CHAPTER SIX

THE GREAT ENCLOSURE AT MUSAWWARAT ES SUFRA

There are certain areas of scholarship [...] where the scantiness of evidence sets a special challenge to the disciplined mind [...] The isolated and uneloquent fact must be exhibited within a tissue of hypothesis subtle enough to make it speak[.]1

1. Kings and Gods at Musawwarat es Sufra

1.1. The Building and its Function(s): 1

The most impressive, and enigmatic, building ruins of Meroitic Nubia lie in the valley of Musawwarat es Sufra2 in the western Butana (Keraba) c. 75 km southwest of Meroe City, 35 km east of the Nile, and 160 km northeast of the confluence of the Blue and White Nile.3 Within an

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2 Including the reports of the excavators, the literature uses indiscriminately the writings Musawwarat es Sufra, Musawwarat es-Sufra and Musawwarat-es-Sufra. In this book the first variant is observed.
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amphitheatre-shaped valley, 2 to 3 km across, with entrances on the north-east and south-west, there are situated the so-called Great and Small Enclosures, the one-roomed Temple of Apedemak, erected by King Arnekhamani, who was contemporary with (the later reign of) Ptolemy III Euergetes I (246–222/1 BC) and (the earlier reign of) Ptolemy IV Philopator (221–204 BC); further three smaller shrines (I D, II A, II D) and two artificial water reservoirs or hafirs. The buildings were constructed from sandstone, but the Small Enclosure also has some parts built of mud-brick. There are little remains of permanent habitation quarters and the burials recovered at the site date from the Neolithic and Post-Meroitic periods.

Before turning to the elements that display Hellenistic or Hellenizing influences in the architecture and decoration of the Great Enclosure we cannot dispense with a more detailed discussion of this unique building and its function(s).

The valley of Musawwarat es Sufrā, ‘Ibrp, ‘Ipbr-‘nh of Egyptian Aborepi (from ‘Ipbr-‘nh) of Meroitic texts, is dominated by the imposing mass of the Great Enclosure extending over an area of c. 64,000

Teil 2: 10. 01.–30. 03. 2000. Ibid. 13–15; for further preliminary excavation reports, see MittSAG 12 (2002) ff.

4 The Small Enclosure was published by M. Fitzenreiter et al.: Die Kleine Anlage (Meroitica 17,1). Wiesbaden 1999. There is no final publication of the 1960–1968 excavations at the Great Enclosure.

5 Hintze et al. 1971, 1993; for the iconographical program cf. also L. Török: The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubia. in: Kuhn – Stahl (eds) 2001 127–146; Török 2002a 187 ff.; Hallof 2005.—The temple was found in a badly ruined condition, its walls were rebuilt, its columns reerected by the Humboldt University mission.

6 On the basis of the successive epithets in his Son-of-Re name, cf. Hintze 1962; FHN II Nos (124), (125).

7 For the cult of shrine II A, see Török 2002a 201 ff.


9 Excavations were conducted at burial sites between 1960 and 1968 and after 1995, see C. Jeuthe: Neuere Untersuchungen der Bestattungen im Wadi es-Sufrā. MittSAG 15 (2004) 69–78.—Wolf 2001a 494 f. supposes that future archaeological work may change this impression.

10 Hintze 1962 fig. 9 No. 11.

11 Cf. REM 1111.