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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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High-status burials in the Napatan Period: cultural interactions between Egypt and Nubia

John Taylor

Introduction

In the years between about 750 and 700 BC the Kushite rulers of Napata, close to the 4th Cataract in the Middle Nile Region, extended their control northwards until Egypt was under their domination. These rulers portrayed themselves as champions of ancient Egyptian culture and traditions, a status expressed above all through their conspicuous devotion to the Egyptian gods – especially Amun and Osiris.

The burials of these rulers and their families contain numerous elements inspired by Egyptian models. This is clear from the architecture of their tombs, with pyramid superstructures, cult-chapels on the eastern side to receive the rays of the rising sun, and subterranean burial chambers that could be adorned with texts and images in paint or carved into the stone surfaces. Egyptian influence was also manifested in the provision of *shabti* figures, protective amulets and canopic jars, as well as in the mummification of the bodies, for which there is clear evidence (Török 1997, 327).

Particularly striking is the use of Egyptian funerary texts and iconography, the most notable examples dating from the seventh and sixth centuries BC. Among the most prominent instances of this are the massive stone sarcophagi of the consecutive brother kings Anlamani and Aspelta, now Khartoum 1868 and Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 23.729, respectively, both of which are covered with hieroglyphic texts from the Book of the Dead and other Egyptian sources (Dunham 1955, 58, 86-95, pls LXXVI-LXXVII; Doll 1981; 1982) (Figure 1). About sixty to eighty years earlier, in the mid-seventh century BC, in the tombs of Tanwetamani and his mother Queen Qalhata at el-Kurru, the walls of the subterranean chambers were painted with Egyptian images and texts. The later tombs of Senkamanisken, Aspelta and the latter's mother Nasalsa at Nuri had similar decoration carved on the walls. For all these burials a wide range of Egyptian sources was tapped, including the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts and the Book of the Dead (Balanda 2020, 33) (Figure 2).

This trend towards the adoption of Egyptian models may in part reflect continuity from the centuries before the Kushite takeover, when Nubia was largely free from Egyptian political control and yet retained elements of Egyptian religious practice and burial customs that had been implanted during the New Kingdom. But it is surely no coincidence that the relatively rapid growth of Egyptian mortuary practice in Nubian elite burials occurred in the later eighth and early seventh centuries BC, the time of increased contact with Egypt, as Kushite kings sought to present themselves as legitimate rulers of the northern realm. Nevertheless, it is important to note that what may appear as 'Egyptianisation' left little or no mark on the majority of the Kushite population in Nubia during the Napatan period. The adoption of Egyptian funerary practice was mainly restricted to the highest social strata in Nubia and was indeed a marker of exalted rank; nor were the models simply copied, but instead adapted to reflect the specific cultural requirements of the Nubian elites (Howley 2017, 223-227).

The changes that occurred in this period of political and cultural transition affected burial practices in both Nubia and Egypt in ways that were clearly related. In order to understand the dynamics of these developments, it is instructive to examine what was happening in Egypt during the formative phase of the late eighth and early seventh centuries BC.



Figure 1. Case and lid of the sarcophagus of Anlamani from Nuri Pyramid Nu. 6 (SNM 1868) (photograph J. Anderson taken courtesy Sudan National Museum).

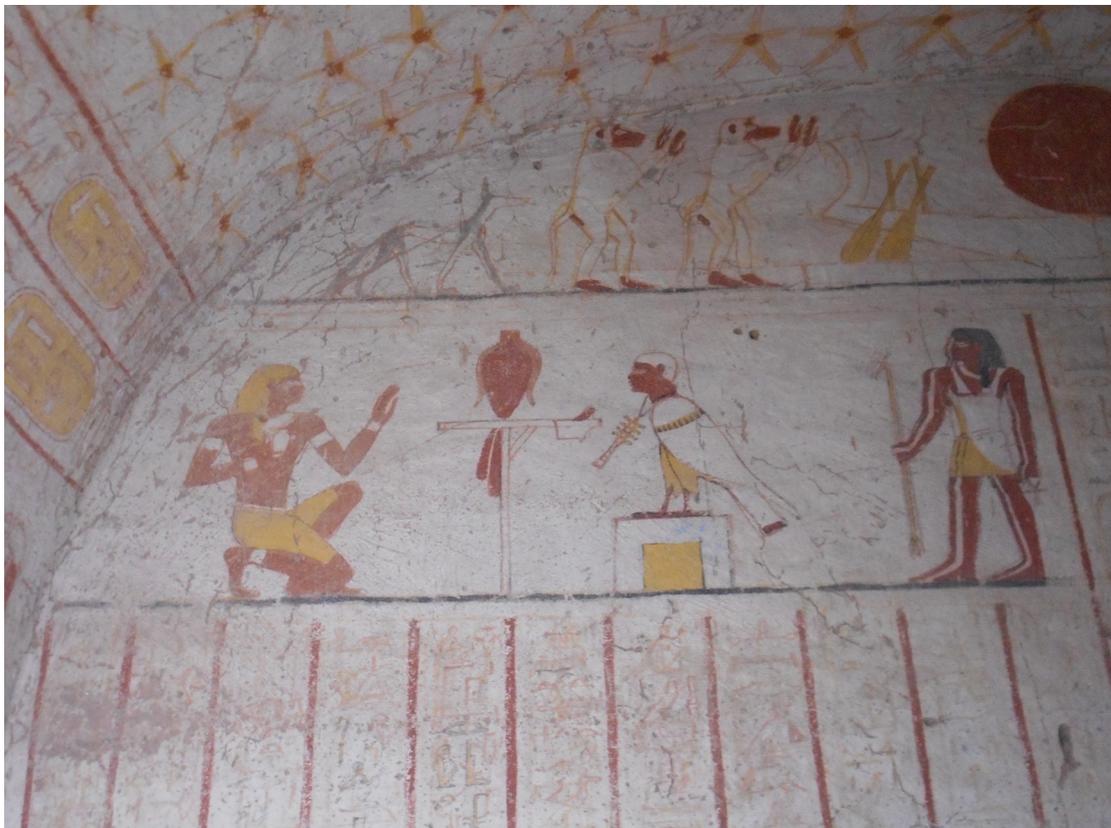


Figure 2. Paintings on the west wall, Room B, in the tomb of Tanwetamani at el-Kurru, including the vignette of Book of the Dead Chapter 26 (photograph J. Anderson).

Historical background¹

In the period before the late eighth century, Egypt had lost its former political unity and much of its prestige abroad. The land had fragmented into a patchwork of small kingdoms and chiefdoms; the lack of a centralised government meant a reduced programme of royal works such as temple building, and a general diminution in the richness of material culture. During this time a strong state grew up in Nubia, focused around Napata, close to the holy mountain of Jebel Barkal, sacred to Amun. Its rulers were buried at the nearby cemetery of el-Kurru, and later across the river at Nuri. Two of these Napatan rulers, Kashta and Piye (Piankhy), extended their authority into Egypt.

Kashta was probably accepted as overlord by some of the petty rulers of Upper Egypt, while at Thebes, the ancient home of the god Amun, his daughter Amenirdis was appointed as successor to the God's Wife, a religious office soon to become of exceptional importance. The next ruler, Piye, led a famous military campaign to stop the territorial ambitions of the Prince of Sais in the Delta and to gain, or regain, the allegiance of the local rulers in Upper Egypt, as recorded on his Victory Stela, which shows at the top Piye before Amun, receiving the submission of Egypt's kings and chieftains (Cairo JE48862, 47086-47089; Grimal 1981; Eide *et al.* 1994, 62-118 no. 9). Kashta and Piye adopted the style of Egyptian rulers, used hieroglyphic inscriptions, and expressed their devotion to Amun and other Egyptian deities, but they were not resident in Egypt and did not carry out substantial monumental work there – at least, there is little surviving trace of it.

The situation changed with the next two rulers, Shabitko and Shabako.² At this time, between about 715 and 690 BC, more direct control over Egypt was imposed from the south. Local rulers were still tolerated, but the Kushite kings, particularly Shabako and his successor Taharqo, had a much more conspicuous presence in Egypt than did Kashta or Piye. They made Memphis their main residence and ordered major construction works at important centres. Besides Memphis, Abydos and especially Thebes received their attention, reflecting their emphatic devotion to Amun and Osiris. The half-century to 664 BC was a time of much activity and innovation.

Changes in burial practices in Egypt

In the centuries preceding the Kushite domination, the custom of building elaborate tombs, richly stocked with burial equipment of all kinds, which had characterised Egypt in the New Kingdom, had given way to a much more austere pattern of burial, with very few monumental tombs and a much reduced range of grave goods (Taylor 2010, 233-237). In the ninth-eighth centuries BC bodies were placed in cartonnage mummy-cases and anthropoid wooden coffins, while the canopic jars that traditionally held the embalmed internal organs were often replaced by solid dummy-jars, which evidently served a symbolic role. The graves contained little other than a small wooden stela and faience or clay *shabtis*, mass-produced, poor in quality and bearing just the owner's name (Taylor 2010, 234). Most notably, substantial religious texts had all but disappeared from tombs in Egypt. The custom of providing these texts on papyri had ceased, and even coffins, by now the main carriers of written religious content, bore only short and standardised funerary formulae. Out of the great corpus of nearly 200 spells from the Book of the Dead only a handful remained in use. By the last decades of the eighth century BC, this restricted model for burials had been customary for between one and two hundred years, but around 700 BC major changes occurred, coinciding with the imposition of direct Kushite control over Egypt.

¹The most recent survey of this period can be found in Payraudeau 2020.

²I adopt here the revised order of succession of these two kings, which appears preferable to the 'traditional' sequence of Shabako and Shabitko. For a summary of the discussions which have led to this reinterpretation of the mid-25th dynasty, see Payraudeau 2020, 185.

Napatan royal burials at el-Kurru and Nuri

The earlier tombs of the Kushite royals in the cemeteries of el-Kurru and Nuri have been extensively excavated, first by the Boston expedition under George Reisner (Dunham 1950; 1955) and more recently by the International Kurru Archaeological Project (<https://ikap.us>). Despite having been heavily plundered, the tombs allow some of the main developments to be observed. Whereas the earlier tombs at el-Kurru followed Nubian tradition, comprising tumuli over a pit-grave, that of Piye had a small (7.5 m²) built superstructure, probably a pyramid, and a stairway leading down to a chamber with a corbel-roof. A rock-cut bench with four hollows had probably supported a bed. Placing the corpse on a bed was a long-standing Nubian tradition (Török 1997, 119, 121), but Piye's burial also had features typical of contemporary Egyptian interments: dummy canopic jars (though rather crude) and a set of *shabtis* resembling those current in Egypt, slender and simple in form and inscribed with only the king's name.

Shabitko had a similar tomb with a corbel-vaulted burial chamber and a bench. His canopic jars were also dummies, carved in one piece and again quite crude, and his *shabtis* were similar to Piye's (Dunham 1950, 67-71, pls XXIII, XXXVII D, XLV A-B). So far the royal burials seem only to copy Egyptian practice, without much sign of innovation or adaptation. Indeed, the immediate source of most of the Egyptian-inspired features of these burials could have been found nearer at hand in Nubia, where small pyramids still stood over tombs of the colonial period. It may be that the royal grave goods were made by Nubian craftsmen, and indeed some features suggest a local interpretation of Egyptian models, such as *shabtis* that carry a basket, or examples from the tombs of some queens, which represent them as living individuals (after Dunham 1950, pl. XLVI, A, B, D, E).

Amulets also feature in these tombs. Most of them employ Egyptian motifs but stylistically they are un-Egyptian in their openwork technique and double-sided iconography. Many are of faience, which was certainly produced in Nubia (Balanda 2020, 44), and so these items probably represent an indigenous interpretation of subject-matter. The intermingling of Nubian influences with the Egyptian features has other manifestations in these cemeteries such as the distinctively Sudanese practice of providing formal burial for the horses belonging to kings Piye, Shabitko and Shabako.

The tomb of the next king, Shabako, shows a clear progression. There are traces of painted wall-decoration, although the subject-matter is unfortunately unidentifiable. The surviving lids of Shabako's canopic jars are much more technically accomplished than those of the previous kings, and his *shabti* figures are of a distinctively different form to those preceding. Other grave goods, such as a bronze mirror with silver handle (Dunham 1950, 57, pl. LXII), show a stronger infusion of Egyptian designs, raising the question whether these items were actually made by Egyptian craftsmen either in Egypt or in Nubia.

Taharqo, whose reign marks the apogee of Kushite power in the Middle Nile, built his pyramid tomb at Nuri. At 52 m² it was much larger than those of his predecessors and its subterranean section was much more elaborate, consisting of a passage leading to an antechamber and a burial apartment with six pillars, niches in the walls and a surrounding passage (Figure 3). The grave goods included an imposing array of more than 1000 *shabtis*, each one individually carved in stone and fully inscribed with a distinctive version of the ancient spell from the Book of the Dead to magically activate the figures (Figure 4). Taharqo also had a set of canopic jars with inscriptions, and these vessels were hollowed to receive the internal organs, marking a return to the original function of the jars.

Tanwetamani, the last Kushite king to rule in Egypt, was buried in the older ancestral cemetery of el-Kurru. In the chambers beneath his pyramid (Ku. 16) there is well-preserved painted wall decoration, comprising images and inscriptions drawn from traditional Egyptian sources including the Book of the Dead, with a special focus on the resurrection of Osiris (Balanda 2020, 53-122, 202-11, 213-15). Images of the solar disc, and stars painted on the vaulted ceiling create a microcosm, focusing on the repeating solar

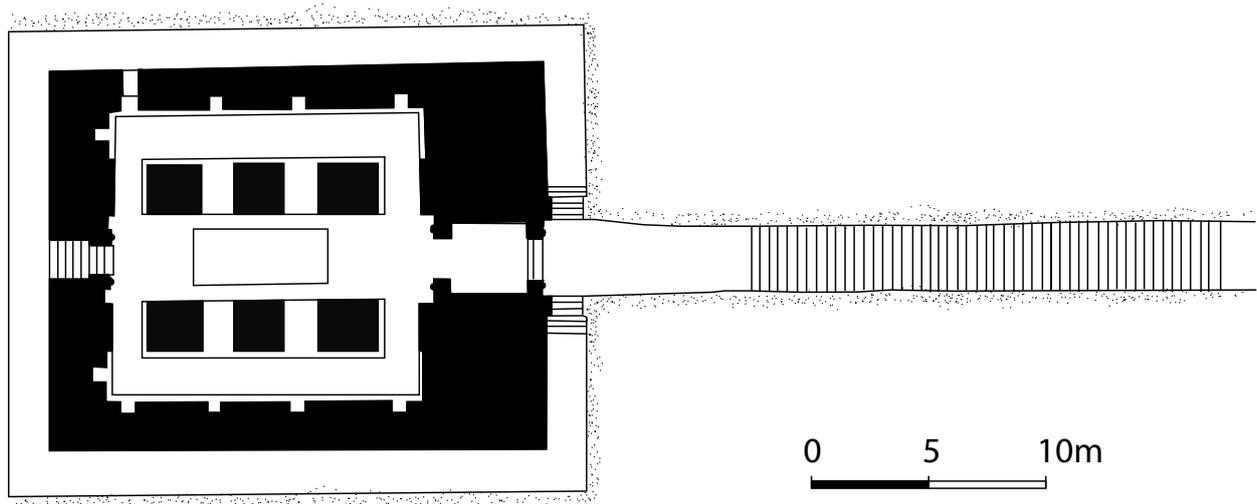


Figure 3. Plan of the substructure of the pyramid of Taharqo at Nuri (after Dunham 1955, 6, fig. 1).

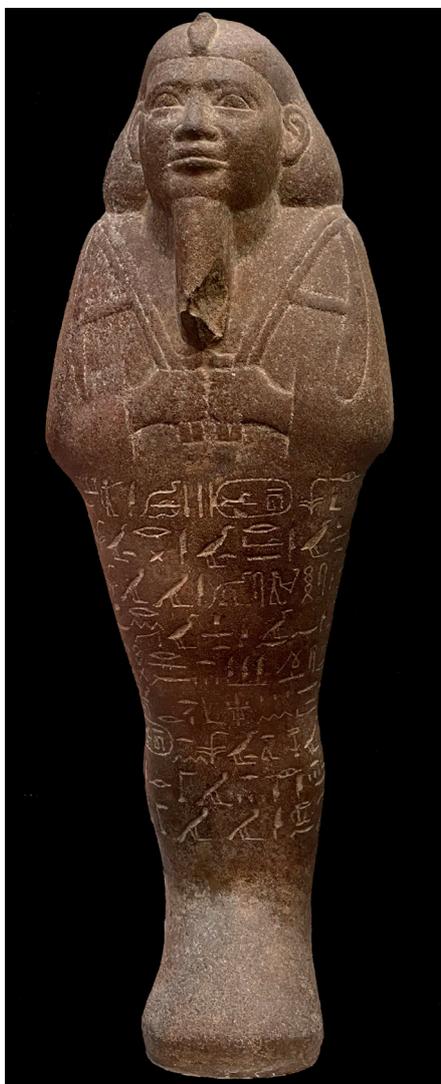


Figure 4. Quartzite *shabti* of Taharqo from Nuri Pyramid Nu. 1 (EA 55485) (photograph J. Anderson taken courtesy The Trustees of the British Museum).

cycle, through which – according to Egyptian notions – eternal rebirth was ensured (Figure 5).

The biggest gap in our knowledge of these royal burials is how the body itself was housed. None of the mummies have survived, nor any coffins, but we can deduce that these kings had anthropoid coffins, probably of wood, because inlays from some of them – particularly those of Taharqo – were found by Reisner's workers, and these suggest that they were decorated with feathered designs (Dunham 1955, 11, pl. IV B-C), perhaps somewhat like the earlier coffins of kings Tutankhamun and Psusennes I. No trace of stone sarcophagi has been found in these early Napatan tombs, and it may be that the mummy-shaped coffins were enclosed in rectangular outer cases made of wood; indeed the great sarcophagi of the later kings Anlamani and Aspelta appear to be stone versions of such things.

What the royal tombs do show is an evolution in the richness and complexity of high-status burials, marked chiefly by an increase in Egyptian features but with an intermixture of some local elements.

Contemporary developments in Egyptian burials

Turning now to look at Egypt, it is clear that comparable changes occurred at the same period, the end of the eighth and beginning of the seventh century BC. Most striking is the revival of the construction of great monumental tombs for high officials, a feature not seen since the New Kingdom, four hundred years earlier. This can be observed most clearly at Thebes. In the great west bank necropolis a series of huge tombs, more like temples in design, was built in the Asasif, along the processional avenue leading to the temple of Hatshepsut, the goal of the important



Figure 5. Stars painted on the vaulted ceiling in the tomb of Tanwetamani at el-Kurru (photograph J. Anderson).

annual Festival of the Valley and itself the burial place of high-ranking officials (Figure 6). The ‘palace’ tombs that were now constructed along this route were some of the most elaborate ever made in Egypt. Many of the officials who owned these tombs were closely linked with the Kushite royal house, serving the king directly or the God’s Wife of Amun, a post now consistently held by Kushite princesses.

One of the first of these great tombs was TT 223, made for a man named Karakhamun, probably about the time of Shabitko. Karakhamun is thought to have been a Nubian and hence was perhaps one of the Kushite ruler’s trusted appointees. The copious decoration of the tomb is drawn from traditional Egyptian funerary sources, especially the Book of the Dead, which now returned to prominence after a long hiatus. Karakhamun’s tomb has many of the spells carved on its walls and pillars, besides other ancient works such as the Ritual of the Hours of Day and Night (Pischikova 2014) (Figure 7).

The burial chamber has a remarkable astronomical ceiling representing the night sky, with a blue-painted ground, many groups of stars and a large figure of the sky-goddess Nut, depicted frontally with images of the solar disc passing along her body (Figure 8). This unique design is an adaptation of much older astronomical ceilings and serves to create a miniature universe around the deceased, as noted in the tomb of Tanwetamani (above). Figures of gods painted on the side walls are taken from Book of the Dead Spell 125, in which the deceased is vindicated in the court of Osiris, a crucial stage in his transition to eternal life.³

³ The decoration of the chambers in the tomb of Queen Khennuwa, Begarawiya S. 503, also shows similarities in content and style to some tombs and coffins of Theban officials of the 25th dynasty. Khennuwa’s tomb has recently been assigned to the late fifth/early fourth century BC on the basis of epigraphic and architectural evidence as well as radiocarbon dating (Wolf *et al.* 2018, 12-14), but the character of the wall-paintings might point towards an even earlier date.



Figure 6. Brick superstructures of ‘palace’ tombs of high officials of the 25th-26th dynasties, Asasif (photograph J. H. Taylor).

These and other themes are repeated and elaborated in the tombs of the other Theban high officials such as Montemhat and Padiamenope. All were robbed, and most of the grave goods have gone, but fine stone *shabtis* were a feature of these burials, as in that of Taharqo. Imposing burial and/or cult places were also prepared at the sanctuary of Medinet Habu for the Gods’ Wives of Amun.

Although some of these elite tombs were simpler in design than those of Karakhamun or Montemhat, the mummies were often enclosed in elaborate coffin-assemblages. The sarcophagi of Kings Anlamani and Aspelta imitated an Egyptian type of outer coffin that was produced in painted wood from the late eighth century onwards, and it may be that Piye, Shabitko, Shabako and Taharqo had coffins of this type, though proof is lacking. On the lid are depictions of the barques of the sun, and goddesses personifying the hours; around the base protective gods stand in line, and on the top were placed carved images of jackals and falcons. Many examples of this so-called *qrs*w coffin-type from Egyptian cemeteries have survived. They have a vaulted top, and posts at all four corners, with figures of jackals and falcons on the lid and the posts. The surfaces were decorated with images of the journeys of the sun by barque in day and night, and around the sides protective divine figures. The interior of the vaulted lids of these wooden coffins is sometimes painted with a full-frontal image of the goddess Nut, as on Karakhamun’s ceiling. So these coffins are also microcosms, representing the sacred environment in which resurrection would occur, and inside them were two anthropoid coffins, one inside the other, depicting the deceased in Osirian form, awaiting rebirth (Sheikholeslami 2014) (Figure 9).

A phase of accelerated change

This type of burial assemblage quickly took hold in all parts of Egypt, though there are regional variations.



Figure 7. Carved funerary texts in the tomb of Karakhamun, Asasif (photograph J. H. Taylor).



Figure 8. The goddess Nut painted on the ceiling of the burial chamber in the tomb of Karakhamun (photograph J. H. Taylor).

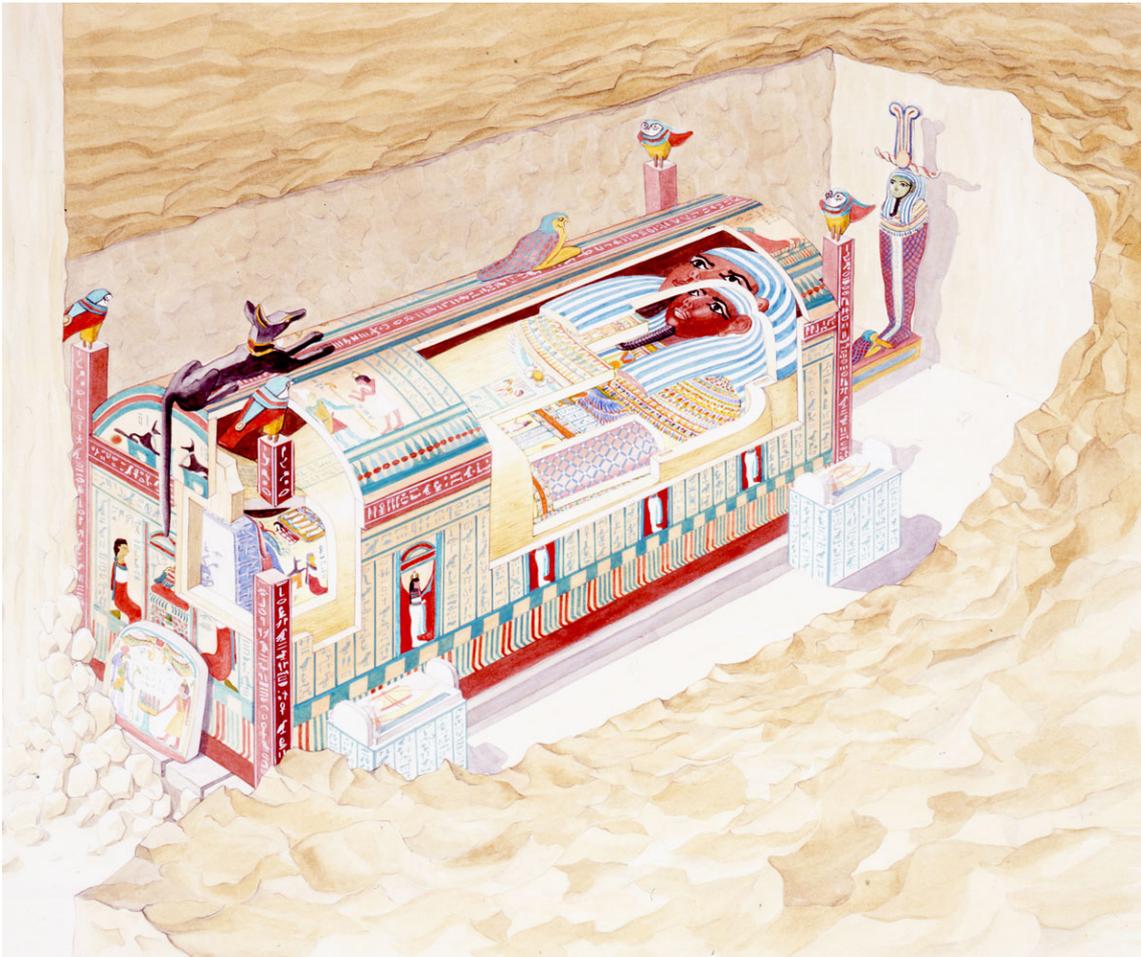


Figure 9. Reconstruction of the components of a high-status Theban burial of the 25th dynasty (painting Claire Thorne).

Qrsw coffins in wood are attested from Saqqara, Giza, Abusir el-Meleq and Abydos (among other sites), while examples in stone are known from the Memphite necropolis. The evidence from Thebes is the most important, because here the course of these innovations can be plotted in some detail. The coffins and other burial goods of members of Theban official families, such as the Besenmut family, represent several generations in succession and show the changes as they occur. One of the first members of this family to be buried in the new style about 700 BC was a lady named Tashepenkhons. As well as the tripartite coffin assemblage, she also had a papyrus inscribed with texts from the Book of the Dead; it is the earliest known reappearance of this tradition, which had then been in abeyance for a century or more, raising questions about the sources from which such older material was retrieved (see below, 12ff). The layout of the papyrus, with spells written in vertical columns but without vignettes, is irregular and points to the writer feeling his way in an unfamiliar medium, perhaps in fact copying from coffin decoration rather than from older papyri (Munro 2009). Tashepenkhons perhaps died a short while before Karakhamun's tomb was inscribed with fuller Book of the Dead texts: at any rate, the years around 700 BC are clearly the crucial ones, when much traditional mortuary literature was being tapped into and revised.

The deceased as the resurrected Osiris

Among the wealth of spells from the Book of the Dead, the Rituals of the Hours and others, one particular composition stands out as having special importance at this time. It is now known as the Awakening of Osiris and the Transit of the Solar Barques (Roberson 2013). In its ancient form it consists of a



Figure 10. The awakening Osiris, as depicted in the tomb of Sheshonq III at Tanis (photograph by Giuseppina Lenzo).

complex image, in which Osiris, mummified and confined within a shrine-like tomb, is surrounded by protectors and is reanimated by a god who holds the *ankh*, signifying life, to his nose. Having been reawakened from the sleep of death, he is vindicated and leaves the tomb to ascend to the sky, where he enters the barque of the sun and makes endless journeys across the sky by day and by night, renewing life eternally (Figure 10).

This composition, which was closely associated with the Hour Ritual, was clearly influential in the design of some of the burials that have been considered above – both in royal tombs at el-Kurru and Nuri, and in those of high officials in Egypt. The triple coffin assemblages manifest the main elements: the deceased in his mummy-shaped inner coffin is Osiris. The rectangular outer coffin with its corner posts is a three-dimensional rendering of the shrine-tomb of Osiris (which also has posts topped by falcons) and the vaulted top of the coffin is the sky, on which the night and day barques of the sun travel. The main elements of the composition are present on these coffin sets, interwoven with extracts from other mortuary texts to provide additional magical support (Sheikholeslami 2010, 380). In the tomb of Tanwetamani, and even more clearly in that of his mother Qalhata, the references to this model are quite explicit. On one wall we see the deceased as a recumbent mummy awaiting resurrection, and on the facing wall he/she has become the awakened Osiris (Figure 11).

The awakening and transit composition in its oldest form is found in only a few earlier tombs, including those of Ramesses VI and IX in the Valley of the Kings and that of Sheshonq III at Tanis. It is possible that these tombs were reopened in later centuries so that the images could be copied, but probably a more immediate source for the Kushite examples is the structure known as the Osireion at Abydos, a kind of imitation tomb for the god Osiris that was constructed in the New Kingdom. On its walls is one of the earliest known versions of the Awakening, which could have been used as a source by the Kushite



Figure 11. Osiris awakening; tomb of Queen Qalhata, el-Kurru Ku. 5 (photograph courtesy D. A. Welsby).

revivalists; there is all the more reason to think so because the burial apartments of the tomb of Taharqo clearly imitated the main chamber of the Osireion in their design. It is well-known that the Kushite rulers paid particular attention to Abydos, and that several Kushite queens and other high-status persons were buried in a cemetery there (Leahy 1994; Török 1997, 234). The venerable monuments at the site would have attracted the attention of those seeking to revive the ancient past.

The agents of evolution

It is clear that much research into past forms was going on in Egypt, raising the question, who was driving this development? This revival of ancient mortuary practice is usually interpreted in the context of the so-called ‘archaising’ tendencies of the period, of which there were numerous manifestations, notably the revival of older styles of sculpture (particularly those of the Old and Middle Kingdoms) which were copied and blended with new elements (Pischikova 2008). Showing respect for the past was a facet of Egyptian royal ideology, something that would have appealed particularly to the Kushite rulers of the 25th dynasty, who, as ‘foreigners’, would have wished to appear as good pharaohs. Although an archaising trend can be traced already in the time of the Libyan rulers of the 22nd to 24th dynasties, it was under the Kushite regime that it was accelerated and intensified in Egypt (Liptay 2008, 71-73). The Kushite kings adopted royal titularies modelled on those of the Old Kingdom, and they ordered the deliberate copying of ancient images and texts. Wall-decoration in Old Kingdom pyramid temples was copied and adapted at Taharqo’s temple at Kawa in Nubia, and, as noted above, the internal plan of the Osireion was used as inspiration for the design of the king’s own tomb.

In particular, ‘archival’ research must have been necessary in order to recover the full range of old texts that were now being used (Balanda 2020, 32, 52). The motivation for this kind of activity was also traditionally attributed to the ruler; consulting the writings of the ancestors, to retrieve authentic



Figure 12. Inscription on the 'Shabako Stone', recording the copying of the Memphite Theology of Creation on the orders of the king (EA 498) (photograph I. Regulski taken courtesy The Trustees of the British Museum).

versions of rituals or texts, was another mark of a good king. With their interest in Abydos, the Kushites may have seen there the inscription of the 13th dynasty king Neferhotep I, recording how he commanded that ancient writings be consulted to establish the original image of Osiris and the correct protocols for the rituals of the gods (Cairo JE 6307; Ryholt 1997, 345, File 13/27/12). The Memphite myth of creation, carved in stone on the orders of Shabako (British Museum EA 498), records a specific royal directive to copy and preserve the text of a fragile ancient papyrus (Figure 12). Whether this is literal truth or a rhetorical device, the principle of researching and respecting ancient texts is clearly advocated and a Kushite king declares that he has done this.

Generally we cannot tell who actually carried out the underlying 'research', but for the period in question a strong contender is the Lector Priest Padiamenope, known chiefly from his vast tomb in the Asasif (Theban Tomb 33; Eigner 1984, 46-48; Pläne 14-16, Taf. 22-25). As personal secretary to the king, and a priest with responsibility for ancient writings, he could well have been a key figure in the process of revival. All the great funerary texts of the past ages, the Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, Book of the Dead and Books of the Underworld, are inscribed on the walls of his tomb, making it a veritable library or compendium of ancient sacred literature (Figure 13). Padiamenope's tomb demonstrates that high officials in Egypt were able to use this recovered knowledge for their own posthumous benefit. Was this because they had 'permission' from the king or does the practice relate to economic factors - great personal wealth enabling the owner to pay specialist craftsmen?



Figure 13. *Shabti* of the Lector Priest Padiamenope from his tomb in the Asasif. British Museum EA 8724 (photograph K. Accetta-Crowe taken courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum).

Evidence for social patterning?

This leads to a further question - whether there was a restriction on the use of these ancient models by certain members of society. It is noteworthy that outside the royal family there is no evidence in Nubian cemeteries of this period for the use of inscribed sarcophagi, *shabtis*, canopic containers, papyri or wall decoration. Indeed, non-royal burials in Nubia contain no writing at all, except for small inscriptions on scarabs or amulets. In view of this, it has been proposed that, 'In Napata seemingly many aspects of the cult of Osiris were exclusive to royalty', whereas in Egypt 'Osirian beliefs were widely spread among virtually all levels of society' (Balanda 2020, 25, 33-5, 52).

We can gain a more nuanced impression of this crucial phase from tombs in Egypt itself. Here, despite the general predominance of 'Osirian beliefs', there is telling evidence that variability in burial accoutrements was to some extent linked with social standing. The monumental 'palace' tombs, naturally, belonged to persons of the highest rank, but only just below them in status were other senior priests and officials and it is they whose burials feature the triple coffin sets with rectangular outer cases and religious content drawing on the Awakening of Osiris, the Hour Ritual and specific spells from the Book of the Dead. Below these individuals on the social spectrum were persons of what might be termed 'lower elite' rank - minor priests, temple doorkeepers and others; they too could aspire to painted coffins, but

these assemblages usually omit the rectangular *qrsw* outer case, and their decoration repeats a limited repertoire of bland offering formulae and standard images (Taylor 2018, 362-372). Again, we cannot tell whether this variation reflects smaller financial resources or some formal restriction governing access to more elaborate burial equipment.

An interesting case study is that of a lady named Tjesreperet. Her tomb at Thebes was discovered in 1829 by the Franco-Tuscan expedition led by Jean-François Champollion and Ippolito Rosellini and the contents are now divided between the Museo Egizio in Florence and the Louvre. The tomb was undisturbed and contained two burials - those of the lady herself and a man named Djedkhonsuiuefankh, presumed to be her husband. The man's titles show that he was a priest of Amun of middle rank. The texts give no suggestion that either he or his wife were members of a powerful family. Yet Tjesreperet had an elaborate burial assemblage, comprising a rectangular outer coffin and two anthropoid ones, besides *shabtis*, a Ptah-Sokar-Osiris figure, a wooden stela, a bronze mirror and various vessels (Budka 2010, 512, Table 2). The inscriptions on Tjesreperet's coffins show that she was the nurse of a daughter of Taharqo. Was this intimate contact with the royal family a factor in procuring for her this relatively rich burial

assemblage? If so, it is interesting that her coffins resemble in their form those that were provided for the 'high elite' at Thebes, but their inscriptional content is more mundane, comprising mainly standard formulae with only a few brief extracts from specific Book of the Dead texts (Greco 2010). If her royal associations gave her access to a rich style of burial, were there limitations to that access? Was the full paraphernalia of specific text and image considered too exalted for a princess's nurse, or was it simply a question of cost? It would also be interesting to know whether Tjesreperet was ethnically Nubian; her name is Egyptian, as are those of her mother Taremetjenbastet and her father Pawen, but these could be adopted names, masking a Kushite identity (Vittmann 2007, 156-157). If Tjesreperet was Egyptian by birth we would have the only documented case of an Egyptian woman performing the intimate role of suckling a child of Kushite ethnicity.

Another burial of this period was found relatively undisturbed at Thebes, this time by the Austrians in 1971 (Budka 2007; 2010, 505-511). Again the form of the coffins (rectangular outer and mummiform inner) and their iconography are entirely Egyptian, and they closely resemble those of the assemblage of Tjesreperet. In this case the owner was certainly an ethnic Nubian, since she has a Kushite name, Kheriru or Kheril, and the painter has represented her with dark skin, a hairstyle of tight curls, and wearing a style of dress that has been identified as Kushite (see Reiser-Haslauer and Satzinger 1979, 105, Abb. 3; Vittmann 2007, 141, Fig. 3; Budka 2007, 246-7; 2010, 509, fig. 5)⁴. Kheriru's coffin set imitates in its outward form those of the higher elite, but, like the coffins of Tjesreperet, the inscriptional content is routine, comprising repetitive offering formulae, and distinguished by just one brief extract from the Pyramid Texts.

It might be expected that these two ladies – one a Nubian, the other the nurse of a Kushite princess – could have been the recipients of special royal favour from the Napatan rulers, which was manifested in their burials. The character of their assemblages seems to point in this direction, but with the suggestion that there were limits or boundaries to what was permissible in this context. Just as, in the New Kingdom, the funerary Books of the Underworld were restricted in use to the King and his immediate circle, only becoming more widely accessible in the late 21st Dynasty, so in the phase of revival and re-working of such traditions in the 25th Dynasty (Forman and Quirke 1996, 134), it would be no surprise to find a similar environment of controlled access operating.

The developments in mortuary practice that took place in Egypt in this period were founded almost entirely on earlier Egyptian models, and there is little in these burials that could be considered 'Kushite.' Even when the deceased individuals were themselves of Nubian ancestry, it is only detectable through their names or via the occasional representation of the owner with distinctive hairstyle or dress.

Conclusion

The Assyrian invasions and the subsequent resurgence of native Egyptian dynasties pushed the Kushite rulers out of Egypt in the 660s. Throughout the remainder of the Napatan period and in the succeeding Meroitic period the rulers in Nubia continued to employ Egyptian-inspired features such as pyramids in their burials for many centuries, but the mortuary texts and iconography that had been used so dynamically in the days of their rule over Egypt faded from use or were further adapted to suit indigenous traditions. The innovations that the Kushite kings had fostered continued to flourish and evolve in

⁴ Moreover, Kheriru's father had both a foreign (Kushite?) name - *Pnprnzh* – and an Egyptian name - *P3-wn*: Vittmann 2007, 148; Budka 2010, 509. As noted above, the father of Tjesreperet was also called *P3-wn*, raising the possibility that Kheriru and Tjesreperet were related. The manifestly foreign name of Kheriru's mother is written in various ways on her coffins (*Rytmdt*, *Mrditzy*, *Lmmt* ?) but unfortunately no Egyptian *alias* is documented (Budka 2010, 509).

Egypt itself. Their strong government had facilitated a lively traffic in ideas, skills, and materials, while their ideological identification with Egyptian traditions stimulated ‘research’ in ways that had not been possible in the politically fragmented land they had conquered. Egypt’s final phase of prosperity owed much to their inspiration.

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