In popular usage, an origin is a beginning which explains—worse still, a beginning which is a complete explanation; there lies the ambiguity, and there the danger!

Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*

The recent publication of the excavation records of both John Garstang and the late Peter Shinnie, as well as the ongoing horizontal clearance of Temple M 260 by the Khartoum-Toronto mission, have clarified greatly the role which Meroë played in antiquity as a cultic site of the god Amun. Yet for historians and archaeologists of the past two centuries, Meroë has also served as a locus for veneration of a rather different kind—devoted to what the *Annales* historian Marc Bloch once termed “the Idol of Origins.” More than any other Sudanese site, Meroë has been uniquely associated with questions of cultural and dynastic origin. This has proven particularly true for the history of Meroë during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty and the reign of Taharqo specifically, for the paucity of empirical evidence datable to this period at Meroë has necessitated a greater reliance upon logical inference and thereby allowed a wider field of play for inherited theories of origin. The excavation of historiographic practice is therefore of the greatest relevance to the physical excavation of the site itself, because the search for origins at Meroë has influenced the questions traditionally asked and the explanations currently proposed for evidence unearthed by the trowel.

II.1. *Historia Quaestionis: Meroë and Origins*

The special association between the site of Meroë and the problem of origins predates the academic discipline of archaeology, and its subsequent trajectory in the face of an accumulating material record has been one of mutation rather than extinction. For early nineteenth-century authors George Alexander Hoskins, the Reverend Michael Russell, and François Chrétien Gau, Meroë was a utopia of the Diodoran and hyper-diffusionist imagination: “that cradle of the arts which distinguish a civilised from a barbarous society . . . [and] whence the arts and learning of Egypt, and ultimately of Greece and Rome, derived their origin.” In the middle of the nineteenth century, Lepsius’s Prussian expedition effectively put paid to this notion, demonstrating the comparatively late construction of those monuments visible at Meroë and in the broader Butana Steppe. Rather than questioning the model of singular origins and unilateral influence, Lepsius reversed its direction, maintaining that “von einer äthiopischen Urbildung oder überhaupt von einer alten äthiopischen Nationalbildung, von der die neuere Gelehrsamkeit so viel zu rühmen weiß, nothing zu entdecken war. . . . Was von den Nachrichten der Alten nicht auf gänzlichem Mißverstande beruht, bezieht sich nur auf die ägyptische Civilisation und Kunst.” Meroë was thus transformed from the

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3. By contrast, el-Kurru has become a topic of fervent debate only since the 1980s, and even those attributing to el-Kurru the greatest significance for dynastic history have not necessarily posited it as a site of cultural origin for the individuals interred there. For recent historiographic discussion and references, see Morkot, “On the Priestly Origin of the Napatan Kings.”
4. Hoskins, *Travels in Ethiopia*, v, 84. See also: Russell, *Nubia and Abyssinia*; Gau, *Antiquités de la Nubie*. For Diodorus’s view of Meroë, see e.g. Florence Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana 70.1 folio 158. For an English translation during the early nineteenth century, see Booth, *Historical Library of Diodorus the Sicilian I*, 151-158.
reputed origin of “civilised society” to a provincial backwater where all signs of “Civilisation und Kunst” were attributed an external origin.

In the early twentieth century, this schism was recast in the more particularist idiom of culture historical archaeology. During the first large-scale excavations at Meroë City (Fig. 1), John Garstang discovered within the Royal Enclosure an assortment of re-used blocks and votive objects inscribed in Egyptian hieroglyphs with unfamiliar royal nomina. In the Second Interim Report, Garstang’s colleague Archibald H. Sayce concluded that Meroë must have been the original homeland, no longer of “civilised society,” but instead of “the first of the Ethiopian kings who was master of Egypt as well as of Ethiopia”—the predecessor and possible ancestor to the better-known kings of Manetho’s Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.6 By contrast, George Reisner’s excavations in the neighboring cemeteries of Begrawiya West and South revealed grave goods inscribed with the nomina and prenomina of those more familiar Twenty-Fifth Dynasty kings, evidence which he took as proof of the region’s rapid annexation by the “Libyan” pharaohs of “Ethiopia” at the beginning of that era.7 He concluded that “a branch of the royal family of Ethiopia had gone south to Meroë in the days of Piankhy to hold and administer southern Ethiopia for the king in Napata.”8 For both Sayce and Reisner, the appearance of inscribed artifacts at Meroë became a beginning which explained and, still more decisively, a beginning which was a complete explanation—of the site’s political history and its relationship to the Double Kingdom.

Following the paradigm shifts in Nubiology precipitated by the UNESCO salvage operation in distant Lower Nubia, more recent interpretations of the site of Meroë have largely been shorn of that earlier hyper-diffusionism—but not of the overriding emphasis on origin. In 1971, Muhammad Ibrahim Bakr revived Sayce’s theory, tentatively proposing that the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty may have been fundamentally Meroitic in both geographic origin and cultural substratum.9 Published in Arabic, Bakr’s interpretation appears to have attracted little notice in Western Egyptology, but the same cannot be said of a lecture delivered the following year in English by Ahmed Mohamed Ali al-Hakem in Khartoum; entitled “The City of Meroë and the Myth of Napata,” it endorsed a theory similar to Bakr’s, proposing Meroë as the original homeland of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.10 Over the past four decades, al-Hakem has been followed in this interpretation by a distinguished company of scholars, including Karl-Heinz Priese, Rebecca Bradley, Maurizio Damiano, David O’Connor, and Karola Zibelius-Chen.11 Alternatively, in the publication of Garstang’s excavation records, László Török has updated Reisner’s competing interpretation, jettisoning all suggestions of Libyan extraction for the conquerors of Meroë while maintaining that “the Meroë region lost its independence to the el Kurru dynasty around the beginning of the 25th Dynasty period.”12 The scenario advocated by Török would conclude, à la Reisner, that the appearance of Egyptian inscriptions at the site coincided with its annexation by an Egyptianized state at Napata, rendering Meroë not the homeland of the el-Kurru dynasts but rather one of their earliest territorial acquisitions and temple-town foundations—perhaps even before the annexation of Egypt.

Such are the two dominant interpretations in current scholarship: Meroë as the ancestral seat of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty versus Meroë as a site annexed at the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty’s inception. The available evidence is sufficiently ambiguous to permit both scenarios to be entertained with reason, and both would associate Meroë closely with the problem of origins—in one case, geographic origin, and in the

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6 See Garstang and Sayce, “Second Interim Report,” 57. The king to whom Sayce assigned this honor—Malonaqen—was initially judged by him a contemporary of Aspelta but assigned quite broadly to “8th or 7th [century] BC.” See the excavation records for Khartoum SNM 00511 as now excerpted in Hinkel and Mohamed, Catalogue of the Objects in the Sudan National Museum, 28.
7 For Reisner’s theory of Libyan origin, see Reisner, “Royal Family of Ethiopia,” 26-28; id., “Note on the Harvard-Boston Excavations at El-Kurruw and Barkal in 1918-1919,” 63-64.
8 Reisner, “Meroitic Kingdom of Ethiopia,” 38.
9 Bakr, Tarikh al-Sudan al-qadim, 100.
12 Török, Meroe City I, 18.
Fig. 1. Meroë City with author's labels in bold. After Garstang, "Fifth Interim Report," pl. I.
other, temporal. Most importantly, the two scenarios reach the same conclusion about Meroë’s relationship to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty state, placing the region firmly within the territorial boundaries of the Double Kingdom—with significant implications for the state’s economic and political structure. Yet they are not the only possible interpretations of Meroë’s role, whether during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty as a whole or within the reign of Taharqo specifically. The discussion that follows will present apologiae and critiques of the two dominant schools of thought before proposing a third alternative which has received little discussion in the published literature to date—a scenario equally supported by the evidence but less devoted to the Idol of Origins.

II.2. Meroë as Ancestral Seat of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty

II.2.1. Apologia

At the outset, it is necessary to eliminate one point of potential distraction. For scholars specializing in regions beyond the Middle Nile, the assertion that the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty originated at Meroë may appear a natural one, for it has been routinely observed in the literature that the dynasts themselves bore Meroitic nomina. Yet the apparent linkage between these two points is based upon a confusion of geographic and linguistic terminology. The Meroitic language was first named as such by Heinrich Brugsch, because the texts available to him had been collected by Lepsius from precisely the Meroë region. To the ancients, the language was more likely designated by some variant of ‘Ikš, "Kushite." The "Meroitic" label has been retained in later scholarship as a convenient means of periodization: the grammar of the language first assumed written form during an era when the kings were buried in the vicinity of Meroë City at the Begrawiya North cemetery.

In all other respects, there is nothing distinctly Meroitic about the language which bears this name, for the Meroë region would seem to correspond neither to the language’s area of origin nor to its geographic range of distribution, insofar as both have been reconstructed in recent scholarship. Based upon the linguistic principle of least moves and certain suggestive lexical considerations, Claude Rilly has argued that Proto-North Eastern Sudanic—the sub-family of the Nilo-Saharan phylum from which Meroitic and Old (medieval) Nubian equally derive—may have spread from the region between Dongola and Darfur, as the Wadi Howar succumbed to increasing aridity during the middle of the third millennium BC and its inhabitants dispersed in search of more favorable conditions along the Middle Nile and the southern savannah. By the first half of the second millennium BC, an early form of the Meroitic language appears to have been spoken already by Kushite individuals known to Egypt’s Hyksos regime, for Papyrus Golenischeff at Krokodilopolis lists several anthroponyms with recognizably Meroitic linguistic features. Given the political landscape of that era, the residence of the individuals named in Papyrus Golenischeff would seem to be in the vicinity of Kerma, home of the Hyksos’s Kushite allies and terminus of the desert routes leading from the Fayum. Thus, the later use of Meroitic nomina by the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty no more proves their origin from Meroë than it does their origin from Kerma, where the language had likely been in use for a millennium. Consequently, the authors who have proposed Meroë as the origin of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty have not done so on exclusively linguistic grounds.

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13 E.g., Priese, “Kingdom of Napata and Meroe,” 208. For the predicate –qo as a Meroitic demonstrative pronoun –qo/-qe accompanied by a copula –o in the nomina of Shabaqo, Shebitqo, and Taharqo, see: Rilly and de Voogt, Meroitic Language and Writing System, 13, 164-166; Rilly, La langue du royaume de Méroé, 21.
14 Brugsch, “Entzifferung der Meroitischen Inschriften.”
15 Rilly and de Voogt, Meroitic Language and Writing System, 5; Rilly, La langue du royaume de Méroé, 4. In the London-Leiden Magical Papyrus, vo., col. 20, l. 3, the reader is instructed to recite “three spells in the speech of Kush” (r 3 n nt.t ‘Ikš). See Thompson’s transcription in Griffith and Thompson, Demotic Magical papyrus of London and Leiden II, pl. labeled “Verso XVII-XX.” For discussion, see: Dieleman, Priests, Tongues, and Rites, 138-143 §4.4.4; Koenig, “La Nubie dans les textes magiques”; Thissen, “Nubien in demotischen magischen Texten,” 371.
16 Rilly and de Voogt, Meroitic Language and Writing System, 174-181; Rilly, La méroitique et sa famille linguistique, 400-408 §5.5; id., “Enemy Brothers,” 214-215; see also Keding, “Yellow Nile.”
17 Rilly and de Voogt, Meroitic Language and Writing System, 5; id., La langue du royaume de Méroé, 5-11.
Geography, however, has been a fundamental component of the argument throughout its long development from Hoskins to Zibelius-Chen. Situated between the Nile and the Butana, the Meroë region combined the benefits of river and steppe into a unique synthesis which may have proven advantageous to an aspiring local dynasty. In the Shendi Reach, the Nile lays a broad alluvial terrace across the soft Nubian Sandstone Formation, yielding circumstances exceptionally amenable to riverine agriculture. Based upon the distribution of silt and fluvial pebbles at the site, Bradley has estimated that Meroë City was located immediately adjacent to the eastern bank of the Nile in antiquity, with the area of the so-called “Royal Enclosure” and the North and South Mounds actually constituting islands separated by a braided channel of the river. Thus, even before the introduction of the saqia, the ancient inhabitants of Meroë City would have had access to a considerable surface area of gerf and gezira soils for the intensive cultivation of durra, wheat, and vegetables, as well as for the grazing of cattle during the winter months. These resources were then greatly supplemented by Meroë’s proximity to the Wadis Hawad, Hadjala, Tarabil, and, to a lesser extent, the Wadis Awateib and Haselb, each of which distributed varying degrees of seluka, nagda, and atmır soils for cultivation and pasture across the region between July and September. Still farther afield of the Keraba, the Butana proper and the Gezira offered a vast expanse of rainfed steppe for both shifting cultivation and animal husbandry.

Moreover, there can be little doubt that isohyets in the ancient Butana reached well to the north of their modern locations, placing the region within a less arid climate than that of today. If this were not the case, then the numerous hafirs excavated within the Butana during the Meroitic era would not have been functional, and the presence of Celtis integifolia seeds at Meroë would be equally difficult to explain. While the exact proportions of intensive versus extensive agriculture and sedentary versus nomadic pastoralism remain open to debate, the combination of these various regimes would have been highly conducive to the sustenance of both urban and hinterland populations. If one is willing to assume that the catalyst for the rise of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty was its successful mobilization of military force, and that the number of available military conscripts would have been directly proportional to the size of a regional population, then a dynasty originating at Meroë would have enjoyed a marked advantage over any potential rivals between the Fifth and First Cataracts.

The same advantage would seem to obtain if access to mercantile wealth is instead posited as the catalyst, because Meroë’s strategic location at the interface of the Nile corridor and the broad steppe would have allowed its inhabitants to mediate the exchange of products characteristic to each ecological zone. The importance of long-distance trade at the site is also suggested by its position at the southern end of the Bayuda Road, which linked the region to Sanam and Gebel Barkal and, in turn, to Kawa and Kerma via the Meheila Road. Thus, the fate of Meroë City and its local elites was likely tied in part to the fortunes obtainable through long-distance commerce during a given period. In this regard, O’Connor has observed that the distinctive faunae of the savannah—rhinoceros, elephant, and monkeys—were circulated as diplomatic exchange between Egypt and Assyria in the era that immediately preceded the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.
The elites in the Keraba and Butana from whom those animals were obtained, O’Connor suggests, may then have turned their commercial position to political advantage. Whether one subscribes to a military or mercantile explanation, geography would seem to have decisively favored the inhabitants of Meroë over their northern neighbors—including, perhaps, those in the Fourth Cataract region.

If Meroë possessed certain military and mercantile advantages conducive to the rise of an expansionist dynasty, the theory that it was the ancestral seat of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, specifically, requires two further conditions in logical sequence: (1) anteriority—that Meroë was actually inhabited prior to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty; and (2) filiation—that those inhabitants bore familial ties to the dynasts buried at el-Kurru. Evidence for the first of these conditions was initially rather equivocal. During the excavations of the Ghana-Calgary and Khartoum-Calgary missions between 1965 and 1972, two deep trenches were opened on the North Mound, revealing in their earliest strata a “set of post-holes arranged in a pattern suggesting a horseshoe-shaped hut” combined with “a series of small mudbrick structures” indicative of “a community of mixed permanent and temporary structures, as in some modern Sudanese villages.”28 Radiocarbon dating of nineteen charcoal samples from the trenches’ earliest strata led the excavators to postulate “a sudden burst of building activity in the 8th century BC” involving “the early stages of sedentarization and absorption of local transhumants” by a “nuclear settlement [that] already existed.”29 However, as Török would later observe, “according to Shinnie-Bradley 1980 Appendix C, the uncalibrated carbon date associated with the earliest level in Trench A is 1330 ± 150 BC; in Trench B 1030 ± 140 BC.”30 Consequently, at least one member of the Khartoum-Calgary mission, John H. Robertson, concluded that “the origins of the city of Meroë appear to date to the beginning of the tenth century BC… much earlier than originally claimed.”31 As Gryzmski would later observe, the stratigraphic connection between the built structures and C14 dates is actually quite unclear: “[A]ny attempt at connecting the post-holes with the earliest date from the North Mound would be futile,… [and t]he other two dates from trench 50-line come from a pit dug into the natural soil and are not associated with any particular building remains.”32 The results of excavation upon the North Mound are therefore inconclusive.

Further support for pre-Twenty-Fifth Dynasty settlement at Meroë has nevertheless emerged from two recently published excavations at the site. The 2004 publication of the 1973-1984 seasons of the Khartoum-Calgary mission describes mud-brick foundation courses found beneath M 292 within the area which Garstang had designated the “Royal Enclosure.” As Shinnie and Anderson explain: “Two C-14 dates were taken from this level. The first sample (MRI-203 Beta 9863) was dated to 2650 ± 150 BC; and the second (MRI-207 Beta 9867) to 2740 ± 60 B.P. calibrated as 961-841 BC.”33 Similarly, Grzymski’s 2005 and 2008 articles describing the ongoing work of the Khartoum-Toronto mission report “surprisingly early” radiocarbon dates from M 750: 920-780 BC (1 σ 840-800 BC) and 840-770 BC (1 σ 820-790 BC).34 Likewise, a charcoal sample collected in association with the mud-brick foundations of a sandstone structure on the South Mound yielded “a 2 sigma (95% probability) calibrated date of 820-410 B.C. (1 sigma, i.e. 68 % probability, calibrated date of 800-740 BC and 710-530 BC).”35 More excavation will be necessary...
to refine the chronological implications of these dates, but at present the evidence would at least appear to indicate that, prior to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, Meroë already constituted a built and inhabited landscape. As Grzymski has recently concluded, “there can be little doubt that Meroë was occupied from at least the 9th century BC and perhaps earlier.”

The additional condition of filiation between the inhabitants of Meroë and the earliest kings of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty was first argued by Sayce on the basis of inscribed objects found within the area designated as the “Royal Enclosure.” Sayce’s hypothesis was quickly deemed untenable, for the name which he identified as “the first of the Ethiopian kings”—Malonaqen—was subsequently connected by Reisner to the inscribed contents of a post-Twenty-Fifth Dynasty pyramid at Nuri (Nu. 5). However, Reisner’s excavations at Begrawiya West and South would soon reveal evidence of greater relevance to Sayce’s theory. In addition to several burials equipped with wooden coffins, bead-nets, amulets, scarabs, and assorted Egyptian imports, the excavation of the West and South cemeteries also produced a number of inscribed objects of considerable historical interest. Tomb BW 658 was found to contain a faience plaque naming Kashta and Amenirdis I (Boston MFA 23.842), while BW 816 yielded a golden statuette of the goddess Bastet (Boston MFA 23.335) inscribed with a dedication for the wr 挹 PꜤ-mꜤy—presumed equivalent to the ḫt.KeyUp PꜤ-mꜤy of Busiris shown within the lunette of PꜤ(ankh)y’s Great Triumphant Stela (Cairo JE 48862). The inventory in von Beckerath, “Zu den Namen des kuschitischen Königs PiꜤankhy,” and 1385 (2), and Khartoum SNM 1386 (B).

In the critique of this argument below (Ch. II.2.2).
The interpretations of Priese and Zibelius-Chen would posit that the Kushite dynasts, their wives, and mothers were interred at el-Kurru near Napata, while other individuals of the blood royal were buried at Meroë, their town of origin. The distance between these two sites—roughly 300 km—raises an important question, as voiced by Török: “[W]hy were the rulers or the conquerors not buried in their original homeland?”45 One possible answer was proposed by al-Hakem in his seminal 1972 lecture: the Napata region near Gebel Barkal was, he argued, of merely cultic significance, while the state’s true secular capital was located at distant Meroë—just as the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty’s later capital would be established at Memphis, exponentially farther still from the el-Kurru cemetery.46 In support of this theory, al-Hakem cited the apparent absence of an urban settlement at Napata: “If we survey the area around the eastern side of the Gebel [Barkal], we can hardly find an area large enough to accommodate such an important capital with its domestic quarters. The present area is devoted almost entirely to temples and their subsidiary installations.”47 There was also, he asserted, a certain artificiality to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty’s presence in the el-Kurru/Napata region: none of the royal children were buried there, while the cemeteries of Begrawiya West and South contained an abundance of children—including seventy-three at Begrawiya West alone.48 Moreover, Priese has observed that the dynasty’s tombs at el-Kurru show little connection with the C-Group culture then prevalent in the Napata region—in direct contrast to the neighboring and contemporaneous cemetery at Sanam.49 The inference Priese and al-Hakem would draw is that the dynasts had transplanted themselves in the Napata region for religious and political advantage, though they hailed from and continued to reside at Meroë farther south.

Al-Hakem’s proposed distinction between Napata as cultic site and Meroë as secular capital hinges on the question of residence: the capital, he argued, was quite simply “the city where the king resided,” and thus “one notices that Napata was mentioned as an important religious and ceremonial centre, but never as the capital.”50 The underlying assumptions of this definition will require further explication below (II.2.2), but it will suffice at present to note the manner in which the argument has been constructed: affirmative evidence that Meroë, rather than Napata, served as a royal residence emerges most clearly in an inscription written centuries after the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. Nastasen’s year 8 stela (Berlin ÄMP 2268) from the late fourth century BC states the following:

\[
\text{ll. 4-5: } iw \, wn=i \, pi \, šr \, nfr \, m \, Brw.t \, iry=f(r) \, š \, ū \, r=i \, l\text{mn} \, Npy \, p\text{ty}=i \, it \, nfr \, dd \, \text{imy} \, n=k \, di=i \, ū=s \, \text{sn.} \, \text{wy} \, nsw.t \, nfy \, iw \, wn \, m \, Brw.t \, ďr
\]

When I was the good youth in Meroë, Amun of Napata, my good father, summoned me, saying, ‘Come!’ I had the royal kinsmen who were throughout Meroë summoned . . .

\[
\text{ll. 18: } ir=f \, sdm \, t.i \, wy \, nb(t) \, r\text{n}t \, nb.t \, di=k \, ū=s \, r=i \, m \, Brw.t.t
\]

All the lands and all people have heard that you summoned me from Meroë.

\[
\text{ll. 22: } iw=f \, r \, iry \, nsw.t \, hms \, ndm \, m \, Brw.t.t
\]

He will be a king who dwells successfully in Meroë.51

As one traces earlier textual references to Meroë across the preceding centuries, a greater proportion of inference is required to ascertain its political status. Nearly forty years prior to Nastasen’s account, Harsiyogetef would mention Meroë only in reference to an Osiris procession, the planting of date palms, and a conflict with the Rehrehs, but his description of the ruinous state of the temple and palace at Napata has led many to infer that the royal residence was instead located at Meroë.52 Harsiyogetef’s predecessor, Irike-Amanote, would mention Meroë only in reference to an Osiris procession, the planting of date palms, and a conflict with the Rehrehs, but his description of the ruinous state of the temple and palace at Napata has led many to infer that the royal residence was instead located at Meroë.

45 Török, Meroe City I, 20 n. 69. The original reads “the rulers of the conquerors” (a typographical error?).
47 Al-Hakem, “City of Meroe and the Myth of Napata,” 122-123.
49 Priese, “Napatan Period,” 78.
50 Al-Hakem, “City of Meroe and the Myth of Napata,” 121.
51 Schäfer, Die äthiopische Königsschrift des Berliner Museums, Taf. I-II. See also the collation in Peust, Das Napatanische, 34-36 §3.3.
52 See Cairo JE 48864, ll. 7-8, 22-24, 56-57, 61-62, 100, 106, 127-129, 137-138, 148, in Grimal, Quatre stèles napatéennes, pls. Xa-XXV.
recorded that he was “among the royal kinsmen” when King Talakhamani died “in his palace of Meroë” (m-bnw n ẖn=t=f n.t Bjrw.t).53 Roughly a decade before Irike-Amanote’s inscription at Kawa, Herodotus’s account specified of Μερόη that: Λέγεται δὲ αὕτη ἡ πόλις εἶναι μητρόπολις τῶν ἄλλων Αἰθιόπων, “This city is said to be the metropolis of all the other Aithiopians.”54 Nearly two centuries before Herodotus, a fragmentary passage from Psamtik II’s Tanis stela described the Saiite king’s attack upon: p3 kwr nty m […]tu […]hm=f[…]mrw.55 Macadam concluded that the missing toponym “must be none other than Meroë” and the anonymous qore (kwr) residing there none other than Aspelta, thereby positing Meroë as the residence of the Kushite king only two to three generations after the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.56

The further extension of this argument into the preceding Twenty-Fifth Dynasty requires, quite literally, some reading between the lines: at the end of line 6 in Tanutamani’s Dream Stela (Cairo JE 48863), the broken edge of the granite obscures a word which may have specified the king’s place of residence or even his hometown:

\[ pr pw ir.n Ḥm=f m b(w) wnn=f m m pr Ḥr m Ḥbyt pr n=f m […] (7) iw n=f hh ḥfr pr m-s=t \]

His Majesty went forth from the place where he had been, as Horus went forth from Khemmis. When he went forth […] (7) millions came to him and hundreds of thousands followed him.57

From there, Tanutamani traveled immediately to Napata: ḡw pw ir.n Ḥm=f r Npt (l. 7). Thus, Priese has argued that “[w]e can conclude from the report of King Tanwetamani’s coronation in 664 BC that even he had visited Napata only on his way to Egypt . . . It is consequently conceivable that the original homeland of the Meroites and their kings was in the region of Meroe.”58 Al-Hakem has drawn a similar inference from the Great Triumphal Stela of Pi(ankh)y during the eighth century BC:

While he stayed behind, his soldiers sent war booties “to the place where his Majesty was.” Later on, the king led the campaign in person, and when he had finished the conquest “he sailed upstream” back to his native country. These two statements are most inconclusive and can be applied to Meroe, as well as to Napata.59

Al-Hakem nevertheless concluded that “Meroe remained as a Royal Residence from a very early date of well before 800 BC”—spanning the entirety of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty and the Napatan era, from the generations of Alara and Kashta to those of Harsiyoufet and Mastasef.60

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53 Kawa IX, cols. 3-6, in Macadam, Temples of Kawa I, pl. 17. Irike-Amanote’s inscription at Kawa is cited by Török as “[t]he earliest so far known mention of Meroe in a Kushite hieroglyphic text”; id., Meroe City I, 2. On the preceding page, Török cites “the mention of the city of Mer (?) in the hieroglyphic text of a stela of King Aspelta (late seventh—early sixth century BC) found in fragments of Temple M 250.” He states: “Unfortunately, the inscription fragment in question—which was not published by Garstang—disappeared after the excavations were interrupted in 1914. It can perhaps be hoped, however, that it may turn up among the fragments of the same stela recently re-discovered in the SAOS” (op. cit., 1-2). Alas, the likelihood of such a discovery appears slim, for an examination of the First Interim Report would seem to suggest that, pace Török, the toponym Mer was mentioned not on the stela of Aspelta but on a neighboring wall fragment of much later date. Sayce stated: “In one of the Meroitic hieroglyphic inscriptions however, which we found on the walls of the Sun-temple, the name occurs as Mer, with a possible play upon the Egyptian mera, ‘a port,’ and since we also found the remains of a stela of Aspelt (BC 625) at the same spot, we may conclude that the city, with its Amon-temple was already in existence.” Sayce and Garstang, “Meroë,” 54.

54 Herodotus II.29.6 in FHN I, 307 §56.

55 Cairo JE 67055, l. 8, in Sauneron and Yoyotte, “La campagne nubiennes de Pasmamétique II,” pl. III.

56 Macadam, Temples of Kawa II, 240. The number of generations may be estimated from the following genealogical deductions. Aspelta and his predecessor, Anlamani, would evidently have been brothers, as they both claim Nasalsa as their mother: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. É.LN. I708 (= Kawa VIII) in Macadam, Temples of Kawa I, pls. 15-16; Louvre C 257, lunette and l. 10, in Schäfer, “Die aethiopische Königsinschrift des Louvre,” pls. 4-5, and in Valbelle, Les stèles, pls. 3A-3B; Khalil Stela (left in situ), l. 13, as published in M. B. Reinsier, “Inscribed monuments from Gebel Barkal: Part 4,” 40-41. Anlamani’s own predecessor, Senkamanisken, seems unlikely to be his and Aspelta’s father, for as Morkot has observed, the father’s cartouche in Aspelta’s Enthronement Stela (Cairo JE 48866) is not large enough to accommodate the erased name of Senkamanisken and would better fit that of Atlanersa. Grimal, Quatre stèles napätennes, pls. VIIa-VII. In this case, Senkamanisken and Atlanersa might be brothers representing only a single generation—particularly as Atlanersa’s small Nuri pyramid and unfinished Barkal monuments suggest a short reign. See: Morkot, “Kingship and Kinship in the Empire of Kush,” 199; Reinsier, “Meroitic Kingdom of Ethiopia,” 75; Dunham, Nuri, 2; al-Rayah, Napatan Kingdom, 97.

57 Grimal, Quatre stèles napätennes, pls. II-IIa.

58 Priese, “Napatan Period,” 77-78.


As the foregoing survey illustrates, the logical structure of the argument advanced by al-Hakem et al. is not unlike that of the Diodoran thesis once endorsed by George Alexander Hoskins: both theories would deduce the early history of Meroë by retrojecting the prominence which the city would later attain in Classical antiquity. Thus, Damiano concludes that the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty was descended from “genti venute dal Sud, presumibilmente dal Butana, vista l’importanza poi accordata a Meroe.”

While this conclusion may ultimately prove justified, the method used to derive it must raise some initial sceptis.

II.2.2. Critique: Twenty-Fifth Dynasty Origins and the Site of Meroë

In the apologia outlined above, the Meroë region was argued to possess certain geographic advantages conducive to the rise of a local dynasty. Yet the proposed linkage between the two is perhaps more dubious than it would first appear. That the region offered diverse forms of subsistence for urban and hinterland populations is apparent, but the additional conclusion that these advantages would have translated into greater potential for dynastic formation and political centralization does not follow logically from the first. While the wadis and the steppe greatly supplemented the yields available from basin agriculture alone by increasing the total quantity of fertile land, they would also have produced less crop per hectare, resulting in lower corresponding population densities. The resultant high demand for labor would be considerably frustrated by the mobility of Butana transhumants who, unlike riverine agriculturalists of the Lower Nile, could easily relocate to productive soil beyond the reach of an exploitative urban elite. Historical research into similar conditions across Africa’s Sahelian and savannah belts has observed that the diffuse nature of the resulting system of land organization has often “prevented the separation of the producer from his means of production (the land),” thereby forming “an obstacle to the concentration of wealth and power and thus to differentiation into social classes.” Rather than giving advantage to aspiring local elites, the geography of the steppe may instead have presented a daunting political challenge.

By contrast, the Dongola-Napata Reach was an environment more analogous to that of the Lower Nile: a riverine basin circumscribed by tracts of desert and semi-desert. What the region lacked in total agricultural yield and carrying capacity it may have compensated in population density and political cohesion. In fact, Adams has observed that the Napata region was not nearly so agriculturally impoverished as comparison with Meroë might suggest:

Napata and Meroë—the northern and southern districts in which Kushite civilization originally flourished—are in reality separated by no more than one and a half degrees of latitude, and the climatic difference between them is correspondingly slight. It is also true that the area of Nile floodplain available for cultivation at Napata is at least as great as that of Meroë. If the southern district enjoys any environmental advantage, it is not so much because of increased rainfall or soil resources as because the Butana Steppe, the hinterland of Meroë, is traversed by a number of large watercourses whose headwaters lie considerably farther south in the rainfall belt, so that they seasonally carry a substantial runoff.

The population of the Napata region should therefore not be underestimated, and political control of the region by aspiring elites would seem to have presented fewer obstacles there than in the variable ecozones around Meroë. It must also be noted that Napata, like Meroë, was admirably positioned for long-distance commerce, and the international circulation of steppic faunae during the Third Intermediate Period would have required Napatan intermediaries no less than Butana suppliers. The large magazine at Sanam further attests the continuity of Napatan commercial mediation during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, with an accumulation of raw elephant tusks, faience, gemstones, copper alloy, and clay sealings naming Pi(ankh)y, Shabaqo, and Taharqo.

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61 Damiano, “L’Età Tarda,” 47 [emphasis added].  
63 Goody, Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa, 30-33; id., Production and Reproduction, 108; Stein, “Segmentary States and Organizational Variation in Early Complex Societies,” 68.  
64 Coquery-Vidrovitch, “Research on an African Mode of Production,” 265-266 [emphasis added].  
65 Adams, Nubia: Corridor to Africa, 301.  
The fact that Meroë was clearly inhabited before the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty would only support the theory that the dynasty originated there if it could be determined that those inhabitants were related by blood to the dynasts buried in the Napata region. The mere presence at Begrawiya West and South of small funerary objects bearing the nomina of Twenty-Fifth Dynasty kings is not sufficient proof of such relation, for the inscribed plaques, scarabs, and rings may also have been circulated as diplomatic gifts for provincial elites, or even as more pedestrian items of commerce. Plaques and scarabs of Mn-hpr-Rʿ (P(ankh)y? Iny? Shebitqo?), Nfr-kꜣ-Rʿ (Shabaqo), P-š-m-š-k (Psamtik I?), and ḫḏ-h-pr-Rʿ štp-n-Rʿ (Sheshonq I) have also been found in roughly contemporaneous tombs and occupation levels at Kosti and Gebel Moya, another 500 km south of Meroë (800 km south of Napata) on the White and Blue Niles, respectively, but these have not been taken to indicate filiation between the inhabitants of the Gezira and the Kushite, Saïte, and Tanite royal houses—nor should they be. The shared assertion of Priese, Zibelius-Chen, Hinkel, and Sievertsen, that “other members of the royal family were buried at Meroë” “mindestens seit der Zeit des Piye” is therefore contingent upon the additional presence of royal kinship titles among the grave goods at Meroë—namely, “King’s Wife” (ḥm.t nsw.t), “royal kinsman” (sn nsw.t), and “King’s Son” (sš nsw.t).

Yet a closer examination of the chronology of the Begrawiya grave goods reveals the assertion to be potentially misleading. While the Begrawiya West and South cemeteries did contain tombs which could be securely dated to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty era, and also produced grave goods with royal kinship titles, the titles were not found in the tombs of Twenty-Fifth Dynasty date. Rather, the earliest tomb attributable to a “King’s Wife” is that of Mernua, spouse of either Anlamani or Aspelta—two to three generations after the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. In the tombs at Meroë which were judged to be contemporaneous with the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, the highest title of filiation attested for a woman on any object is not sš nsw.t but simply sš.t lry-p’š.t, “daughter of a hereditary noble(wo)man,” as inscribed upon a small scarab found in BW 529. Pace al-Hakem, the tomb of Sashensa (BS 132) did not contain the name of Tanutamani; Dunham’s report of the excavation states only that faience ushabti figures found in the tomb “closely resemble in style and type those of King Tanwetamani.” The ushabtis may just as easily have derived from the decades immediately following Tanutamani, during the reigns of Atlanersa, Senkamanisken, Anlamani, or Aspelta. Consequently, the existence of a “King’s Wife” at Meroë cannot be established with certainty before the end of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. The earliest attested “royal kinsman” and “King’s Son” at Meroë are later still, dated by Reisner to the reigns of Siospiqo/Nasakhma (early to mid-fifth century BC) and Talakhamani/Irike-amano (second half of fifth century BC), respectively—two centuries after the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. The presence of such royal kinship titles in the cemeteries of Meroë certainly increases the probability that the wives, kinsmen, and sons of earlier el-Kurru dynasts might have been buried near Meroë as well—particularly as some of the earlier tombs at Begrawiya South and West are

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67 For such items during the New Kingdom interpreted as gifts for provincial elites, see: Säve-Söderbergh and Troy, New Kingdom pharaonic sites, 140-141.
68 See n. 39 above.
69 See O. C. 2353, 3341, 4177 in: Addison, Wellcome excavations in the Sudan I, 117-119; Gerharz, Jebel Moya, 182-185. See also Khartoum SNM 3562 and 3643 in Arkell, “Varia Sudanica,” 40. It should be noted that the scarab from Kosti (Khartoum SNM 3562) has not been dated according to either stratigraphic context or associated finds. Possible relations between Kush and regions farther south, west, and east, are tentatively discussed in Eisa, “Extremities of the Kushite State.”
70 Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroe, 370 fig. 199 B. See also Lohwasser, “Die königlichen Frauen,” 705; Hinkel and Sievertsen, Die Royal City von Meroe, 33.
71 On the translation of sn nsw.t as “royal kinsman,” rather than narrowly as “king’s brother,” see above Notes on Terminology, Chronology, Orthography, and Maps, and further references in Ch. V.2 n. 115 below.
72 Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroë, 370 fig. 199 B. See also Lohwasser, “Die königlichen Frauen,” 78, 167 D.32.
73 See Khartoum SNM 02282 in: Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroë, 287 fig. 175 no. 10; Hinkel and Mohamed, Catalogue of the Objects in the Sudan National Museum, 133.
74 Al-Hakem, Meroitic Architecture, 48.
75 Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroë, 362-363 figs. 193c-d. Török’s suggestion that the “wife of King Tanwetamani” buried in BS 132 was “Queen Khensa” is difficult to explain, for Khensa’s name is known from several items in Ku. 4, including one inscribed with the name of P(ankh)y. See Török, Meroe City I, 16 n. 48; cf. Dunham, El Kurru, 30-37. Moreover, Török elsewhere identifies Khensa as “another queen of Piye.” See Török, Birth of an Ancient African Kingdom, 104. It therefore appears most likely that Török’s “Khensa” in the Meroe report could be simply a misprint for “Sashensa.”
76 Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroë, 379-380 fig. 206 D-E (MFA 23.869, top of lunette, second col. from right), 398-399 fig. 221 H.; cf. Dunham, Nuri, 3.
77 See Khartoum SNM 02282 in: Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroë, 370 fig. 199 B. See also Lohwasser, “Die königlichen Frauen,” 705; Hinkel and Sievertsen, Die Royal City von Meroe, 33.
lavishly provisioned with apparent Egyptian imports (esp. BS 155 and BW 609). However, royal kinship is not the only means by which wealthy burials may be explained, and the burial of royals at Meroë in the sixth century BC does not require the burial of royals there during the seventh and eighth centuries BC. To assume that later tombs at Meroë for kings' wives, royal kinsmen, and kings' sons reflect earlier conditions at the site effectively begs the question of historical development.

Without explicit titles of royal kinship linking those interred at Meroë with the members of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty buried in the Napata region, the relationship between the cemeteries must be judged by a broader consideration of demography and burial practice. In regard to the first of these criteria, the prevalence of child burials at Begrawiya West and South and their absence at el-Kurru as noted by al-Hakem does present a suggestive contrast, but it cannot be assumed that the three cemeteries represent a closed cultural system accounting for all burials across the 300-km distance between Napata and Meroë. The possibility cannot therefore be excluded that children of the el-Kurru dynasts were interred at Sanam or in another cemetery as yet unexcavated in the Napata region. As a possible parallel, it is worth noting that a small cemetery of Twenty-Fifth Dynasty date at the fortress of Mirgissa near the Second Cataract was found to consist almost entirely of children: "Surprisingly, of 27 individuals, buried in individual tombs, only 4 (14.8%) were adults (2 males and 2 undetermined), the remaining 23 (85.2%) children and juveniles." Strouhal concluded: "This find helps vividly to elucidate the problem of missing infants in regular cemeteries"—most notably, at the cemetery of el-Kurru.

The additional criterion of burial practice presents no simple answers to the question of cultural affinity between Napata and Meroë. As Priese has observed, the royal tombs at el-Kurru do not show the strong connections to C-Group cultural tradition that one might expect in the Napata region. However, the development of the el-Kurru tombs is also different in important ways from that of contemporaneous burials at Begrawiya West and South in the Meroë region. The substructure of the earliest tombs at el-Kurru included both a pit and a lateral niche—a feature also present at nearby Sanam—and the contents from Ku. Tum. 6 and its successors reflected the influence of the Egyptian rite of breaking the red pots. By contrast, that rite was not evidenced in the early tombs in the Meroë region, and the lateral niche grave would not be adopted there until more than a century after the end of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. Instead, the Begrawiya tombs of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty era began as simple non-mummified burials in pit graves oriented east-west prior to the reign of Pi(ankh)y, were then diversified by the inclusion of frequent mumified coffin burials oriented either east-west or north-south, and were gradually replaced in the mid-Twenty-Fifth Dynasty period by the so-called "axial niche grave"—a substructure attested in the later Napatan and Meroitic eras across the Butana at Geili, el-Kadada, and Gereif, but evidently not characteristic of the Napata region. Both the el-Kurru and Begrawiya cemeteries nevertheless included a similar inventory of faience amulets, pottery, and metallic vessels across their histories of development.

When judged against the backdrop of C-Group and Butana cultural traditions, the question of the relative "Egyptianization" of the tombs at el-Kurru would therefore appear to be a rather subjective matter with equally unclear implications: while Priese has cited "the fact that the latter [cemetery] is so decisively 'Egyptianized'" as evidence that "there was very little to connect the Kushite kings with the indigenous traditions of the region around Napata," O'Connor has concluded from the evolution of circular superstructure to mastaba that "the rulers buried at Kurru, and hence the people they governed, were evidently familiar with Egyptian culture, but they were not themselves 'Egyptianized' in any fundamental way." Similarly, Bakr's Tarikh al-Sudan al-qadim argued that the burial methods and accoutrements of the

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77 Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroe, 28-39, 358-360.
78 As now acknowledged for Meroë by: Lohwasser, Aspekte der napatanischen Gesellschaft, 314.
80 Strouhal, Palaeodemography of Kush, 331.
81 Priese, “Napatan Period,” 78.
82 Török, Meroe City I, 16-17 n. 51.
83 See, e.g., BS 311 and BS 500 in Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroë, 380, 444.
85 Priese, “Napatan Period,” 78.
86 O’Connor, Ancient Nubia, 69.
el-Kurru dynasts were so distinct from Egyptian traditions that they may well have originated from an area beyond Egypt's previous sphere of colonial influence—namely, from Meroë:

The logical explanation for the persistence of these local traditions across this period until the time of the 25th Dynasty—[traditions which persisted] despite the direct influence of elements of Egyptian culture upon the people of the C-Group culture as well as the Kerma culture—is that during the New Kingdom this group from which the house of the 25th Dynasty derived may have lived away from the strong influence of Egyptian culture and may have taken up residence in Meroë. It is known that Meroë finally became the capital of the Meroitic kingdom, and it was previously and from the beginning the residence of a branch of the ruling family at the time of the 25th Dynasty. If this assumption is true, then the conquests of this family start from south to north, and consequently we can consider the rulers of Napata (the 25th Dynasty) as Meroitic kings.87

Interestingly, both Priese's interpretation and that argued by O'Connor and Bakr have been used to support the theory that the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty originated from Meroë—in the first instance, because they were so artificially Egyptianized vis-à-vis the cultural milieu of the Fourth Cataract region, and, in the second instance, because they were so un-Egyptianized when compared with the customs of Egypt itself. However, as Dafa'lla has observed, non-Egyptian traditions co-existed with Egyptian influence throughout Kush's history—most notably before the earlier kingdom based at Kerma.88 The image that results from an examination of the el-Kurru and Begrawiya cemeteries is not therefore one in which unconscious adherence to traditional burial customs betrays the geographic origins of those interred in a straightforward deterministic fashion, but rather a process of selective adoption which defies neat cultural categorizations and theories of origin. As no individuals of royal blood have been securely identified in the tombs of Meroë during or before the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, and the tomb types of Begrawiya West and South do not closely or consistently parallel those at el-Kurru, the cemeteries provide little support for the theory that Meroë was the dynasty's ancestral seat.

When attention is instead directed to the settlements that would have neighbored those cemeteries, the results are similarly inconclusive. Al-Hakem's contention that Napata was devoid of urban settlement is, of course, an argumentum ex silentio, and it also presumes that the city could only have been located directly at the foot of Gebel Barkal. Such an assumption would seem unwarranted and may actually be contradicted by evidence from Reisner's unpublished excavation diary. Entries for 21-23 March 1919 mention the discovery at el-Kurru of a gateway and a “fort wall of poor masonry,” at least 200 m in length, that was partly visible beneath the modern village neighboring the cemetery. Weeks later, further exploration of the area revealed stone walls and a rock-cut stair leading to groundwater. Reisner judged the structure to be “manifestly a large well tapping water and serving a large palace,” and he concluded: “Here I take it was the palace of Piankhy.”89 Though Reisner included sketches in his unpublished diary, unfortunately no survey plans of these features were included in Dunham's publication of the el-Kurru cemetery three decades later. In the early months of 2013, excavations were re-opened in the settlement areas of el-Kurru by the University of Michigan Nubian Expedition under the direction of Geoff Emberling; in addition to further excavating the features identified by Reisner, this new project has already found a large temple of uncertain date, demonstrating that el-Kurru was certainly a site of monumental construction beyond the royal cemetery itself during some period of its history.90 Whether this site was the famed Napata is not yet clear. Even if the structures discovered at el-Kurru represent an urban center other than Napata, the possibility cannot be excluded that Napata remains unexcavated beneath the modern village of Kareima northeast of Gebel Barkal.91

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87 Bakr, Tarikh al-Sudan al-qadim, 100. I thank Dina El Gabry of Helwan University for refining my translation of this passage.
89 Kendall, “Origin of the Napatan State,” 48-49, 1/4 fig. 17. I thank Tim Kendall for showing me the location of these structures during a visit to el-Kurru in 2005.
90 The results have yet to be published, but I thank Geoff Emberling for discussing the project with me and making photographs available online at: http://www.lsa.umich.edu/kelsey/fieldwork/currentfieldwork/elkurru sudan/2013sudanblog_ci (last accessed 26 June 2013).
91 The location of Napata is unfortunately not clarified by Nastasen’s itinerary, for the text is only explicitly about the location of the Amun temple at Gebel Barkal which served the town: See Berlin AMP 2268, II. 8-12, in: Schäfer, Die aethiopische Königsschrift des Berliner Museums, Taf. II; and collation by Peust, Das Napatanische, 34-35 §3.3. That Napata was more than a cultic pilgrimage
and the river discovered a mud-brick *temenos* wall extending nearly 200 m, not unlike that at el-Kurru. The apparent contrast between Napata and Meroë would then result, not from an ancient distinction between cultic center and capital city, but instead from each degree to which each site has been re-used and concealed by modern habitation.

In fact, the concept of a singular and secular capital may be inappropriate to the Kushite case. Inscriptions from the Napatan period describe a coronation ritual in which Kushite kings travelled to the leading centers of the kingdom in a consistent sequence in order to receive oracular legitimation from local forms of Amun and Bastet, and a similar rite appears to be depicted in embryonic form in Taharqo’s decorative program at Kawa (see Chs. III.1-III.2.3 below). Török has named this process “ambulatory kingship,” citing archaeological and textual evidence that most, if not all, stops in the coronation circuit were home, not only to a temple, but also to a royal residence (*pr nsw*) and palace (*ḥt.t*). Consequently, the definition of the capital as the “city where the king resided” would seem to necessitate the recognition of several such “capitals” within the kingdom. Even if one posits, *à la* Wenig, that “es tatsächlich nur eine Krönung gab,” with the other sites serving merely as places where the coronation “zelebriert wurden,” the surviving evidence does not convincingly support the identification of that primary coronation site with Meroë—and particularly not during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. As illustrated in the apologia above, the documentary evidence in favor of Meroë as a station in the coronation cycle and as a royal residence is most explicit and unequivocal in the late fourth century BC, but it becomes progressively less so as one follows the textual references across the preceding centuries. During the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty itself, the argument must be supported from reconstructed lacunae and ellipses. While the lacuna at the end of line 6 in Tanutamani’s Dream Stela may conceivably have included the first attestation of the toponym *Meroë*, it is equally plausible that the missing word was something much more pedestrian like *ḥt.t=f*, “his palace,” or simply *nsw*, “king”:

\[
\text{pr pw Ir.n Ḥm=f m b(w) nwn=f m m r Hr m Ḥḥ.n.t pr n=f m [ḥ.t=f]/[nsw] (7) ūw n=f Ḥḥ Ḥn phr m-st=f}
\]

His Majesty went forth from the place where he had been, as Horus went forth from Khemmis. When he went forth from [his palace?] as [king?], (7) millions came to him and hundreds of thousands followed him.97

Such a solution appears all the more likely when one considers that the size of the lacuna, as judged from comparison with the intact edge of line 9 below it, may actually be too narrow to accommodate *

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92 Kendall, “Napatan Temples.”

93 In Irike-Amanote’s inscription, the king leaves Meroë to receive the conferral of legitimacy from Amun of Napata, Amun-Re of Kawa, and Amun of Pnubs. See Kawa IX (*in situ*), cols. I-19, 36-45, 49-60, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa* I, pls. 17-26. The text states that Irike-Amanote had a “royal residence” (*pr nsw*) at Gebel Barkal (col. 37), a “palace” (*ḥt.t*) at Koroton between Napata and Kawa (col. 45), and another “palace” (*ḥt.t*) at Kawa (col. 78). The context of cols. 89-94 and 118-119 would further suggest that there was a “royal residence” (*pr nsw*) at Kawa as well. For archaeological evidence of the palace at Napata, see Kendall and Wolff, “Excavations in the Palace of Aspelta at Jebel Barkal.” In the Annals of Harsyiotef, a visit to Bastet at Taret is added to the coronation journey, and Harsiyoitef again reiterates that there was a royal residence (*pr n sw*) at Napata. See Cairo JE 48864, ll. 10-22, 127-129, in Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls. XII-XIII. For Taret, see Zibelius(-Chen), *Afrikanische Orts- und Völkernamen*, 179-180. The context of cols. 179-180 and 223-231, in Schäfer, *Die aethiopische Königsgeschichte des Berliner Museums*, Tit. II-III, and collation by Peust, *Das Napatanische*, 34-35 §3.3. In Anlamani’s Enthronement Stela, four of his kinswomen are appointed as sistrum-players at Napata, Kawa, and Pnubs, and also for Amun-Re, Bull of the Land of the St-Bow (presumably at Sanam), but no mention is made of Bastet of Taret: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Ä.LN. 1708 (Kawa VIII), ll. 24-25, in Macadam, *Temples of Kawa* I, pls. 15-16.

94 Török, “Ambulatory Kingship and Settlement History”; id., *Birth of an Ancient African Kingdom*, 65-73. See also Kormys(c)heva, “Festkalender im Kawa-Tempel.” For references to the inscriptions in question, see the preceding note.

95 Al-Hakem, “City of Meroe and the Myth of Napata.”


97 Cairo JE 48863, l. 6, in Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls. II-IIa. These two alternatives were proposed by Maspero and Akmar, respectively: Maspero, “Essai sur la Stèle du Songe”; Akmar, “La Stèle du Songe,” 51, 75, 91.

The fact that Tanutamani then came (īw) to Napata and its Amun temple (ll. 7-8) demonstrates only that the locale in question was not identical with either; such a context does not by any means require that Tanutamani had come from Meroë. Pi(ankh)y's earlier reference to "the place where His Majesty was" is equally too vague to be localized in any way, and thus the primary royal residence, if such existed during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, is left unstated in the surviving records. Reference to the toponym Meroë cannot be confirmed in a single Twenty-Fifth Dynasty inscription.

Al-Hakem's attempt to retroject the later prominence of Meroë into the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty is based upon the assumption that, because coronation rituals were "ancestral in character" and among "the most traditional ceremonies," they would therefore be unlikely to change over the centuries. However, this hypothesis conceals a significant flaw, for Meroë was not one of the cities included in the coronation circuit, nor was a local form of Amun attested there before the first century AD. Instead, it was at Napata, Kawa, Pnubs, and Taret that the Kushite kings were crowned during the Napatan era, and it was Amun of Napata who was worshipped at Meroë for most of the city's history. As Török has cogently argued:

[The] hypothesis, according to which the kingdom of Kush rose from the Meroë, not the Napata, region, presupposes an initial conquest of the el Kurru chiefdom from the south and it leaves open elementary questions. Why did their original centre play only a subordinate role in the enthronement rites and in the myth of the state, while the most important part of the coronation journey remained at Napata. Furthermore, the hypothesis of the origins of the royal dynasty of Kush in the Meroë region cannot explain the central role of Amûn of Napata, and not an Amûn of Meroë, worshipped at Meroë? Significantly, 'southern' cults or 'southern' accents in cults emerge, by contrast, in the course of the 3rd-2nd centuries BC, when a dynasty probably originating in the Meroë area came to power and also transferred the royal necropolis from the Napata region to Meroë City.

In inscriptions of the Napatan era, Meroë is often the place which kings leave in order to perform the coronation rites elsewhere, but no enthronement rituals are mentioned in connection with Meroë itself. This would be a striking omission, if Meroë were in fact the ancestral seat of the royal line, dating back even to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.

Ironically, the source which provides the most direct support for Meroë's status as a royal residence during the Late Napatan period may also contain the most explicit evidence against the theory that Meroë was the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty's ancestral seat. Only a few lines after recounting Nastasen's summons from Meroë, his year 8 stela describes the subsequent journey to Napata as follows:

(7) di=zi thiny dwy ph-s=zi 's-d-r-[s]-l.t di=zi sdr sw p=s=i 'b'b' sdm=z=i {f}r mr s=f w m Npy dd=w (8) lw=s f r m dnyt ti,w,y) nb=f=zi diw ph-s=zi Ti-qit sw p i m{t}š=t š r rd ns nw P 'nh-f-r m in=f lw wn p i=zi dr š lby (9) š r s.t nbm gm pty pr 'mny lry=sw by n(by)=š rm lw t-mdtr 'mny Npy dr ntw tyw rm t sb t md(t)w rm=š (10) dd=w n=f dd š f snš n=k š t n p Ti-Sty 'mny Npy pty=[tw] k it nfr īw dd=w rm š Swipe n snw tw n-dw (II) dd=š <n>=š dd š i lw š t trw my srš-t[n n=š]f 'mny Npy pty=š=š i [tw] n fr ms[t]n sy š n t lby (12) 'mny Npy

(7) I made haste in the morning to reach Isdarras and spent the night. It was my 'threshold'. I heard the 'head patrolsmen' from Napata. They said, (8) 'It is the 'dam' of all lands.' I got up early in the morning and I reached Taqt. It is the 'garden' from which King Pi(ankh)-Alara 'sprouted'. While my left hand was (9) upon the place of seizing power, that temple of Amun, all of the people of the temple of Amun of Napata, the citizens, and all the notables came to me. They spoke with me (10) and they said to me, 'Amun of Napata, your good father, has...
confirmed for you the rulership of the Land of the St-Bow,' while all the people said, 'When will he moor?'. (11) I said <to> them, 'Go! Cross the river. You should propitiate Amun of Napata, my good father, for me. Leave! Go, that you may greet (12) Amun of Napata.103

It may be inferred from the passage that Isdarras and Taqat were located on the Bayuda Road between Meroë and Napata, with Isdarras roughly a day's journey northwest of Meroë. Because of the text's reference to patrolmen there, Darnell has suggested that Isdarras might be the fortress at el-Fura.104 Taqat was evidently located quite close to Napata but perhaps on the opposite bank of the river, for it was here that "the people of the temple of Amun of Napata, the citizens, and all the notables" came to meet Nastasen and were told to "cross the river" that they might "propitiate Amun of Napata."105 Most significantly, the toponym $T\-q.t.t$ is associated with the name of $P\-\text{nhr}\-T\-r-r-\text{t}$—the latter possibly an amalgam of the two famous Kushite progenitors, but more likely a Kushite royal title and nomen: "The Living One, Alara."106 Pi(ankh)-Alara's connection to Taqat is open to philological interpretation: the passage may be read as either "the garden from which King Pi(ankh)-Alara sprouted" or possibly "the garden which King Pi(ankh)-Alara planted." Most translators have preferred the former.107 If this reading is correct, then the text would seem to explicitly state the hometown of Alara—the Ur-ancestor of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty as honored in later memory108—and it would place that hometown immediately across the river from both the temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal and the dynastic cemetery at el-Kurru, as much as two days' journey north of the Meroë region.

There is thus little evidence to support the major assertions of the ancestral seat theory: that the Meroë region offered unique environmental advantages which would have favored political centralization; that the ancestors, wives, kinsmen, and children of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty were buried at Begrawiya West and South; that Meroë was the singular and secular capital of the Kushite half of the Double Kingdom; or that it was regarded as a homeland in Kushite historical memory. The most popular alternative to the ancestral seat theory would instead view Meroë as a region annexed at some point during the expansion of the el-Kurru kingdom. The question of whether Meroë was annexed before, during, or after the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty is of the greatest importance in ascertaining the southern boundary and political strategies of the state ruled by Taharqo during the first half of the seventh century BC.

103 See Berlin ÄMP 2268, ll. 8-12, in: Schäfer, Die aethiopische Königsgeschichte des Berliner Museums, Taf. II; and collation by Peust, Das Napatanische, 34-35 §3.3. Translation here after: Darnell, "Whom did Nestasen overhear at Iserdes?": Sargent, Napatan Royal Inscriptions, 390-393; but cf. FHN I, 476-477. For translation of $T\-Sty$ as "Land of the St-Bow," rather than the more generic "Land of the Bow," see above Notes on Terminology, Chronology, Orthography, and Maps.

104 Darnell, "Whom did Nestasen overhear at Iserdes?". See also Shinnie, "Note on Ast-Raset." For the fortress at el-Fura Wells, see Crawford, Castles and churches in the Middle Nile Region, 36-39. The toponym would appear to contain the Meroitic word astu, "water," suggesting perhaps an oasis; see Peust, 'Der Regierungsbericht des Nestasen,' 94.

105 Schäfer and Peust identified $T\-q.t.t$ with Nuri, and Priese associated it with Sanam Abu Dom: Schäfer, Die aethiopische Königsgeschichte des Berliner Museums, 30-31; Peust, 'Der Regierungsbericht des Nestasen,' 95; Priese, 'Napatan Period,' 77. Darnell suggested the wells of Umm Inderaba (Abu Tuleh/Abu Klia), Darnell, 'Whom did Nestasen overhear at Iserdes?,' 155. If $T\-q.t.t$ were so close to el-Fura Wells, one must ask why Nestasen stopped at el-Fura Wells the previous night (unless this was merely a pun: see Peust, 'Der Regierungsbericht des Nestasen,' 94)—and equally why he then told the inhabitants of $T\-q.t.t$ to cross the river to Amun of Napata. Ancient sandstone blocks underneath a modern mosque just 4 km north of Sanam may signal the location of the quay; see Ludwasser, Kushite Cemetery of Sanan, 107-108 n. 100.

106 Priese, 'Nichtägyptische Namen und Wörter,' 167. Macadam, Temples of Kawa I, 123; Leclant and Yoyotte, "Notes d’histoire et de civilisation éthiopiennes," 9 n. 1. $P\-\text{nhr}$ as a royal title has often been taken to be "un souvenir du grand Piankhy déifié." However, the possibility should be considered that King Pi(ankh)y derived his nomen from the concept underlying the eventual royal title, rather than the reverse. The title is not written in a cartouche in the $\text{rn nfr}$ of Peketor: $\text{rn nfr} \text{Hn m-nfr}$. See Chicago OIM 6408 in Leahy, "Kushite Monuments at Abydos," IS 14 pl. XXVIa. Pace Rilly (Valbelle, Les stèles, 74 n. 3), at least one piece of evidence suggests that the title may have been understood by Kushite royals with its Egyptian meaning. In l. 7 of Queen Katimala’s Semna inscription, written well before Pi(ankh)y’s reign, it is stated that: $\text{w=f r d} \text{djt npr n=f}$, ‘He (Amun?) shall appoint the one who is alive.’ See Oriental Institute photograph P. 3349. For further bibliography, see Ch. V.2 n. 125 below.

107 FHN I, 477; Priese, ‘Napatan Period,’ 77; contra Darnell, ‘Whom did Nestasen overhear at Iserdes?’, 154, 156.

108 Beyond Nastasen’s stela, Alara is also remembered in the Kawa IX inscription of Irike-Amanote (col. 54) and in two Kawa stelae of Taharqo: See Khartoum SNM 2678 (Kawa IV = Merowe Museum 52), 1. 17, and Khartoum SNM 2679 (Kawa VI = Merowe Museum 53), col. 22, in Macadam, Temples of Kawa I, pls. 7-8, 11-12, 19, 24. Alara is earlier named as the father of Tabiry and husband of Kasaqa on Khartoum SNM 1901 in Dunham, El Kurru, fig. 29.
II.3. Meroë as Early Twenty-Fifth Dynasty Annex

II.3.1. Apologia

The timing of the Meroë region’s annexation depends largely upon what processes that term is taken to comprise. Based upon New Kingdom colonial precedents and Twenty-Fifth Dynasty parallels from Kawa, Thebes, and Memphis, several factors may be envisioned in the state’s annexation of a peripheral territory, though not always in combination or in a consistent order:

1. extraction of local resources, whether through trade or outright seizure;
2. development of local industries for extra-local demand;
3. dissemination of state loyalism and supporting cultural values;
4. incorporation or elimination of local elites;
5. installation of state administrators to serve, command, or replace (4);
6. construction of a physical space for (3) and (5);
7. construction of a royal residence on-site; and
8. integration of the locality into the larger myth of the state.

As described in Ch. II.2 above, (1) was already well underway at Meroë before the inception of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, while (8) would not come to fruition until nearly 800 years after the dynasty’s end, even though kings began to be interred there by the third century BC. In the absence of other factors, the combination of (1) and (3) would also be clearly insufficient to constitute territorial annexation, for these factors characterized both New Kingdom Egypt’s and Twenty-Fifth Dynasty Kush’s interaction with Near Eastern vassals who were not regarded as part of either state. Moreover, the hand of the state is difficult to discern in (2) and (4) without supporting evidence of either (5), (6), or (7). The nature of the Meroë region’s incorporation into the Double Kingdom may therefore be gauged initially by measuring the extent to which these latter three factors were in operation during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.

For Reisner and Dunham, the presence of plaques, scarabs, and amulets inscribed with royal nomina among the grave goods at Begrawiya West and South was taken to indicate, not only the dissemination of state loyalism and supporting cultural values (3), but also the subordination of local elites (4) to an intrusive caste of state administrators (5). Noting the prevalence of non-mummified burials in simple pit graves within the West Cemetery and of mummified coffin burials in the South Cemetery, Reisner and Dunham proposed that the West and South burial grounds served ethnically and occupationally distinct groups:

Thus, from about 750 to 275 BC there were two cemeteries serving the city of Meroë, a fact the writer believes may be explained by the existence of two parallel groups of people living there which he has called the Napatan and the Meroitic groups, the latter being the indigenous inhabitants of what was at first an important provincial city subservient to Napata, and the former consisting of Napatan officials stationed at Meroë but belonging to a different clan.

The immediate subservience of Meroë to Napata was not problematized by Reisner, who regarded the presence of Egyptianized burials as proof of an immigrant population from Napata stationed at Meroë, and that population, in turn, as proof that the region was dominated by the el-Kurru dynasty.

A similar logic guided Reisner’s earlier excavations at Kerma, which are perhaps then instructive for an understanding of his conclusions at Meroë. At Kerma, the use of Egyptian building techniques in the Lower Deffufa, along with the proliferation of Egyptian-style vessels, stamp seals, and inscriptions alongside manifestly non- Egyptian burial customs in the neighboring cemetery, signaled to Reisner the conquest of a native Kushite chiefdom by the Middle Kingdom Egyptian state and the subordination of local elites.

109 For discussion and bibliography see: Smith, Wretched Kush, 56-96; Higginbotham, Egyptianization and Elite Emulation in Ramesside Palestine; Kemp, "Imperialism in New Kingdom Egypt," 7-57, 283-297; Morris, Architecture of imperialism. For discussion of Twenty-Fifth Dynasty activity at Kawa, Thebes, and Memphis, see Chs. III, V, VII below.

110 Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroë, I; id., "Outline of the Ancient History of the Sudan, Part V."
to an intrusive caste of Egyptian administrators.\textsuperscript{111} These conclusions were subsequently challenged, first by Hermann Junker and later by Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, who posited instead the political independence of Kerma under the leadership of a Kushite ruling class that imported Egyptian goods and co-opted literate Egyptian architects in their own service.\textsuperscript{112} As Adams would later observe:

That there were Egyptians at Kerma seems beyond dispute. Yet it is almost equally certain that Reisner overestimated their numbers and their rule. . . . A small Egyptian elite, supervising native commerce and industry on behalf of a Nubian king, would best account for the archaeological facts at Kerma as we now know them. . . . This seems to be attested too by the stele of Sepedher: "I was a valiant commandant of Buhen, and . . . I built the temple of Horus, Lord of Buhen, to the satisfaction of the ruler of Cush."\textsuperscript{113}

The case of Kerma suggests an alternative to Reisner’s interpretation at Meroë: the various Egyptian goods, influences, and/or personnel at Begrawiya West and South might be explained as imports from the Napata region acquired by a local Meroëite elite.\textsuperscript{114} Under this scenario, the subordination of that elite to the kingdom ruled by the el-Kurru dynasts would more likely be inaugurated, not by the presence of inscribed grave goods and mummified coffin burials tout court, but instead by the devotion of local resources and manpower to the construction of a royal residence to house the overlords from el-Kurru and a local temple to disseminate royal propaganda and the cultural values that supported it. If Meroë was annexed to the Double Kingdom during or before the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, one might expect the royal center to leave some such architectural stamp upon the local landscape during the roughly nine decades of Twenty-Fifth Dynasty rule. Consequently, the argumentative burden would seem to shift from the outlying cemeteries at Begrawiya West and South to Meroë City itself.

Török’s updated version of the hypothesis introduced by Reisner has therefore focused upon possible evidence of royal construction projects at the city’s North Mound and within the so-called “Royal Enclosure.” Upon the North Mound, the absence of any inscriptive material whatsoever has rendered the identification of such projects difficult, but Török would nevertheless infer the hand of the state in certain details of the mud-brick construction. In particular, he cites a suggestive change in brick size, as first observed by Bradley. Early strata of the North Mound revealed brick sizes of $26 \times 12 \times 8$ cm and $30 \times 15 \times 9$ cm.\textsuperscript{115} As Török observes, “[t]hese standard mud-brick sizes correspond with the mud-brick sizes recorded by Griffith from the foundation wall of the Sanam temple the building of which was probably started by one of Taharqo’s predecessors.”\textsuperscript{116} Similar brick sizes were found in the West Cemetery at BW 662—a burial which Reisner tentatively dated to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, albeit without supporting argumentation.\textsuperscript{117} After an intervening stratum of silt, subsequent construction upon the city’s North Mound used much larger bricks ($34 \times 17 \times 8.5$ cm) comparable to those found in constructions of Taharqo in the Napatan region, as well as in BW 467—an adult male’s tomb, with no associated objects, to which Reisner consequently declined to assign a date.\textsuperscript{118} The close concordance between brick sizes at Napata and Meroë is

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\textsuperscript{111} Reisner, “Accessions to the Egyptian Collection during 1914,” 76; id., “Excavations at Kerma (Dongola Province) I/II,” 49. See also id., Excavations at Kerma, Parts I-3; id., Excavations at Kerma, Parts 4-5.

\textsuperscript{112} Junker, El-Kubanieh-Nord, 1910-1911, 18-26; id., Der nubische Ursprung der sogenanten Tell el-Jahudiye Vasen, 94-105; id., “Bemerkungen zur Kerma-Kunst”; Säve-Söderbergh, Ägypten und Nubien, 103-116. See also the overview provided by Kendall, Kerma and the Kingdom of Kush, 19-27.

\textsuperscript{113} Adams, Nubia: Corridor to Africa, 209-210, 214 [emphasis added].

\textsuperscript{114} One may compare in this regard the Hyksos royal scarab seals found in the Judaean hills. While Bunimovitz has interpreted them as “an indication of administrative integration,” the actual context of their archaeological discovery suggests a rather different function. Ilan explains: “The overwhelming majority have been found in mortuary contexts and should probably be associated with a regenerative amuletic symbolism.” In this regard, the biblical mention of the Hyksos dynast “Shesi” among the “Anakite” kings of Hebron need not indicate his rule over the town, as Kempinski has implied; it is just as likely that Sheshi’s appearance in the Judaean hills was a result of ritual authority devoid of administrative control. A similar scenario might well be proposed for the relationship between the el-Kurru dynasts and Meroë as reflected in the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty scarabs which appear in mortuary contexts at Begrawiya West and South. For the problem of the Hyksos scarabs, see discussion in: Bunimovitz, “On the edge of empires,” 320; Ilan, “Dawn of internationalism,” 311; Kempinski, “Middle Bronze Age,” 194.

\textsuperscript{115} Bradley, “Meroitic Chronology,” 197.

\textsuperscript{116} Török, Meroë City I, 25. For the foundation courses of the Amun temple at Sanam, see Griffith, “Oxford Excavations in Nubia VIII-XVII,” 80.

\textsuperscript{117} Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroë, II.

\textsuperscript{118} Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroë, fig. 174.
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taken by Török to indicate that at the latter site “the builders came from the Napata region,” both before and after an episode of flood which deposited the intervening layer of silt during the reign of Taharqo.119

The neighboring areas of the Amun temple (M 260) and the so-called “Royal Enclosure” pose a challenge to this thesis, for in both areas there is a conspicuous absence of any architectural fragments inscribed with the nomina or prenomina of Twenty-Fifth Dynasty kings. Garstang explained this absence by speculating that “their stones were carried away” at a point when “some catastrophe overwhelmed the city.”120 More recently, Török has proposed to identify this catastrophe with the aforementioned flood, which he connects to the famous inundation of Taharqo’s sixth regnal year.121 Following Bradley,122 he cites a passage from Kawa V as a possible reference to the inundation of the habitation mounds at Meroë City:

When the time came for the rising (7) of the inundation, it continued rising greatly each day and it passed many days rising at the rate of one cubit every day. It penetrated the hills of the Southland, it overtopped the mounds of the Northland, and the land was Primeval Waters, an inert (expanse), without land being (8) distinguishable from river. It rose to a height of twenty-one cubits, one palm, and two-and-a-half digits at the harbor of Dominion (Thebes). His Majesty had the annals of the ancestors brought to him, to see the inundation(s) that happened in their time(s), and the like thereof was not found therein. (9) Indeed, the sky rained in the Land of everything, Egypt was in beautiful festival, and they thanked god for His Majesty.123

This flood, Török argues, effectively covered the area upon which M 260 would later be built and limited all royal architecture during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty to elevated ground northwest of that area. According to this interpretation, the braided channel of the river prevented the expansion of urban space during the later Napatan era as well, requiring instead that Twenty-Fifth Dynasty structures be dismantled to make room for new royal monuments. The temenos which was found to surround that area, dubbed by Garstang the “Enclosure Wall,” was assigned by Török to the mid- or late-third century BC, based upon “stratigraphical speculation” relative to dated levels in Shinnie and Bradley’s trenches on the North Mound.124

Observing the “pseudo-rustication” unique to the eastern side of the Enclosure Wall, Török would further date the adjacent construction of M 260 to a period when that wall “was still being in the course of construction,” and thus also in the third century BC.125 It is certainly to be hoped that future excavations will provide a more secure means of dating the structure than subjective observation of one wall’s texture or “rustication”—much less its “pseudo-rustication.” Nevertheless, if Török’s conclusion does prove correct, then M 260 would not have been in existence during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.

Constrained by the course of the river, any temple or royal residence built for the kings of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty would therefore need to be sought within the space demarcated by that later wall—the area of the so-called “Royal Enclosure.” Re-used blocks from the area yielded no Twenty-Fifth Dynasty royal nomina, but apparent foundation deposits have nevertheless been taken to suggest a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty date. Beneath the structure designated M 296, Garstang discovered “foundation deposits, bronze figures, &c., of Egyptian style, … [which] take us back also, like the architecture of the building, to the period of Taharqa.”126 Garstang’s allusion to the building’s architecture evidently referred to the four columns which had supported the roof,127 and this arrangement, along with the foundation deposits, led Garstang and

119 Török, Meroe City I, 25.
121 Török, Meroe City I, 25.
123 Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek A.E.I.N. 1712, ll. 6-9, in Macadam, Temples of Kawa I, pls. 9-10.
124 Török, Meroe City I, 43-45.
125 Török, Meroe City I, 35. The proposed connection between M 260 and the Enclosure Wall remains a matter of considerable dispute: Gryzmski, Meroe Reports I, 21; Török, “From chieftom to ‘segmentary state,’” 160 n. 66.
127 See also Arkell, History of the Sudan, 133.
Sayce to designate M 296 as the “Taharqa building” in the Interim Reports. In the 1988 publication of his doctoral thesis on Meroitic architecture, al-Hakem also attributed to foundation deposits in the Royal Enclosure “several faience fragments bearing the name of Amanirdis (daughter of Kashta, 760-744 BC),” citing as support the published testimony of Sayce. More recently, Török would add to this evidence a striding bronze statuette from Garstang’s excavations “which can be identified as a representation of Taharqo” (Figs. 2 and 3 below). Attributing this statuette to the area inside the later “Royal Enclosure,” Török has reconstructed an “early Amûn temple” (to be distinguished from M 260, the “late Amûn temple”) which was located across the area later spanned by M 292-298 and which was oriented north-south like the earliest dwellings upon the North Mound. Combining the evidence of the foundation deposits from Meroë City with the mumified coffin burials and inscribed early royal prenomina and nomina from Begrawiya South and West, he proposes that, at the inception of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, Meroë was already host to “an Egyptianized temple and its priesthood who could care for mortuary rites and cult.”

Possible support for the theory of a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty Amûn temple at Meroë is provided by the recent finds of the Khartoum-Toronto mission in M 750, an enigmatic structure containing an assortment of re-used reliefs from the Middle or Late Meroitic periods. As noted in Chapter II.2.1 above, radiocarbon samples within the structure yielded “surprisingly early” dates: 920-780 BC (1σ 840-800 BC) and 840-770 BC (1σ 820-790 BC). If such dates are taken to indicate the existence of a predecessor to M 750 located

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130 Török, *Meroe City I*, 29, 32, 260, pls. 210-211.

131 Török, *Meroe City I*, 25-30 §§2.4.1-2.4.2. The area of M 295 is assigned by Török to the early palace that would have accompanied the early Amûn temple.


133 Grzymski, “Recent Research at the Palaces and Temples of Meroë,” 234; id., “Meroe, the capital of Kush,” 54.
upon the same spot, then they might equally suggest a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty core to M 260, for M 750 is located on the starboard side of M 260’s processional way, in exactly the position one would expect of a royal palace vis-à-vis an Amun temple.\(^{534}\) The radiocarbon dates are not mentioned in Török’s most recent discussion of the “early Amûn temple,” and indeed they would not accord well with his hypothesis that M 260 was a construction of the third century BC and its predecessor instead located within the area of the “Royal Enclosure” and oriented north-south rather than east-west.\(^{535}\) Consequently, the Khartoum-Toronto discoveries in M 750 offer possible support for Török’s chronological conclusions, but not for his architectural reconstruction.

However, it would be hazardous to base the early history of the site upon only two radiocarbon samples, particularly as neither was directly associated with any architectural features. As Gryzmski cautions:

> The presence of the Early Napatan [read: pre-Twenty-Fifth Dynasty] material within a building containing reused Meroitic reliefs is difficult to explain. The deposits found in rooms C and G were placed inside these rooms and do not seem to represent an early midden on which the palace was later erected. They could conceivably represent the fill placed in that position during the construction of M 750S, although the different nature of deposits in each room and the presence of complete vessels rather than broken sherds argue against this explanation.\(^{536}\)

Thus, Török’s reconstruction of the “early Amûn temple” is instead based upon the aforementioned small finds from the area of the “Royal Enclosure,” and he has taken these to indicate a conquest of the region by the el-Kurru dynasts that coincided with the earliest royal nomina at Begrawiya West and South and resulted in a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty Amun temple and royal residence at the site. This scenario is reiterated in each of his recent monographs dealing with the Nubian half of the Double Kingdom.\(^{137}\) Török concludes: “[T]he Meroe region lost its independence to the el Kurru dynasty around the beginning of the 25th Dynasty period.”\(^{138}\)

A certain irony must be remarked here about the manner in which Reisner’s and Sayce’s interpretations have mutated in subsequent scholarship. As discussed above, the evidence which Reisner used to argue for Meroë’s annexation by the el-Kurru dynasts—the collection of inscribed grave goods at Begrawiya West and South—is now cited by Priese et al. as proof that the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty originated from Meroë, while the evidence which Sayce first used to argue for the dynasty’s origin at Meroë—the group of small finds from the Royal Enclosure—is now cited by Török as proof that the city had been annexed by the dynasts from el-Kurru. Clearly, the archaeological evidence from Meroë does not speak for itself. However, the two divergent interpretations have one important conclusion in common: both would subsume Meroë within the Double Kingdom across the entire history of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.

II.3.2. **Critique: The Architectural Chronology of Meroë City**

While Török concedes that his reconstruction is “incomplete and at points hypothetical,” the scenario he proposes is nevertheless eminently plausible, incorporating several categories of evidence, and it should

\(^{534}\) O’Connor, “City and Palace in New Kingdom Egypt,” 82ff.

\(^{535}\) Magnetometry survey conducted by the Khartoum-Toronto mission within the Royal Enclosure has not revealed the early Amun temple envisioned there by Török; Gryzmski, “Amun Temple(s) at Meroe”; Schellinger, “Nubian Palaces and Amun Temples.”

\(^{536}\) Gryzmski, “Meroe, the capital of Kush,” 54. Quite recently, Gryzmski’s excavations have uncovered a mud-brick wall beneath M 750S which was covered by a ceramic dump, a large quantity of animal bones, and charcoal. According to the excavators, the resulting C14 dates confirm “that the newfound wall is of the Early Kushite/Napatan period” [their designation for the pre-Twenty-Fifth Dynasty era], but it remains to be determined whether the wall was commissioned by the el-Kurru dynasts themselves. As argued above, Meroë may well have been a site of construction by local elites before it became a site of royal construction by the family buried at el-Kurru and Nuri. Indeed, the existence of some form of temple at Meroë during the ninth century BC would not be at all surprising, given that the evidence in contemporaneous tombs at the site strongly suggests the presence locally of priests literate in the Egyptian language. Less obvious is the political context of any such temple at that time, and thus considerable caution must be exercised in interpreting the decorated blocks that had been re-used in M 750. Again, the complete absence of royal nomina either upon or in association with architectural fragments renders the political significance of the earliest structures at Meroë quite unclear. See Gryzmski and Gryzmska, “Excavations in Palace M 750S at Meroe,” 48-49 pl. 4; Rocheleau, *Amun Temples in Nubia*, 80-81. See also discussion in n. 140 below.


\(^{138}\) Török, *Meroé City I*, 18.
remain among the candidate explanations for Meroë’s early history.\textsuperscript{139} Future excavations at the site by the Khartoum-Toronto mission may well furnish additional pieces of support for Török’s reconstruction, particularly if they are able to locate even a single re-used block securely attributable to a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty pharaoh.\textsuperscript{140} The critique that follows will highlight certain ambiguities in the evidence which admit explanations other than those endorsed by Török, so that alternative scenarios might not be foreclosed prematurely.

Among the more ambiguous evidence cited by Török are the brick-size correlations, and the argument which would connect them to the el-Kurru dynasty bears the closest and most instructive analogy to Reisner’s logic at Kerma. In his study of Kerma’s Lower Deffufa, Reisner observed that the 52.3 × 26.7 m base of the structure would have corresponded almost exactly to 100 × 50 ancient Egyptian cubits.\textsuperscript{141} The use of Egyptian units of measure, he reasoned, demonstrated the involvement of Egyptian architects, who, in turn, must have been stationed at Kerma following an Egyptian conquest of the region. Similarly, Török has observed a correspondence between the measurements of mud bricks in the Fourth Cataract region and those found at Meroë, and he has reasoned that the use at Meroë of units of measure otherwise attested in the Fourth Cataract region demonstrates the involvement of architects from that Fourth Cataract region who must have been stationed at Meroë following a conquest by the el-Kurru dynasts. Reisner’s and Török’s arguments are as speculative as they are ingenious, and both are vulnerable to the same critique: the use of standardized, foreign units of measure demonstrates influence, but it need not correspond to foreign domination—whether by Egyptians at Kerma or by the el-Kurru elites at Meroë.\textsuperscript{142}

Foreign (or even local) architects employing those units might just as plausibly have been commanded by local elites rather than by foreign overlords. While this point is now widely accepted as a corrective to Reisner’s conclusions at Kerma, it has not been raised against Török’s similar conclusions at Meroë. Deductions based upon brick-size correlations on the North Mound must therefore be supported with firmer evidence of involvement by the el-Kurru dynasts in other construction projects at the site. In this regard, it is immediately striking that none of the architectural elements of M 260 or the “Royal Enclosure,” whether in situ or re-used, bears the nomina or prenomina of a single Twenty-Fifth Dynasty king. Török would explain this absence as the result of the high Nile recorded in Taharqo’s sixth regnal year—a flood which, he maintains, confined all royal architecture for several centuries to the palimpsestic space later demarcated by the Enclosure Wall. Considerable doubts about the proposed effects of such a flood upon the urban layout of Meroë City have been voiced by Pawel Wolf.\textsuperscript{143} Yet, even if the exceptional inundation in Taharqo’s year 6 did transform the city, it does not necessarily follow that the city thus transformed was already the site of an Amun temple and royal residence.

The textual evidence cited in support of this argument—Kawa V—does not mention Meroë by name, much less a temple or royal residence at the site, and refers only vaguely to “the hills of the Southland” and a rain in the “Land of the St-Bow” which “adorned all the hills” (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Æ.I.N. 1712, il. 7-9). In fact, Kawa V has frustrated many such attempts at geographical eisegesis: though the text does include the only explicit statement of the Double Kingdom’s boundaries known thus far, it does so without any identifiable reference to Meroë or the Butana region. In lines 15-16, the inscription states in the voice of Taharqo: “[M]y father Amun had ordered for me that every land and every hill-country be placed under the soles of my feet, south \(\text{Qbh}-\text{Hr}\) and north to \(\text{Qbh}-\text{Hr}\), east to the rising of Re and west to the place in which He sets.”\textsuperscript{144} The southern boundary as named has proven enigmatic, and most scholars have

\textsuperscript{139} Török, \textit{Meroe City} I, 14.
\textsuperscript{140} The possibility that blocks from the earliest Amun temple may have been re-used in M 750 or M 260 is discussed by: Grzymski, “Meroe, the capital of Kush,” 53; \textit{id., Meroe Reports} I, 20; Rocheleau, \textit{Amun Temples in Nubia}, 80-81.
\textsuperscript{141} Kendall, \textit{Kerma and the Kingdom of Kush}, 21.
\textsuperscript{142} The same logic must ultimately be applied to the mud-brick wall recently found by Grzymski beneath M 750S (see n. 136 above), which was “made of small bricks (230-260 × 130 × 80 mm) usually associated with the 25th Dynasty.” Grzymski and Grzym ska, “Excavations in Palace M 750S at Meroe,” 49.
\textsuperscript{143} Wolf, “Vorbericht über die Ausgrabungen am Tempel MJ E 105.” See also Ahmed, “Island of Meroë?”.
\textsuperscript{144} Macadam, \textit{Temples of Kawa} I, pls. 9-10. See also the recent transcription by Jansen-Winkeln, \textit{Inschriften der Spätzeit} III, 137. As Macadam explained in 1949, however, the stela was further damaged during transport and is no longer useful for verification of this reading: Macadam, \textit{Temples of Kawa} I, 31.
Without a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty reference to the toponym Meroë, or a reference to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty kings upon the inscribed architecture of Meroë City, the identification of a royal construction project at Meroë during that era is therefore dependent upon the small finds and, in particular, those attributed to foundation deposits within the “Royal Enclosure.” Garstang’s designation of M 296 as the “Taharqa building” was based initially upon a casual architectural comparison which he later rescinded, but also upon “foundation deposits, bronze figures, &c . . . [which] take us back . . . to the period of Taharqa.”

Though the objects in question are not further described by Garstang, Török’s analysis of the excavation records has proposed that they “are probably identical with 296-1 to 7,” objects whose present whereabouts are unknown (Fig. 4). Török’s closer study of the surviving photographs allowed only a vague stylistic dating to the “25th Dynasty or Early Napatan” era. Unfortunately, it is precisely the distinction between the two periods that is most important to the question at hand, and thus the M 296 deposits provide little assistance in ascertaining the existence of a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty temple or palace at Meroë.
More definite proof of Twenty-Fifth Dynasty architecture at Meroë would seem at first to be provided by al-Hakem’s reference to “faience fragments bearing the name of Amanirdis (daughter of Kashta)” from the foundation deposits of M 294 and M 295, particularly as references were given to Garstang’s “Card Records” as well as a published mention of the fragments by Sayce.156 Though Török’s study of Garstang’s records found no mention of any inscribed objects naming Amenirdis at Meroë City,157 Sayce’s publication in 1929 did refer to an inscribed object of “blue faience from the Southern Palace” naming “Amonardu[s].”158 However, Sayce made no mention of the nomen Kashta found in association with that object, and thus there is little reason to presume that the Amenirdis in question was the God’s Wife of that name during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty (Amenirdis I), rather than the Divine Adoratrice Amenirdis II, who many believe may have returned to Kush after the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.159 In fact, Sayce’s chronological list of the inscribed objects found in that deposit placed “Amon-ardu[s]” between the fifth and fourth centuries BC(!)—likely erroneous but indicating, at the very least, that there was little in the way of archaeological context, artistic style, or palaeography to connect the inscribed object with Kashta and the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty kings.

Török’s publication of Garstang’s excavation records does discuss both the bronze figures found beneath M 296 and the “Amon-ardu[s]” fragment mentioned by Sayce, but Török judiciously discounts both as proof of a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty temple in the area.160 Instead, Török cites the evidence of a bronze royal striding statuette which supports, “however indirectly,” the conclusion that “the early Amûn Temple already existed in some form in the early 25th Dynasty period” (Figs. 2 and 3).161 Attributing the statuette to Taharqo, Török writes:

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157 Török, Meroe City I, 161.
158 Sayce, “Ethiopian Sovereigns at Meroe,” 71.
160 Török, Meroe City I, 161, 165-166.
161 Török, Meroe City I, 29.
As far as it may be judged on the basis of the poor photograph, the profile of the Meroe City statuette closely resembles the profile in the Boston bronze [MFA 1970.443]. The proportions of the forehead, nose, and chin parts are identical in both pieces and also the rendering of the short, weak chin and the smooth curve of the transition from chin to neck line are analogous in the two pieces. . . . Russmann and Mysliewiec did not suggest an identification of the Boston statuette, but in Mysliewiec's work it is illustrated on Pl. XIV, certainly not accidentally, in the company of three relief representations of Taharqo. The striking resemblances between the weak chin, full lips and cheeks and the skull shape in the Boston piece and the Taharqo reliefs and especially the characteristic backward slant of the forehead shared by all of them indicate that both the Boston and the lost Meroe City bronzes represent this particular ruler. Such an identification is further supported by the similarities between these statuettes and the Louvre statuette representing Taharqo before Hemen [Louve E 25276].

The chain of inference thus runs as follows: the existence of a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty temple at Meroë is posited on the basis of a striding statuette from the excavations, now lost, whose facial features are judged "on the basis of the poor photograph" to resemble a squatting statuette of Taharqo at the Louvre and another striding bronze statuette in Boston which, though unattributed, was suggestively placed on the same page with three relief representations of Taharqo in Mysliewiec's published overview of late royal portraiture.

Noticeably absent from this analysis is any demonstration that the statuette could not belong to the corpus of post-Twenty-Fifth Dynasty portraiture—e.g., for such kings as Senkamanisken and Aspelta. Indeed, the exclusion of post-Twenty-Fifth Dynasty kings would be difficult, for even though bronze statuary continued to be made in Kush during the Early Napatan period, the paucity of attributable portraits in that medium renders the identification of distinctive facial features for each king of that epoch and their differentiation from Taharqo quite speculative—particularly given the likely filiation of those kings from Taharqo himself. As both Marsha Hill and Edna Russmann have noted, the royal image and iconography of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty are continuous with those of the Early Napatan kings who followed, and one must therefore be wary of "the tendency . . . to call them all Taharqa, even though some . . . could very well be later than the Twenty-fifth Dynasty proper." If the statuette came from the area within the "Royal Enclosure," as Török quite reasonably suggests, then its date is best judged, not on the basis of stylistic comparisons alone, but also through confrontation with the chronological data provided by the other foundation deposits from that area.

Beneath M 294 were found several objects inscribed with royal nomina. Garstang recorded below its wall three golden necklace spacers inscribed with the names of Aramatelqo (first third of sixth century BC) and Malonaqen (first half of sixth century BC), presumably left there as a foundation deposit. These are now in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum (49.29) and Khartoum's Sudan National Museum (511.1), with replicas at the Brooklyn Museum (63.35.1-2) and Liverpool (SAOS 8041-8043). In a separate cachette below M 294, labeled by Garstang the "rubbish pit," a large number of votive sistrum and šnḫ-wıs symbols was found inscribed with the nomina of: Senkamanisken and his presumed wife, Nasalsa; Aspelta; and Siospiqo (first half of fifth century BC). Several of these objects are believed to remain uncatalogued in Khartoum. In the Second Interim Report, Garstang and Sayce dated the objects to the “8th [sic] to 6th century BC,” but the earlier half of that date range may .

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162 Török, Meroe City I, 260.
163 Mysliewiec, Royal Portraiture of the Dynasties XXI-XXX, pl. XIIVc.
164 Macadam, Temples of Kawa II, 141-149, pls. LXXV-LXX XII.
165 Morkot, “Kingship and Kinship in the Empire of Kush,” 209; Dunham and Macadam, "Names and Relationships of the Royal Family of Napata." 166 Hill, Royal Bronze Statuary from Ancient Egypt, 51 n. 2; Russmann, Representation of the King in the XXVth Dynasty, 20.
167 Though Török initially published the statue as "unprovenanced," he has stated recently: "I failed to realize that it was photographed by Garstang as part of the metal finds from the second cachette." Török, Hellenizing Art in Ancient Nubia, 120 n. 51.
168 Török, Meroe City I, 160-161.
169 Wenig, Africa in Antiquity II, 185 no. 101.
170 But cf. n. 56 above.
171 Török, Meroe City I, 155-160; but see also Khartoum SNM 00624 and 00626, both inscribed for Aspelta and attributed to M 294, as now published in Hinkel and Mohamed, Catalogue of the Objects in the Sudan National Museum, 54.
be explained by the fact that Garstang and Sayce initially believed Malonaqen and Aspelta to be pre-Twenty-Fifth Dynasty kings—a view subsequently rendered untenable by Reisner’s excavations at Nuri.\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Mutatis mutandis}, the cachette yields a date range from the late seventh to the early fifth century BC.

As Sanhouri al-Rayah would first observe, the votive sistra and ‘\textit{ḥw-ws}’ symbols suggest an association with the renewal of royal power on New Year’s Day\textsuperscript{173} and possibly also an Early Napatan practice of antedating regnal years to coincide with that date—a \textit{à la} their Saïte contemporaries. Török has thus concluded that “the two object complexes discovered under M 294 attest in themselves the existence of a temple in this area.”\textsuperscript{174} This interpretation has been disputed by Hinkel and Sievertsen, in light of the “Neujahrshalle des Aspelta” in the royal palace (B 1200) at Gebel Barkal: “Könnte man die Ritual nicht auch in einem speziell dazu bestimmten Bereich des königlichen Palastes ausgeführt haben?”\textsuperscript{175} For the present discussion, the distinction is less crucial, as the more important fact is that a royal construction had been erected at Meroë City during the Early Napatan, \textit{i.e.} post-Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, period.

More definitive proof of the same conclusion is provided by an assortment of blocks found at spot M 293, under M 294, and in secondary position within M 295. These were inscribed with the names of: \textit{[Hr]-nbw H[ry-hr-Mr/t ?]} (Anlamani?, late seventh century BC); Aspelta (late seventh-early sixth century BC); Malonaqen (first half of sixth century BC); Amaninatakilebte (second half of sixth century BC); and Talakhamani (second half of fifth century BC).\textsuperscript{176} Yellin’s recent study of the blocks has concluded that several derived from “temples of either Aspelta or Malonaqen in area M 293/4.” Combining the evidence of the inscribed blocks with that of the foundation deposits beneath M 294, Yellin envisions “a Napatan[-era] Temple to Amun dating to the reign of Senkamenisken,” to which “Aspelta apparently added” before it was “renovated by Malonaqen”; she would presumably exclude the possible Golden Horus name of Anlamani as too fragmentary and conjectural for attribution.\textsuperscript{177} The names of Senkamanisken, Aspelta, and Malonaqen are thus the first that are securely attested in relation to a royal construction at Meroë City. This time frame is too fragmentary and conjectural for attribution.\textsuperscript{177} The names of Senkamanisken, Aspelta, and Malonaqen are thus the first that are securely attested in relation to a royal construction at Meroë City. This time frame corresponds to the first possible textual reference to Meroë as [\textit{B}rw\textit{t}] in Psamtki II’s Tanis stela (Cairo JE 67095, L 8),\textsuperscript{178} as well as to the appearance of iron-working at the site\textsuperscript{179} and of the earliest surviving large-scale statuary at Meroë: a figure of Horus inscribed with the prenomen \textit{Mr-k3-Rt} (\textit{i.e.}, Aspelta).\textsuperscript{180} It also corresponds to the earliest evidence of royal construction farther afield in the Meroë region and Butana Steppe: at M 250 southeast of the city, broken fragments were found of a stela inscribed with the name of Aspelta, and the possibility has been entertained that reliefs on the lower podium of that structure may derive from his reign as well.\textsuperscript{181} At distant Defeia in the Butana, a sphinx of Aspelta (Khartoum SNM 11777) was discovered in 1957 that referenced an Osiris cult at a hitherto unlocated toponym: \textit{Mr\textit{t}t}.\textsuperscript{182} The later mention by Harsiyyotef of separate Osiris processions at \textit{Brw\textit{t}} and \textit{Mr\textit{t}t} was taken by Vercoutter to indicate that the two sites were distinct, and that centuries prior Aspelta had founded a temple at \textit{Mrt\textit{t}/Mr\textit{t}t}.


\textsuperscript{173} Al-Rayah, \textit{Napatan Kingdom}, 9, 103, 132.

\textsuperscript{174} Török, \textit{Meroe City I}, 28.

\textsuperscript{175} Hinkel and Sievertsen, \textit{Die Royal City von Meroe}, 35 n. 32; cf. Török, “From chiefdom to ‘segmentary state,’” 160 n. 67.

\textsuperscript{176} Yellin, “Garstang Cache,” 396-416 §§2.8-2.10; Török, \textit{Meroe City I}, 28. Though Yellin does not mention it, the possibility cannot be altogether excluded that the cartouche (her fig. 240, block 6) which she took to be the Golden Horus name of Anlamani might instead have been that of Shebitoq: \textit{[Hr]-nbw H[ry-hr-nHr]}, as seen upon Berlin ÄMP 1480 from the right doorjamb of his chapel by the Sacred Lake at Karnak: \textit{LD} V, Bl. III. The isolation of such a royal architectural fragment at Meroë during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty would nevertheless speak in favor of Yellin’s identification of the fragment as the Golden Horus name of Anlamani.

\textsuperscript{177} Yellin, “Garstang Cache,” 418. For the “Anlamani” block, see \textit{op. cit.}, 408 fig. 240.

\textsuperscript{178} Sauneron and Yoyotte, \“La campagne nubiennes de Psamétique II,\” pl. III.

\textsuperscript{179} Shinnie and Anderson, \textit{Capital of Kush 2}, 73-74. For broader discussion of iron-working and its chronology in the Sahelian and savannah belts of Africa, see: Trigger, “Myth of Meroe and the African Iron Age”; Haaland and Shinnie, \textit{African Iron Working}; Rehren, \“Meroë, iron and Africa\”; Killick, \“What Do We Know about African Iron Working?\”; Abdu and Gordon, \“Iron artifacts from the land of Kush\”; Alpern, \“Did They or Didn’t They Invent It?\”; Smith, \“Death at Tombos\”; Killick, \“Cairo to Cape.\” Ongoing excavations at Hamadab and Meroë may yield relevant dates for the earliest iron-working there by the end of the summer excavation season of 2013; I thank Jane Humphris of University College London Qatar for sharing this information with me.


\textsuperscript{181} Garstang, \textit{Meroë}, 26; Shinnie, \textit{Meroë}, 83; Wenig, \textit{Africa in Antiquity II}, 59-60; Hofmann, \“Notizen zu den Kampfzänen\”; Török, \textit{Meroë City I}, 104.

\textsuperscript{182} Vercoutter, \“Le sphinx d’Aspelta de Defeia.”
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near Defeia to which the royal sphinx belonged. It is therefore quite evident that the kings of the Early Napatan period were already erecting monuments at Meroë City, and that Aspelta’s sphere of activity extended even farther into the steppe.

In contrast to the profusion of royal nomina from the Early Napatan era attested among the foundation deposits and inscribed blocks in Meroë City and even farther afield, not a single Twenty-Fifth Dynasty nomen or prenomen has yet been found in association with any monumental architecture in the region. When attempting to assign a stylistic date to the various “25th Dynasty or Early Napatan-era” bronze figures that were either located beneath M 296 or unprovenanced in Garstang’s records, preference should therefore be given to the later of these two periods. The same would logically apply to any “early Amûn temple,” “Neujahrshalle,” or “königlicher Palast” in whose foundations these bronze figures were deposited—rendering the earliest identifiable royal construction at the site a product of the post-Twenty-Fifth Dynasty period. In the absence of earlier evidence of royal construction, the vague textual references to flooded hills in Kawa V and the changes in mud-brick size on the North Mound cannot be tied with confidence to overrule at the site by elites from the Fourth Cataract region, thereby raising doubts about the extent to which Meroë had “lost its independence to the el Kurru dynasty around the beginning of the 25th Dynasty period.” Consequently, the nature of Twenty-Fifth Dynasty control in the region must be reconsidered.

II.4. Beyond Origins: The Annexation of Meroë

The archaeological and inscriptive evidence related to Meroë’s early history appears in the following sequence. In the late ninth century BC, mud-brick construction was present upon the South Mound, and steppic faunae from the broader Butana region were circulated internationally in the Near East as items of diplomatic exchange. During the middle of the eighth century BC, scarabs, inscribed seals, amulets, and coffin burials in the cemeteries at Begrâwiyâ West and South demonstrate contact with the dynasts interred roughly 300 km to the northwest at el-Kurru, likely mediated by mortuary priests from Egypt or from the Fourth Cataract region who were now resident at Meroë. As recent excavations have revealed, the first half of the seventh century BC brings the establishment of a cult of the royal statue at Dangeil just above the Fifth Cataract, likely accompanied by royal temple construction. In the second half of that century, farther south at Meroë City the area within the “Royal Enclosure” yields the first clear evidence there of royal construction—either of a temple, palace, or both—and slag deposits on mounds neighboring the city attest to the development of local iron industry. The reign of Aspelta at the beginning of the sixth century BC witnessed royal construction in the city’s immediate hinterland and far afield in the Butana Steppe, and it coincides with the first possible textual reference to Meroë, as well as the burial of a “King’s Wife” in the Begrâwiyâ South cemetery. By the fifth century BC, Meroë was recognized internationally as “the metropolis of all the other Aithiopians,” and there can be little doubt that the king and his royal kinsmen resided there for some portion of the year.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the chronological distribution of this evidence is that the aforementioned phenomena did not emerge simultaneously at Meroë. The inhabitation of Meroë City, its

183 See Cairo JE 48864, li. 148-149, in Grimal, Quatre stèles napatéennes, pls. XXIV-XXIVa.
184 Khartoum SNM 30177, 30178, in el-Sadig, “Some fragments of a statue of King Aspelta at Umm Dom.”
185 Török, Meroe City I, 166.
186 Török, Meroe City I, 18.
187 Anderson and Ahmed, “What are these doing here above the Fifth Cataract??”; cf. also Anderson and Ahmed, “Kushite Kiosk of Dangeil.” It should be apparent that construction by the el-Kurru dynasts at Dangeil does not necessarily entail construction by the el-Kurru dynasts at Meroë farther south, though it may well signal their southward expansion toward Meroë during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. The dedication of Taharqo’s statue at Dangeil to “Re-Horakhty who resides in Mst[?]” is particularly interesting and may help to clarify the motivations for royal activity there. Based upon the sequence in which Mst appears in Thutmose III’s toponym list at Karnak, Zyhlarz proposed to identify it with a coastal port on the Red Sea. Dangeil is too far inland to be synonymous with such a port, but overland routes to the Red Sea would seem to have departed the Nile at Dangeil. See Zyhlarz, “Countries of the Ethiopian Empire of Kash (Kush),” 29.
incorporation into long-distance trade networks, the appearance of mortuary priests from the Fourth Cataract region, the development of local industry for extra-local demand, and the devotion of local resources and manpower to royal construction projects are instead evidenced in phases, rather than all at once at the inception of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. Within this scenario, Meroë would have been annexed quite gradually by the dynasts buried at el-Kurru and Nuri. The earliest local elites at Meroë would thus be neither ancestral to nor entirely subservient to the kings of the Fourth Cataract region, constituting instead a Meroëtian lineage that benefited initially from long-distance trade with Napata and was then grafted onto the royal line(s) of el-Kurru and Nuri over the course of several generations. Under this scenario, Dangeil farther north would have functioned for the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty in a manner analogous to their sites of monumental construction in Lower Egypt (see Ch. VII below): a point of tangency between spheres of established royal hegemony and growing royal influence. It must be noted that this explanation is quite different from the theory, promoted by many and justly critiqued by Török, according to which the singular Kushite “capital” was abruptly transferred to Meroë during the reign of Aspelta as a response to the invasion of Psamtik II and/or the tyranny of Napatan priests.\footnote{Arkell, History of the Sudan, 144-146; Gadalla, “Meroitic Problems,” 199-200; Adams, Nubia: Corridor to Africa, 305-306; Török, “Ambulatory kingship and settlement history,” 113; Welsby, Kingdom of Kush, 20, 31-32, 65, 138, 140; Török, Meroe City I, 20 n. 69; id., Kingdom of Kush, 371-374.} That older theory would still presuppose that Meroë had been rapidly conquered by the el-Kurru dynasts centuries earlier and then served as the refuge of defeated royalty in the early sixth century BC. By contrast, the evidence reviewed above would suggest that Meroë maintained a considerable degree of autonomy in the centuries before Aspelta.

Further support for this interpretation is provided by certain patterns in the evidence which were not cited in support of the two foregoing apologiae. For example, in the cemeteries at Begrawiya West and South, Reisner observed that the earliest mummiﬁed coffin burials were among the most poorly-equipped of their generation, while the contemporaneous non-mummiﬁed pit burials were often lavishly provisioned with grave goods.\footnote{Dunham, West and South Cemeteries at Meroë, I, id., “Outline of the Ancient History of the Sudan, Part V,” 5.} This contrast would seem to speak in favor of the autonomy of local elites and against the theory of a dominant, intrusive caste from the Fourth Cataract region. The process by which these local elites were acculturated into the worldview of the el-Kurru dynasts and incorporated into the nascent Double Kingdom is perhaps suggested by the presence of a number of simple pit graves oriented east-west on the distant northern margins of the el-Kurru cemetery (Ku. 51, 52, 54, and 55), which may have contained the burials of Meroëtian women associated with the el-Kurru kings through diplomatic marriage.\footnote{Vila, La nécropole de Missiminia I, 170. For possible explanations of these ﬁgures, see Lohwasser, Die königlichen Frauen, 78.} Moreover, the cemeteries at Begrawiya West and South contained a much higher number of graves per generation before the reign of Aspelta than they did after his reign: sixty percent and ﬁfty percent of the graves at the West and South cemeteries, respectively, were made during roughly the ﬁrst two centuries of each cemetery’s existence, with the remaining forty percent and ﬁfty percent at each site spread over a period of nearly a millennium.\footnote{Dunham, El Kurru, 78, 81, 91, 93. As noted by Török, Meroe City I, 20, who would also include Ku. 22.} The reign of Aspelta also produces the earliest securely attested burial of a queen in the Meroë region (Mernua in BS 85), and only two generations later, the number of queens buried at Nuri in the Napata region decreased sharply.\footnote{Vila, La nécropole de Missiminia I, 170. For possible explanations of these ﬁgures, see Lohwasser, Die königlichen Frauen, 78.} If the local Meroëtian elite witnessed an abrupt change in their political status at any point during the city’s early history, it would therefore seem more likely to coincide with the early sixth century BC than with the inception of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty nearly two centuries prior.

Finally, it is perhaps noteworthy that each of the earliest historical inscriptions deriving from or mentioning Meroë also contains suggestions of local conﬂict. The earliest royal stela from the region—that of Aspelta at M 250—was thoroughly destroyed, and the neighboring reliefs sometimes attributed to him there depict a parade of captured enemies.\footnote{Dunham, “Outline of the Ancient History of the Sudan, Part V,” 7.} Two generations later, the few surviving blocks from Malonaqen’s

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\footnote{Garstang, Meroë, 26; Wenig, Africa in Antiquity II, 59-60; Török, Meroe City II, pls. 70-84; but cf: Hofmann, “Notizen zu den Kampfszenen”; Török, Meroe City I, 104-107; Hinkel, “Untersuchungen zur Bausubstanz, Architektur und Funktion des Gebäudes Meroe 245,” 224.}
temple M 294 include references to smt ("slaying"), [n]fr.wt mr ("soldiers"), and [s]biw ("enemies"). In Irike-Amanote’s inscription, Meroë is mentioned precisely because it was the place where Talakhamani was killed, and the guilty party—the Rehrehs—again provide the context for Meroë’s appearance in the stela of Harsiyotef. If this pattern is not completely coincidental, then it may suggest that the populations of Meroë’s hinterland and the broader Butana Steppe continued to pose a formidable challenge to the Napatan-period kings across the early history of their activity at the site.

The defensive functions of Meroë City have often been downplayed, for the Enclosure Wall alone was clearly insufficient as fortification. However, as Grzymski has recently observed, an examination of the broader region around Meroë City does confirm the impression given by the texts that Meroë was located in potentially hostile territory:

[A] careful look at the surrounding area reveals that to its north, west, and south, Meroe is enclosed by a chain of jebels . . . My own visits to Jebel Ardeb, whose summit is full of small stone depressions, convinced me that the place was . . . likely occupied by sentries guarding the Greater Meroe Area and was part of an “early warning system.” Traces of fire and presence of heat-cracked stones, already noticed by Lenoble, are in my opinion the evidence of the use of fire and smoke signals. Such guard posts placed on the hills are known from other regions, notably Dakhla Oasis. The jebels form an arch around Meroe at a distance of some 4 to 10 km away from the city, allowing for direct visual contact. Additionally, on the plains the entrance to the Meroe Plateau was protected by military camps such as Hamadab and perhaps Awlib to the south and possibly Gadu to the north.

If the region was violently contested during the Napatan and Meroitic eras, it cannot be assumed that the same populations folded compliantly to Twenty-Fifth Dynasty overrule centuries before.

A gradual annexation of the Meroë region as proposed above would have implications for the political history of the Early Napatan period, for it would recast the Keraba and Butana as a zone of active expansion for the kings of that era rather than a territorial bequest from their Twenty-Fifth Dynasty forebears. The Napatan period has often been narrated as a history of decline, corresponding to the loss of Egypt and Lower Nubia, and the subsequent increase in activity at Meroë, culminating in the transfer of the royal cemetery from Napata to Meroë during the third century BC, has been interpreted as a “Kushite Retreat into Africa.” Such an interpretation implicitly assumes that an indeterminate Africa south of Napata already belonged to the Kushite kings as their natural inheritance, and thus the move to Meroë was a retraction rather than an expansion of the state. It is a view which owes much to the centuries-long Egyptian tradition of associating Kush metonymically with the African Other, and it does not withstand scrutiny of the archaeological or inscriptive evidence. As outlined above, that evidence does not convincingly support the theory that the el-Kurru dynasts originated from Meroë, and it further draws into question any assumption that the region had lost its independence to those kings at the inception of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty.

For the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, the implications of a gradual annexation of the Meroë region are quite different, suggesting less territorial expansion than has generally been assumed. If Meroë City and its hinterland have yet to provide firm evidence of a Twenty-Fifth Dynasty royal construction, it stands to reason that the dynasty had made fewer inroads there than they had in much of contemporaneous Egypt. Given the challenges impeding the political control of transhumant populations in the steppe, this contrast is perhaps not surprising. The image of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty that is reflected in Meroë’s early history is that of an embryonic kingdom, whose boundaries, political strategies, and myths of the state were more inchoate than inherited.

194 Blocks #12b and 12c in Yellin, “Garstang Cache,” 404-405 figs. 229a,b-230a,b.
195 Kawa IX, cols. 3-6, in Macadam, Temples of Kawa I, pl. 17; Cairo JE 48864, ll. 99-100, 105-106, in Grimal, Quatre stèles napatéennes, pls. XXa-XXV.
196 Török, Meroe City I, 45.
197 Grzymski, “Recent research at the palaces and temples of Meroe,” 235-236.
198 Kendall, Kush: Lost Kingdom of the Nile, II.
199 For a contrasting view from an Africanist archaeologist, see Connah, “Corridor or cul-de-sac.”
200 For discussion of this tradition and its residues, see Edwards, “Ancient Egypt in the Sudanese Middle Nile,” I37-140.