-*, suggesting the formula could have been copied from an older text (Rilly 2007, 174).

⁷ Michael H. Zach concludes that human sacrifice in Meroitic temples was a complex phenomenon, intertwined with religious, political, and cultural dimensions. Meroitic evidence primarily comes from the temples of Amun and Apedemak, with little to no inscripational or iconographic records found in the sanctuaries of other gods and

goddesses in the pantheon. These sacrifices were likely to assert the king's divine authority and ensure societal cohesion while some evidence remains ambiguous (Zach 2010, 547-548). Human sacrifice remained a foreign practice to Kushite mortuary religion for a longer period (Török 1997a, 513).

⁸ The lion motif is commonly found in traditional iconography and royal inscriptions, symbolising power, dominance, and strength (Iannarilli et al. 2019, 55). The adornment of Meroitic painted pottery includes depictions of lions or lion-like faces, which have been found on vessels from the cemeteries of Karanog (Woolley and Randall-Maciver 1910, PL 43) and Faras (Griffith 1924, Pl. L: 10; Table 16). These lion-like faces bear a resemblance to the representations of Apedemak, suggesting that Meroitic artisans may have depicted their indigenous deity in the decoration of their pottery (El-Hassan 1997, 79). Considering the possibility that Makedoke could be the name of the lion itself, it may link the lion's head depiction to Makedoke rather than to Apedemak. However, the precise religious connotations of this amalgamation remain unclear. However, if the lion depiction indeed represents the Meroitic lion-God Apedemak, this combination could imply his connection with themes of creation, renewal, and vitality, symbolised by the lotus and ankh. The association between the lotus, the ankh, and the serpent appears logical, considering their traditional ties to life, creation, and resurrection (El-Hassan 1997, 147).

⁹ For more details about the pattern X, see (Davis et al. 2019, 163-165).

¹⁰ This formula is extremely rare: it is only attested in REM 0137B, 0311, and 0326, three offering tables of similar style. The first was purchased in Aswan, and the other two come from Karanog. The three examples are written as follows:

REM 0137B: *sr mh: yi-we-bh-te* (plural).

REM 0311: *sr [m]h- psi-l-ke*

REM 0326: *sr: mh psi: wi*

The initial phrase seems to include the noun *sr*; likely followed by variants of the adjective *mhe*, meaning "abundant." In REM 0445, an ancient and heavily eroded offering table from Meroë, the phrase *sr mlo* appears in an unclear context, where the same noun is followed by the adjective *mlo*, meaning "good," and possibly the verb *-l-*, meaning "to give." Based on a convincing argument, Hofmann proposed that *sr* could mean "meat" or "animal." The verbal phrase includes the rare verb *-we- / -wz-* in REM 0137B and 0326, and possibly the verb *-l-* ("to give") in REM 0311, although this verb is not attested elsewhere with the affixes seen here. Therefore, the meaning of blessing F might be something like: "give him / carve for him / carve for them abundant meat" (Rilly 2007, 175).

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صوت من الماضي: تحليل نقش بالخط المروي المختصر من معبد آمون M.260.

الملخص

كُشفت هذه الكتلة المستطيلة المصنوعة من الحجر الرملي النوبي في رمال مروي، وهي مكسورة الآن إلى جزأين وتحمل نقوشًا بالخط المروي. يُحفظ الجزء الأيسر الذي عليه النقش في متحف بترى (UC 44568)، بينما يُحفظ الجزء الأيمن في سوانزا في المركز المصري بجامعة ويلز (EC 1304). تم اكتشاف هذا اللوح بواسطة جون جارستانج خلال حفائر عامي ١٩٠٩-١٩١٠ في معبد آمون M.260. يهدف هذا البحث إلى إعادة قراءة النص وتحليل خصائصه اللغوية والأسلوبية، بالإضافة إلى إجراء تحليل مقارنة مع نصوص مروية أخرى لتحديد الرموز والعبارات المتكررة. وتحتوي الكتلة على جرافيتي يصور شخصًا مستلقيًا، وذيل حيوان، ورموز علامة عنخ، مما يعكس الصبغة الدينية للنقش. تشير الثقوب المحفورة في الحجر إلى ممارسات الحج، بينما توفر آثار التصاميم النسيجية رؤى حول التقاليد الفنية في مروي. من خلال التحليل الأيقونوغرافي والمقارن، يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على أهمية الأجزاء الدينية والطقسية في المجتمع المروي.

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بيانات المقال

تاريخ المقال

تم الاستلام ٣٠ مايو ٢٠٢٤

تم استلام النسخة المنقحة ٦ أغسطس ٢٠٢٤

تم قبول البحث في ٥ سبتمبر ٢٠٢٤

متاح على الإنترنت ١٩ فبراير ٢٠٢٥

الكلمات الدالة

كتلة حجرية مجزأة، متحف بترى، المركز المصري، الكتابة المروية، النقش، معبد آمون بمروي M.260.