Abstract

In the last years archaeological missions working in Sudan have been shining light on the ruling period of the Meroitic king Amanikhareqerem, whose name was only known from few objects until the end of the last century. Recently discovered temples bound to him in Naga and el-Hassa, made from different materials and techniques according to local availability and climate conditions, have improved our knowledge of the Meroitic kingdom. Both buildings highlight the coexistence of strong Egyptian influx and Nubian traditions in plan, artistic and devotional context. Furthermore, new epigraphic dates, in addition to the iconographical program of the Naga temple, have offered new elements to the controversial dating of Amanikhareqerem and to the Meroitic pantheon, especially regarding the autochtonous god Aritene.

Keywords

Meroitic kingdom, Amanikhareqerem, Aritene, Naga, el-Hassa
Inquiries on the Napatan-Meroitic kingdom, that flourished in ancient Nubia from 8th century BC to 4th century AD, behove us to evaluate its strong multicultural nature, which permeated several aspects of the Nubian society. Rich external influxes, especially coming from Pharaonic and Hellenistic Egypt, had a strong impact on the Kushite kingdoms. Nevertheless, it was not a simple introduction of foreign traditions passively received from culturally poor territories; a broad secular trade network and reciprocal territorial occupations allowed a profitable acquisition of manifold Egyptian customs, that were locally elaborated giving life to original solutions of a polymorphic society.

1. A LITTLE-KNOWN KING

The ruling period of the Meroitic king Amanikhareqerem can be well included in this composite picture, according to recent discoveries that have been throwing light on his figure. Until the end of the last century our knowledge of him was limited to four objects reporting his name1: two sandstone ram statues, respectively found by Frederic Cailliaud in 1822 at Soba (REM 0001) and by workers digging an irrigation canal in 1975 at el-Hassa (REM 1151); a stone medallion reemployed in the foundations of a modern enclosure close to the Apedemak temple in Naga; the so-called Omphalos of Napata (fig. 1), a miniature dome-shaped sandstone shrine brought to light by George Reisner inside the Amun temple at Jebel Barkal. The king leads two processions introduced by cartouches respectively reporting his Throne name nb-mIšt-Rē in Egyptian hieroglyphs and, more badly preserved, his Son of Rē name Amanikhareqerem in Meroitic hieroglyphs (REM 1004); this peculiar artefact, that has been interpreted in different ways, likely represented a sanctuary in the form of a circular plan reed hut, so-called gutta, well-known in Africa2. Following these occasional finds, the reign of Amanikhareqerem has been being better known thanks to the archaeological missions working at the Amun temple of el-Hassa and at temple N 200 of Naga.

2. EL-HASSA AND ITS RAMS

The temple of el-Hassa is one of the most interesting complexes brought to light in the territories of ancient Nubia in the last years (fig. 2)3. It com-

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1 His burial place is not known for certain.
2 In confirmation of this, in the Nastasen stela (second half of the 4th century BC; FHN II; 471 ff.) the words kIk(r), “shrine”, and Npy, “Napata”, are sometimes written with a hut-shaped determinative (Wenig 1978: 209).
3 A Sudanese-French mission led by Vincent Rondot has been working at the site: Lenoble and Rondot 2003; Rondot 2010a; 2010b; 2011; 2012.
FIGURE 1
Jebel Barkal, B 500, Shrine so-called *omphalos*. Sandstone. 1st century (Wildung 1997: cat. 288)

FIGURE 2
El-Hassa, Temple. 1st century (drawn by Baldi after Rondot 2012: fig. 2)
bines typical aspects of the Nubian Amun temples, as the building plan, and
more unusual elements, and represents a particularly significant expression
of Egyptian-Nubian syncretism, confirming and strengthening the long-lived
influx of the Pharaonic tradition on the Kushite culture. The temple is a lon-
gitudinal plan multi-roomed structure oriented E-W entering from a pylon,
as usual, and from three side entrances. Following an open courtyard and
the hypostyle hall, a vestibule leads to the sanctuary, flanked by side rooms.
The walls were made from the combination of red and mud bricks laying on
red bricks foundations, according to well-known Meroitic customs, whereas
sandstone was used for the columns.

A plastered reemployed red bricks processional avenue leads off the build-
ing, and is flanked with two groups of different-sized sandstone ram statues
(fig. 3); a rectangular plan kiosk made from red bricks separates the two
groups. Six statues have been uncovered, nevertheless the finding of fourteen
pedestals suggests that the complex originally held seven couples of rams,
probably including the two previously known statues. It is unclear when the
statue observed by Cailliaud was moved from el-Hassa, but the no finding of
Amun temples by Amanikhareqerem at Soba, the correspondence of style and
inscription, make likely that it was part of this processional avenue.

**Figure 3 – El-Hassa, Temple, Ram. Sandstone. 1st century**
*(Rondot 2012: fig. 3)*
The fleece of these rams is not in spiral curls, as in Meroe and Naga, but in scales, likewise to the ones in the temple of Amenothep III in Soleb, which represent the most ancient Nubian large-sized rams. The choice of the same Prenomen of Amenothep III, nb-m$^2$Aat-Ra, may confirm the association established by Amanikhareqerem with this pharaoh, considering the great attention paid by the kings choosing their Throne name. Amanikhareqerem was the first Meroitic ruler using this Prenomen, and only one among his successors, Amanitenmomide, made the same choice.

The engraving of inscriptions on bases of rams was unusual enough in Nubia; on the present knowledge the el-Hassa statues represent the only Meroitic case. The inscription, repeated on each ram, was written partly in Egyptian and partly in Meroitic hieroglyphs. Though Egyptian was commonly used on official Meroitic monuments until the fall of the kingdom in the 4th century AD, its joint employ with the local writing finds little evidence. This peculiar choice represents a further evidence of the Kushite archaism, highlighting the very profitable coexistence between the rich Napatan heritage and the coeval indigenous expressions.

The inscription, translated by Claude Rilly (Rondot 2012: 179), reads:

Oh, Amun Aritene, Amun of Tabakha, to the king of Upper and Lower Egypt Neb-Mâat-Ra, to the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands, Amanikhareqerem, given life, the ruler beloved of Amun, give life!

Tabakha (𓄙 Scarab) is probably the ancient name of el-Hassa; Amun of Tabakha may therefore indicate a new hypostasis of the god, that has not found other evidences till now. A significant element of this text is the inclusion of the term aritene (𓄱 Scarab) after the first mention of Amun. Aritene is known in a limited number of Meroitic inscriptions, but its exact meaning is unclear. Scholars working at el-Hassa firstly identified him with Harakthy (Rondot and Török 2010: 227); afterwards they preferred to hold the matter in abeyance (Rondot 2012: 180), although in the meantime the epigraphist of the Sudanese-French mission recognized in Aritene a well-attested hypostasis of Amun reading a text from Naga (Rilly 2011: 192-193).

The suggested reference to Aritene as divine epithet can be excluded after its occurrence in expressions with no gods’ names it could be associated to. Its role as attribute of Amun in the meaning of “lord of” or “guest in” before a toponym was first proposed by Fritz Hintze, referring to an inscription on

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5 In cursive characters Meroitic hieroglyphs, in regular Egyptian hieroglyphs.
6 The term was likely a toponym especially according to locative suffix –te (Wenig 1999: 681).
7 Reported as oral communication in Wenig 1981: 206. Such idea was later couched by Hofmann (1981: 348).
the entrance lintel of the Amun Temple in Naga reporting *Amni-lḥ-āritn-tolktt* (REM 0024)\(^8\), translated as “Great Amun, lord of Naga”\(^9\); nevertheless, the inscription of el-Hassa makes it unlikely, Aritene not being followed by a placename but inserted among two mentions of Amun.

Such construction in Naga justified other theories about *aritene*. According to Kormysheva (2010: 93), it was an epithet translating as “clement”\(^10\), but the recurrent inclusion of the term in sentences with no other divine names does not permit to embrace her idea. Zawadowski and Katznelson (2010: 78) read “worshipped god”, resulting from the doubtful translation of –*ne* as “worshipped” linked to –*arit* (“god”)\(^11\). In this context, the root *arit* could have justified the suggested generic reading of *aritene* as “god” (Priese 1968: 175; FHN III: 840).

Cartouches of Aritene on a fragmented faience round-shaped medallion, found at the royal cemetery of Meroe and hypothetically symbolizing Sun, led Karl-Heinz Priese to identify him as Sun god (1984)\(^12\). Nevertheless, a number of iconographical evidences, supported by philological comparisons, suggest that Sun was worshipped as god Mash (Griffith 1911: *passim*; FHN III: 954-955; Kormysheva 2010: 317-318)\(^13\); his association with Amun, giving life to the form Mash-Amani, would have represented the Meroitic version of Amun-Ra (FHN III: 955)\(^14\). In this sense, the proposed correspondence of Aritene to Ra (Zach and Tomandl 2000: 139), under the epigraphic evidence of Aritene both as independent deity\(^15\) and as figure linked to Amun\(^16\), cannot be confirmed.

In the light of what expounded, Aritene did not indicate a divine epithet or attribute, but can be considered a divine name identifying an autochthonous god, who was sometimes associated with Amun in a still unclear way. The

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\(^8\) The same expression is in REM 0035 and 0037, both coming from Naga.

\(^9\) For the translation of *lḥ* as “great” see Griffith 1911: 10, 23, 96.

\(^10\) In her opinion this translation is strengthened by the expression *Amni-āritn-tolktt* (REM 0027 and 0034, both from Naga).

\(^11\) In the Meroitic writing –*ne* was a nominal derivational suffix (Rowan 2006: note 21). Nevertheless, the volume of Isidor S. Katznelson was a posthumous edition of a Zawadowski’s work, therefore it includes anachronistic theses.

\(^12\) Afterwards he translated *aritene* as “heavenly” from the root *ari*– (“heaven”) ( Priese 1998)

\(^13\) The present Nubian term indicating Sun, *mashil*, could be derived from the ancient divine name, confirming the association with the star (Griffith 1911: 56). Sun worship finds evidence in a heterogeneous iconography (Kormysheva 2010: 315-317), often showing an anthropomorphic deity wearing a radiate crown: for Naga see Gamer-Wallert 1983: bl. 11a; for Gebel Qeili see Welsby 1996: fig. 68

\(^14\) See esp. REM 0430, reporting the invocation *Wosi Msnni* (“Oh Iside, oh Mash-Amon”).

\(^15\) See for example REM 0084, 0094, 1293.

\(^16\) See for example REM 0024, 0027, 0034, 0035, 0037.
cult of him, hypothetically known under Napatan rulers\textsuperscript{17}, spread in Nubia during the Meroitic period. He was often named, as well as other gods, in inscriptions honouring kings, and was included in Napatan and Meroitic royal names\textsuperscript{18}. In royal texts by Amanishakete (1\textsuperscript{st} century BC), Amanitore (1\textsuperscript{st} - 1\textsuperscript{st} century AD) and Kharamadoye (5\textsuperscript{th} century AD), kings and queens are heirs and descendants of Aritene\textsuperscript{19}, strengthening his strong tie with the royal family, as confirmed by the association with the dynastic god Amun in the el-Hassa inscription. Though the deification of the living sovereigns is not certain, it confirms that the royal cult exalted their divine descent.

3. THE EXPRESSIONS OF POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

In el-Hassa, another ram on a pedestal turned its back to the windowless and doorless rear building wall (Rondot 2012: 174). An altar was before the statue, that was destined to the popular devotion according to a solution which has the only known comparison in the Amun temple at Naga, built by Natakamani some decades before (Wildung \textit{et alii} 2011: 91-92, abb. 106). So far, fieldwork in the Kushite territories has not brought to light in fact contra-temples comparable to Egyptian ones, as real architectural structures reserved to popular devotion; the intermediation between gods and people was accomplished through cult images that were easily visible, in the form of royal or divine statues, in addition to external reliefs on temple walls. Such reliefs reported the principles of the official cults, as well as the god-king relationship, in a simple form that could be intelligible for the population, assuring the divine legitimation to the ruler in the eyes of his subjects.

The offering of natural curiosities, as oddly shaped quartzite and sandstone formations (Rondot 2012: 178), confirms the occurrence of popular cults in el-Hassa. In Nubia, such a custom is known in temple complexes in Jebel Barkal (Kendall 2009: 11), Kawa (Macadam 1955: 26), Naga and

\textsuperscript{17} This can be suggested from the personal names of some kings, as Akh-Aritene, ruling in the 4\textsuperscript{th} century BC (see Edwards 2004: 115) and Piankharitene, dated to the 7\textsuperscript{th} century BC (see Porter and Moss 1975: 230).

\textsuperscript{18} For example Ariteñyesebokhe, ruling between late 2\textsuperscript{nd} and early 3\textsuperscript{rd} century AD (see Welshy 1996: 209; Török 1997b: 206); for an interpretation of the suffix –yesebokhe see Rilly 2001b: esp. 366-368.

\textsuperscript{19} In Naga, a stele reads \textit{amnişhēto-ariteñ-qrne} (“Amanishakete heir of Aritene”) (REM 1293; Rilly 2011: fig. 219), and the same relation with the god is reported in texts linked to Amanitore (REM 0034), as well as in Amara in the expression \textit{amnitore-aritñl-mds} (“Amanitore, the heir from Aritene”) (REM 0084; Griffith 1917: 25; Macadam 1950: 45. The suffix -\textit{l}, usually employed as definite article, is however unusual for a divine name). In post-Meroitic times, during the 5\textsuperscript{th} century, the inscription by king Kharamadoye on the Mandulis temple at Kalabsha reads \textit{hrmdoye-qore-aritñl-mds} (“King Kharamadoye, heir of Aritene”) (REM 0094; FHN III: 1103 ss.; Millet 2003).
Soniyat (Zurawski 2005: 296), as well as in a funerary context (Kendall 1981: 28-29), and spread in many other cultures. The exact meaning assigned to these objects is unclear, nevertheless their placing in an offering area in Naga, that was devoted to the popular worship, seems to indicate their votive nature (Kröper 2014). So humble offerings were sometimes accompanied or replaced by more elaborate votive objects, usually works of local sandstone producing geometrical, animal and rarely human figures. The high stylization of these goods probably makes them donations by common people.

Furthermore, votive character can be likely recognized for Neolithic objects, especially weapons, noticed in the temple of el-Hassa as well as in the offering area of the Apedemak temple in Naga. The Kushite offerers could not know the age of these goods, probably coming from a funerary context; the donation of them was not aware of their antiquity but rather justified from the admiration for objects outside of the own culture and believed worthy of a consecration to the gods.

4. N 200: KING AS HORUS

The visible complex of el-Hassa was the result of two building phases. According to the excavators, some rams were already part of the processional avenue in the first phase of the temple: this would explain the different dimensions of the statues belonging to the two groups and would allow to attribute the building to Amun since its erection. Its original structure shared the plan of the other known sacral building of Amanikhareqerem, the temple N 200 at Naga (Kuckertz 2011) (fig. 4).

It is a little sandstone structure oriented N-S, placed along the street leading to the great Amun temple. Its consecration is unclear notwithstanding the rich parietal decorative program, that was partly reconstructed by excavators from walls and fallen blocks. In an unusual way Amanikhareqerem is the only royal figure, always shown alone before the gods, first of all on the pylon; on both towers he grasps a group of prisoners by a tuft of hair in order to smite them with a mace-axe, according to the traditional theme of the ruler triumphing over his enemies. The scenes are dominated by the subject of the divine family: divine couples and triads appear on the outer long sides of the temple, whereas the middle scene of the rear wall shows enthroned Isis in a papyrus thicket before a praying king. Though Horus at breast of Isis is missing, the parallels allowed to the excavators to hypothesize his presence.

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20 A German mission led by Dietrich Wildung and Karla Kröper has been working at the site.

21 This building has been being relevant for improving our knowledge of Meroitic temple iconography, it representing one of few sacral structures of Egyptian influence whose decoration has survived or could be partially reconstructed.
Horus was the symbol of the king, and the descent of the sovereigns from Isis was one of the cornerstones of the Napatan-Meroitic royal ideology\(^{22}\). In this sense, the main message transmitted by the reliefs of the temple seems to be the divine descent of the king and the legitimacy of his claim to rule. The goddess, referred to as “Mother of the God”, had in fact a primary role in the divine legitimation of the ruler, through the association of her and her son Horus with the Queen Mother and the king\(^{23}\).

The association between the two deities was a common theme in Kushite inscriptions and artistic media, and had the emblematic very recurrent expression in the intimate and strongly symbolic act of nursing. A serpentinite statuette of suckling Isis, stylistically dated to the 3\(^{rd}\) century BC, was brought

\(^{22}\) On this topic see Baldi 2016; id. forthcoming.

\(^{23}\) In a stela from File Isis, presented as mother of qore Adikhalamani (ca. 207-186 BC), sais: “(I) have granted you power (just) as (I once did to my) son [Horus]! (FHN III: n. 132 l. 1 of the scene in front of Isis’ legs).
to light in the temple of Amanikhareqerem at el-Hassa (fig. 5): head is preserved in addition to part of bust and arms. It shows well-defined long shaped eyes, flattened nose, prominent cheek-bones and plaits hairstyle. The goddess wears a skullcap and a wide necklace made from decorated bands and strings in relief. The right hand gives her left breast to the breast-fed. Her forehead presents a hole that likely held an uraeus, a diadem or a crown. In addition to a little statue of Osiris (Rondot 2010a: cat. 309), it could link also this temple to the divine descent of the king, but the disappearance of the decorative program, at least at the actual knowledge, does not allow to confirm it.

5. THE OCCURRENCE OF OUTER ALTARS

Each of the two known complexes of Amanikhareqerem was completed by an outer high altar oriented towards the sacral building and made from a square-plan filled structure whose top was reachable by a ramp (fig. 6)24. The occurrence of such altars in two temples of the same king is potentially

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24 For the el-Hassa temple see Rondot 2012: 172; for N 200 in Naga see Kuckertz 2011: abb. 78.
very significant considering the rarity of this architectural type in Meroitic Nubia. It is in fact attested only in the Sun temple in Meroe (Török 1997a: 111-12, fig. 13a) and in the Amun temples in Naga (Kröper and Krzyzaniak 1998: 205-206, figg. 2-3, pl. VIII), Awlib (Borcowski and Paner 2005: 56) and Hamadab (Wolf 2015: 115-117, pls. 1-2), all of them within the Butana boundaries. Further Kushite comparisons can be found in the Napatan Amun temples of Nubian pharaoh Taharqo (690-664 BC) in Kawa (Macadam 1955: 57-58, pls. 6, 10-11, XLIV/a-e) and Sanam (Török 2002: 133), close to the Fourth Cataract. These suggest an ancient tradition which was forgotten for centuries, at the actual knowledge, and was rediscovered by Meroitic kings.

These outer altars were clearly integral part of the religious complexes, but their exact role is still under discussion. In Kawa, according to the excavators’ suggestion, the altar had a role in the coronation rituals (Macadam 1955: 57)\(^{25}\); nevertheless, the idea cannot be for sure embraced because of the lack of a similar structure in the other two Amun temples, in Napata and Pnubs\(^{26}\), which held certainly the coronation rituals in Napatan times.

\(^{25}\) Epigraphic sources justified the suggestion (see esp. FHN II: n. 84 ll. 24 ff.). Cf. Török 1997a: 112.

\(^{26}\) See Török 1997b: 215 ff.
Furthermore, although the coronation ceremonies of the Meroitic kings are not fully known, such a hypothesis is not acceptable for the Meroitic period. In Meroe, an altar linked to coronation rituals would have been likely erected in the close Amun temple, that was indissolubly bound to the ruling dynasty and had a proper throne room, rather than in the Sun temple. Moreover, it would be inexplicable the erection at Naga of two twin altars referred to two temples very close each other and probably functioning at the same time. It is unlikely that these structures had a role when the king visited the temple as well\textsuperscript{27}.

A badly preserved relief on the western side of the lower podium of the Sun temple may offer an interpretation about the function of these structures (fig. 7)\textsuperscript{28}. In a background reproducing the real architecture of the complex, a ritual act is performed on the altar; it is reachable by a ramp, walked up by a prisoner followed by a guard (Garstang and Sayce 1912: 48; Hinkel 1985: 224). Above the altar, the relief would preserve remains of a sacrificial fire; the relief was probably the visible part of a wider scene on the other sides of the podium, and it would have represented the rite of the destruction of the enemy; the supposed human sacrifice would have been the climax (Garstang

\textsuperscript{27} For this suggestion see Kröper and Krzyzaniak 1998: 206.

\textsuperscript{28} See Török 1997a: pls. 77-81; id. 2002: fig. 39.
and Sayce 1912: 48; Török 1997a: 109, note 338; id. 2002: 223). The occurrence of a human sacrifice cannot be proved, and according to our actual knowledge appear unlikely. Nevertheless, apart from its specific character, a man seated on a throne watches the ritual and seems be the receiver of it. His attributes and the overall iconographical context would identify him as a deified non-ruling royal person. According to Török (2002: 222-225), this suggests a close connection between the altar and the kiosk, from where the god watched the rituals.

It is unclear if every outer altar shared such a role, moreover it cannot exclude that its function had changed when it was reintroduced by Meroitic kings after a secular gap. At the same time, due to the interaction between the different elements of the sacral complex, the role of the altar could be different according to its specific position: in Kawa and Meroe it was set between the building and the kiosk, whereas in el-Hassa and in the two Naga samples the altar was located behind the kiosk.

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29 The possible making of human sacrifices in Meroitic temples was dealt with by Michael Zach (2010), who, with all uncertainty of sources, offered but evidences of impalement deaths.

30 For the specific case of Awlib altar, which acted probably as terrace cult, see Baldi 2014.
6. THE DATING OF THE KING

The recent discoveries and the re-analysis of past ones in the light of the new data have suggested a more precise dating of Amanikhareqerem, whose ruling period had been dated in uncertain way according to the few available elements. Fritz Hintze had dated his reign to the 2nd century AD under the paleographic study of the inscription on the Soba ram (1959: 33, 68 note 1); Inge Hofmann and Herbert Tomandl proposed a dating on the half of the same century basing on the finding of an Alexandrian drachma of Antoninus Pius (138-161), bearing a ram whose fleece is in scales as well as the el-Hassa rams (1986: 71-72).

Claude Rilly recently offered a more convincing dating after the epigraphic study of the inscription on the medallion found at Naga. It represents the only text reporting the name of the king in Meroitic cursive script (REM 1282; Hallof e Hallof 2000; Carrier 2000: 2, figg. 4-5; Rilly 2011: 199-201, abb. 229):

1) mnḫe
2) reqere
3) m: wtemro
4) so31

The cursive writing had a greater evolution than the hieroglyphic writing and is more suitable for a paleographic comparison. The four lines of the brief inscription, that seems to be preserved in its entirety, report the name of Amanikhareqerem and a word, wtemroso, that was probably an expression of the royal protocol32, but whose meaning is unclear. Rilly compared this text with other Meroitic inscriptions in cursive script, seventeen especially, ascribed to Natakamani’s successors (2001a)33. The resulting dating of Amanikhareqerem to the 1st century AD can be certainly shared. Furthermore, the attribution of the king to the late phase of the century is confirmed by seven fragments of decorated sandstone plaques brought to light at Dukki-gel, bearing a cartouche including the Throne name nb- mAªTh-Rc and stratigraphically dated by Dominique Valbelle in a range between AD 70 and 80 (Valbelle 2011). As said before, in addition to Amanikhareqerem only Amanitenmomide chose this Throne name in the Meroitic period, and the attribution of this king to the 2nd century AD assigns the fragments from Dukki-gel to Amanikhareqerem confirming his dating to the late 1st century.

32 In a bronze conical-shaped object found at Kawa this word is significantly included in a cartouche bearing the name of king Amanikhabale (REM 1026; Rilly 2011: 199-200).
33 See also Rilly 2011: 200-201.
7. CONCLUSION

The several international archaeological missions working in Sudan from the beginning of the 21st century, have been improving our knowledge of the ancient Nubian history revealing its protagonists. Occasional findings throughout the territory of the Meroitic kingdom, and excavation work within temples of Naga and el-Hassa, have been especially throwing light on the figure of Amanikhareqerem, ruling in the late 1st century.

The two sacral complexes, which represent the only buildings that can be attributed with certainty to this king, offered significant elements to a better comprehension of the Meroitic world. Their architectural nature can be included in a well-known Kushite background, confirming the heterogeneity of the practices in the encounter between local heritage and Egyptian influx. Artistic and material culture, as well as the epigraphic sources, have been at the same time specifying and enriching our knowledge of the still unclear Meroitic kingdom.
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