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An inscribed basin of the 18\textsuperscript{th} dynasty (reign of Amenhotep III) from the fortress of Shalfak in Lower Nubia

W. Vivian Davies

Introduction

The publication of the Harvard University-Boston Museum of Fine Arts excavation of the fortress of Shalfak in Nubia included, in its catalogue of finds, a description with photograph of ‘an inscribed circular sandstone basin with a dedicatory inscription round the rim’ (Dunham 1967, 116, 129 (31-2-357), pl. LX, A). Also included was a drawing of the inscription (with a number of gaps and uncertainties) but no translation or interpretation of the content (Dunham 1967, pl. LX, B). The basin (diameter 570mm; height 260mm), possibly intended to receive libations, is described as having been discovered in the northeast corner of Room 9 in Block I near the main (south) gate of the fortress. The location has been confirmed by the recent re-examination of the room by the new Shalfak Archaeological Mission, which found that the ‘mudbrick floor ... preserves the depression into which the sandstone basin mentioned by Dunham was set’ (Näser \textit{et al.} 2017, 165). Room 9 appears to have been the entrance-room of a three-roomed structure (Rooms 7-9), its original function probably ‘in a domestic or workshop context’ (Näser \textit{et al.} 2017, 165-167). Later, during the 18\textsuperscript{th} dynasty, the structure might have been adapted to serve as the cult-place
of the deity invoked on the basin. The present whereabouts of this basin is unknown, but I offer here a new, provisional, copy of the inscription, with translation, based on a scan of the original photograph (Figures 1-2). As will be seen, the text consists of a dedication to the deified Meresger (wife of the deified Khakaure/Senwosret III), with further interesting content permitting the basin to be dated to the late 18th dynasty (reign of Amenhotep III).

The Inscription: Content and links
The inscription, a line of incised hieroglyphs, facing outwards, orientated right to left, runs, within a frame, around the entire rim of the basin. It begins at the point marked by the arrow on the copy (Figure 2). In reasonably good condition, though with areas of loss through damage and surface-erosion, it reads:

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1 I am grateful to Drs Rita Freed and Susan Allen of the MFA for their co-operation in providing a new scan of the photograph (Figure 1), Will Schenck for inking the copy (Figure 2), Dr Ikhlas Abdellatif for facilitating associated research in the Sudan National Museum, Dr Johannes Auenmüller for helpful comment on the interpretation of the inscription (in particular, regarding the principal dedicant’s first title), Dr Hourig Sourouzian for advice on a matter of dating, Dr Ken Griffin and Elizabeth Fleming for bibliographic support, and Dr Renée Friedman for assistance in the preparation of the paper.
'Divine offering' ['for'] Me[res]ger, mistress of Wa[f]khasut (Shalfak), made by Scribe, Reckoner of gold [of] Amun, Mayor of Sekhem, Neby, [repeating] life, and (his) sister (= wife), his favourite, his beloved, Songstress of Meresger, Great One of the musical troupe of Nebmaatre who dwells in Khaemmaat (Soleb). Meryt'.

This is a significant new attestation of the deified queen, Meresger, otherwise known from a small number of sources, most prominently the Year 2 inscription of Thutmose III at Semna, a text detailing festival-offerings to be provided for the cults of local deities, including Senwosret III and the 'King's great wife Meresger at Wafkhasut' (see Caminos 1998, 43-44, 46-7, pls 23, 25, line 12). The basin provides in situ evidence that the queen's cult was indeed practised at Shalfak and was still operational in the later 18th dynasty (suggesting a longer occupation of the fortress than hitherto realised), as indicated by Meryt's connection, as an officiant, not only to the Shalfak cult but also to that of the deified Nebmaatre in the temple of Soleb, constructed, of course, during the reign of Amenhotep III. Moreover, in view of the 18th Both

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3 The initial signs of the name are here obscured by damage; cf. the intact version later in the inscription.
4 For Wf-bnswt as the name of the fortress of Shalfak, see Vogel 2004, 62, Table 2, no. 5, and 249; Obsomer 2007, 68; Somaglino 2017, 231. Of the name's first element (w/), only remnants of the initial sign, G4, and of the following D36 survive here.
5 The sign following abv 'gold' (S12), its form obscured by erosion (read as [M17] in Dunham 1967, pl. LX, B), might have been the determinative Z3 or possibly N33 (repeated and arranged vertically); the following genitival n, for which there is ample room, is lost in the damage. For the ss hsb nbw, 'Scribe, Reckoner of gold', an important Treasury field-official, see Müller 2013, 55, 252-255; Klotz and Brown 2016, 283-284, C (j); Brown 2017, 184-187; Auenmüller 2020a, 388, Doc. 66, and 391; Davies 2020, 198-205, pl. 15.7, fig. 15.14, KRP18, no. 5, and pl. 15.41, fig. 15.19, KRP18, no. 13; for the Amun-affiliation, De Morgan 1894, 128, no. 9; Müller 2013, 55, 388, 15.1.26; Klotz and Brown 2016, 283-284, C (k).
6 hst-y n Śm (see further below).
7 For this extended meaning of snr, firmly attested from the reign of Thutmose III onwards, see Wb. 4, 151, 9; Hannig 2006, 773, snr (2); Černý 1954, 24-25, 27-28; Robins 1979, 203-204; Whale 1989, 251-254; Toivari-Viitala 2001, 29-30; Bryan 2009, 23, 37, no. 22; Shirley 2010, 279-280; Davies 2014, 389; Jones 2018, 92; Skumsnes 2018, 117-123, 310-311.
8 Reading hst-y as 'songstress' rather than 'praised' (see Onstine 2005, 6-7; cf. Stefanovic 2009, 77-78) owing to its association here with the title following (see n. 9).
9 hnt (the latter here written ḫnrōw); the sign surmounting the plural strokes is possibly U31 (its right end eroded). On the title, that of a senior female temple-officiant, and the meaning of hnt, as 'musical troupe' or similar, see Nord 1981; Bryan 1982; Robins 1993, 148-149; Bryan 1996, 42-43; Onstine 2005, 7-8; Morris 2017, 310-312; for the various writings of ḫnr, see Wb. 3, 297-298; Hannig 2006, 650-651; Nord 1981, 137-139, with n. 2; Bryan 1982, 36-37; Al-Äyedi 2006, 251-255.
10 For the epithet ḫnm-mr-m (as the abbreviated name of Soleb (full name ḫnm-mr-m ḫm-mr-m) see, recently, Beaux 2013, 16; Berman 2013, 40; Bickel 2013, 63; and Somaglino 2017, 235, commenting: ‘il s’agit du nom du demenou de Soleb. Il désigne le temple, mais sans doute aussi largement la ville, qui n’a cependant pu être fouillée jusqu’à présent’.
11 For a parallel object, cf. the fragmentary sandstone basin (Khartoum, SNM 4449) from Faras, with a similar inscription mentioning Taemwadjsy, sister or wife of Huy, viceroy of Tutankhamun, as ‘Great One of the musical troupe of Nebkheprure who dwells in Sehetepnetjeru (Faras)’ (PM vii, 126; Karkowski 1981, 28, B, a, 69, 72, 85, n. 369, 89-90, no. 8, pl. vi; Ping 1993, 35, 38, 301, fig. 5, 9-10; Torök 2009, 173, no. 11; Gnirs 2013, 680, n. 170; Morkot 2013, 932-933, n. 74; Müller 2013, 232-233, 2.5.3 F6; 431, 34.11; Gabolde 2015, 263-264, fig. 116; Kendall et al. 2017, 175); on the name of Faras, Somaglino 2017, 236.
12 Cf. Delia 1980, 12; Morris 2005, 98-100; Dorman 2006, 42; Müller 2013, 12, 60-61, 308, Anh. 2.6.2, no. 11; Laboury 2014, 56-57, fig. 5.7; Vogel 2017, 269-270; Näsner 2018, 8, noting also the Shalfak rock-inscription of the viceroy Amenemnehkau dated to Year 18 of Thutmose III, with dedication to the deified ‘King of Upper and Lower Egypt Khakaure’ (Hintze and Reinke 1989, 90, pl. 122, no. 365; El-Enany 2004, 210, no. 5, 2014, 231).
13 The other sources comprise: an offering-text on a Thothossea basin from Kumma (Dunham and Janssen 1960, 124-125, 24-5-1 pl. 92, D [now SNM 2482]; Barns 1954, 24-25; Delia 1980, 13; El-Enany 2004, 208, n. 13), where ‘Meresger’ is invoked together with ‘Khnem’ and ‘Khakature’ [I was able to verify the reading of her name during a recent visit to the SNM]; a possible representation of her, with inscription, on a fragmentary stela, probably Thothusmos, from Semna (Dunham and Janssen 1960, 43, 24-2-318, pl. 39, B); a fragmentary stela, of uncertain provenance, showing the king [‘Khakau[re]’ and ‘King’s wife Meresger’ (Hall 1913, 8, pl. xxiii, BM EA 846; Broyère 1930, 213-215, fig. 110; PM i/2, 807; Delia 1980, 12-13; Troy 1986, 159, 12.27; Quirke 1990, 53; El-Enany 2004, 212; Grajetzki 2014, 53, fig. 5, and 55; tentatively dated, on grounds of style and iconography, to the reign of Ramesses II by Dr Hourig Sourouzian [pers.comm.]); and a Kohl-pot, of unknown provenance, bearing the inscription ‘Great king’s wife Meresger’ (Christie Sale Catalogue, March 10, 1970, 47; Delia 1980, 13). Meresger is hitherto unattested in Middle Kingdom sources but the proposal of Broyère 1930, 213-215, 217 (cf. Delia 1980, 14; Grajetzki 2014, 55; Vogel 2017, 270, n. 17) that she be regarded as fictive, an invention of the 18th dynasty to provide a wife for the deified Senwosret III, remains open to question.
14 The process of deification of the living king as the god ‘Nebmaatre who dwells in Soleb’ (and ‘Lord of Nubia’) was arguably completed with the celebration of his first jubilee in Year 30 (Bryan 1992, 106-111; Johnson 1998, 89-90; Kozloff 2012, 191-192; Beaux 2013, 35-36; Berman 2013, 45; Bickel 2013, 71-73; Hornung 2013, 94), the event presumably marking also the inception of the Soleb cult of the divine Nebmaatre, of which Meryt was a functionary (and in turn, if such is the case, probably dating
latter connection, it seems almost certain (and is cautiously assumed in the following discussion) that Mayor of Sekhem Neby and wife Meryt, the dedicants of the Shalfak basin, are the same people as the contemporary pair, Mayor Neby and Meryt/Meryt-sherit, the owners of Soleb Tomb no. 15, the latter known from two fragmentary shabti-figures (Schiff Giorgini 1971, 98, 186, 193-194, figs 341-342, T 15 p1 [SNM 11845]; 248-249, figs 481-482, T 24 p1 [SNM 60/4/21]), the former from an inscribed door jamb (Schiff Giorgini 1971, 98, 186, 187, 192, 248-249, figs 483-484, T 24 p2).

Founded, as already noted, under Amenhotep III, Soleb (Khaemmaat), the administrative capital of Upper Nubia, no doubt in succession to Sai, was situated in the vicinity of an area rich in gold-production sites. It is well known that an intensification of the gold-industry as a whole occurred during the latter’s reign, directed by Viceroy of Kush Merymose, the first viceroy to hold the title ‘Overseer of the gold-lands of Amun.’ Neby’s role as ‘Scribe, Reckoner of gold of Amun’, reflects the priorities of the administration, while his title, ‘Mayor of Sekhem’, the toponym surely referring to Semna, and his interest in Shalfak, not far from Semna, suggest that his official remit, extending well beyond Soleb (the latter presumably his home-base), covered the old strategic border region (once separating Egypt from Kush) to the south of the Second Cataract in the Batn el-Hajar, with the regional base located at Semna. The border fortresses, established by the legendary Khakaure (Senwosret III), now the principal cult-places of the deified king (and wife), probably functioned, to varying degrees, as nodes of local administration and as venues ‘for at least a limited range of activities.’ However, the business of regional resource extraction and its control would surely have remained central concerns, not least in relation to the gold-working sites along the Batn el-Hajar, from Saras southwards and notably at Duweishat, a short

the Shalfak basin to the King’s Year 30 or later). Note that Meryt, as the sole known female officiant (and in a senior role), is a significant addition to Soleb temple’s slim prosopographical database (for the latter, Auenmüller 2018, 247-249).

With ‘Sekhem’ understood as an abbreviated form of the original name of Semna fortress, ‘Sekhem-Khakaure’, š²hm-ḥr-kwwr-mailbox (as suggested in Dunham and Janssen 1960, 47, 28-1-69, n. 1; Bryan 1991, 201; cf. Davies 2018, 350, n. 12; for the full name, Vogel 1904, 62, Table 2, no. 2, and 259-261; Hannig 2006, 1185-1186; Obsomer 2007, 66, 68; El-Enany 2014, 204; Davies 2017, 77-78, fig. 12, with n. 9; Somaglino 2017, 231, 233). Note the epithet ‘Lord of Sekhem’ (š²hm), of the deified Khakaure attested at Dakke (temp. Thutmos III; Dewachter 1971, 90, n. 2; El-Enany 2004, 212, n. 46; at Urnartis (temp. Amenhotep II; Davies 2018, 350, 353, fig. 6, left, line 1); and at Amada (temp. Thutmos IV; Baguet and Dewachter 1967, IV, C9; Bryan 1991, 201, 237, n. 327; El-Enany 2004, 212, no. 13). On the region’s historic and ideological significance during the 18th dynasty and the importance of Semna, see Klotz and Brown 2016, 278, 291, 298-299; Brown 2017, 194.

On the presence at Soleb of a contemporary ‘goldsmith’ (ḥbby), named Bak, depicted on an architrave from Tomb 38 (Schiff Giorgini 1971, 98, T 38, p1, and 319-320, fig. 629; Müller 2013, 186, 2.3.2, no. 39, and 458, 47.4; Auenmüller 2018, 247-248, Table 3, T 15. Meryt’s damaged title, in the case of T24 p1 (fig. 482), is quite possibly to be understood as wr[t] ḫntywr.

Cf. Minault Gout and Thill 2012, 182, b; Auenmüller 2013, 698, 931, BM-Soleb-01; Müller 2013, 209, 2.5.2, no. 18; 459, 47.9; Auenmüller 2018, 247-248, Table 3, T 15, and 255. The inscription, now incomplete and eroded, appears originally to have contained two or three titles (probably those held towards the end of his career) but, on the basis of the published photograph, only the last, ḫntywr-mailbox ‘Mayor Neby’, without toponym, can be read with confidence. Previous commentators (unaware of the Shalfak inscription) have understandably assumed that Neby’s mayoralty was of Soleb itself.

See Auénmüller 2013, 698, 931; Morkot 2013, 915, 936-937; Müller 2013, 12; Brown 2017, 193-194; Auenmüller 2018, 247-249.

See Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, 415, with n. 27, and 418; Auenmüller 2013, 698; Thill 2016, 263-265, 297-299; Bonnet and Valbelle 2018, 181; Budka 2018a, 123-124; Auenmüller 2018, 246, 254; Budka 2020b, 74, 391, 401-402, 407, 425; for parallels between Tomb 15 at Soleb, dated by its excavator to the reign of Amenhotep III, and Tomb 26 at Sai and the ‘close connection between the two sites during the second half of the 18th dynasty’, Budka 2018b, 191, 194; 2020b, 402.

See McLean 2017, 90, 91, 94, and 96: ‘The region of the Gorgod Hills … between the settlements of Soleb and Sesebi was a significant source of gold production in the 18th dynasty’; cf. Vieh 2018, 233; Davies 2020, 213, with n. 139.

See Murnane 1998, 178; Eichler 2000, 188-190; Mahfouz 2005, 58-59, 75-77; Török 2009, 173, no. 9; Müller 2013, 8, 230, 2.5.3 E38; Brown 2017, 178.

Note also the presence at Soleb of a contemporary ‘goldsmith’ (ḥbby), named Bak, depicted on an architrave from Tomb 38 (Schiff Giorgini 1971, 98, T 38, p1, and 319-320, fig. 629; Müller 2013, 186, 2.3.2, no. 39, and 458, 47.4; Auenmüller 2018, 247-248, Table 3, T 38; 2020a, 386-387, Tab. 39, Doc. 76, and 389; 2020b, 60); on the prosopographic record for ‘goldworkers’ in New Kingdom Nubia, see now Auenmüller 2020a, 386-390.

With ‘Sekhem’ understood as an abbreviated form of the original name of Semna fortress, ‘Sekhem-Khakaure’, š²hm-ḥr-kwwr-mailbox (as suggested in Dunham and Janssen 1960, 47, 28-1-69, n. 1; Bryan 1991, 201; cf. Davies 2018, 350, n. 12; for the full name, Vogel 2004, 62, Table 2, no. 2, and 259-261; Hannig 2006, 1185-1186; Obsomer 2007, 66, 68; El-Enany 2014, 204; Tallet 2014, 146; Davies 2017, 77-78, fig. 12, with n. 9; Somaglino 2017, 231, 233). Note the epithet ‘Lord of Sekhem’ (š²hm), of the deified Khakaure attested at Dakke (temp. Thutmos III; Dewachter 1971, 90, n. 2; El-Enany 2004, 212, n. 46; at Urnartis (temp. Amenhotep II; Davies 2018, 350, 353, fig. 6, left, line 1); and at Amada (temp. Thutmos IV; Baguet and Dewachter 1967, IV, C9; Bryan 1991, 201, 237, n. 327; El-Enany 2004, 212, no. 13).
distance (about 13km) upstream of Semna, the business operating, it might now be suggested, under the civil oversight of the Mayor of Sekhem (a post well suited to an official, like Neby, with a background in gold-accounting).

**Mayor of Sekhem: Known office-holders**

The earliest attested reference to the office of ‘Mayor of Sekhem’ is currently to be found in a fragmentary family-stela from Semna (Dunham and Janssen 1960, 47-48, 28-1-69 and 28-1-116, fig. 3), the title probably held by the stela-owner (very likely temp. Thutmose III/Hatshepsut) and certainly by at least two of his sons/descendants. Next in line are two other examples from later 18th dynasty contexts, in addition to our Shalfak case, one from an elite tomb at Sai (no. 5) (Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, 37-42, pl. 57),28 the other from a group of three rock-inscriptions at Tangur, a routine stopping point for officials travelling along the Batn el-Hajar (Hintze and Reineke 1989, i, 170-171, nos 553a, 554a, 174, no. 573, ii, pls 235, 236, and 244).29 In both these latter contexts, the title-holder is again named Neby, raising the question as to whether there are further connections to be made.

The Neby from Sai appears to have been the co-owner (with a ‘Mayor Ipy’, possibly his father) of the Sai tomb (no. 5) in question,30 his title and name, ‘Mayor of Sekhem Neby’, inscribed on objects found within the burial chamber, namely a fine shabtī-figure and a group of metal vessels.31 As for a possible connection, there is no evidence for a direct family link, but the Sai Neby and the Soleb/Shalfak Neby would seem to have been close in date while not exactly contemporary, the Sai Neby being the earlier of the two.32 In that case, it follows that the Shalfak/Soleb Neby was a successor in post of the Sai Neby, the home-base of the ‘Mayor of Sekhem’ transferring to Soleb from Sai, feasibly in consequence of the one replacing the other as Upper Nubia’s administrative headquarters. With regard to the rock-inscriptions of the ‘Mayor of Sekhem Neby’ at Tangur, there are no accompanying criteria that would enable us to decide to which Neby they might have belonged. Their presence there, however, is consistent with the view, supported by the evidence of the Shalfak basin, that the Mayor of Sekhem’s zone of responsibility, while centred at Semna, involved a degree of purview over other sites and activity in the region of the Batn el-Hajar.

**Summary**

The inscription on the Shalfak basin, a single offering-text, has turned out to be surprisingly rich in new

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29 Cf. Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, 182, b; Auenmüller 2013, 930-931, BMSai-027, a-c; Müller 2013, 209, 2.5.2, no. 18; Auenmüller 2018, 241; 2019, 404-405; 2020a, 371, Tab. 38, Docs 29-31, and 384-385.

30 Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, 414, Table 10, T 5; Auenmüller 2013, 930-931, BMSai-02 and 03; 2018, 241-242, Table 1, T 5; 2020a, 370-371, Tab. 38, Docs 25, 27-28, and 384-385. It is worth noting that the office of ‘Mayor Ipy’, co-owner of the tomb, might too have related to Sekhem rather than to Sai, though the matter remains uncertain. Previously on the known Sai ‘mayors’, all 18th dynasty, including the earliest and best attested, the hnty-n Srt Ṭ-hnms; ‘Mayor of Sai Ahmose’ (temp. Thutmose III/Hatshepsut), see Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, 182, nn. 54-55; PM viii/4, 287, no. 803-055-842 (stela Louvre C 103, datable to mid-18th dynasty on stylistic grounds); Müller 2013, 209, 2.5.2, no. 16; Auenmüller 2013, 696-698, 930-931, VII.2.49; Budka 2015, 74-75, Table 2; 2017, 443; Auenmüller 2018, 241-242, and 255; 2020a, 369-372 (Tab. 38, Docs 2-4, 25, 27-31, 57), 382-386, 391, 393-394; and Davies 2021.

31 Shabti: Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, 38, 40, 42, 180-183 (TSC33), 408, 413-414, Table 10, pl. 94. Vessels: Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, 38, 40, 42, 381-383, pl. 169; Cressent and Raimon 2016, 30-34, pls 5-13. Note that, in the case of the shabti inscription, the determinative of Sekhem is sign N25, as in the earlier Semna stela, but, in that of the vessels, 049 is preferred, as on the Shalfak basin and in the epithets referenced above (n. 22). On the significance of these alternative determinatives in the case of Nubian toponyms and their sometime ‘interchangeability’ during the New Kingdom, see Zibelius 1972, 70, H. S. Smith 1976, 88-90, and now, more generally, Cooper 2020, 33-45.
information, bearing on the deified Meresger, her cult, its duration and, by extension, the official use-life of the fortress, as well as including prosopographical data with significant local and wider implications, offering scope for further productive research. Long neglected (and still lost), the basin may now play a fuller part in the welcome new investigation of this notably important site, one of only two such fortresses (the other, Uronarti) that still survive.\textsuperscript{33}

**References**


\textsuperscript{33} Näser et al. 2017; Näser 2018; cf. Edwards and Mills 2020, 163-165.

\textsuperscript{34} Welsby 2004; on the programme of renewed work at Uronarti, see, most recently, Knoblauch and Bestock 2017; Bestock and Knoblauch 2020; cf. Edwards and Mills 2020, 166-171.
An inscribed basin of the 18th dynasty (Davies)


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