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Front cover. Stone slab A3 used as a paving slab in Temple 4, Qasr Ibrim, showing Taharqa and Amun (photograph courtesy of F. Aldsworth).

Above. Frontal scan of lion head, Naga (Kroeper and Perzlmeier 2022, fig. 21, © Naga Project, 3-D scans by TrigonArt BauerPraus GbR).

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From cult theory to cult practice through excavation: throne pedestals in Naga

Christian Perzlmeier

Although throne pedestals have mostly been assumed to have been used for the place of the first enthronement ceremony of the king (Kuckertz and Lohwasser 2016, 94-95), it seems in my opinion more likely that they served various cultic practices.¹ The necessity of multiple throne daises in respective areas seems a compelling argument that these were necessary for a given cult event and this seems to receive confirmation in Naga where so far four pedestals have been found in different areas of the site. Excavations give us a means to experience and grasp facts, situations, and circumstances of the ancient world. Thus, I undertake in this contribution an attempt to give my ideas, previously expressed already several times in different places, a more or less uniform framework and to summarise them, as far as is possible up to now. The impulse for this was the assumption that there must have been, and *de facto* exists, more than one throne platform in Naga.

Even if as frequently propagated in literature, the throne pedestal serves only for the enthronement ceremonies in a temple it seems that the pedestal did not belong to the temple inventory in a narrow sense, but served not only for the enthronement – the very first time for that ceremony – but was also used as the starting point for all further cultic actions by the ruler. The assumption that the throne daises so far known were not found in their original position should be reconsidered, especially since the foundations of these stones have not been examined in detail, and moreover it is often considered that they do not exist. With the finds in Naga, reliable evidence for the foundations and therefore the original locations of the pedestals have been documented for the first time.

The location of the throne pedestal of the temple of Amun, a monolithic sandstone block (Kröper *et al.* 2011, 46-50; Wildung in press), was found in the southwest corner of the Amun temple, near the high altar within the sacred area (Figure 1). It is divided into three levels (Figure 2) ending with a semi-circular dais (H. 0.435m; W. 0.84m; D. 1.61m). On all three levels are depictions of prisoners in sunken relief (Tomandl 1986, 149 ff). Likewise, the outer sides of the platform are decorated with continuous representations of bound prisoners lying on their stomachs (Figure 3).

The Amun temple of Naga was used until its sudden destruction. This is clearly shown by the excavation results, which document not only the collapse of the building but also a fire in the temple building itself. Thanks to these circumstances, a rich and *in situ* ‘treasure’ of sacrificial basins, altars, statues etc. could be recovered. The subsequent smouldering fire resulted in the preservation of several painted plaster fragments from the walls, and of temple furniture that had been turned into charcoal. It is difficult to imagine that the throne platform was excavated from these ruins and dragged to the beginning of the ramp in the southwest corner of the area, while all other objects were left behind in the temple.

We can then conclude that this pedestal was probably found approximately in its original position and is therefore not part of the actual inner temple inventory. Why would one bother to move the throne platform from the interior of the temple to the southwest corner of the temple area? At Jebel Barkal, the throne pedestal (Figure 4) was also found southwest of the temple of Amun (Lohwasser and Haupt 2012, 77ff) and in Meroe another pedestal was found south of the kiosk of the Amun temple (M260).²

¹ It should be mentioned here that in some literature high altars (not discussed here) that are found at different sites including Naga (Kroeper 2011, 95-96; Kroeper 2010, 234; Anderson and Salah ed-Din M. Ahmed 2006, 95), mostly with offering stands on top, are not always clearly differentiated from these pedestals.

² A fragment of a throne or victory stela bearing a poorly inscribed Greek inscription was also found at Meroe associated with M282 but its original disposition is uncertain. It is now in the Sudan National Museum (SNM 24841) (see Hägg 1984; 2004; Török 1997, 106-108).

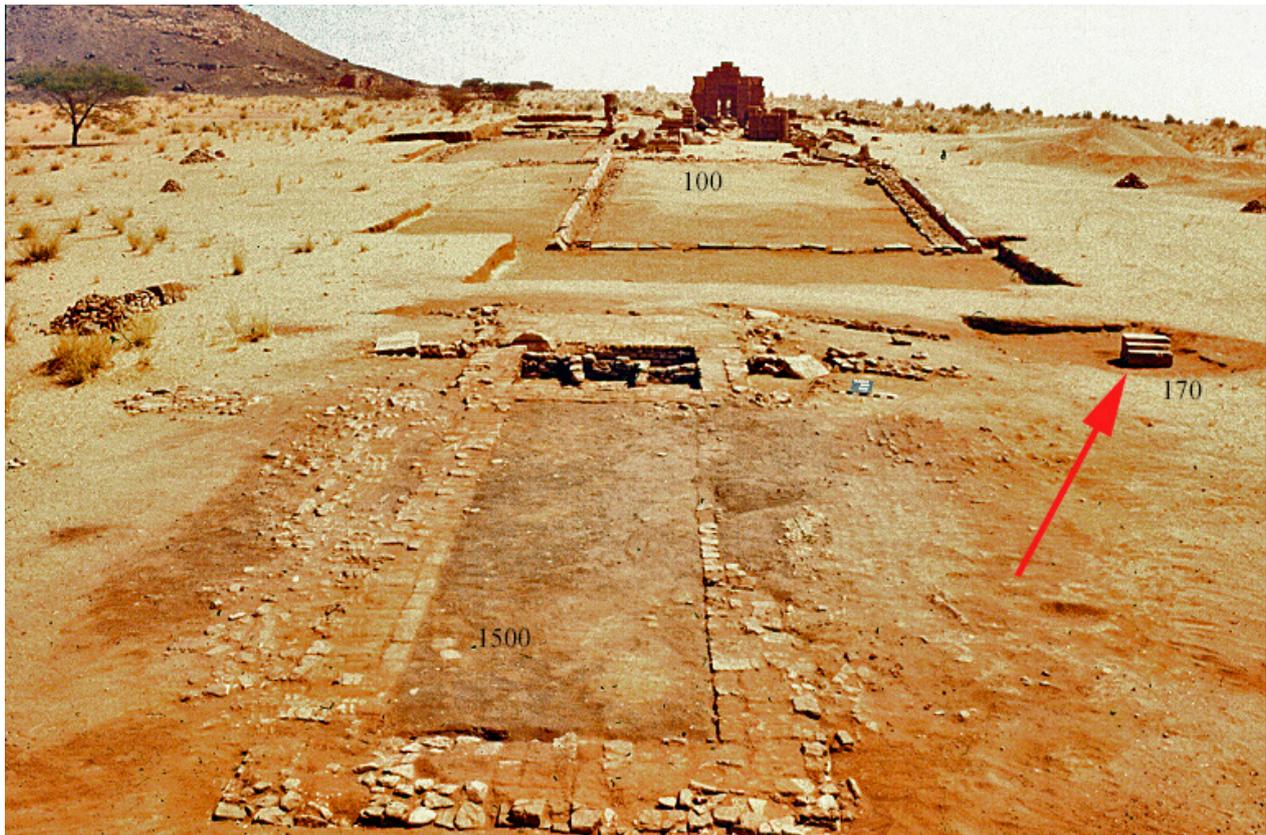


Figure 1. Location of the throne pedestal in the Amun temple district; in the foreground High Altar 1500 (photo from Slide 1995, © Naga Project).



Figure 2. View of the decoration of the Throne Pedestal 170 with three decorated levels (© Naga Project).



Figure 3. View of the decoration of the Throne Pedestal 170, with a surrounding decoration of bound prisoners. The pecked area at the bottom indicates to which level the pedestal was invisible (© Naga Project).



Figure 4. View of the throne pedestal at Jebel Barkal, with decoration of bound prisoners (photo K. Kroeper).

On the other hand, a throne pedestal of the ruler within the temple building itself, as in any other temple, makes little sense because it is Amun who rules here and not the king who performs sacrifices to him. The throne pedestal is clearly, made for a chair or stool, i.e. the throne of the king, which was reached by two or three steps, and probably situated under a canopy. Since this canopy most probably consisted of organic material and was most likely placed there only temporarily, no evidence of one has been found. From here the king examined and supervised work in progress, and moreover this place served as the beginning of all cultic actions within the respective temple. Because the king does not squat on the ground but sits enthroned on a chair, he does not run through sand, mud or thorns to come to the respective temple in order to perform the necessary ritual actions that he needed to accomplish. Instead he was carried on his throne, as one who is always carried, to the throne pedestal. There in the holy district he can rise and walk to enter the temple. This explains the idea of the walk of the king, which was a sign of his still-existing strength and ability to continue to exercise his office, as e.g. in the *Heb-Sed* festival – because, externally, the ruler appears as one always carried and not as one who himself runs to and fro between the temples and sacrificial places. If this would have been the case, a ‘show run’ of the king would hardly be of interest.

Another throne platform (Nos 770: D. 1.60m; H. 0.38m; W. 0.78m) was found exactly in front of the entrance to the temple complex (comprising Nos 600, 700, 1000 and 1400) north of the Temple of Amun. In contrast to the platform of the Temple of Amun, this one does not consist of a monolithic block, but comprises three stone blocks pushed together, which were plastered over to appear as a unit (Figures 5-8). The partly preserved foundation of the individual blocks leaves no doubt about the original positioning of the pedestal. Yellow pigments found on the lime plaster suggest that prisoners were not depicted in relief but in polychrome painting.

Further throne pedestals, not previously recognised as such, are located in the visual axis of the Lion Temple (Nos 341 and 342). They consist of composites of bricks and sandstone slabs that were completely plastered to appear as single units. With a preserved height of 280mm, and the surface dimensions of 3.30m x 0.76m, these pedestals also correspond to those previously mentioned, with a doubling of their length due to their accessibility from both sides. Here, the carefully laid foundation slabs leave no doubt about the deliberately planned placement of the platforms (Figures 9-12). These pedestals, which are,

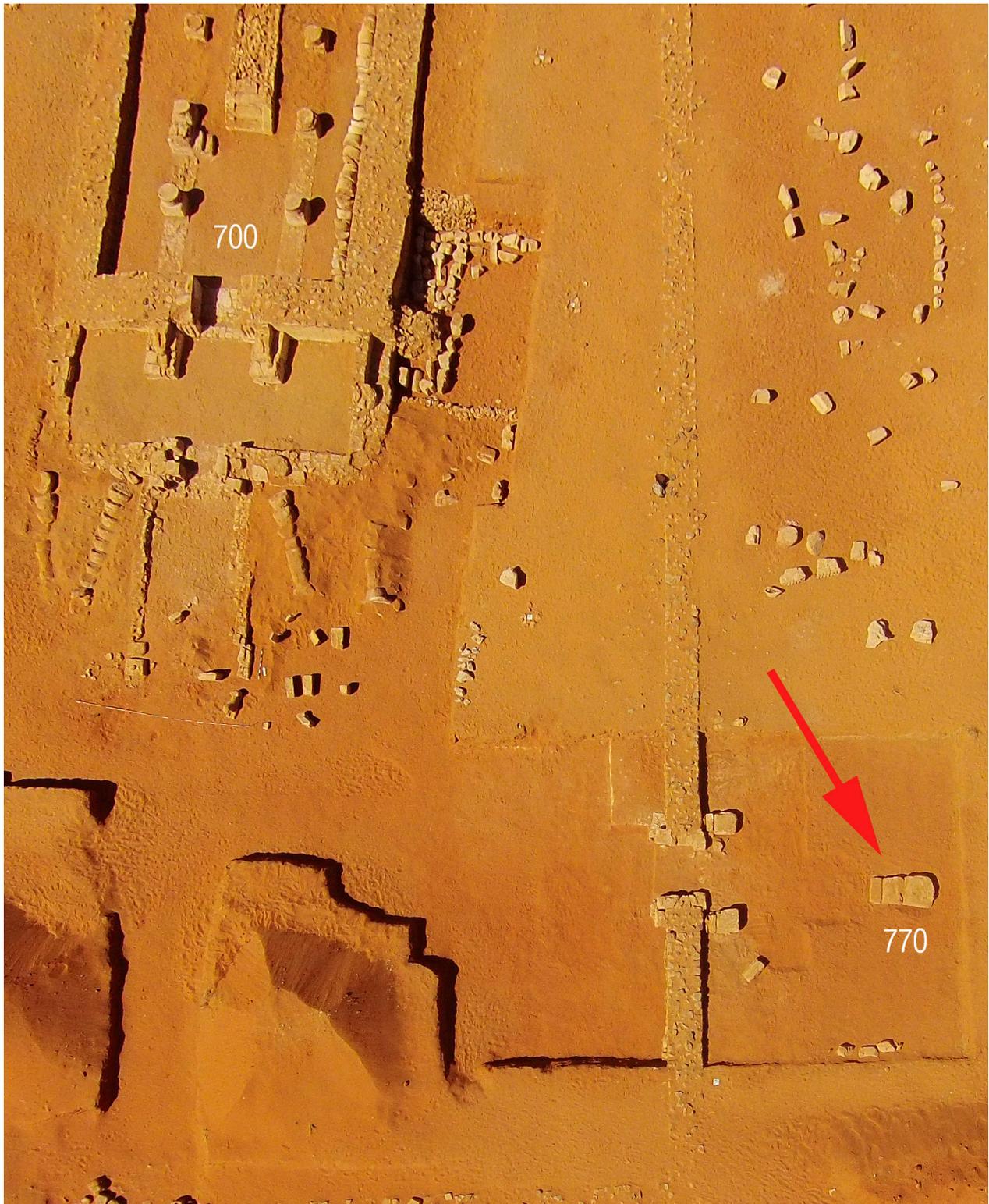


Figure 5. Location of Throne Pedestal 770 found in the district of Temple 700 (© Naga Project).



Figure 6. Throne Pedestal 700 consisting of three sandstone blocks (© Naga Project).



Figure 7. Throne Pedestal 700 with remains of plaster (© Naga Project).



Figure 8. Throne Pedestal 700 with remains of the foundation visible (© Naga Project).



Figure 9. Location of the pedestals nos 341 and 342 on the axis of the Lion Temple 2009 (© Naga Project).



Figure 10. View of the two daises nos 341 and 342 with an approach from two sides toward a round central area (© Naga Project).

very unusually, accessible from both sides over at least two steps, are oriented east-west towards the Lion temple (west) and the temple of Amun (east).

A further peculiarity is the fact that two throne pedestals of identical size were placed directly next to each other. Thus, there is now also room for the throne of the Kandake, who is here present on an equal footing to inspect the activities in the Lion temple and to participate in the cult of the temple. Nothing could describe this togetherness better than the well-known scene on the pylon wall of the Lion temple with the representation of the ruler and the Kandake depicted as the same size and with the same gesturing actions, the slaying of the enemies.

Thus, the throne daises found so far in Naga represent a necessary and indispensable part of the religious activities for the cult in the temple area, which in my opinion are not part of an enthronement ceremony. This idea may be verified or proven wrong by further finds, research and detailed documentation at Naga and other sites.

The various throne pedestals assigned to the reign of Natakamani in numerous places, sometimes with several pedestals in one site (i.e. Meroe, Naga), suggest that they were not only used for enthronement ceremonies, because the question would then also arise as to where exactly the ruler was enthroned. Although at present no other ruler has been found to have had a throne pedestal, this should not necessarily lead to the conclusion that throne pedestals were only a feature during the reign of Natakamani. An important aspect to be considered is the enormous building activity of this ruler in comparison to that of others during the Meroitic empire, as this might explain the find situation so far.



Figure 11. Nos 341 and 342 detail showing plaster and foundation (© Naga Project).



Figure 12. Detail of no. 341 (© Naga Project).

Only future excavations will reveal whether a throne platform was required for all rulers, and for all cult activities within a religious area, or whether this practice was expressly limited to the reign of Natakamani. Another extremely important aspect, that of a chronological classification of these throne daises, needs to be further studied in future.

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