



A BESTIARY OF ANCIENT NUBIA

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ANCIENT CULTURES
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
ISAC MUSEUM PUBLICATIONS • NUMBER 4

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Edited by
Marc Maillot

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Decoration on a bowl from Qustul depicting an animal procession, a tree,
and a shrine. Drawing by Josh Tulisak. **Cat. no. 66.**

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*To Bruce Beyer Williams,
devoted archaeologist of ancient Nubia
and to our Sudanese colleagues and friends*

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Abbreviations

ÄM	Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
ÄS	Ägyptische Sammlung
BM	British Museum
ISAC	Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, University of Chicago
ISACM	Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Museum
K	Kerma
Ku.	El-Kurru
Louvre	Musée du Louvre
MFA	Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
MMA	Metropolitan Museum of Art
Penn	University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology
Petrie	Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology
REM	Répertoire d'épigraphie méroïtique (Leclant 2000)
ROM	Royal Ontario Museum
SAOS	School of Archaeology and Oriental Studies, Liverpool University
SNM	Sudan National Museum
TT	Theban tomb
WBN	Wad Ben Naga
WM	World Museum

Foreword

Timothy P. Harrison

Director, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures—West Asia & North Africa

A *Bestiary of Ancient Nubia*, catalog and companion volume to the ISAC Museum's special exhibition of the same name (April 16–August 17, 2026), celebrates the extraordinary African art of ancient Sudan. Drawing largely on the extensive collections of the ISAC Museum, the volume presents a unique visual history of ancient Nubian civilization from the A-Group culture to the medieval period (3,800 BCE–900 CE), seen through its rich engagement with the fauna of the Middle Nile Valley and Eastern Desert, and of the Nubians as renowned arbiters of the animal kingdom in the ancient world. The beautifully illustrated volume provides vivid insight into the deep knowledge of these ancient Nubian communities and their intimate symbiosis with the natural world. The volume's essays are organized by type of animal, ranging from wild to domesticated, and highlight the important role animals played in virtually every aspect of the daily life of these communities.

As chronicled in Bruce Williams's introduction, ISAC has enjoyed a long and illustrious history of exploration in Sudan, beginning with James Breasted's 1905–6 Nubian campaign, conducted following the completion of the first Aswan dam in 1902, and continuing most recently between 2006 and 2008 with excavations codirected by Geoff Emberling and Bruce Williams in the vicinity of the Fourth Cataract in conjunction with the Merowe Dam Project. The most substantial campaign occurred during the salvage operations of the 1960s, prompted by the Egyptian and Sudanese appeal to the international community to aid in the rescue of the monuments and cultural heritage threatened by the construction of the Aswan High Dam and consequent flooding of the Nile Valley. The Institute's Nubian Expedition, which played a leading role in this international effort, conducted extensive excavations between 1960 and 1968 at numerous sites in the anticipated flood zone, extending from Abu Simbel into northern Sudan south of the Second Cataract. The Institute's excavations documented the extraordinary cultural heritage threatened by the dam project, and as part of the effort to preserve this unique heritage it was entrusted with a portion of the finds, approximately 15,000 objects, which today form the heart of ISAC's Nubian collection—one of the largest and most comprehensive in existence, and an unmatched repository of ancient African art.

Long overdue, *A Bestiary of Ancient Nubia* finally brings these long-lost cultures and civilizations to light. Masterfully produced under the careful direction and curatorship of Marc Maillot, the ISAC Museum's director and chief curator, the volume and exhibition together provide a beautiful introduction to one of the great civilizations of ancient West Asia and North Africa, and an important testament to the Institute's enduring commitment to the preservation of the region's extraordinary cultural heritage.

Preface

Marc Maillot

Director and Chief Curator, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Museum

The inhabitants of ancient Nubia lived in symbiosis with animals. The Kushites were renowned throughout West Asia and North Africa as suppliers of animals and animal by-products such as skins and ivory. They were also represented as such, whether in the context of bearing tribute or in scenes of presenting diplomatic gifts. Wild or domesticated, fantastic or realistic, hunted or feared, animals were depicted in temples and tombs, on the walls of palaces, on ceramics, and in the niches of houses. Companions of daily life, sources of artistic and religious inspiration, subjects of trade, familiar even in the afterlife, animals in the ancient world had their place at the top of society and power.

In parallel with the special exhibition *A Bestiary of Ancient Nubia*, which opened on April 16, 2026, the ISAC Museum of the University of Chicago presents this catalog—a fascinating, scholarly compendium on animals in ancient Nubia from the A-Group culture to the medieval period (3800 BCE–900 CE). From the lion to the crocodile, from the ibis to the griffin, from cattle to insects, the catalog is an original take on the history of the Nubian civilization, with unparalleled information and a keen sense of storytelling. To offer a more comprehensive anthology of Nubian animal art, the illustrations selected for the essays are not limited to the objects displayed in the exhibition. A world first, *A Bestiary of Ancient Nubia*—both exhibition and catalog—are intended for all enthusiasts of Nubian civilization.

The special exhibition is a project particularly dear to my heart, considering my focus of research, but it is first and foremost indebted to ISAC's engagement in Nubia as long ago as 1959. In that year, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued an appeal at the request of the Egyptian and Sudanese governments to rescue the sites and monuments of Nubia threatened by the planned construction of the Aswan High Dam, which would flood the Nile Valley southward through the Second Cataract. At the University of Chicago, members of ISAC (then called the Oriental Institute) answered UNESCO's international call. Egyptologist Keith C. Seele, accompanied by philanthropist William R. Boyd, traveled to Sudan to explore the possibility of opening new excavations in agreement with the Sudanese authorities. On the other side of the border, in Egypt, Egyptologists George R. Hughes and Edward F. Wentz prepared Chicago House, the headquarters of the Epigraphic Survey in Luxor, for the considerable endeavor of recording the Nubian temples, while fellow Chicago Egyptologist John A. Wilson, chair of the UNESCO Consultative Committee for the Salvage of the Nubian Monuments, promoted their efforts through lectures.

The Institute's Nubian Expedition started its activities in 1960 at the Beit el-Wali temple of Ramesses II and then, the following year, at the fortress of Serra East. Such a major endeavor needed more than ad hoc financial support, however. Seele, together with archaeologists Pinhas Delougaz and Helene Kantor, applied for grants from the US State Department to support the extensive emergency operations, in effect transforming the size and scale of the salvage campaigns. The years 1962–64 of the Nubian Expedition, corresponding to the exploration of the sites of Ballana, Qustul, and Adindan, are of particular importance to the exhibition because a substantial number of the objects displayed originated from these excavations, assigned to the ISAC Museum through the division of finds. ISAC began operations in a concession that stretched southward along both banks of the Nile from the temples of Abu Simbel to the Sudan border and that included Ballana,

Qustul, and Adindan. To meet the campaign's technical requirements, the expedition hired architect James E. Knudstad, whose expertise proved particularly useful when the team explored the concession's X-Group tumuli area, as numerous brick chapels were discovered there. The 1962 season also saw the initial excavation of a Meroitic cemetery comprising several hundred tombs, some of which originally featured small pyramids. In 1963, the expedition moved farther south upriver between Qustul and Adindan, with a focus on C-Group Cemeteries K and T, and especially the A-Group elite Cemetery L.

The special exhibition is thus the consequence of a deeply rooted engagement of ISAC in Nubian art and archaeology. Indeed, this passion goes back to the Institute's founder, James Henry Breasted, who led ISAC's first expeditions to Nubia in 1905–6 in response to the completion of the first Aswan dam in 1902. Pioneering the archaeological recording of monuments and sites through photography, he traveled twice to Egypt and Nubia to photograph the monuments and sites there, capturing a total of 1,200 images. On his first trip—documenting all historical periods, from prehistoric rock art to Christian churches—he eventually reached Abu Simbel, where he spent forty days, and Wadi Halfa. On his second trip he went south to Meroe, Naga, and the pyramids of Sudan. Sailing downstream to the island of Argo, he discovered the inscriptions of Tombos and stopped at Sesebi, Soleb, and Sedeinga, as well as at the temples of Semna and Kumma, now located and preserved in the gardens of the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum. These seminal expeditions shaped the spirit that presided over the later founding of ISAC in 1919. Facing the rapid deterioration of the monuments he explored, Breasted foresaw an increasing need for documentation and publication of these sites, a situation particularly acute today for our Sudanese colleagues, who fight every day and risk their lives to preserve their heritage.

The special exhibition was organized by the ISAC Museum team and the catalog conceived in partnership with the ISAC publications office. I extend my deepest gratitude to Andrew Baumann, managing editor of ISAC Publications, for his meticulousness in bringing this catalog to life, and to Connie Gundry Tappy for her assistance with the copyediting. The ISAC development team, composed of Bill Cosper, Brad Lenz, and Emily Smith, helped find the necessary support to sponsor the exhibition and catalog, and their contribution was pivotal for the object loans and the high-quality standard we set for the ISAC Museum Publications series. The exhibition includes, in addition to objects from the ISAC Museum's collection, critical loans from the Penn Museum in Philadelphia, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and the University of Chicago Library. I am grateful to these institutions for supporting the show. The companion children's book was designed by the Museum's Education and Programs department, which created the perfect activities for the youngest members of our audience. Programming and merchandise were customized for the show by Programs and Education staff members Kate Ayres, Madeleine Roberts-Ganim, Tasha Vorderstrasse, and Tonya Lifshits and ISAC Museum Shop manager Denise Browning, who together created a Nubian Month in May 2026 following the opening of the exhibition with lectures, documentaries, community events involving Sudanese food and music, and contemporary art outreach. On that note, I thank Stuart Tyson Smith, Séverine Marchi, Vincent Francigny, Artur Obluski, and Salah el-din Mohamed Ahmed for agreeing to participate in the celebrations and for their passion for Sudanese heritage.

The generous support of ISAC donors Deborah and Philip Halpern, Furthermore (a program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund), and ISAC members and visitors made the exhibition and catalog possible. I thank ISAC's director, Timothy P. Harrison, for his constant support and advice on the project, as well as ISAC business administrator Marianna Capeles, assistant director for finance and administration Matt Perley, director of finance and administration Sheheryar Hasnain, and executive assistant Kiel Gray. On behalf of the ISAC Museum team, I cannot thank them all enough for their dedication and the time they spent in bringing this Nubian anthology of animals to life. I am grateful to Kiersten Neumann, ISAC curator and special exhibition

coordinator, for her engagement and passion for the ISAC collection; Helen McDonald, senior registrar; and Susan Allison, assistant registrar, all of whom were instrumental in coordinating the loans and photographing the objects for the catalog. Laura D'Alessandro, head of Conservation, demonstrated her usual meticulousness and care for the most fragile of the objects selected, and conservators Alison Whyte and Elisheva Yardeni helped tremendously during the treatment and installation of the objects. ISAC's Exhibition Design and Production department drew fully on their usual creativity, particularly Josh Tulisiak on the graphic design front with the exhibition's visuals, magnificent maps, and line drawings of the most demanding carvings and inscriptions, and Robert Bain for the Nubian vault, pedestal cases, and mounting and cradling of the Frédéric Caillaud atlas. The mounts were precisely crafted by Patrick Dykstra of Avero Museum Services, with Josh's and Rob's help. Kea Johnston, ISAC/Field Museum postdoctoral scholar, provided tremendous support, especially in creating the digital rollouts of ISAC's Nubian pottery collection, celebrated internationally for its refinement and originality. Kea was also instrumental in generating the replica of the Worcester Art Museum plaque, turning this masterpiece into an educational platform for our school field trips.

At the Penn Museum, I thank Williams Director Christopher Woods, Anne Brancati, Katherine Blanchard, Laura Hartz Stanton, Adam Hutler, and Evan Peugh for their support in providing object loans for the exhibition and photographs for the catalog. At the Met, I thank Max Hollein, director and chief executive officer; Diana Craig Patch, the Lila Acheson Wallace Curator in Charge of Egyptian Art; Kim Benzel, Curator in Charge of Ancient West Asian Art; Niv Allon, curator; Adela Oppenheim, curator; Aude Semat, associate curator; Brendan Hainline, research associate; Marci King, exhibitions project manager; and NESTA Alexander, associate registrar. At the Royal Ontario Museum, I am grateful to Josh Basseches, board director; Melissa Maltby, registrar; Ann Marie Erum, senior treasury analyst; Kristyn Rolanty, senior manager; and Nicola Woods, rights and reproductions coordinator. At the Brooklyn Museum, I thank Anne Pasternak, the Shelby White and Leon Levy Director; Yekaterina Barbash, curator of Egyptian, classical, and ancient Near Eastern art; Elisabeth Lergi, associate registrar; and Monica Park, rights and reproductions manager. Additional thanks are due to Ali Rosenberg, registrar at the Worcester Art Museum, for allowing us to reproduce the sandstone plaque of Prince Arikankharor. And finally, at the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center at the University of Chicago Library, I warmly thank Patti Gibbons, head of collections management and exhibitions, and Elizabeth Frengel, curator of rare books and director of the Kim-Park Program for the Study of the Book. Additional thanks are due to Foy Scalf, director of the ISAC Data Research Center and Research Archives, and Allie Scholten, ISAC Museum archivist, for their support regarding archival documentation; Vick Cruz, ISAC's manager of visitor services and security, and his security staff for their support in organizing the Nubian Month; and Sali Maghoub, director of development at the Obama Foundation, for helping with our outreach programs and creating synergies with the Sudanese diaspora in Chicago. Finally, I thank Denise Doxey, curator of ancient Egyptian, Nubian, and Near Eastern art, for permission to use images of artifacts in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts collections in the essays, as well as the Louvre Museum for permission to use illustrations of its excavation material from Muweis. Geoff Emberling and Michele Buzon helped obtain the best illustrations from the El-Kurru and Tombos archives. Special thanks to Dominique Valbelle, professor at the American University in Cairo and professor emerita at Université Paris IV–Sorbonne, and Séverine Marchi, head of the French Archaeological Unit in Sudan now based in Cairo, for granting permission to reproduce the Kerma frieze. Olivier Cabon of Soleb Éditions, my dear friend and colleague, provided astonishing images of the Great Enclosure Wall of Mussawwarat es-Sufra.

I am grateful to all the authors of this catalog for their robust and expert contributions, which have made this anthology the scholarly reference it aims to be. Sharing their research and fresh perspective on the state of the art regarding the animal world of Nubia is not an easy task; the fact that the information is scattered

emphasizes the need for bibliographical syntheses, such as this catalog, in the field of Nubian studies. It was a delight working with them all.

I thank Gabrielle Choimet, who shared the entire story and behind-the-scenes anecdotes of this project. In addition to her constant support, she was pivotal for the catalog's last chapter, which is dedicated to pastoralism and climate change, as well as the distribution of animals in Egypt and Nubia. The exhibition and catalog would not be the same without her.

When I contemplated the possibility of organizing *A Bestiary of Ancient Nubia*, I immediately wished to dedicate the exhibition and accompanying catalog to Bruce Beyer Williams. After Keith Seele passed away in 1971, the publication of the Nubian Expedition excavations was entrusted to Bruce, who received his PhD in Egyptology from the University of Chicago in 1975. Following the first two volumes in the Nubian Expedition series, which had been published in the 1960s, Bruce completed eleven monumental monographs that became immediate reference works for Nubian archaeology. Bruce has devoted his entire academic career to Nubia. Such commitment is unparalleled and has made Bruce a pillar of our discipline, and the Institute a leader in Nubian studies. Although Chicago exhibitions on Nubia are not new—*Archaeological Textiles from Nubia* ran from May 26 to August 5, 1979, at the Art Institute, for example, and *Vanished Kingdoms of the Nile: The Recovery of Ancient Nubia* in 1992 at the ISAC Museum—the current situation in Sudan called for an original and positive project highlighting the wealth and depth of the Nubian past in these tragic times for the Sudanese population. My final thoughts here therefore go to the Sudanese people and colleagues in the field—the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums; the Universities of Khartoum, Shendi, Gezira, Nileen, and Africa; and others—who daily face impossible situations in keeping the memory of their heritage alive. I am grateful for their willingness and dedication to share their heritage with us and indebted to their continued commitment to our joint research projects, even in the worst of times. This exhibition and catalog are also dedicated to them.

Contributors

Rozenn Bailleul-LeSuer

Rozenn Bailleul-LeSuer received her PhD in Egyptology from the University of Chicago in 2016. An interdisciplinary with a background in chemistry and classical studies, her research centers on the ancient Egyptians' relationship with their environment, with a particular focus on the animal world. She is currently finalizing a book on ancient Egyptian aviculture and poultry husbandry and is a member of the project "Raptors Unwrapped," which investigates the exploitation of birds of prey in Late Period and Ptolemaic Egypt through the study of bird mummies. She divides her time between teaching in the Department of Anthropology at the State University of New York at Brockport and the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Rochester. She also serves as the curator of the Morgan-Manning House, a Victorian house museum in western New York. She has served as a consultant for the Art Institute of Chicago and the ISAC Museum of the University of Chicago, where she curated the exhibition *Between Heaven and Earth: Birds in Ancient Egypt*.

Gabrielle Choimet

Gabrielle Choimet (PhD in Egyptology, Sorbonne University, 2022) is a researcher in the archaeology of Sudan, focusing on settlement archaeology and urbanism in ancient Nubia and Northeast Africa. She has participated in numerous excavations in the Middle East and Northeast Africa and is a member of the Damboya and Sai Island projects of the Section Française de la Direction des Antiquités in Khartoum, Sudan. She is also a research associate at the Field Museum in Chicago and an assistant lecturer at Sorbonne University, where she teaches museum studies and archaeological and curatorial practices. Her research interests include Nubia and the Horn of Africa from the Kerma period to the rise of the Christian kingdoms of Nubia, architecture and town planning, land control and administration practices, craft production and ancient economies, building materials, agricultural strategies and food storage, nomadic lifestyles, water management, and ethnoarchaeology.

Margaret Geoga

Margaret Geoga (PhD in Egyptology, Brown University, 2020) is an assistant professor of Egyptology at the University of Chicago. Her research focuses on ancient Egyptian literature, scribal culture, and textual transmission and reception in both ancient Egypt and later periods. Her other research interests include ancient Egyptian language, translation, and literary theory, as well as the history of Egyptology. Her work has been supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, and the American Philosophical Society. Her current book project focuses on *The Teaching of Amenemhat*, an enigmatic Middle Egyptian poem depicting the murder of a pharaoh. Combining textual criticism, material philology, and reception theory, the monograph investigates how this unusual and highly popular text was passed down, edited, and reinterpreted over the course of approximately 1,000 years by its many ancient readers in both Egypt and Nubia.

Laura Harris

Laura Harris (PhD in Egyptology, Macquarie University, 2024) is an early-career researcher at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, studying Egyptian animal husbandry and animal welfare. Her dissertation investigated the question of Egyptian animal welfare via an examination of the methods the Egyptians used to manage their livestock as represented in two-dimensional art scenes in elite tombs of the New Kingdom. She has worked on archaeological sites since 2018, primarily at Luxor in Upper Egypt. Her current research focuses on the Egyptians' physical interactions with livestock and husbandry practices, examining how handling methods can reveal attitudes toward animal welfare from the early dynastic period to the New Kingdom.

Marc Maillot

Marc Maillot (PhD in Egyptology, Sorbonne University, 2013) is an associate member of the Orient et Méditerranée unit of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. Before his appointment in 2015 as a courtesy assistant professor at the University of Central Florida, he conducted seminars on Late Antiquity urbanism and architecture at Sorbonne University in Paris and Shendi University in Sudan. His research interests include vernacular architecture in both Egypt and Sudan, Meroitic iconography, social anthropology, and urbanism in antiquity. He has worked at archaeological sites since 2007, with a special focus on Middle Nile Valley sites such as Muweis, el-Hassa, Damboya, and Sai Island. His field experience also includes the archaeology of Roman settlements in France, particularly on the shores of the Marne River. His past research has focused on technical approaches to the study of cultural transmission, and more specifically on the theme of casemate foundations for monumental brick structures along the Nile. His current research focuses on the Osirian cult practice in Meroitic royal pageantry, architectural representations in the iconography of the Middle Nile Valley, and late antique Sudanese towns as production machines for a centralized power at Meroe. He was appointed director and chief curator of the ISAC Museum in January 2023.

Shayla Monroe

Shayla Monroe (PhD in anthropology, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2021) specializes in faunal analysis, the social zooarchaeology of Sudan and Egypt, and the archaeology of African pastoralism. Her dissertation analyzed the acquisition of cattle at the ancient Egyptian colonial fortress of Askut (ca. 1850–1550 BCE) and its implications for cultural contact and asymmetrical power relations between pastoralists and nonpastoralists. Since 2013, she has worked as an archaeologist at the Third Cataract of the Nile River in Sudan—first at the Egyptian colonial site of Tombos and then at the Kerma hinterlands site of Abu Fatima, also in Northern Sudan. Her present research focuses on mapping social networks and relationships among pastoralists in the Middle Nile Valley and adjacent regions from the Late Neolithic to the end of the Bronze Age.

Brian Muhs

Brian Muhs (PhD in Egyptology, University of Pennsylvania, 1996) is interested in the history of ancient Egyptian social, economic, and legal institutions, particularly but not exclusively during the transition from pharaonic to Ptolemaic and Roman rule. He is also interested in language contact and interaction, particularly between Demotic and Greek, and in the reconstruction of ancient Egyptian textual archives that have been dispersed by antiquities dealers and collectors. He taught at Leiden University in the Netherlands from 1997 to 2011 and has been an associate professor at the University of Chicago since 2011. He is currently studying the interactions between Egyptian and Greek traditions of banking and lending in the Ptolemaic period. He is the author of several books on taxes and tax receipts in Ptolemaic Egypt, *The Ancient Egyptian*

Economy, 3000–30 BCE (Cambridge University Press, 2016), and *Lending in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Demotic Loan-Account Papyri of Panas* (Lockwood, 2025).

Kiersten Neumann

Kiersten Neumann is an art historian, archaeologist, curator, and educator specializing in ancient West Asia, with a focus on Assyria and Persia, as well as connections with Arabia. She is a curator at the ISAC Museum, a research associate at ISAC, and a lecturer in the University of Chicago's Department of Art History. Her publications, teaching, and speaking engagements explore sensory experience, ritualized practice, and visual culture, as well as museum practice, collecting of histories, provenance research, and cultural-heritage management and preservation. She has curated numerous exhibitions at the ISAC Museum, including *Joseph Lindon Smith: The Persepolis Paintings* (2022), *Making Sense of Marbles: Roman Sculpture at the OI* (2022–23), *Artifacts Also Die* (2023), and *Megiddo: A City Unearthed, A Past Imagined* (2025–26), in addition to the museum's permanent galleries as part of a complete renovation (2019). She is coeditor of *The Routledge Handbook of the Senses in the Ancient Near East* (2022). She has conducted archaeological fieldwork at Nineveh in Iraq, Tell Tayinat in Turkey, and the Athenian Agora in Greece and collaborates on international museum, art, and cultural-heritage projects. Originally from Vancouver, Canada, she earned her BA and MA at the University of British Columbia and her PhD at the University of California, Berkeley (2014).

Claude Rilly

Claude Rilly (PhD in Egyptology and Linguistics, Sorbonne University, 2003) is a senior researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. Since 2019, he has also been a professor of Meroitic language and civilization at the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Sorbonne–Paris). He was director of the French Archaeological Unit in Khartoum, Sudan, from 2009 to 2014 and has led the French Archaeological Mission at Sedeinga, in Sudanese Nubia, since 2008. He has written three monographs on the Meroitic language: *La langue du royaume de Meroé* (2007), *Le méroïtique et sa famille linguistique* (2010), and *The Meroitic Language and Writing System* (2012, with Alexander de Voogt), as well as the comprehensive “Histoire du Soudan, des origines à la chute du sultanat Fung” (2017).

Emily Teeter

Emily Teeter received her PhD in Egyptology from the University of Chicago. Her research interests focus on popular religion and the material culture of ancient Egypt. Most of her career was spent at the Oriental Institute (now ISAC) Museum of the University of Chicago. She has served as a curatorial consultant for other museums throughout the United States, including the Art Institute of Chicago. She is the author of many monographs, including *Ancient Egypt: Treasures from the Collection of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago*; *Chicago on the Nile: A Century of Work by the Epigraphic Survey of the University of Chicago*; *Egypt and the Egyptians* (which has appeared in Turkish and Arabic editions); *The Presentation of Maat: Ritual and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt*; and *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, and coauthor of the digital publication *Ancient Egyptian Art at the Art Institute of Chicago*. In the 1990s, she researched some of the small finds from the University of Chicago's excavation of Medinet Habu, leading to the publication of *Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals, and Seal Impressions from Medinet Habu*, *Baked Clay Figurines and Votive Beds from Medinet Habu*, and many shorter articles. She is a past president of the American Research Center in Egypt and the editor of the *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. Since 2024, she has served as the cocurator for the Africa and Nile Valley galleries at the Chicago Field Museum.

Tasha Vorderstrasse

Tasha Vorderstrasse (PhD in Near Eastern archaeology, University of Chicago, 2004) is the manager of the continuing education program and a research associate at the ISAC Museum of the University of Chicago. Her research focuses on the material culture of West Asia and North Africa, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia and the relationship between these areas and China. Her work seeks to understand the identity of past communities through archaeological and textual evidence, as well as the interconnections between different regions. She administers and teaches in ISAC's adult education program and leads teacher workshops and tours of the ISAC Museum for University of Chicago students and other groups on a variety of topics ranging from post-colonialism to legal history, medicine, and queens and princesses in the ancient world. Her classes for ISAC have covered Nubian queens, Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade, and Frank Lloyd Wright's unrealized plans for Baghdad, among other topics. She curated the ISAC Museum special exhibition *Antoin Sevruguin: Past and Present* (2021) and edited the accompanying catalog. In 2015, she was the cocurator of the ISAC Museum special exhibition *A Cosmopolitan City: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Old Cairo*. She has excavated at sites throughout the Middle East—primarily in Turkey, but also as codirector of ISAC's excavations at Ambroyi in Armenia.

Bruce Beyer Williams

Bruce Beyer Williams is an associate of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures at the University of Chicago, where he has authored ten volumes in the ISAC Nubian Expedition series and coauthored an eleventh volume. He has also authored a book on early painted pottery and numerous articles on the archaeology and history of Nubia, and coauthored a volume on Nubian textiles. He helped curate the ISAC Museum's Robert F. Picken Family Nubia Gallery. He has participated in excavations in Sudan since 1997, including two seasons as codirector. In addition to his ISAC affiliation, he is a research associate at the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw.

Introduction: The University of Chicago and Nubia

Bruce Beyer Williams

Associate, Nubian Expedition, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures

In 1959, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued an appeal to rescue the archaeological heritage and monuments of Nubia (fig. 1). This plea came in response to the immediate plan of the government of the United Arab Republic (as Egypt was then named) to erect a high dam at Aswan, which would flood the Nile Valley from Aswan south through the Second Cataract. Numerous expeditions from many countries ultimately answered the call and participated in the salvage work.¹ Their surveys and excavations, conducted with various objectives and methods, covered most of the open areas of the Nile Valley and adjacent desert that were to be flooded. Most prominent monuments were removed—some to higher ground, others to locations in Nubia, and some to other countries. Although the work was celebrated as a success, several areas—notably, modern settlements—were mostly not explored.



Figure 1. Abu Simbel temple of Ramesses II before removal.

In Chicago, faculty members at the Oriental Institute (now the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, or ISAC) took up the challenge. Egyptologist Keith C. Seele went to Nubia with a certain William R. Boyd to look at possible excavation concessions. Seele's colleagues George R. Hughes and Edward F. Wente prepared Chicago House (the headquarters of the Epigraphic Survey expedition in Luxor, Egypt) for the challenge of recording Nubian temples, and the Institute's director, John A. Wilson, as chairman of the UNESCO Consultative Committee for the Salvage of the Nubian Monuments, embarked on a lecture tour to publicize the rescue of the monuments.

The Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition took to the field in 1960 using research funds and additional support from private donors, notably Mr. Boyd. The team worked at the Beit el-Wali temple of Ramesses II and joined the Swiss Institute in an archaeological concession stretching some 25 kilometers to the south along the river.² The next season's work took place in Sudan at Serra East. Clearly, private contributions and the research budget alone could not support such a major undertaking. The Egyptian government had provided aid only in the form of the transportation of grain and local funds that could be used only in Egypt and Sudan. The Institute appealed to the US State Department and received from it grants that transformed the salvage work.

This development coincided with a major move to the concession stretching from the temples of Abu Simbel to the Sudan frontier. The expedition acquired new housing in the form of a converted steamer named the *Fostat*; towed to each location (having had its engines removed), the boat provided not only housing but also workspace and a garage for a jeep. Thus refinanced in a major way, the expedition resumed and expanded its work. The various excavation and documentation campaigns are described here in chronological order together with their ensuing publications, since publication is an essential part of any archaeological enterprise and both the campaigns and the publications furnished major discoveries.³

Nubian Expedition volumes published to date.

Volume number	Author(s)	Title	Year of publication
1	Herbert Ricke, George R. Hughes, and Edward F. Wente	<i>The Beit el-Wali Temple of Ramesses II</i>	1967
2	Herbert Ricke, with contributions by Carl Fingerhuth, Labib Habachi, and Louis V. Žabkar	<i>Ausgrabungen von Khor-Dehmit bis Bet el-Wali</i>	1967
3	Bruce Beyer Williams	<i>Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan Frontier, Part 1: The A-Group Royal Cemetery at Qustul: Cemetery L</i>	1986
4	Bruce Beyer Williams	<i>Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan Frontier, Parts 2, 3, and 4: Neolithic, A-Group, and Post-A-Group Remains from Cemeteries W, V, S, Q, T, and a Cave East of Cemetery K</i>	1989

Volume number	Author(s)	Title	Year of publication
5	Bruce Williams	<i>Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan Frontier, Part 5: C-Group, Pan Grave, and Kerma Remains at Adindan Cemeteries T, K, U, and J</i>	1983
6	Bruce Beyer Williams, with a contribution by William J. Murnane	<i>Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan Frontier, Part 6: New Kingdom Remains from Cemeteries R, V, S, and W at Qustul and Cemetery K at Adindan</i>	1992
7	Bruce Beyer Williams	<i>Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan Frontier, Part 7: Twenty-Fifth Dynasty and Napatan Remains at Qustul: Cemeteries W and V</i>	1990
8	Bruce Beyer Williams, with a contribution by Nicholas B. Millet	<i>Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan Frontier, Part 8: Meroitic Remains from Qustul Cemetery Q, Ballana Cemetery B, and a Ballana Settlement</i>	1991
9	Bruce Beyer Williams	<i>Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan Frontier, Part 9: Nubadian X-Group Remains from Royal Complexes in Cemeteries Q and 219 and Private Cemeteries Q, R, V, W, B, J, and M at Qustul and Ballana</i>	1991
10	Bruce Beyer Williams	<i>Excavations at Serra East, Parts 1–5: A-Group, C-Group, Pan Grave, New Kingdom, and X-Group Remains from Cemeteries A–G and Rock Shelters</i>	1993
11	Joanna Then-Obluska	<i>Beads from Excavations at Qustul, Adindan, Ballana, and Kalabsha, Part 1: A-Group, Post-A-Group, C-Group, N-Type, P-Type, Pan Grave, and New Kingdom</i>	2022
12	Lisa A. Heidorn	<i>The Second Cataract Fortress of Dorginarti</i>	2023
13	Bruce Williams, with contributions by Nadejda Reshetnikova, Robin Seignobos, Alexandros Tsakos, and Dobrochna Zielinska	<i>Excavations at Serra East, Part 8: Serre Matto—the Christian Period Churches, Houses, Workshops, and Cemetery</i>	In press
14	Bruce Williams, with contributions by Carol Meyer, Alexandros Tsakos, Tasha Vorderstrasse, and Donald Whitcomb	<i>Excavations at Serra East, Part 9: Serre Matto—the Christian Period and Later Pottery, Glass, Small Objects, Texts, and Inscribed Objects</i>	In press
15	Lisa A. Heidorn and Bruce Beyer Williams	<i>Excavations and Survey in the Fourth Cataract, Part 1: Cemeteries at Al-Widay</i>	Forthcoming

The Epigraphic Survey at Beit el-Wali and the Bab Kalabsha–Khor Dehmit Excavations (1960–61)

The rock-cut temple of Beit el-Wali was recorded by the Chicago House team in 1960–61. Constructed in the time of Ramesses II, it contained an important depiction of a campaign in Nubia complete with people and animals, such as giraffes and cattle with deliberately deformed horns.⁴ Since the Nile Valley was firmly under Egyptian control as far as Napata, the scene probably records a campaign to either the west or the south of the river's Great Bend.

The expedition worked simultaneously at sites nearby and in the area to the south. Chief among them were a complex of buildings on the desert above the west bank and an important cemetery of well-constructed tombs, dated by coins to the fourth century CE. The most important of these tombs had well-built circular enclosures and domed burial chambers. Outside some of them were small, stone platforms—apparently to accommodate offering tables, some of which were actually found (fig. 2).⁵ In the fourth century this region of Nubia, called the Dodekaschoinos, was under the control of the Blemmyes, who were the major power in the Eastern Desert and whose sway and activities reached from the southern Atbai to Upper Egypt, where they held property. These tombs, considered princely by Herbert Ricke, the excavator, also yielded a new kind of handmade, incised, and burnished red, black, and buff pottery that has also been found in the desert (fig. 3). The cemeteries in this area give archaeological substance to this people—known from history, legend, legal documents, and even inscriptions—who exercised great power in late antiquity and whose tombs mark one of the major discoveries of the salvage campaign.

The project of publication began soon after the expedition concluded its work, and the first two volumes in the Nubian Expedition series were published only a few years later.⁶

Ballana, Qustul, and Adindan (1962–64)

With its new source of financial support and housing on the *Fostat*, the Nubian Expedition directed by Seele began operations in a concession that stretched along both sides of the Nile from the temples of Abu Simbel south to the Sudan frontier, including the districts (*omodiyya*) of Ballana, Qustul, and Adindan. The concession was accepted with some reluctance because major discoveries had already been made there during salvage operations in the 1930s⁷ and a more recent excavation by the Antiquities Department of Egypt.⁸ A brief survey undertaken for the current project did not recommend further work in most of the districts.⁹

For this first season, the expedition had James E. Knudstad as its architect.



Figure 2. Gebel Khor Abu Sinna tomb B6 (center).



Figure 3. Incised, burnished, and painted Eastern Desert Ware of the Blemmyes culture in Lower Nubia. *From top to bottom, left to right:* beaker with indentations (ISACM E35582), sherds from two beakers depicting animals (ISACM E36370 and E49097), beaker (ISACM E35586), and bowl sherd (ISACM E40320).

The team began work in the area of the X-Group tumuli, focused on finding installations associated with these burial mounds. Their efforts were rewarded with some lesser tombs and pits containing sacrificed animals, but more importantly with long rows of one-room brick chapels built just north of three tumuli and possibly for people buried in the tumuli with the rulers and other courtiers.¹⁰ Some chapels had small, brick platforms that had supported sandstone offering tables.

The season's major excavation was a Meroitic cemetery that antedated the X-Group royal tombs and contained several hundred tombs, some of them with small pyramids.¹¹ Although most of the burials had been plundered, a large amount of pottery remained, as well as a substantial number of small objects. Tentative explorations nearer the river to the south, which yielded burials of New Kingdom, C-Group, and A-Group date, completed the first season's work.

In the 1963–64 season, the main effort moved southward, following the river in a space between the houses of Qustul and Adindan. A number of small A-Group plots and New Kingdom cemeteries were explored, but the focus was on two C-Group cemeteries, K and T,¹² and especially the A-Group cemetery complex L, the excavation of which has changed many assumptions about early Nubia.¹³ Its much larger tombs, with contents originally many times greater than those of any known A-Group sites, clearly belonged to individuals of unique status. Across the river at Ballana, the expedition excavated a late Meroitic cemetery (B) and part of a settlement¹⁴ before finishing the season briefly at the monastery of Qasr el-Wizz.

The publications revealed major new information. The earliest substantial remains excavated by the Institute dated to the Nubian A-Group (fourth and early third millennia BCE), contemporary with Naqada II, Naqada III, and the early First Dynasty in Egypt.¹⁵ Although all types of burial and storage pits were found, the most remarkable discovery was Cemetery L, which dated to the Late A-Group, Naqada IIIA–B. Of this cemetery’s thirty-two tombs and pits, twelve constituted the most remarkable A-Group tombs ever found. These tombs, though plundered and partly burned, were far larger than others known from the same period and contained the remains of wealth that vastly exceeded any previously found in A-Group contexts (fig. 4). For example, a famous type of handmade painted pottery, previously known from perhaps fifty pieces, was represented in these tombs and pits by about a thousand discrete vessels distinguished individually by designs and brushstrokes.¹⁶ The burials also contained the remains of fine, stone-bead jewelry, some of it manufactured across the river at Ballana,¹⁷ as well as gold objects¹⁸ and a great array of vessels imported from both Egypt and Sinai or Palestine. It was clear that these tombs were those of rulers in the A-Group—but there was a final surprise. One object, an incense burner from tomb L24 carved from a mixture of clay minerals¹⁹ and a type typical of the A-Group, was decorated in a recessed-silhouette style well known from rock art (see **cat. no. 64**). The complex decoration was clearly a unified composition: a procession of three boats, of a type reserved for gods and kings, navigating toward a palace facade, called a *serekb* in ancient Egyptian. In the second, most poorly preserved boat was a king, evidenced by a White Crown that would have been atop his head, as well as by the tail and body of a falcon in front of the crown. The first boat contained a prisoner kneeling in what was probably a carrying chair and bound with a cord held by a man behind him, who also holds an upside-down mace. The last boat contained a lion figure—a god, as indicated by the falcon on a standard behind it.²⁰ Other incense burners with paneled facades were found in Cemetery L, but no other single object



Figure 4. A-Group tomb L23 trench partly cleared with rows of storage jars and chamber blocking.

demonstrated so clearly that pharaonic rulers or kings were buried in its tombs. The kingdom was the third of three great regions recognized during this period—the southern one, called Ta-Seti “Land of the Bow.”

After the A-Group ended in the early First Dynasty, a long gap in settlement followed in Lower Nubia, with only a few scattered burials.²¹ In the late Old Kingdom, however, a new occupation, called the C-Group, began—a culture strongly represented in the excavations by Cemeteries T, K, and U at Adindan and Cemeteries B and C at Serra East.²² These sites not only yielded major remains of the C-Group, reinforcing its chronology, but also illustrated the relationship between the C-Group, Pan Grave, and Kerma cultures. New Kingdom remains were plentiful here (fig. 5), as well as in the Sudanese concessions (see below), as was material from the first millennium BCE.

Two great Meroitic cemeteries at Qustul and Ballana, Q and B, yielded a lot of information on burial customs and a wealth of small objects and pottery. They were also large enough and complete enough that this information could be used to create a chronology for Lower Nubia.²³

The expedition’s work in the area around the X-Group royal tombs at Qustul, excavated in the 1930s, revealed large funerary complexes as well as smaller tombs that could be used to construct a wider archaeological chronology for Lower Nubia (fig. 6). The layouts of the royal and private tombs could also be compared with remains from farther upstream to indicate a cultural relationship between the Kingdom of Nobadia and regions much farther south.²⁴ The X-Group was already famous for its archery equipment, including quivers and arrowheads, but new to the research was the discovery of leather fragments that turned out to be an unstrung compound bow (fig. 7).

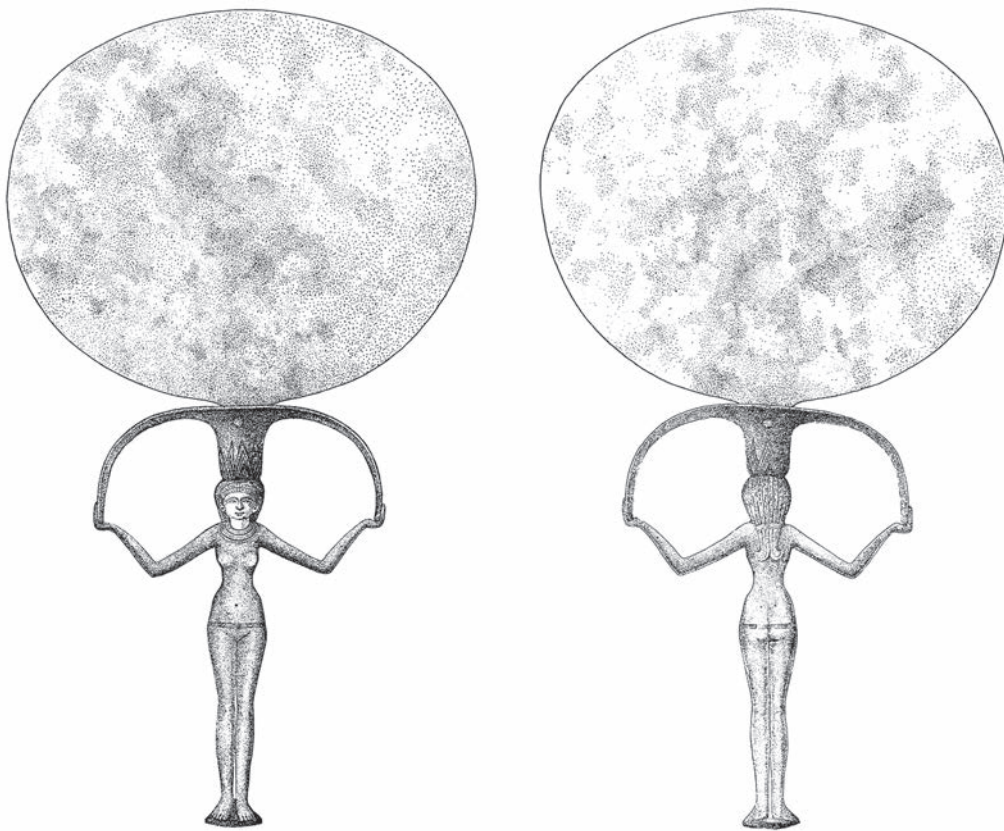


Figure 5. New Kingdom feminiform mirror from tomb V48. Drawing by Joanna Steinkeller.

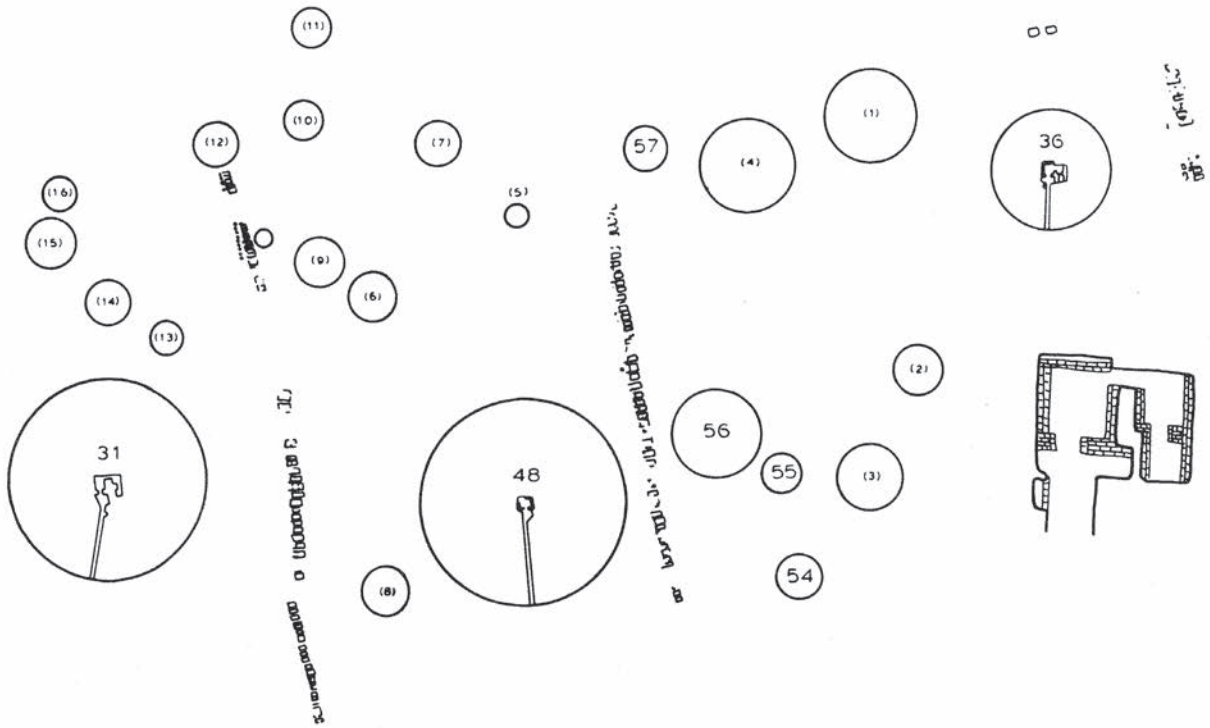


Figure 6. X-Group Cemetery Q, northern half with chapel rows (north is to the right).



Figure 7. X-Group archery equipment: reflex composite bow (unstrung) from Q345-7, ISACM E20961. Drawing by Lisa Heidorn.

The Meroitic and X-Group tombs yielded the largest body of textiles known from the period in Nubia. The curator of textiles at the Art Institute of Chicago, Christa C. Mayer Thurman, spent years carefully cleaning, conserving, and researching these finds, which were included in a major Art Institute exhibition.²⁵ Her research on the textiles, including their fibers and manufacture, was presented in a detailed catalog—one of the expedition's major milestones—and became the basis for a significant reinterpretation of the economy in northern Nubia during the Meroitic and X-Group periods.

Work in Sudan (1961–64)

The Nubian Expedition began its work in Sudan by opening excavations at the fortress of Serra East, originally built in the late Twelfth Dynasty but used into the New Kingdom and rebuilt as a Christian town around the start of the eleventh century CE. Living aboard the *Memnon*, director George R. Hughes, architect and archaeologist James E. Knudstad, and Egyptologists Charles F. Nims and Ronald J. Williams led excavations that outlined the fortress and worked in associated cemeteries, including a few very large tombs that may have belonged to governors. Ronald Williams excavated a substantial, earlier C-Group cemetery built on a hill to the south.²⁶

After a yearlong gap, excavation resumed under Knudstad's direction in 1963. This season was expected to be a long one because two fortresses had to be studied. The work at Serra involved first studying and recording the Christian town's remains while detailing the fort and working in open areas, and then—because everything was going to be submerged and thus destroyed anyway—tearing away the Christian buildings to reveal more of the earlier structures (figs. 8–9). As a result, many more Christian documents were discovered: mostly fragments but also, under a floor, the Serra East Codex—the longest known document in Old Nubian.²⁷

The second large-scale operation in this phase was the excavation of the fortress of Dorginarti, located on an island at the foot of the Nile's Second Cataract (fig. 10). The work was supervised by Richard and Wenche Pierce under Knudstad's direction. The entire fortress was to be cleared, from granaries at one end



Figure 8. The Christian town at Serre Matto (Serra East), viewed from the east. Digital rendering by Nadejda Reshetnikova.

to an administration building nearby and many houses in various strata throughout the rest of the fort. Although the fortification was originally thought to be New Kingdom in date, archaeologist Lisa Heidorn, examining the records and finds many years later in Chicago, discovered that Dorginarti in fact dated to a later period and is thus a site of pivotal significance for the history of the first half of the first millennium BCE.²⁸

Qasr el-Wizz (1965) and Semna South (1966–67, 1967–68)

George Scanlon directed a six-week campaign of excavations at Qasr el-Wizz (“Castle of the Flying Geese”) that completely cleared a Christian monastery located on the desert edge above Ballana. With a basilica church, seven cells, and a refectory with four table-arrangements, plus large storage and work rooms, it was a fully equipped monastery of the period. The most significant single find there was a small parchment book with an apocryphal text.²⁹

Semna South, a small, rectangular fort located a short distance south of the Semna fortress, was excavated in two seasons directed by Louis and Joan Žabkar. Most of the fort had already been excavated by the Sudan Antiquities Service, but the Chicago team completed that work and further excavated quarry dumps, which yielded an important body of sealings and a large, early Meroitic cemetery with ceramics of special interest.³⁰

The Fourth Cataract (2007–8)

After completing an installation of Nubian antiquities in the ISAC Museum in 2006, the Institute participated in the Merawi Dam Archaeological Salvage Project, supported by grants from the National Geographic Society and the Packard Humanities Institute. The expedition’s initial concession, on Shirri Island, could not be implemented, so the Gdansk Archaeological Museum Expedition kindly offered sites within its concession in Northern Sudan and remained a major source of support and encouragement. The expedition owes a debt of gratitude to Henryk Paner, Elżbieta Kolosowska, Mahmoud el-Teyeb, and Zbigniew Borowski, as well as thanks to the *omda* of Amri, Hassan Mohammed Hassan, who aided the expedition repeatedly, and especially our kind and resourceful inspector, Mahmoud Suleiman al-Beshir.³¹

The first site for exploration at the Fourth Cataract was Hosh el-Geruf, attractive because of a major scattering of large grindstones that indicated it was an industrial site. Located in an open area surrounded by ridges of granitic-gneiss boulders, the industry there was clearly not agriculture but rather mining. Small pieces of gold-bearing quartz from mines upstream and downstream could be brought to the site in boats to be ground into powder so that the gold could be extracted by washing nearby. Numerous surveyed and excavated areas yielded many stones for pounding and grinding on the large grindstones—almost all of them deliberately broken, apparently as part of some military campaign against the region.



Figure 9. Serre Matto objects. Top: sherd with a unique representation, the horned helmet of an Eparch of Noubadia (ISACM E19545). Bottom: sandstone architectural bird decoration (ISACM E24726).



Figure 10. The Dorginarti fortress, viewed from the west. Digital rendering by Nadejda Reshetnikova.

A second site on which work started in the first season was al-Widay, where there was a large, Old Kush cemetery, dating roughly between 1800 and 1600 BCE, and a small plot of earlier graves, dating perhaps to the fourth and third millennia BCE. Several tombs at al-Widay were excavated in the first season, but in 2008, at the suggestion of inspector Suleiman al-Beshir and team member Edyta Klimaszewska-Drabot, the entire cemetery was excavated. This effort enabled the development of a detailed archaeological chronology.³²

The final operation in the region was a survey of the nearby island of Umm Gebir (“Mother of Tombs”), which identified more than a hundred sites. The four sites selected for excavation included a stone, platform building dating to the Napatan period (shared with the Gdansk expedition), a cemetery that ceased to be used in the Egyptian New Kingdom, a Neolithic settlement, and a number of stone-structure burials, locally called “dome graves,” dating to the early Napatan period.

Publication History and Support

The process of publishing these excavations has so far undergone a number of phases. In the first phase, the 1960–61 Epigraphic Survey documentation of Beit el-Wali and the excavations between Bab Kalabsha and Khor Dehmit were published fairly rapidly—by 1967. The second phase, which dealt with a much larger body of material, consisted of the major effort to publish—supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities—the excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan frontier that Seele had directed and that resumed after his death in 1974 until 1990. The third phase involved preparing materials from Serra East and Dorginarti for publication. This work began with Lisa Heidorn’s 1992 dissertation on Dorginarti and volume 10 in the Nubian Expedition series, on the cemeteries at Serra East, published in 1993. After a long gap, which involved research on the fortress of Serra East but no full-time work, the project

resumed in 2010 in the third phase, which saw the completion of the Dorginarti volume³³ and two volumes on the Christian-period town at Serra East³⁴—research that was supported by grants from the Michela Schiff Giorgini Foundation, the American Research Center in Egypt’s Antiquities Endowment Fund, and the Shelby White and Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publications. Since 2019, the project has focused on the sites in the Fourth Cataract, with a volume on the al-Widay cemeteries³⁵—supported by a second grant from the Shelby White and Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publications and funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities Collaborative Research Program—accepted for publication. Finally, an unusual and fortunate opportunity arose to have a proper study done on the beads found during the Nubian Expedition’s work at various sites: archaeologist Joanna Then-Obłuska used an extended stay in Chicago to complete one of two projected volumes.³⁶ In this latest phase, the earlier publications have become a resource and guide for new research using new ideas, and new technology—such as the ready availability of color printing—has much improved the publication of both the beads and Meroitic pottery.

Two Lessons from the Nubian Salvage Projects

Two major realities deeply affected the work of the Nubian Expedition, both in the field and during the publication process. First, the sites and remains were not chosen as research projects but were generally unfamiliar to the archaeologists involved. Second, the archaeologists were confronted by materials that were not part of their normal training or research experience. However, meeting the constant challenges of new experiences brought satisfaction in that the knowledge gained was much more than incremental. The archaeologists confronted cultures on their own ground, yielding many surprises.

A second lesson of value came from the experience as described at a 2009 Aswan conference:

Still, the Nubian salvage operations ignited a sustained interest in a part of Africa that had long been considered peripheral and dismissed as imitative, despite some major excavations. Some of the field participants and their succeeding researchers sustained an interest well enough to build a community of scholarship and a field of knowledge. The scholarship was elaborated in detail and deepened in thought to reveal persisting cultural patterns of profound significance for the career of civilization in the widest sense. The salvage alone broke down the walls of assumption that worthwhile knowledge was derived from what you want to know. It forced archaeology once again to make knowledge out of what is encountered, to find intention, pattern and meaning in it. Archaeologists were challenged to perform the acts described by Heidegger as ‘to lay out and take to heart,’ that is, what is called thinking.³⁷

Another lesson, which perhaps has not yet been learned as well as it should be, is that these salvage projects were the result of programs that not only provided states with hydropower (and sometimes irrigation control) but also destroyed hundreds of kilometers of habitat along the river, displaced more than a hundred thousand people from lands they had inhabited for many centuries, and erased vast amounts of cultural, historical, and archaeological heritage: “In carrying them out you destroy not just the past, but any future a drowned land might have offered. No matter how gently and generously you accomplish a resettlement, you inevitably uproot a people and create a diaspora. You take a living country and make it a desert, with water.”³⁸ The dams on the Nile represented only one part in a pattern of dam building across the Middle East and elsewhere that repeated this massive destruction. Fortunately, plans to build dams at Dal at the southern end of the Second Cataract, Kajbar at the head of the Third Cataract, and in the Fifth Cataract were abandoned in response to the vehement objections of the inhabitants of these areas.

Notes

1. Säve-Söderbergh 1987, esp. 223–26; De Simone 2025.
2. Ricke, Hughes, and Wente 1967; Ricke 1967.
3. Williams 1983, xvii–xxi.
4. Ricke, Hughes, and Wente 1967, pls. 8–9.
5. Ricke 1967.
6. Ricke, Hughes, and Wente 1967; Ricke 1967.
7. Williams 1983, xvii–xxi.
8. Farid 1963.
9. Smith 1962, 5–39.
10. Williams 1991b, 178–94, pl. 2.
11. Williams 1991a, 24, pls. 3, 6.
12. Williams 1983.
13. Williams 1986.
14. Williams 1991a.
15. Williams 1986.
16. Williams 1986, table 9.
17. Then-Obluska 2022, 18.
18. Williams 1986, 306, L17–11b; Then-Obluska 2022, cat. no. 10.
19. Williams 1986, 108–10.
20. Williams 1986, 138–45.
21. Williams 1989, 122–33.
22. Williams 1983, 1993.
23. Williams 1991a, 3–23.
24. Williams 1991b.
25. Mayer Thurman and Williams 1979.
26. Williams 1993.
27. Williams in press a, b.
28. Heidorn 2023.
29. Scanlon 1970, 1972.
30. Vercoutter 1966; Žabkar and Žabkar 1982.
31. Heidorn and Williams forthcoming.
32. Heidorn and Williams forthcoming.
33. Heidorn 2023.
34. Williams in press a, b.
35. Heidorn and Williams forthcoming.
36. Then-Obluska 2022.
37. Williams 2025, 345.
38. Williams 2025, 345.

PART I

Essays



1

Birds and Fish

Rozenn Bailleul-LeSuer*

Although it may seem odd at first glance, considering birds and fish side by side comes naturally to scholars specializing in the ancient fauna of the Nile Valley, for these two categories of animals are often mentioned together in ancient Egyptian religious and literary compositions.¹ On the walls of funerary chapels, artists traditionally combined the activities of fishing and fowling in the marshes of the floodplain, since, as written in wisdom literature, the creator god ensured that both bird and fish were provided to sustain human beings.² This association is reinforced when considering the environment in which the inhabitants of the Nile Valley lived. The arid climate that characterizes this region makes the Nile a lifeline for all human beings and most animals. The waters of the Nile host a wide variety of fish that could be exploited. Likewise, twice a year the river and the vegetation growing on its banks provided the nourishment and shelter necessary for migratory species of birds that used the valley as a flyway between their breeding grounds in the north and their wintering quarters in this corner of Northeast Africa or in Central Africa. This essay investigates, in turn, how the birds and fish encountered in this region impacted the cultures flourishing in Nubia, not only pragmatically as a source of food and secondary products but also as symbols of power, protection, and promise of rebirth. The focus here is not limited to the floodplain bordering the Nile River. While it is undeniable that the waters of the Nile were essential for the survival of all living creatures in the region, the bird that brought fame to Nubia came from the surrounding savanna. African ostriches (*Struthio camelus camelus*), their eggs, and their feathers quickly became luxurious and rare commodities that the elites of Africa, the ancient Near East, and the Mediterranean region coveted as much as precious metals. By focusing on the trade of these items, this chapter also investigates how the natural corridor that is the Nile Valley was used for trade, diplomacy, and the spread of another species of bird now ubiquitous in the world: the chicken (*Gallus gallus domesticus*).

Sandstone stela with a guinea fowl from Adindan. ISACM E23633. **Cat. no. 19.**

*I am grateful to Solange Ashby, Debora Heard, Marc Maillot, and Emily Teeter for their help and thoughtful comments on earlier drafts of this essay. Their intimate knowledge of ancient Nubia has deepened my appreciation for the place of birds in the cultures of the Middle Nile Valley. Any errors herein are entirely my own.

Evaluating the significance of both birds and fish in these communities requires reliance on the faunal assemblages that have been excavated in southern Egypt and Sudan, for they concretely demonstrate that these animals shared the lives of ancient Kushites. Yet, since bird and fish bones are not always attested or recorded as systematically as those of mammals, only a partial image appears from the study of this material.³ The representations carved on the cliffs and rock surfaces in the desert margins and along wadis used by caravans of traders and hunters provide further insight into the ways ancient Kushites experienced the environments in which they lived and the animal species they saw while traveling across the deserts. Objects and scenes recovered in temples and funerary chapels are especially illuminating in evaluating how birds and fish entered the Nubian psyche.

Birds in Ancient Nubia

Their Role and Presence in Daily Life

The varied ecological zones currently encountered in southern Egypt and Sudan—principally desert, but also mountainous terrain in the Red Sea Hills; savanna, which supports the growth of grasses, shrubs, and acacia trees; and floodplain near the river—are home to a diverse array of bird species, including resident breeders, passage migrants, and winter visitors.⁴ Despite the potential that these birds could offer as game for hunters, avian remains are poorly represented in the faunal assemblages. From the Neolithic period onward, it appears that local populations relied exclusively on cattle and ovicaprids to provide for their protein needs.⁵ These domesticates were also considered the most valuable funerary offerings, especially in elite graves. Birds, whether wild or domesticated species, appear as sources of food exploited only marginally. Yet the presence of bird bones, albeit scarce, suggests that Kushite hunters at times took advantage of the massive flocks of birds that migrated through the region, as they rested and fed on the waters of

the Nile, or that spent the winter months there.⁶ Located at the First Cataract on the Nile, the island of Elephantine constitutes an interesting case study thanks to the wealth of osteological material recovered at the site.⁷ The paucity of remains of anatids (ducks and geese) suggests that the tumultuous waters of the First Cataract, especially during the height of the flood in the summer and early fall, were not a favored stopover location for these birds, which prefer calm and clear waters for feeding. The inhabitants of Elephantine instead turned their bows and arrows to the skies and felled not only storks but also pelicans, ibises, and spoonbills as they migrated and flew above the island. The passage of these birds over the island was likely seen as a boon for local communities, especially at times of high water during the annual flood, when fishing was extremely difficult if not impossible. Stork hunting appeared as a local tradition that lasted for centuries. High numbers of both black and white stork remains (*Ciconia nigra* and *Ciconia ciconia*) have indeed been recorded throughout the site and in most stratigraphic layers. The summer months offered other targets to local fowlers. Yellow-billed storks (*Mycteria ibis*), today encountered only south of the Sahara, used to visit Egypt regularly during the summer, as far north as the Delta. The shallow waters near the First Cataract allowed these birds to search for fish, amphibians, and aquatic insects. The African sacred ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*), another summer breeding migrant from farther south in Africa, may have been found feeding alongside the yellow-billed stork. The bones of both species of bird are attested in the island's food refuse and thus were occasionally consumed. Although site specific, the faunal remains collected at Elephantine showcase that hunting strategies could be adapted to capitalize on the flocks of migratory birds flying over the cataract of the Nile and may have been implemented by other Nubian groups upstream.

While never pretending to supplant the prevalence of cattle and caprid meat in the diet, birds

became more prominent in farmyards after the introduction of the domestic chicken (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) in Africa. This bird, which has made its way around the world and can be seen scavenging in both rural farmyards and urban gardens, arrived on the African continent via two routes: one starting at the Horn of Africa as early as the ninth century BCE and another following the Nile Valley, more significantly during the Roman period.⁸ This domestication process started in Southeast Asia as early as the sixth millennium BCE, when attempts were made to breed in captivity the red jungle fowl (*Gallus gallus*), a species still encountered in its wild form from India eastward across southern China and into Southeast Asia.⁹ By the third millennium BCE, the Indus civilization was successfully exploiting the domesticated fowl (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) in their settlements, and, via trade, the chicken made its way westward from India through Mesopotamia to Syria, Egypt, and Nubia.¹⁰ Although egg consumption has left scant evidence in the archaeological record, we can surmise that the domestic fowl was exploited just as much for its meat as for its prolific egg production.¹¹ Wild guinea fowls were captured during the Meroitic period (see below), and other birds may have been snared as well (fig. 1.1). It is also worth mentioning that Egypt likely imported parrots from Nubia, at least from the medieval period onward.¹² Likewise, the plucked feathers collected during poultry processing did not go to waste. The soft, downy feathers could be used to stuff pillows. As attested at Kerma, wing and tail feathers could be trimmed and affixed to arrows as fletching, which further stabilized the arrows in flight and gave them speed, thus indirectly contributing to the reknown and accuracy of Kushite archers.¹³

The bird whose feathers and eggs are best attested in the archaeological record of Nubia is the ostrich, represented in North Africa by the subspecies *Struthio camelus camelus*. The largest living bird, native to Africa's savannas and semiarid regions and characterized by its inability to fly, the ostrich used



Figure 1.1. Imitation of a Greek psykter decorated with a representation of an ibis on a leash, from Faras. ÄM 20890. Courtesy of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung / Sandra Steiß.

to roam in the Nubian and Libyan deserts,¹⁴ but habitat loss and excessive game hunting have led to a significant decline in local populations.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, this impressive bird has left its mark in the iconographic record of the Middle Nile Valley since prehistoric times. Ostriches are a common motif in rock art, being included in the many representations of wildlife, hunting expeditions, and boat processions.¹⁶ They were at times targeted by hunters, as evidenced by depictions of them running, flapping their wings, or being chased by dogs or captured with nets.¹⁷ Ostrich bones, however, are rarely if ever attested in faunal assemblages. Conversely, their feathers and eggs feature prominently in both the archaeological and iconographic records and became hallmarks of Nubia. The ostrich feather was especially significant as a marker of ethnic identity for Nilo-Saharan hunters.¹⁸ In ancient Egyptian

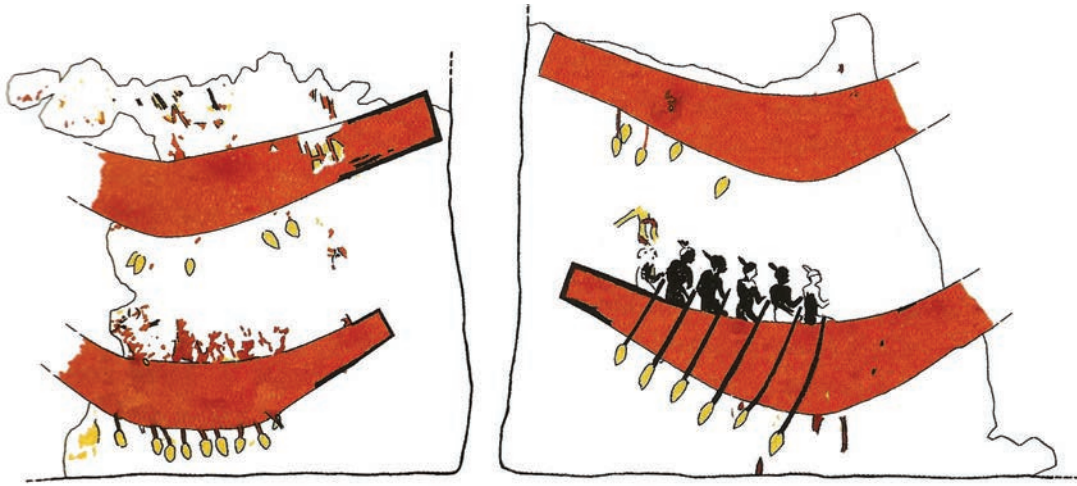


Figure 1.2. Wall painting representing boats with Nubian crews, Kerma period (Bonnet 2000, 90, fig. 65). © Mission archéologique suisse-franco-soudanaise de Kerma Doukki Gel.

and Nubian representations, seminomadic Nubian and Libyan individuals are shown wearing one or several ostrich feathers in their hair in an arrangement used to characterize each group (figs. 1.2–1.3). Sometimes described by Egyptians as “feather wearing,” Nubian men could be represented with one ostrich feather worn vertically atop the head.¹⁹ Donning this feather was possibly the privilege of hunters showcasing their success in seizing this quarry, which is famously challenging even for horsemen.²⁰ Capturing an ostrich is undoubtedly a feat, since these fast-running birds are known to reach speeds of 60–70 kilometers per hour when pursued by a predator.²¹ In addition to wearing ostrich feathers as a headpiece, either on their own or as trimmings on a cap,²² Kushite archers are also known to have added an ostrich plume to their bows, as evidenced at Kerma (ca. 2300–2150 BCE).²³ Ostrich feathers were also coveted by Egyptian and Kushite royalty and members of the elite. Fans made with these feathers were used in ritual ceremonies, as military standards, or as a mark of status.²⁴ During the Kerma period, feathers, possibly plucked from ostriches, were intricately woven with thread to make cloth. Despite the intrinsically fragile nature of feathers, which hinders their survival in the archaeological record,²⁵ the climate of



Figure 1.3. Dinka from South Sudan with feather headdress, ca. 1900–1909. Photo by Richard Storch (1877–1927). © Musée du Quai Branly—Jacques Chirac, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

northern Sudan has allowed the preservation of ostrich-feather fans at Kerma.²⁶ Likewise, several lambs were found buried with elaborate headdresses made of ostrich feathers.²⁷

Ostrich eggs have been recovered at numerous sites, most frequently in elite funerary and dedicatory contexts. Nubian populations incorporated eggshells in their funerary assemblages from as early as the Neolithic period; some tombs have yielded complete eggshells, intact but for one hole, suggesting they were used as vessels.²⁸ Ostrich eggs may also have decorated the apex of ancient Sudanese huts, as illustrated on a bronze bowl from Karanog (fig. 1.4).²⁹ More frequently found were eggshell fragments, some of which had been processed as beads strung together in necklaces and bracelets. The Meroitic site of Selib clearly housed a workshop for making beads from ostrich eggshells: about 150 beads were found in the northern part of the site along with 200 blanks, which undoubtedly attest to their local manufacture.³⁰

Ostrich feathers and eggs quickly became luxury items coveted not only by North African elite but also for trade, as is well attested throughout

the Near East and around the Mediterranean basin during the Bronze and Iron Ages.³¹ During the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1070 BCE), Egyptian wall paintings in tombs and reliefs in temples feature Nubian emissaries, their arms loaded with both highly coveted gold and ostrich eggs and feathers.³² In a few instances, a live bird is part of the procession, perhaps to enter the royal menagerie.³³ Whether by acquiring these goods locally or via trade from communities farther south, it became the prerogative of Nubian colonies—at a time when Egypt was occupying their land—to provide the royal house with these luxury items, some of which it kept for its own use while others were traded as diplomatic gifts with neighboring empires.

The aesthetic appeal of birds has influenced artistic traditions since time immemorial,³⁴ and Middle Nile Valley craftsmen likewise integrated avian imagery into their work. Objects associated with the A-Group elite feature avian motifs, storks in particular, amid other wild animals of the desert, as attested on the gold mace handle from Seyala.³⁵ During the Kerma period, thin mica

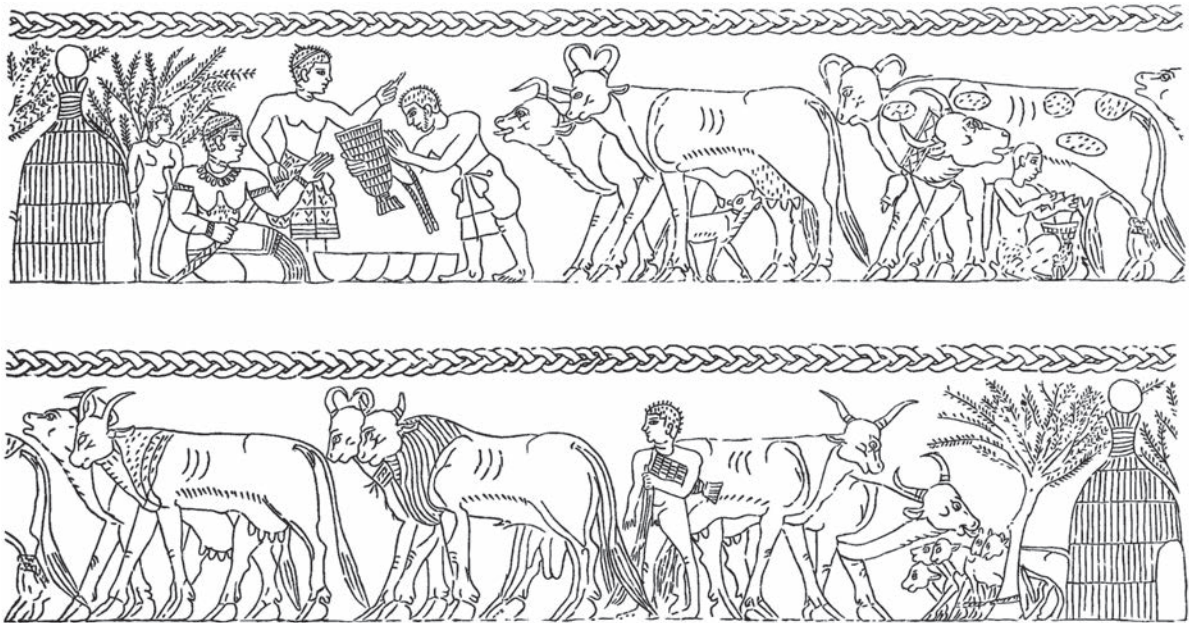


Figure 1.4. Scene on bronze bowl from Karanog. Penn E7156 (Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pl. 27). **Cat. no. 5.**



Figure 1.5. Bed leg in the shape of a goose. MFA 21.2815. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

appliqués in the shape of ducks, ostriches, guinea fowl, bustards, and pelicans were sewn onto garments and later deposited in tombs.³⁶ Reminiscent of Egyptian blue faience vessels, numerous sherds decorated with birds (and fish) in marshy landscapes are also known from this period.³⁷ Some of the funerary beds on which members of the Kerma elite were laid to rest were embellished with carved ivories in the shape of various animals, including bustards, ostriches (adults and chicks), vultures, falcons, and possibly pheasants.³⁸ The tradition of using bird motifs in funerary contexts is also attested at the Napatan cemetery of El-Kurru. Two surviving bronze bed legs in the shape of a goose resting on a base decorated with a papyrus clump are testimony to the metalsmith's talent of observation (fig. 1.5).³⁹ The plumage of the birds, the scaly skin on their legs, and the bone structure of their

heads are all carefully rendered. Birds were also a favorite design for use in jewelry, as attested by bird-shaped earrings and signet rings made during the Meroitic period.⁴⁰ Avian shapes could be used to manufacture and decorate more mundane objects as well, such as ceramic vessels and figurines.⁴¹ Classic Kerma artisans are known to have produced bird-inspired vessels—in the shape of a duck or an ostrich, for instance, or incorporating a falcon motif in the shape of the handle.⁴² Especially attractive are the representations of animals—including ibises, ducks, and swans⁴³—painted on a series of spherical pots and cups during the Meroitic period. One set of vessels stands out by the presence of one or several guinea fowl (*Numida meleagris*), a bird species endemic to the Ethiopian region today but whose range most likely extended northward, as evidenced by its presence in Nubian art. László Török concluded that the vessels depicting this bird were the work of a single artist, active in Lower Nubia around 250 CE and designated the “Guinea Fowl Painter.”⁴⁴ As Török aptly notes, the bird is often shown in naturalistic poses. Yet the artist chose to render the bird's white-spotted plumage with cross-hatching. Since the motif is a distinct tradition of this region of Nubia, scholars have posited that it refers to a local folktale.⁴⁵ Several of these vessels specifically depict the snares used by local hunters to capture these birds alive (fig. 1.6).⁴⁶

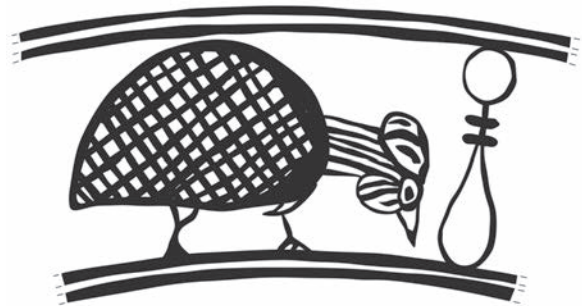


Figure 1.6. Guinea fowl pecking the ground, with snare. Line drawing of motif on Penn E5271 by G. Choimet (forthcoming, fig. 4).

Birds in Nubian Religion and the Afterlife

Evaluating the cultural significance of birds in the iconography of early complex societies with limited written records, such as Nubia, poses major challenges. What clues can be gathered from the birds' behaviors and the contexts in which they are shown? In the rock art of the Nubian and Libyan deserts, on the artifacts manufactured by A-Group craftsmen, and in wall paintings adorning funerary chapels during the Classic Kerma period, birds are represented alongside riverine animals (often crocodiles) and those of the savanna (giraffes, antelope, and gazelles).⁴⁷ Some are perched in trees, others are attacking snakes, and a few are simply roosting. Are these birds solely environmental indicators? Are the large, wading birds emblems of certain confederations?⁴⁸ Egyptian influence becomes increasingly visible in the iconographic record of the final phase of the A-Group, contemporary with the Naqada III period of Egypt. For a few centuries, until the First Dynasty, both Lower Nubia and Upper Egypt exhibited similar repertoires.⁴⁹ Falcon imagery thus appears in both Nubia and Egypt and becomes tied to the king and his assimilation with the falcon god

Horus.⁵⁰ Egyptian religion was firmly implanted in Lower Nubia by the time Middle Kingdom kings built fortresses to control both the Lower Nubian communities and the trade they conducted and facilitated. While Egyptian gods feature prominently in the temples and tombs built in the Kushite kingdoms, they also acquired distinct Kushite qualities and features.⁵¹ Horus, introduced during the fourth millennium BCE, is continuously represented on temple walls into the Meroitic period. At Qasr Ibrim, a small, Meroitic wooden plaque with suspension holes, discovered in the temple of Isis, depicts a falcon wearing the Double Crown of Egypt and positioned before a golden vessel from which two ladles hang (fig. 1.7).⁵² An inscription in cursive Meroitic accompanying the painting provides the name of the bird of prey: *kele* or *kere*. This term finds parallels in related languages spoken today, where it variously means “falcon,” “hawk,” “vulture,” or “eagle.”⁵³

During the New Kingdom, other Nubian-specific versions of the falcon god also rose to prominence, such as Horus of Miam, Horus of Baki, Horus of Buhen, and Horus the bull, lord of Ta-Seti (Nubia), prominent at Sai.⁵⁴ Dedwen,



Figure 1.7. Painted wooden plaque from Qasr Ibrim (Diskell, Adams, and French 1989, 20, pl. VII).

a god of ancient Nubia sometimes depicted with a falcon's head, came to be associated with Horus and became a god shared by both the Egyptian and Nubian cultures. During the Napatan period, King Taharqo showed his devotion to the falcon god Hemen by having himself represented offering two wine pots to a large figure of the god.⁵⁵ The Greco-Roman period witnessed the rise of an additional Nubian god with raptorial features: Mandulis, at times represented as a falcon with a human head (or “*ba*-bird”; see further below) and wearing a *bembem*-crown, saw his cult expand and several temples built in his honor. Worship of Mandulis was restricted to Lower Nubia, especially Kalabsha, with no known attestations farther south. He was particularly revered by the Blemmyes, a seminomadic people settled east of the Nile. Likewise, the Egyptian ibis-headed god Thoth underwent a process of assimilation after he was incorporated into the local pantheon: his most important role in Egypt—as god of writing—became secondary to his involvement alongside

Horus in the purification rituals during the king's coronation, as well as in the ritual of the unification of the Two Lands.⁵⁶ Thoth was particularly venerated in Dakka in Lower Nubia and in Pnubs near the Third Cataract.

In Nubian temples, several goddesses can, like their Egyptian counterparts, also be seen bearing avian features. As the consort of Amun-Re, one of the main gods of the Nubian pantheon, the goddess Mut is represented wearing a vulture headdress. It was Isis, the mother of Horus, however, who became the most prominent Kushite goddess, overshadowing Mut by the Meroitic period. Like the Kushite goddess Amesemi (see below), both goddesses are frequently shown with one or two pairs of wings attached to their back and arms, thus emphasizing their protective role (fig. 1.8).⁵⁷ Protection was also provided by a vulture with outstretched wings, akin to the Egyptian goddess Nekhbet, or by a falcon, both birds being represented as hovering over the king and queen, ready to smite their enemies. Gods, kings, queens, officials, and priests



Figure 1.8. Gold, four-winged Mut armlet from the tomb of Amanishakheto, first century CE. Munich Antiquarium 2455. Photo by INTERFOTO / Fine Arts.



Figure 1.9. Representation of a diplomat at Philae (Griffith 1912, pl. XVIII).

were further wrapped in feathered dresses, or in garments meticulously decorated with a falcon or vulture that shielded their flanks, shoulders, chest, or head, thus emphasizing the connection between the divine and the human (fig. 1.9). Some rulers even wear a crown surmounted by a bird.⁵⁸ By donning this regalia, they evoked the goddess Amesemi, the lion god Apedemak's consort, who is distinguished by a modius headdress topped with one or sometimes two falcons, whose function and origin remain unclear. During the Meroitic period, the vulture could also be represented in temples as a scavenger or on small objects, such as signet rings, pendants, and bells, as plucking the eyes of fallen enemies (fig. 1.10).⁵⁹ These motifs highlighted the prowess of kings and queens on the battlefield and made the vulture another powerful royal symbol alongside the lion.

Because some aspects of funerary religion adopted by the Nubian elite were based on those of Egyptians settled in their land, birds often assumed similar roles in both cultures. For instance, the concept of the *ba*, an aspect of the deceased's

personality that was able to move between this world and the divine realm, is incorporated into Meroitic funerary assemblages in the form of sandstone statues.⁶⁰ Originally brightly painted and reserved for prominent community members, they stood in niches located on the front face of the pyramids marking such people's graves. Depicting the deceased individual as a winged figure, the *ba* statue mirrored the Egyptian notion that, after death, the *ba* became effective in the afterlife and may have joined the sun god on his journey.⁶¹ The status and role of the deceased in society was incorporated into the statue's design. With a sun disk on their head, individuals (both men and women) as well as pairs of people are shown wearing the clothes, jewelry, and attributes indicative of their office and/or gender. In Napatan times, avian features dominated via a long cloak reminiscent of the body and tail of a falcon, whereas in the Late Meroitic period bodies were shown as entirely human.⁶² Worn like a cape, large wings—often shown as closed but sometimes as deployed—were attached to these individuals' shoulders.⁶³



Figure 1.10. Bronze bell decorated with vultures mutilating enemies. MFA 24.857a. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Birds served mundane roles in the funerary cult, too. Animals were a traditional food offering in most Nubian burials.⁶⁴ While cattle were of special prominence at funerals—in the form of food offerings, bucrania marking the grave, and entire animals buried with the deceased—birds also featured among the desired offerings. Bouquets of live birds tied by their legs are sometimes shown being held by offering bearers, as seen on the famous pair of painted and gilded blue-glass goblets from Sedeinga on which an offering bearer holds three ducks in his left hand, intended for the god Osiris.⁶⁵

Fish in Ancient Nubia

Their Economic and Nutritional Significance

The annual flooding of the Nile not only replenished the agricultural plain with nutrients but also created an ideal habitat for various species of fish to spawn. Among the seventy reported fish species in the Lower Nile, several taxa known as “floodplain dwellers” preferred as their breeding ground the shallow waters appearing in the Nile Valley during the flood season.⁶⁶ Once the water started to recede in the floodplain, these fish began their lateral migration back toward the main channel of the Nile. Floodplain dwellers include the *Clariidae* catfish, the Tilapiini, and the Cyprinids. Another category of Nile fish, composed of open-water species that live primarily in the main river channel, includes the Nile perch (*Lates niloticus*) and the catfish genera *Bagrus* and *Synodontis*. Both types—floodplain dwellers and open-water species—have been exploited by Nubian populations since at least Mesolithic times.⁶⁷ Fishing methods needed to be adapted to the observed biological behaviors of the fish, such as seasonal migrations tied to their breeding cycle and feeding habits, as water levels in the river system rose or fell throughout the year.⁶⁸ Some fishing was opportunistic—floodplain fish could be gathered by hand or dispatched with clubs, spears, and harpoons, especially at times of low water levels.

Catching fish from the riverbank was possible with the use of hand nets, as represented on the walls of the funerary chapel KXI at Kerma (fig. 1.11).⁶⁹ In this exceptional scene, four fishermen, wearing typical Nubian clothing embellished with yellow lines and black triangular motifs, target the school of *Hydrocynus* heading in their direction. Two of the men, perhaps holding a line equipped with a hook, are shown observing the surface of the water from their papyrus skiff. The largest figure pulls a large hand net toward the shore, where he is standing. Behind him, a fisherman seems to be gathering the fish caught using a basket trap. In the main channel, fishing was done by boat and required the use of baskets and nets weighted with stone sinkers—more sophisticated equipment that enabled the capture of a broader variety of fish.⁷⁰

Fish offered the potential to be a reliable food resource throughout the year. For this reason, they are often said to be a staple in the diet of the inhabitants of the Nile Valley, available to all classes of society.⁷¹ This hypothesis has been partially confirmed by zooarchaeologists Veerle Linseele and Andrea Zerboni, working at sites in Upper Nubia and Central Sudan. They have observed that fish bones are well represented in faunal assemblages dated to the Early and Middle Holocene (ca. 8000–3000 BCE).⁷² This trend shifted, however, after the Neolithic period. In particular, from the Kerma period (ca. 2500 BCE) onward, fish remains are consistently scarce as compared with mammal bones, most likely because of a significant drop in fish consumption. Linseele and Zerboni have proposed that this shift in subsistence strategy can be explained, in part, by the paleoenvironmental changes experienced in the region at the end of the African Humid period, around 3500 BCE. At about this time, the Nile started to experience reduced flood levels, leading to the disappearance of much of Central Sudan’s wetland ecosystem. With significantly reduced fish stocks, communities turned to domestic species as their main food source, in particular bovids and ovicaprids, which were considered to be



Figure 1.11. Fishing scene in funerary chapel KXI at Kerma (Bonnet 2000, 84, fig. 62). © Mission archéologique suisse-franco-soudanaise de Kerma Doukki Gel.

more productive.⁷³ These findings are supported by the results of isotope analyses conducted by Klervia Jaouen and Alexandra Touzeau on human remains from the Nile Valley dating from prehistory to the Middle Ages.⁷⁴ Stable isotopes such as carbon-13, nitrogen-15, oxygen-18, and sulfur-34, which are found in the food and water we consume, accumulate in our bones, teeth, and hair during our lifetime. Because plants, animals, and environments exhibit distinct isotopic signatures, researchers can reconstruct dietary patterns, such as the proportions of plant- and animal-based foods consumed. Jaouen and Touzeau's study thus reveals that, despite the abundance and variety of fish present in the Nile, fish remained a minor food source across all social classes and across time for all the communities living in the Nile Valley.

Although scientific data may suggest that Nubians did not consume fish as frequently as

first surmised, it remained a resource that could be exploited when necessary. The discovery of fishhooks and net sinkers at the Second Cataract Egyptian forts demonstrate that the inhabitants supplemented their diet with fish.⁷⁵ When caught in abundance, surplus fish could be sun- and smoke-dried or salted.⁷⁶ A number of large jars uncovered at Kerma in a house dated to the Napatan period contained the remains of small fish of the *Barbus* and *Hydrocynus* genera, possibly representing an ancient equivalent to the *tirkeen* paste used in the region today to preserve fish.⁷⁷

Fish in Symbolism and Art

As mentioned earlier, the physical characteristics of the Nile Valley, including the formation of shallow pools in the agricultural plain during the annual flood, created ideal breeding grounds for many species. Among them, Nile mouthbrooders,

such as the Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*), may have left a lasting impression on ancient cultures because of their unusual reproductive behavior. For instance, the tilapia is a maternal mouthbrooder. The female lays her eggs in the nest built by a male, which then fertilizes the spawn. Far from neglecting her clutch, the female collects the fertilized eggs in her mouth for incubation. After hatching, the fry stay near their mother and find refuge in her mouth when they sense danger. For the ancient Egyptians, this fish came to represent the power of self-propagation, an aptitude especially welcome in the context of the tomb, where symbols of regeneration and fertility abound.⁷⁸ During the New Kingdom, the tilapia motif was often paired with a lotus flower emerging from its mouth to decorate the interior of blue faience bowls. By combining these two powerful symbols, artists reinforced the themes of renewal tied to the daily rebirth of the sun.⁷⁹ In some instances, rather than simply using the tilapia motif as a decoration, craftsmen manufactured vases in the fish's shape, as attested by the Eighteenth Dynasty pisciform vessel discovered on Sai Island.

Another species of fish imbued with symbolic meaning was the upside-down catfish (*Synodontis batensoda*). Like the tilapia, this species of Nilotic fish favors the floodplains, where it can find sustenance and shelter in aquatic vegetation. Its peculiar habit of swimming upside down to feed on submerged surfaces did not go unnoticed by the ancient Egyptians. "The resemblance of the upside-down catfish to a dead fish floating belly up on the surface," only to apparently come back to life and escape when approached, "might have led the Egyptians to associate this fish with special regenerative powers as well."⁸⁰ Amulets and pendants fashioned as upside-down catfish were worn in life, possibly as a safeguard against drowning, and were deposited in burials to further ensure the deceased's rebirth in the afterlife.⁸¹ The seemingly magical power of this fish to resurrect itself to avoid danger

was an especially fitting symbol of rebirth and survival in the afterlife.

In Nubia, the fish motif was already incorporated into the artistic repertoire of the A-Group culture, with fish-shaped palettes remaining popular in Lower Nubia after falling out of favor in Upper Egypt.⁸² Additionally, the presence of the fish motif on several fragmentary vessels in the Nubian collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, attests that the tradition of decorating blue faience bowls with this symbol was present at Kerma just as it was gaining popularity in Egypt during the Eighteenth Dynasty.⁸³ To determine whether these vessels were manufactured in Nubia or imported by Egyptian settlers would require additional analyses of the fragments. But the fish motif continues to be used after the end of the Egyptian occupation. Amulets and scaraboids in the shape of fish have been found in Napatan and Meroitic tombs.⁸⁴ Although the extent to which Egyptians and Nubians shared similar views on fish symbolism remains unclear, the presence of fish designs in the material culture of the two cultures attests to its relevance in both contexts.

Conclusion

Both birds and fish seasonally abounded in the Nile Valley—yet the Kushite communities flourishing along the river exploited these commodities only modestly as compared to domesticated mammals. The economy of the Kushite kingdoms was driven mainly by agricultural pursuits and animal husbandry, with bovines and caprines dominating the livestock. This trend was modestly changed with the arrival of the chicken in most farmyards, progressively introduced into Africa from Southeast Asia. Another bird rose above all others, both literally and figuratively. The ostrich brought fame to Nubia, as its feathers and eggs acquired immense prestige and became luxury goods coveted during the Bronze and Iron Ages. The place of birds and fish in the Nubian imagination is more difficult to ascertain. Often seen through the lens of the

Egyptian occupying force, birds appear to have featured prominently in the religion and symbolism of Nubia, just as they did in Egypt. A lack of textual evidence, however, prevents us from appreciating the nuances that undoubtedly resulted from their assimilation into Nubian life. Whether through

cultural exchange or parallel traditions, the presence of fish and bird motifs in both Nubian and Egyptian material culture underscores the artistic and spiritual importance attached to these wild resources provided and supported largely by the waters of the Nile.

Notes

1. On the conceptual grouping of birds and fish in Egyptian thought, see Bashford 2021, 537–38. Lydia Bashford has demonstrated that many terms used to qualify birds can also be applied to fish. In ritual settings, they both could be dispatched (*wšn.w*) or gutted (*wgs.w*), and both could represent the perfect *ḥb*-catch.
2. *The Teaching for King Merikare* (E 132–33). See Tobin 2003, 164.
3. Chaix 2000, 169.
4. No comprehensive study of the Sudanese avifauna has yet been published. Based on regional studies conducted during the past hundred years, the total number of species identified in Sudan ranges between 600 and 1,000 (Hogg, Dare, and Rintoul 1984; Sulieman et al. 2016; Adam, Khalil, and Mohamed 2024).
5. Chaix 2010, 521; Linseele and Pöllath 2015, 554; D'Itria 2023b.
6. Ikram 2012, 213.
7. von den Driesch and Peters 2008.
8. Woldekiros and D'Andrea 2016.
9. Osman, Yonezawa, and Nishibori 2016.
10. For a review of the westward migration of domestic fowl that takes textual and zooarchaeological data into consideration, see Bailleul-LeSuer 2016, 416–17. It is worth noting that in the late fifth or early sixth century CE, a complete hen's skeleton and a group of feathers were buried at Qasr Ibrim. Their arrangement suggests a ritual deposit (MacDonald and Edwards 1993).
11. Prior to the arrival of the chicken, little evidence is available to confirm the consumption of eggs. We can say only that this ready source of protein available during the wild birds' breeding season, often in the spring and early summer, could also have been exploited.
12. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* VI, 184; Burchard of Strasbourg, ca. 1175, as preserved in the chronicles of Arnold of Lübeck: "There are also parrots in Egypt, which come from Nubia" (*Item in Egypto psitaci abundant, qui veniunt de Nubia*) (Pertz 1868, 271).
13. Bonnet 1995, 43–44.
14. Goodman and Meininger 1989, 113–14.
15. Cooper et al. 2009, 1670.
16. Darnell 2021.
17. Almagro Basch and Almagro Gorbea 1968, fig. 29.
18. Darnell 2021, 284.
19. Wente 1990, 39.
20. The Greek historian Xenophon (*Anabasis* 1.5.3) claimed that, in fact, "no ostrich was captured by anyone, and any horseman who chased one speedily desisted; for it would distance him at once in its flight, not merely plying its feet, but hoisting its wings and using them like a sail" (www.perseus.tufts.edu; accessed February 1, 2025).
21. Brown, Urban, and Newman 1982, 33.
22. Reisner 1923b, 300–301, 316.
23. Honegger 2023, 70, fig. 1.
24. Teeter 2010.

25. Of special significance is the ritual deposit of ostrich feathers excavated at Hierakonpolis, in Egypt. See Darnell 2021, 288–90, for a review of the possible significance of this offering.
26. E.g., MFA 20.1568.
27. Bonnet 1988, 14, fig. 12; D'Itria 2023b, 183, fig. 4. Feathers were glued with wax into a piece of leather sewn with linen threads.
28. E.g., Honegger 2007, fig. 5. Besides numerous fragments, an almost-complete ostrich egg was discovered in a cache in the city of Meroe (Näser 2004, 222, fig. 86).
29. Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pl. 26–27; Shinnie 1967, 156; Kendall 1989, 653.
30. Hajduga 2013.
31. Hodos 2020.
32. Roy 2011, 265–66.
33. Rieke, Hughes, and Wente 1967, pl. 9.
34. The first representations of birds in the Nile Valley were carved on rock cliffs at Qurta, Upper Egypt, about 15,000 years ago (Huyge 2008).
35. Firth 1927, 205, fig. 8.
36. Reisner 1923b, pls. 57.1 (MFA 20.1758), 58.2; Wenig 1978, 151–52.
37. E.g., MFA 20.1229, 20.1235, 20.1255, 20.1256, 20.1262, 20.1274, 20.1277, 20.1278 (Kerma).
38. Wenig 1978, 148–49. Ostrich chick: MFA 20.1345, 20.1548a; vulture: MFA 20.1354–58, 20.1495a; falcon: MFA 13.4205; pheasant: MFA 13.4206–7.
39. Wenig 1978, 17. The motif is likely a reference to the god Amun, whose sacred bird is the goose. These artifacts are in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA 21.2815) and the Sudan National Museum (SNM 1900).
40. MFA 24.549; Markowitz and Doxey 2014, pl. 38; Berlin ÄM 1736, 1749 (possibly a swallow); Wildung 1997, 318–19 (cat. nos. 345, 348).
41. ElMahi 1995; Welsby and Anderson 2004, 153; Török 2011, 298–99; Grzymski 2018.
42. Wenig 1978, 144, 156; Török 2011, 247n51, 247n54.
43. Ibises: Williams 1991a, fig. 189; ducks: e.g., Ashmolean AN1912.503; swan: e.g., Penn E8158.
44. Török 1987a, 205–6.
45. Hofmann 1988; Grzymski 2018, 535.
46. Elmahy 1995. See Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 126–37, 151, for a detailed list of the various bird motifs attested in Meroitic art.
47. Darnell 2021; Lacovara 2012a, 79; Chaix 2000, 169.
48. Jiménez-Serrano 1998.
49. Lacovara 2012a, 78.
50. E.g., ISACM E24069.
51. Yellin 2012b, 126.
52. Driskell, Adams, and French 1989, 20, pl. VII.
53. Rilly 2010, 411; Ferrandino 2023, 197.
54. Gabolde 2018, 97–101.
55. See, e.g., Louvre E 25276.
56. Kröper, Schoske, and Wildung 2011, 41–44, figs. 42–45.
57. E.g., Munich Antiquarium 2455 in Markowitz and Doxey 2014, 128, fig. 40; Kuckertz 2020, 118, fig. 13. See also Shonkwiler 2012 on the symbolism of protective wings in ancient Egypt.
58. E.g., Queen Amanishakheto, Meroe, Beg. N6, pylon; King Natakamani and queen Amanitore, Naga, Lion Temple, pylon.
59. E.g., Berlin AM 1720 (signet ring); SNM 20391 (lead pendant); Beg. N29 (bronze bell). See also Sackho-Autissier 2010b.

60. Török 2009, 422–25. It is interesting to note that the early *ba* statues from the cemeteries of Meroe City were shaped as falcons. After adopting the traditional Egyptian style of a bird with a human head, the motif was developed into a winged human figure with a sun disk atop the head.
61. Silverman 1997, 306–7; Scalf 2012a, 202. A large collection of *ba* statues was excavated from the tombs of the ruling class of Karanog, which served as capital of Lower Nubia during the Meroitic period.
62. Rilly, Francigny, and David 2020, 82.
63. E.g., Penn E7005.
64. Monroe 2024.
65. Leclant 1973a, 60.
66. Van Neer 2004, 252–56; Linseele and Zerboni 2018, 232.
67. Linseele and Zerboni 2018, 234–35; Maritan et al. 2018.
68. Brewer and Friedman 1989, 21–46; Van Neer 2004, 253.
69. Bonnet 2000, 83–85.
70. Van Neer 2004, 261–62; Maritan et al. 2018, 49.
71. Ikram 2012, 213.
72. Linseele and Zerboni 2018, 234–35.
73. Linseele and Zerboni 2018, 237.
74. Jaouen and Touzeau 2018.
75. Lacovara 2012b, 168–69.
76. Ikram 2012, 213; Maritan et al. 2018.
77. Salah 1997.
78. Brewer and Friedman 1989, 3.
79. Milward 1982.
80. Stünkel 2015, 204.
81. Andrews 1994, 93; Houlihan 1996, 133.
82. Brewer and Friedman 1989, 9. See, e.g., the fish palette excavated at Dakka, dated to about 3000 BCE and now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA 47.3991).
83. From Kerma: MFA 14.1621, 20.1230, 20.1258, 20.1275, 20. 1283; from Semna: MFA 29.1172.
84. From Sanam: Griffith 1923, pls. L.5, LIII.6 (Napatan period); MFA 21.356: amulet of a fish (698–90 BCE); MFA 47.3843: scaraboid in the form of a fish (Meroitic period).



2

Bovids, Caprids, and Antelope

Tasha Vorderstrasse and Brian Muhs

Nubia is often described rather reductively as being a cattle culture, a characterization that is then used to explain why so many cattle are found in artistic depictions, as well as the large number of actual cattle slaughtered in rituals in certain periods. This model is also used to reconstruct the lifeways of the Nubian people who cared for the cattle and various activities that may have been related to, or a consequence of, being cattle-centric pastoralists.¹ It is clear, however, that the Nubian environment was filled with a large variety of hooved and horned animals, including not only domestic cattle but also wild and domestic caprids (sheep, goats, and ibexes), wild bovids (aurochs), and wild antelope (oryxes and gazelles). It is also clear that the Nubian population was not a monolith and that, depending on the period or region in which they lived, people pursued different strategies in relation to those animals. Although the argument has been made that sheep and goats became more popular than cattle over time partly as a result of climate change, it seems unlikely that a changing climate is the only reason for the patterns one sees in the archaeological and artistic records. While it is true that the Nubian climate became increasingly arid—meaning that keeping cattle, which need large amounts of water, would have become increasingly difficult—this approach denies Nubians any agency in regard to which animals they chose to keep and why. Cattle remained important throughout Nubian history, but it is sheep—and specifically rams—that became increasingly pervasive from the New Kingdom onward. This circumstance has much to do with the worship in Nubia of the Egyptian god Amun, who was one of the most successful Egyptian exports to the country. Even after the Egyptian presence waned, the ram-headed god Amun continued to play a dominant role in Nubian religion and society.

As noted in chapter 6 on insects and arachnids, the interaction between Egyptian and Nubian material culture has generally been interpreted as “entanglement,” with the Nubians continually interpreting and reinterpreting the material culture of the Egyptians. A particularly clear example is the adoption of elements of Egyptian religion by Nubians. As a result of Egyptian settler colonialism, which entailed concerted efforts to integrate Nubia into Egypt, Egyptian animal-headed gods—including Amun and Khnum (with ram heads) and Hathor (with cow horns and ears)—were integrated into Nubian religion.

Faience bowl with procession of cows in a lotus marsh. Brooklyn Museum 74.98.1.
Cat. no. 4.

This is not to suggest, however, that the Nubians merely adopted Egyptian culture passively.²

Archaeological Evidence for Hooved and Horned Animals and the Production of Material Culture

Hooved and horned animals in Nubia included cattle, sheep, goats, gazelles, ibexes, and oryxes. Modern Nubian gazelles, ibexes, and oryxes are wild, whereas modern cattle, sheep, and goats are domesticated. It is no longer believed that all Nubian domesticated animals were introduced from elsewhere. The donkey (formerly *Equus asinus*) is now generally believed to have been domesticated from the African wild ass (*Equus africanus*) in Northeast Africa 7,000 years ago (and should therefore be referred to as *Equus africanus asinus*).³ There is also evidence that wild aurochs were independently domesticated in Northeast Africa and Eurasia. It can sometimes be difficult, however, to identify the type of animal being depicted (see, e.g., fig. 2.1).

In contrast to other categories of animals, the indigenous words for some hooved and horned animals in Nubia are actually known—Meroitic *dime* “cow,” *xlbi* “bull,” and *abese* “gazelle,” for example,

as well as *yer* “milk” designating an animal product. The term *xlbi* is used in Meroitic texts as a royal title or to describe the offerings made to the gods by Meroitic rulers; the term *dime* is used similarly, and the two terms also appear together. The word *abese* appears on two illustrated wooden plaques from Qasr Ibrim.⁴ In addition, Napatan rulers used various words for animals and animal products in their inscriptions written in ancient Egyptian, including various types of cattle (oxen, bulls, short-horned cattle, white cattle, calves) and milk,⁵ as well as some more limited terms for caprids and more general terms for herds. They also used the ancient Egyptian general words for differentiating large herd animals (cattle) from “small cattle,” the latter being a general term for caprids.⁶ The words reflect the vocabulary used for these animals in ancient Egypt itself, although the words are less varied, which is unsurprising in view of the more limited corpus. Ancient Egyptian possesses more words for types of bovids and milk,⁷ caprids,⁸ and antelope,⁹ as well as more general terms.¹⁰ The Ramesside-period model letter Papyrus Koller (Berlin Museum P. 3043), which records Nubian tribute, lists cattle of various types, along with gazelles, oryxes, and ibexes, and mentions cattle boats.¹¹ It is clear that



Figure 2.1. Fragment of a painted wooden boat model(?) from Kerma, depicting unidentified quadrupeds. MFA 20.1485. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

the ancient Egyptians differentiated types of antelope and also knew the difference between gazelles, oryxes, and wild goats, for example.¹²

Bovids: Aurochs and Domestic Cattle

The fact that the archaeological evidence for cattle in Nubia is considerable reveals much about bovids in Nubia, on the one hand, but entails a need to “move beyond generic descriptions and a monolithic approach to cattle,” on the other hand.¹³ If we follow the approach developed by Isabelle Vella Gregory for the Gebel Moya figurines, bovines (*Bos taurus*) can be divided into several major categories—in particular, cattle with udders (cows) and those without them (steers and heifers), as well as humped oxen, calves, and animals that have been modified (depicted as yoked or with modified horns). The important point is that bovids in the archaeological record in Nubia are diverse and represented in different ways depending on the regional and temporal context. Widespread finds of cattle figurines throughout the region are not evidence that cattle were always treated and understood by different populations in the same way. Bovids attested in Nubia, including aurochs and different types of domestic cattle, reflect the environment in which people lived but, importantly, also give us an idea of which animals the ancient Nubians decided to depict.¹⁴

Modern bovines (*Bos* spp.) include both wild and domesticated species. Aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) were domesticated at least twice, giving rise to humpless taurine cattle (*Bos taurus*) in the Fertile Crescent around 10,000 years ago and to humped indicine or zebu cattle (*Bos indicus*) in the Indus Valley around 8,500 years ago. Wild aurochs survived nonetheless in some places until early modern times and may occasionally have interbred with domestic cattle, thereby stimulating the development of local breeds. Taurine cattle were introduced to Northeast Africa by 8,000 years ago, while indicine cattle were first introduced 4,000 years ago, with a second, larger introduction 1,300 years ago.

The fact that African taurine and taurine-related cattle display significant genetic differences from Eurasian taurine cattle has led to the suggestion that a third domestication of aurochs took place in North Africa around 8,000–9,000 years ago, with these aurochs later interbreeding and merging with taurine cattle introduced to Africa.¹⁵

Prior to the domestication of aurochs in the ninth millennium BCE, they were hunted for food in Nubia and start to appear in burials at Toshka in Lower Nubia in the thirteenth to tenth millennia BCE, when the region was still part of a savanna environment prior to climate change in the Holocene epoch. It is also during the Neolithic era that cattle start to appear in rock art throughout Nubia, although the precise dates of these depictions are problematic because they were made throughout Nubian history. The bones of domestic cattle have also been found in human burials, or buried alone, starting in the sixth millennium BCE and continuing in the A-Group culture (both heads of cattle and complete animals); furthermore, the remains of cattle products, such as leather, have been found, in addition to depictions of cattle in rock art.¹⁶ Cattle become the predominant animal in rock art by the third and second millennia BCE, continue in the C-Group culture, and also appear in the Eastern Desert. At the same time, cattle depictions begin to appear on pottery (e.g., in the C-Group Cemetery T of Adindan and at Aniba; fig. 2.2), including calves and cows with udders whose hides are decorated with spots, with similar scenes appearing on grave stelae (fig. 2.3). Cattle figurines also begin to appear in the C-Group period.¹⁷

While cattle are prominent in art, they are less well attested in the archaeological record and seem to have been more common as prestige animals than as herd animals. Although the use of cattle skulls in graves is clearly already important in this period, the precise way in which these cattle skulls were used in graves changed through time. In the earliest attestations of bucrania in graves, the cattle skulls are interred with the deceased, whereas



Figure 2.2. C-Group bowls with depictions of cattle, from Adindan. Left: ISACM E23432 (**cat. no. 7**). Right: ISACM E30262.



Figure 2.3. C-Group stelae with depictions of cattle, from Adindan. Left: ISACM E23281A–B (**cat. no. 8**). Right: ISACM E23303A–C (**cat. no. 9**).

in Kerma, C-Group (somewhat uncommonly), and Pan Grave burials, they are found deposited aboveground in front of the grave tumulus.¹⁸ It has been suggested, based on artistic depictions of cattle, that the Nubians had been practicing horn modification prior to this period,¹⁹ but no

zooarchaeological evidence supporting this suggestion currently exists.²⁰

The sacrifice of cattle continues into later periods, most spectacularly at Kerma, which boasts as many as 5,000 bucrania arranged around large burial tumuli. Salima Ikram suggests that these bucrania

are “looking in” at the deceased, while Elena D’Itria argues that the assembly of skulls and how they are arranged—according to the age and sex of the cattle—mimic a living herd. In some cases, only horn cores were buried with the deceased and/or the deceased was wrapped in a cattle hide.²¹ Wall paintings in royal funerary chapel KXI at Kerma include cattle depictions that may reflect a borrowing of Egyptian cattle imagery (cattle fighting, swimming, walking in file, and being driven by herdsman), even if the style of painting is Nubian. Fighting cattle also appear on Nubian pottery from this period (fig. 2.4), and cattle figurines are attested,²² as are bovids in the decoration of scarabs.²³

From the Napatan period, cows and bulls are frequently depicted on faience and bronze bowls, in some cases clearly representing the goddess Hathor as a cow (fig. 2.5; see also below), while in other cases it is unclear whether the bovines represent anything other than themselves. Milk is frequently mentioned in Napatan texts concerning royal offerings to the gods, and several silver vessels with Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions from Napatan royal tombs allude to milk rituals.²⁴ Cattle depictions become more elaborate in the Meroitic period, with pottery and metal bowls exhibiting scenes of both single cattle and cattle processions with or without herders (fig. 2.6). In one exceptional case



Figure 2.4. Pottery fragment with scene of bulls fighting, from Kerma South Cemetery tomb KIII. MFA 20.2101. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 2.5. Faience bowl from El-Kurru with four striding bulls and a Hathor cow in the center. Third Intermediate Period. MFA 24.1089. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 2.6. Meroitic jar with depiction of a cow, from Karanog. Penn E8192. Courtesy of Penn Museum.

from Karanog, a bowl shows pairs of bulls and cows processing toward two women in front of a round house, one seated and one standing, both gesturing toward a man who is pouring milk from a pail into several bowls (fig. 2.7; see also fig. 1.4 in chapter 1).²⁵ There are similar depictions of cattle in the third-century BCE Meroitic temple of Musawarrat es-Sufra, including scenes of processing cattle beneath larger scenes of deities, as well as in reliefs in Meroitic funerary chapels.²⁶ Although Meroitic depictions of cattle may owe more to pharaonic Egyptian representations than one might expect, such archaisms are not without

precedent in Meroitic art, and similar depictions of cattle continue into the Ptolemaic period in Egypt.²⁷ At the same time, however, rock art depicting cattle disappears at the beginning of the first millennium BCE.²⁸ Yet cattle continue to be sacrificed in burials into the post-Meroitic period, though far more rarely than horses and dogs.²⁹

In Egypt, the goddess Hathor is associated with a cow and often depicted either as a cow or as a woman with cow horns. The same is true in Nubia, where she frequently appears from at least the Eighteenth Dynasty in depictions on the walls of temples, including the Hathor temple at Faras, and



Figure 2.7. Electrotype reproduction of bronze bowl with decorative band depicting cattle and herdsmen, from Karanog. Penn E7156. **Cat. no. 5.** Courtesy of Penn Museum.



Figure 2.8. Hathor-headed rock-crystal pendant from El-Kurru. Napatan period (reign of Piankhy). MFA 21.321. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

on Hathor-headed amulets and scarabs found at Nubian sites. The ancient Egyptians also associated her with Nubia, and specifically with Nubian people, in Hathoric rituals in Egypt.³⁰ Some unusual depictions of the goddess include a rock-crystal pendant with a gold Hathor head from the site of El-Kurru (fig. 2.8). Hathor continues to be depicted into the Meroitic period, including on an unusual double-Hathor-head earring with flies suspended from the base (fig. 2.9).³¹ Besides Hathor, the other main bovid-related deity worshipped in Nubia (though only during the Egyptian Twenty-Fifth Dynasty) is the Apis bull, such as at the temple of Taharqo at Kawa.³² A number of other deities have the word “bull” in their titles, thus associating them with cattle. There was a local adaptation of the deity Horus, or possibly a manifestation of



Figure 2.9. Gold double-Hathor-head earring from Meroe. Meroitic period. MFA 23.340. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Thutmose III, called “Horus, bull, lord of Nubia who is in the midst of Thebes.”³³

Caprids: Sheep, Goats, and Ibexes

Modern ovines (*Ovis* spp.) encompass both wild and domestic species. Wild species include the mouflon (*Ovis gmelini*) indigenous to the Zagros Mountains and adjoining highlands, the argali or mountain sheep (*Ovis ammon*) indigenous to the Himalayan plateau, Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*) indigenous to North Africa, and bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) and Dall sheep (*Ovis dalli*) in North America. Modern domestic sheep (*Ovis aries*) are primarily descended from mouflons domesticated between 11,000 and 9,000 years ago. Different breeds were developed and introduced to Africa at different times. Long-legged and thin-tailed sheep

(*Ovis aries longipes*) were introduced to Northeast Africa between 8,500 and 7,000 years ago, while fat-tailed sheep (*Ovis aries platyura*) were first introduced around 3,000 years ago and again 1,300 years ago. Ancient Egyptian representations of sheep in the Old and Middle Kingdoms (2686–2181 BCE and 2025–1773 BCE, respectively) depict a now-extinct, long-legged and long- and thin-tailed breed with horizontal corkscrew horns, today called the “ancient Egyptian corkscrew-horned sheep” (formerly *Ovis longipes palaeoegypticus*). Ancient Egyptian representations of sheep from the Middle Kingdom and later depict another extinct breed with coiled horns, now called the “ancient Egyptian Ammon-horned sheep” (formerly *Ovis platyura aegyptiaca* or *Ovis ammon* [sic]), which was introduced to Egypt and replaced the corkscrew-horned sheep. Recent studies argue that these representations do not have short, fat tails. Ptolemaic and later Egyptian representations of sheep, however, do have short, fat tails, presumably reflecting the introduction to Egypt of fat-tailed breeds of sheep.³⁴ During the Middle Kingdom, this breed gradually ceased to be depicted, but horizontal corkscrew horns remained part of the iconography of the ram gods Banebdjed of Mendes and Khnum of Elephantine, who were also worshipped in Nubia. Coiled horns became part of the iconography of the god Amun of Thebes.

Modern caprines (*Capra* spp.) encompass both wild and domestic species. Wild species include the West Asian ibex (*Capra aegagrus*), the Asian or Siberian ibex (*Capra sibirica*), the Alpine ibex (*Capra ibex*), the Iberian or Spanish ibex (*Capra pyrenaica*), the Nubian ibex (*Capra nubiana*), the Walia ibex (*Capra walie*), the West and East Caucasian tur (*Capra caucasica* and *Capra cylindricornis*), and the markhor (*Capra falconeri*). Modern domestic and feral goats (*Capra hircus*) were domesticated from the wild goat (*Capra aegagrus*) about 10,500 years ago in Southwest Asia. They were introduced to Northeast Africa about 7,000 years ago.³⁵

Caprines appear early in Nubian art, in petroglyphs, but the evidence for their depiction is more

limited than that for cattle. Although (or perhaps because) they are omnipresent in daily life and kept as stock animals—indeed, they are generally more common than cattle—caprines appear in art in a far more limited way. Much of this art seems to be specific to Nubia itself, such as a glazed-quartz ram head made of local material (fig. 2.10) and vessels that take the shape of a caprine head (fig. 2.11), but inlays from Kerma have a goat-in-a-tree motif



Figure 2.10. Glazed-quartz ram head. Classic Kerma period. MFA 20.1180. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 2.11. Vessel with ram-headed spout. Classic Kerma period. MFA 20.1714. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

that may be an adaptation of a West Asian theme.³⁶ Ibexes and other horned animals are also attested on scarabs,³⁷ and an ibex appears on a New Kingdom axe blade, where it is depicted as being attacked by a lion.³⁸

Much of the evidence for caprines comes from the animals themselves. They were eaten, deposited in burials starting in the A-Group period, and used for animal products such as leather sandals, stool coverings, and burial shrouds (at Kerma, some sheep were placed in leather bags). Caprine burials started to become elaborate in the Pan Grave culture, when the frontal skull bones of sheep and goats (and more rarely gazelles; see below) were painted. In addition, some sheep buried at Kerma had elaborate head decorations, including inlaid horn protectors and ostrich-feather balls on their heads.³⁹

Starting in the Middle Kingdom, when evidence for Egyptian temples in Nubia is limited, there is evidence for the worship of the ram-headed god Khnum. The Khnum ram has corkscrew horns; various temples honored him, and amulets representing him have been found.⁴⁰ But Khnum is not as important a ram-headed deity as Amun, who became a critical part of Nubian religion starting in the Eighteenth Dynasty, with temples to Amun built throughout Nubia. The fact that Amun continues to be an important god after the Egyptian occupation and into the Meroitic period demonstrates the importance Amun held for the Nubians, who built multiple temples in his honor. In particular, the site of Napata/Gebel Barkal became associated with the origin of Amun.⁴¹ Furthermore, the god in his incarnation “Amun of the *nebes-tree*” is represented as a criosphinx (a ram-headed sphinx) in the Napatan-period temples of Taharqa at Gebel Barkal and Sanam and in early Napatan jewelry (see fig. 5.4 in chapter 5),⁴² as well as at Meroe (Beg. N19). There is also a hybrid, ram-headed cobra statue from Gebel Barkal (fig. 2.12) and a late Napatan gold sheet decorated with a flying ram, both of which also have been interpreted as the god Amun.⁴³ From the early Napatan period,

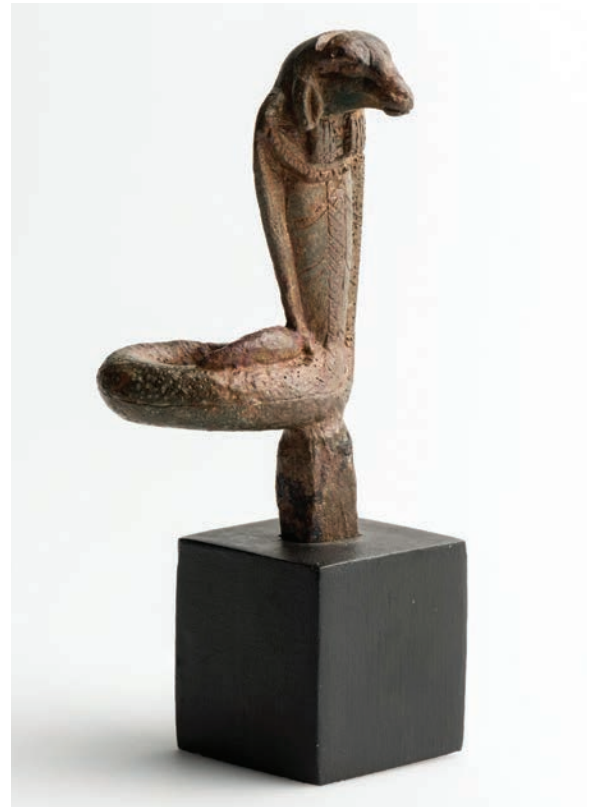


Figure 2.12. Ram-headed cobra of bronze. Napatan period. MFA 24.960. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

a gold amulet with the head of the god Amun was found at Meroe (fig. 2.13), and a very similar example is attested in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 2.14).⁴⁴ In the Meroitic period, elaborate depictions of Amun's ram head are found in gold.⁴⁵ The worship of Amun clearly continues into the late Meroitic period, as evidenced by a bronze bowl from Gamai that bears a clear depiction of Amun as a ram.⁴⁶

Antelope: Gazelles and Oryxes

As noted above, it is difficult to differentiate the various species of antelope on the basis of depictions because they frequently lack the necessary detail; furthermore, modern scholars are often confused about the differences between various types of antelope and what they should be called. The fact that ibexes have large horns, as antelope species



Figure 2.13. Gold ram's-head earring from Meroe. Napatan period. MFA 23.333. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 2.14. Gold ram's-head amulet. Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. Gift of Norbert Schimmel Trust, 1989. MMA 1989.281.98. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. **Cat. no. 25.**

do, also creates considerable confusion in distinguishing between these animals. Furthermore, it is unclear just how accurate depictions were intended to be, such that identifying species on the basis of horn size or shape is challenging. Nevertheless, antelope first appear in the archaeological record in the Pleistocene epoch, when they are hunted in Nubia.⁴⁷ Antelope may have been depicted in early Nubian art because of their importance in hunting activities. They are not, however, as numerous as bovids or even caprids in either depictions or the archaeological record. They are attested in rock art starting in the fifth and fourth millennia BCE. Gazelles are found in A-Group burials, and antelope are depicted on objects from this period as well, including the Qustul incense burner (**cat. no. 64**) and, possibly, painted pottery (**cat. no. 66**). From Dakka, there is a pottery example of cattle and antelope together.⁴⁸ Other depictions of antelope occur on the decorated gold sheet covering the Sayala mace-head, with various antelope including what

appears to be an eland (today inhabiting only South Sudan), an oryx, and a deer.⁴⁹ Although cattle predominate in the mortuary record, various gazelles and other smaller wild animals are found in Pan Grave burials and other contexts, in which they were painted postmortem. At Adindan, in contrast to other sites, gazelles dominate the corpus of deposited skulls. Shaft K82, a separate deposit, contained twenty-two painted gazelle skulls arranged in rows.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, despite the paucity of gazelle bones, the presence of traps—which are similar to the desert “kites” attested in West Asia—suggests that the ancient Nubians once hunted antelope in large numbers. This seeming inconsistency has led to suggestions that gazelles may have been hunted on a massive scale in the earlier Pleistocene and Neolithic periods.⁵¹

At Kerma, inlays identifiable as gazelles or ibexes have been found that originally adorned the top row of inlays on funerary beds, were also worn on caps, and occasionally ornamented vessels in the



Figure 2.15. Antelope and gazelle inlays. Classic Kerma period. Left: MFA 20.2106 and 20.1377. Right: MFA 20.1554a–e. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Kerma period (fig. 2.15).⁵² Other objects, which may have been made in Egypt or Nubia but are Egyptian in style, include scarabs decorated with depictions of various horned animals, although determining what sort of antelope (or possibly ibex) they represent is difficult.⁵³ A hair curler in the shape of a long-horned sheep or antelope⁵⁴ may have been made in Nubia even though it looks Egyptian. A bronze vessel of the early Napatan period, with a depiction of several monkeys and a hunting dog attacking an antelope (see fig. 3.9 in chapter 3), hearkens back to earlier Egyptian art⁵⁵ in a way similar to the previously noted bronze Meroitic bowls depicting cattle. Furthermore, there are examples of antelope decorating Meroitic painted pottery, including a running antelope on a vase from Karanog.⁵⁶

In the Napatan period, gazelles frequently appear on luxury objects, such as a set of calcite vessels from Meroe tomb W609 (dated to before 500 BCE) in the shape of gazelles with their feet bound, as though being prepared for sacrifice (fig. 2.16). Similar objects occur in Egypt,

including dishes in the shape of a bound oryx (fig. 2.17).⁵⁷ The decoration of luxury items with antelope continues into the Meroitic period, when wooden plaques from Qasr Ibrim show a gazelle in front of either a tree or a wooden cup on a stand, and two blue-glass goblets from Sedeinga show antelope and a stag being presented as offerings to the god Osiris.⁵⁸

In contrast to bovids and caprids, which appear as deities in Nubian religion and art, antelope are far less common in the pantheon. The sole exception is the goddess Satet, who is associated with the Nile inundation and cataracts and is said to guard the border between Egypt and Nubia. She wears the White Crown of Upper Egypt flanked by antelope horns. Her temple at Aswan is well known, but she also appears in Nubia itself, specifically in the temple of Thutmose III at Gebel Dosha (fig. 2.18), in rock inscriptions, and on a Ramesside stela from Amara West (fig. 2.19).⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in contrast to the cults of other ancient Egyptian deities found in Nubia, her cult seems to be smaller and less popular.



Figure 2.16. Calcite vessel in the form of a bound gazelle. Napatan period. MFA 24.879.
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Figure 2.17. Wooden dish in the shape of a bound oryx. Eighteenth Dynasty. Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 49.54, Creative Commons.



Figure 2.18. Relief showing an unidentified official before the god Nebmaatre and Satet at Gebel Dosha. Photo taken during James Henry Breasted's 1906–7 Egyptian expedition (ISACM P. 3255 / N. 2329).



Figure 2.19. Stela showing Ramesses II making an offering to Satet, from Amara West. BM EA68675. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.

Notes

1. Hafsaas 2006 (citing ethnographic examples from East Africa whose lifeways are dubiously connected to the C-Group); 2023, 36–38 (where it is argued that heads missing from the graves of predecessors of the A-Group is evidence of headhunting—a practice attested in ethnographic examples cited—because it is a “small-scale and de-centralized society”); Weglarz 2017, 41. See in particular Vella Gregory 2021 (which cautions against a singular focus on cattle in figurine studies, as it “can lead down unproductive avenues of a grand cattle narrative”). The fact that ancient Egypt was not a pastoralist culture reliant on cattle in the same way yet frequently depicts cattle in art and worshipped gods associated with cattle (particularly Hathor) argues for a different approach to understanding the importance of cattle in Nubian society, one that moves beyond the pastoralist model.
2. Smith and Buzon 2018.
3. Rossel et al. 2008; Kimura et al. 2011; Wang et al. 2020; Todd et al. 2022.
4. Rilly and de Voogt 2012, 183–85; Ferrandino 2023.
5. The words attested include those for oxen (*iw3* or *iw*, actually *tp-i3w*, “small cattle”), short-horned cattle (*wnd.w*), bull (*k3*), cattle (*ih.w*), white cattle (*ih.w hd.w*), calf (*bhs*), and milk (*irt.t*).
6. Ram (*b3*), sheep (*sr.t*, written *sw3*), goat(?) (*ʿnh.t*), herds, flocks (*mmn.t*), small cattle (*tp-i3w*, misread as *iw3*), and small cattle (*ʿw.t*, with some unusual spellings).
7. Ox, cow, cattle (*ih* → *ερε*): Egyptian *ih*, *ih.t*, *ih.w* (Wb. I 119 “Rind”), Demotic *ih* (ox), *ih.t*, *ih.t shm.t*, *ih.t hm.t* (cow), *ih.w* (cattle), Coptic *ερε* (Sahidic, Bohairic, Akhmimic), *ⲁⲣⲏ* (Fayumic), plural *ερεου*, *ερεν* (Sahidic), *ερεγ* (Sahidic, Akhmimic, Bohairic), *ερεου*, *ερεου* (Bohairic), *ⲁⲣⲁγ*, *ⲏⲣⲁου* (Fayumic) (Crum CD 64a–b; Černý CED 41); bull: Egyptian *k3* (Wb. V 94–98 “Stier”), Coptic *κο(?)*; young bull: Egyptian *km3* (Wb. V 38), Demotic *gm*, Coptic *ⲃⲁⲙ* (Černý CED 303); calf → heifer: Egyptian *bhs*, *bhs.t* (Wb. I 469), Coptic *ⲃⲁⲣⲥε* (Sahidic, Akhmimic), *ⲃⲁⲣⲥⲓ* (Bohairic), *ⲃεⲣⲥⲓ* (Fayumic) (Crum CD 48a; Černý CED 30); the Coptic probably derives from feminine *bhs.t*, hence “heifer”; some texts substitute *ⲏⲁⲥⲓ*, *ⲏⲁⲥε* “child”; ox: Egyptian *iw3* (Wb. I 49 “Rind”); short-horned cattle: Egyptian *wndw* (Wb. I 326 = “Art Rinder, mit abgeschnittenen Hörnern”); long-horned cattle: Egyptian *ng3w* (Wb. II 349 “Art grosse Rinder mit langen Hörnern”); milk (*irt.t* → *irt(t)* → *ερωτε*): Egyptian *irt.t* (Wb. I 117; also the name of a territory in Lower Nubia), Demotic *irt(t)*; Coptic *ερωτε* (Sahidic, Akhmimic), *ερωτ* (Bohairic, Fayumic) (Crum CD 58b; Černý CED 37). Note: Černý CED = Černý 1976; Crum CD = Crum 1939; Wb. = Erman and Grapow 1926–63.
8. Ram, sheep, goat: Egyptian *b3* (Wb. I 414), Demotic *b3* (ram), *b3-n.p.t* (ram of heaven)—Vycichl 1983, 28, speculates that *b3* was a general word for sheep and goats, one form of which (*b3-n.p.t*) became specifically associated with goats; sheep (*sr* → *siw* → *isw* → *εσοου*; alternation between *r* and *yod* in Egyptian is common): Egyptian *sr*, *sr.t* (Wb. III 462–63), Late Egyptian *siw*, *siw.t* (Wb. III 462–63; Lesko 2004, vol. 2, 11), Demotic *isw* (ram, sheep), Coptic *εσοου* (Sahidic), *εσαγ* (Akhmimic, Fayumic), *εσωου* (Bohairic) (Crum CD 61a; Černý CED 38); goat: Coptic *ⲃⲁⲙⲡⲉ*, *ⲃⲁⲙⲡε* (Sahidic, Akhmimic), *ⲃⲁⲙⲡⲓ* (Bohairic), *ⲃⲁⲙⲡⲓ*, *ⲃⲁⲙⲡ* (Fayumic) (Crum CD 39a; Černý CED 23); he-goat: Coptic *ⲃⲁⲣⲏⲧ* (Bohairic), *ⲃⲁⲣⲏⲧ* (Fayumic) (Crum CD 43b; Černý CED 26), Coptic *ⲃⲁ* (Sahidic, Akhmimic), *ⲃⲁⲉ*, *ⲃⲏ* (Sahidic), *ⲃⲁⲉ* (Bohairic), *ⲃⲏ* (Bohairic, Fayumic), plural *ⲃⲏⲟⲩ* (Fayumic) (Crum CD 803a); she-goat: Coptic *ⲃⲁⲙⲡε ⲏⲥⲣⲏⲙε* (lit. “female goat”); kid: Egyptian *ib* (Wb. I 61 “Böckchen”), Coptic *ⲏⲁⲥ ⲏⲃⲁⲙⲡε* (lit. “goat child”); ibex: Egyptian *ni3w*, *ni3*, *n3w*, *nr3w* (Wb. II 202 “Steinbock”; alternation between *r* and *yod* in Egyptian is common).
9. Gazelle (*ghs* → *ερε*): Egyptian *ghs*, *ghs.t* (Wb. V 191), Demotic *ghs.t*, Coptic *ερε*, *ερε*, *ερε*, *ερε*, *ερε* (Sahidic), *ⲏⲁⲥ* (Akhmimic), *ερε* (Fayumic), *ερε* (Demotic Magical Papyrus), plural *ερεε* (Sahidic), *ⲃⲁⲣⲥⲓ* (Bohairic) (Crum CD 839b; Černý CED 340); oryx: Egyptian *m3-hd* (Wb. II 11 “weisse Säbelantilope” vs. *m3* “antelope”).
10. Small cattle, wild and domesticated (*ʿw.t* → *i3w.t* → *tp-n-i3w.t* → *ⲧⲃⲏⲏ*; alternation between *ayin*, *yod*, and *aleph* is common in early Egyptian): Egyptian *ʿw.t* (Wb. I 170 “Kleinvieh, Wild”), Egyptian *i3w.t* (Wb. I 29 “Grossvieh, Kleinvieh, Wild; wohl jüngere Schreibung von *ʿw.t*”), Demotic (also Napatan hieroglyphic) *tp-n-i3w.t* (lit. “head of small cattle”), Coptic *ⲧⲃⲏⲏ* (Sahidic), *ⲧⲃⲏⲏ* (Bohairic, Fayumic), plural *ⲧⲃⲏⲟⲩⲉ*, *ⲧⲃⲏⲏⲟⲩ*,

- τϣⲛⲏϣ (Sahidic) (Crum 400b; Černý CED 182); herds, flocks (of different kinds of animals, including people, which can be specified): Egyptian *mnmn.t* (Wb. II 81).
11. Gardiner 1911, 40; Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 211.
 12. Contra Bianchi 2021, 11; Bianchi does not note that the word *ʿw.t* (which he claims is the word used) means “small cattle,” nor does he explain how its use conflicts with the fact that the ancient Egyptians had separate words for the animals themselves.
 13. Vella Gregory 2021.
 14. For reflections on the diverse animal corpus at Gebel Moya, see Vella Gregory 2021.
 15. Hanotte et al. 2002, 338; Ajmone-Marsan, Garcia, and Lenstra 2010, 149–51; Stock and Gifford-Gonzalez 2013; Osypińska et al. 2021, 2025.
 16. Hellström and Langballe 1970, 29–30; Williams 1986, 16, 176; Chaix, Dubosson, and Honegger 2012, 192; Ikram 2012, 211, 220; Paner 2020.
 17. C-Group bowl with cattle and fragment of a similar bowl from Adindan: ISACM E23432, E30262; C-Group stelae from Adindan: ISACM E23864, E23281, E23303; Steindorff 1937, 95–96, figs. 46.5 (described as a “magical” figure), 57.1, 57.6, 57.10, 57.12, 57.14; Williams 1983, xx, 3, 99–100, table 46, figs. 9–10; Wildung 1997, 45, cat. no. 38 (from A-Group Aksha); Gatto 2006, 70–71; Hafsaas 2006, 69, 81–82; Dubosson 2018, 847–48; Chaix 2019, 66; Paner 2020.
 18. Contra Hafsaas 2006, 70, which argues that despite the paucity of cattle remains at Sayala, cattle were in fact the most important herd animal for C-Group people in Nubia. See Chaix, Dubosson, and Honegger 2012, 192.
 19. This essay uses the word “modification” rather than the usual “deformation.” Modifying the shape of the horns is unlikely to reflect a negative aspect of the animal, which the word “deformed” would imply; the latter is also considered ableist when describing persons with disabilities. See Morris and Sneed 2021.
 20. Weglarz 2017, 4; Dubosson 2018, 845–46; Bakhiet 2019, 112, 116 table 7.2. Dubosson cites the work of Charles Seligman as the first person to argue that horn modification happened in antiquity. While Dubosson notes that Seligman was “inspired by the Hamitic theory,” he does not point out that the Hamitic hypothesis and indeed Seligman’s writings are racist or that the Hamitic hypothesis has now been discredited.
 21. Chaix, Dubosson, and Honegger 2012, 190, 192n2, 193 fig. 2, 195–99, 208; Ikram 2012, 220–21; Minor 2012, 132; Dubosson 2018, 846; D’Itria 2023b, 177–79. One in eight bucrania arranged in tumuli shows signs of horn modification.
 22. Reisner 1923a, 265–80; Chaix, Dubosson, and Honegger 2012, 189; Minor 2012, 89, 91–94; Manzo 2023, 238. Minor suggests that the bucrania are not simply cow heads but rather a way to show cattle swimming in water.
 23. Schiff Giorgini with Robichon and Leclant 1971, 218.
 24. Early Napatan bronze bowl from Semna with an engraved depiction of Hathor as a cow and an inscription to the goddess: MFA 47.1683. Faience bowls of a queen of Piankhy buried in Ku. 55: MFA 24.1089 and an example in Khartoum; the bowls depict a cow in foliage in the center of the bowl with bulls striding around the rim. For vessels related to milk libations, see MFA 24.901 (silver spouted beaker with the name of Senkamanisken); silver vessel described as originally having a spout, but now crushed, found in Nu.10 (tomb of King Amaninatakilebte) with the name of King Analmaye, sixth century BCE; see Kormysheva 2006, 67–68. Libations were performed more commonly with water, but milk and wine were also important; see Doll 2014; Howley 2015; Ashby 2019; Bishop-Wright 2022.
 25. Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pls. 26–28 (bronze cattle bowls), pl. 41 (pottery jugs with cattle); Penn E7156 (cattle bowl) and E8153 and E8192 (pottery jugs).
 26. Meroe, Beg. S10, Queen Bartare (second century BCE); Meroe, Beg. NII, unknown ruler (late first century BCE); Beg. N2, Amanikhabale (first century CE); Meroe, Beg. N17, burial of King Amanitenmemide (first/second century CE).
 27. Numerous milking and cattle-herding scenes in Old and Middle Kingdom Egyptian art show similarities to the Meroitic scenes, including those in the tomb of Ptahhotep and Akhetotep (Fifth Dynasty; see Davies 1901,

pl. XVII); tomb of Kagemni at Sakkara (Sixth Dynasty); and Middle Kingdom sarcophagi of the Eleventh Dynasty queens Ashayet and Kemsit. For the Ptolemaic period, see Sales 2016. For ancient Egyptian archaism in the Meroitic period, see Baldi 2015.

28. Paner 2020.
29. Dann 2008, 111, 113 fig. 1; 2009, 129.
30. Steindorff 1937, pl. 51.24; Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 103, 124; Ashby 2018; Smith and Buzon 2018; Ullmann 2019, 521; Manzo 2023, 246 fig. 3. One difficulty in identifying Hathor is that it is not always clear whether a cow-headed figure is a deity and, if so, which one; see Lemos 2024. Further, cows are often taken to be depictions of Hathor, but the validity of that interpretation is not always clear; see Kormysheva 2006 (SNM 18580, 18582, 20390). On popular religion in general, see Budka 2018. On the presence of Hathor amulets outside Egypt, see Chapon et al. 2024.
31. The double Hathor head is an unusual motif, the only other known example being that from the much earlier site of Megiddo, where a double-headed gold statuette of Hathor (ISACM A21005) was found in a hoard of Late Bronze Age gold objects in the palace.
32. Kormysheva 2006, 112.
33. Budka 2018, 381–82; Ullmann 2019, 521.
34. Old scientific names that treat breeds as separate species, such as *Ovis longipes* or *Ovis platyura*, are no longer accepted; see Ben Sassi-Zaidy et al. 2022; Da Silva et al. 2025, 3–5.
35. Naderi et al. 2008; Pereira et al. 2009.
36. MFA 20.1372–1376; Minor 2012, 169, 173, 176, 184; Manzo 2023, 255. It is unclear whether this contact took place directly via the Hyksos or via the Egyptians. For vessels shaped like caprid heads, see MFA 20.1714 and SNM 1123, both from Kerma. See also Wildung 1997, 95, cat. no. 96. For a ram-headed statue, see Reisner 1923a, 139 no. xiii; 1923b, 51; Miniaci 2019, 25; Gabolde 2021; Manzo 2023, 240–41. Manzo suggests that ram head MFA 20.1180 goes with a locally produced, glazed-quartz lion body, thus forming a hybrid, ram-headed lion. No other such hybrids are attested, however, and it is unclear how these objects fit together. Minor 2012, 132–33, argues that a Kerman king may have commissioned the piece, another suggestion for which there is no evidence.
37. Säve-Söderbergh 1989, 98.
38. Wildung 1997, 134, cat. no. 137.
39. Säve-Söderbergh 1989, 141–44, 146; Chaix 1993b; 2003; 2011, 215, tables 1–2; Wildung 1997, 57, cat. nos. 50 (taken to be a goat, based on the horn shape), 51–52 (C-Group, Aniba); Gatto 2006, 70; Hafsaas 2006, 27, 67–68, 108, 125; 2023, 17; Chaix and Callou 2011; Chaix, Dubosson, and Honegger 2012, 192n8, 195; Minor 2012, 94, 161; Bangsgaard 2013; Cooper and Barnard 2017; Gabolde 2021; Vella Gregory 2021; D’Itria 2023b, 176, 182–83; Manzo 2023, 248; de Souza 2025.
40. Ullmann 2019, 512.
41. On Amun temples in Nubia in general, see Rocheleau 2008.
42. Silver criosphinx of an unnamed queen of Piankhy found at El-Kurru (Ku. 55; MFA 24.972). See also the discussion in Manzo 2023, 250.
43. MFA 24.960 (Gebel Barkal, Temple B700) and SNM 1365. Another example is MFA 23.333 (Meroe, Beg. 433). See Wildung 1997, 200, cat. no. 225, and 240, cat. no. 267 (tomb of the pharaoh Nastasen); Kendall 2008 (who also observes a graffito at Gebel Barkal of the same figure holding a flail); Gabolde 2021.
44. SNM 2247 and MMA 281.98. Wildung 1997, 199, cat. nos. 223–24.
45. E.g., in the tomb of Amanishakheto. See Priese 1993, figs. 30, 32; Wildung 1997, 310 (cat. no. 329), 312–13 (cat. nos. 331–32); Lacovara and Markowitz 2019, 163.
46. Bates and Dunham 1927, pl. XXXI.3; Wildung 1997, 286–87, cat. no. 304.
47. Chaix 2019, 64, 67.

48. Hellström and Langballe 1970, 29–30; Williams 1986, 141–43; Wildung 1997, 43, cat. no. 34; Gatto 2006, 70; Bakhiet 2019, 112, table 7.2 (where it is suggested the gazelle may be modern). Williams sees parallels in the pottery between this antelope depiction and that of Naqada III. He also thinks ISACM E24119 (**cat. no. 66**) is Egyptian; see Williams 1986, 152–53.
49. Hafsaas 2015, 178–79. The mace is often identified as having been manufactured in Egypt—Hafsaas just assumes so, for example—but there is no reason it could not have been made in Nubia.
50. Williams 1983, 224, pl. 131; Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 179–80; Hafsaas 2006, 125; Ikram 2012, 222; Bangsgaard 2013, 294, table 2, who argues that Williams 1983, pl. 131 (incorrectly cited as pl. 129) shows goat and sheep skulls.
51. Storemyr 2021.
52. MFA 13.4219a–g, MFA 20.1554a–e, MFA 20.1556; Wildung 1997, 64, cat. no. 64; Minor 2012, 173.
53. Steindorff 1937, pl. 55.79; Säve-Söderbergh with Englund and Nordström 1981, 49, 250/35:1; Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 98.
54. Steindorff 1937, pls. 63.10, 92.12.
55. Wildung 1997, 191, cat. no. 198; Sinclair 2015.
56. Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pl. 54 (Penn E8162).
57. MFA 24.879, 24.889 (head missing). The Boston Museum of Fine Arts website identifies its example as an oryx rather than a gazelle, a likelier interpretation given the length of the horns. A stopper with only the head can be found in the Munich Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst (ÄS 5336). See Wildung 1997, 192, cat. no. 199; Kormysheva 2006, 185. Bianchi 2021 provides an overview of multiple examples but omits MFA 24.889.
58. M.S. Giorgini Collection, Archaeological Institute of the University of Pisa; SNM 20432. Leclant 1973a, 56–62.
59. BM EA68675; Davies 2015, 2016, 2017.



3

Canids

Margaret Geoga

Canids—primarily dogs, but also jackals and fennec foxes—played a vital role in the lives and imaginaries of ancient Nubians. Textual, artistic, and archaeological evidence attests to how these animals interacted with humans in their lives, as well as to the animals’ varied functions in ancient Nubian religious, iconographic, and sociopolitical systems. This assemblage of evidence dates from the Neolithic (ca. 6000–3700 BCE) to the Meroitic (270 BCE–330 CE) and post-Meroitic (330–543 CE) eras, evincing the longstanding importance of canids in Nubian culture.

Textual Evidence

Limited textual evidence from ancient Nubia discusses canids. Most notable are three royal texts, all of which clearly or apparently reference Middle Kingdom literature: a stela of Merneptah at Amada, Piankhy’s Great Triumphal Stela, and texts in Taharqo’s forecourt at the temple of Kawa.

The Egyptian pharaoh Merneptah (ca. 1213–1203 BCE)—who ruled Egypt during the Nineteenth Dynasty, when Egypt maintained colonial control over parts of Nubia—had a stela carved into the wall of the entry portal of the temple of Amada, a temple to Amun and Re-Horakhty built by Thutmose III in Lower Nubia. Dating to his fourth regnal year, the stela describes Merneptah’s victory against the Libyans, Medjay, and other peoples on Egypt’s borders, followed by his public display of mutilated corpses of Medjay in Nubia intended to discourage Nubians from similar revolts—an ephemeral deterrent made permanent by the wall stela’s display in Nubia.¹ The stela ends with the unusual claim that Merneptah “caused the coming of the lands of Hatti on their knees, like dogs walk,” thus comparing the Hittites to cowering, submissive dogs. The image of a dominated people walking like dogs recalls the claim in *The Teaching of Amenemhat* that King Amenemhat I “made the Asians (*sttiw*) do the dog-walk.” Both the poem and the stela use dogs as a symbol of submission to the king’s power.²

Amenemhat and Merneptah’s stela appear to have inspired some of the Kushite king Taharqo’s inscriptions in the forecourt of the temple of Kawa, dating to circa 690–680 BCE. Alongside trampling and smiting scenes depicting Taharqo defeating various foreign enemies, three texts state that Taharqo

Sandstone relief of Prince Arikankharor, with a dog mutilating a fallen enemy. Worcester Art Museum 1922.145. Cat. no. 56.

subdued “rebel lands” and “made them do the dog-walk.” These texts clearly evoke *Amenemhat* and recall the Merneptah stela through the imagery of the dog-walk and the use of the word *bšdw* “rebels.”³ Taharqo thus appropriated an uncommon but conventional expression of Egyptian royal power, incorporating it into the temple forecourt’s triumphant context. Moreover, by extending his domination to all “rebel lands” rather than confining it to specific peoples—such as the peoples from Nubia and Kush mentioned by Amenemhat I and Merneptah—Taharqo’s quotations subtly subvert previous Egyptian rulers’ claims to supreme power, especially those claims that rest on the subjugation of peoples from Nubian regions.

The third royal text mentioning dogs dates to several decades before Taharqo’s Kawa inscriptions. On his Victory Stela, the Kushite king Piankhy gives an extensive narrative account of his (re)conquest of Egypt, undertaken in response to the territorial ambitions of the Delta chieftain Tefnakht and eventually resulting in Piankhy’s complete domination of Egypt. Likely composed in Thebes for display in Karnak, the stela was eventually moved to Gebel Barkal and displayed in the temple of Amun there.⁴ The stela’s text contains numerous quotations of Middle Egyptian poetry.⁵ Among them is one from *The Tale of Sinuhe*, in which Sinuhe describes Retjenu as belonging to Senwosret I “like [his] dogs” (B222–23); the figure of speech is repurposed on Piankhy’s stela to describe how the regional rulers in northern Egypt are “like dogs at [Tefnakht’s] heels” (line 3). The quotation has generally been interpreted as a pejorative description of the leaders who sided with Tefnakht—submitting to him out of fear instead of resisting his domination—instead of with Piankhy.

Given the high degree of integration of both Egyptian and Kushite elements in Piankhy’s and Taharqo’s inscriptions—which were likely authored by groups of both Egyptian and Kushite intellectuals, and which therefore incorporated concepts from both cultures, religions, and imaginaries—it is difficult to determine to what extent they reflect

preexisting local conceptions of dogs as opposed to ideas adapted from earlier Egyptian texts. The tendency, when studying Kushite adaptations of older Egyptian cultural forms, to identify all new elements as inherently Kushite serves to replicate, rather than push back against, the colonialist framework that places Egypt and Nubia in binary opposition.⁶ In this case, one can look to uses of dogs in royal triumphal displays both before and after the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty in reliefs and burial assemblages (see below) and find possible echoes in the royal texts of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. However, the precise role of the dogs is not stable across these various media: whereas in iconographic and ritual contexts dogs often constitute a tool used by the king in the exercise of his royal power, the Napatan texts employ dogs instead as a representation of those dominated by the king.

Artistic Representations

Numerous artistic representations survive from ancient Nubia that display canids in a variety of contexts and performing a variety of activities. The majority of these representations consist of rock art, reliefs, and painted or sculpted components of movable objects, such as ceramics and other vessels.

Rock Art

Rock art—a generally neglected domain in Nubian archaeology before the second half of the twentieth century—is attested at numerous sites throughout Nubia dating from as early as the Neolithic era.⁷ Zoomorphic motifs are especially common among this vast corpus, with cattle represented most frequently, along with caprids, gazelles, giraffes, horses, camels, elephants, and other wild and domesticated animals. Although not as common as cattle, many depictions of dogs also survive at sites such as the Wadi Gorgod, Us Island, Gebel al-Sayd, and others.⁸

Dogs are most commonly depicted in hunting scenes. Within this category, there is much variation. For example, a hunting scene can depict a single dog or a whole pack of them (fig. 3.1). Dogs



Figure 3.1. A pack of dogs leaping at a gazelle at Wadi Gorgod (Hamdeen and Polkowski 2018, fig. 14).

hunt a variety of prey, from hares to gazelles to giraffes. Dogs can be depicted in quite figural and dynamic hunting scenes, or they may be represented in more abstract and static forms (fig. 3.2). At some sites with rich rock art corpuses, diachronic trends can be identified. For example, at Us, a shift can be observed from the first millennium BCE's dynamic hunting scenes to more static depictions of dogs in the first millennium CE, attesting not only to changing roles of dogs in the local worldview but also to the long-term popularity of canids in the region's rock art.⁹

A Meroitic graffito at the Great Enclosure of Musawwarat es-Sufra echoes the hunting scenes found in more remote desert locations by depicting a dog hunting a hare (fig. 3.3). Unusually, this graffito is accompanied by a text: *wle qo p-xn tlt 3 Netror-se-l-o* "May this dog yield(?) three talents, it is Netarora's."¹⁰ This text includes one of the few known animal terms in Meroitic, *wle* "dog." It also appears to associate a generic motif commonly

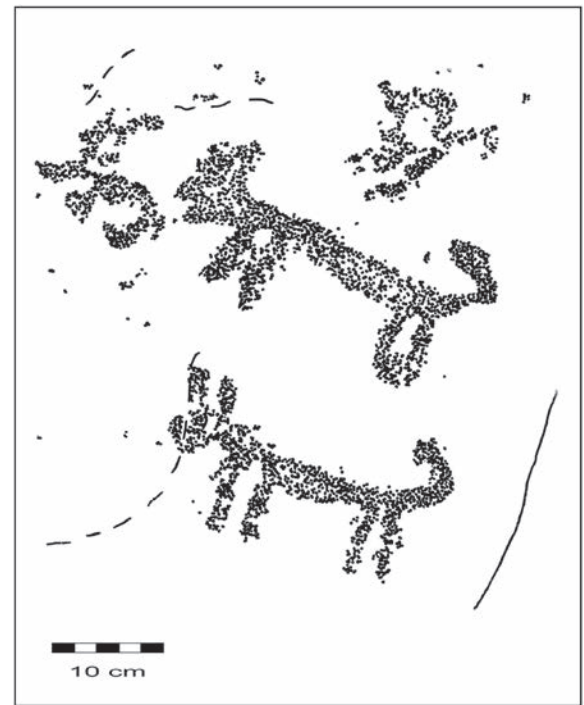


Figure 3.2. Static dogs in rock art from Us Island (Kleinitz 2007a, fig. 10).



Figure 3.3. Graffito from Musawwarat es-Sufra depicting a dog hunting a hare and with a Meroitic inscription (Hintze 1979, fig. 14).

found in rock art with a particular dog, which seemingly existed in reality, and involves a particular human, Netarora, in the dog's depicted hunting activities, which are implied to have the potential to yield him income. Taken together, the desert rock inscriptions and the Great Enclosure graffito suggest that dogs played an important and long-standing role in Nubian imaginaries both in the desert and in more urban areas such as Meroe, as well as in people's lived experiences.

Reliefs

Canids are also depicted in numerous inscriptions of a more official nature—namely, reliefs. They appear most often in royal funerary monuments, including pyramids at Gebel Barkal and Meroe, where they generally take the form of deities, though the depictions vary: recumbent jackals border offering scenes; jackal-headed deities fulfill familiar religious roles, such as participating in the weighing of the heart or appearing among the sons of Horus; and other canid-headed deities, both male and female, make offerings.¹¹ Although in some cases the jackal-headed deities evoke Egyptian antecedents—Anubis, Duamutef, and Wepwawet—the fact that the canid figures in the Barkal and Meroe pyramids take on a wider variety of appearances and roles suggests a more expansive role in Meroitic funerary religion.

Meroitic pyramids also depict canids—in these cases, most likely dogs—in scenes with the sovereigns. Several scenes of enthroned kings, queens, and princes feature dogs seated under the thrones, guarding or surveying prisoners. A notable example from Meroe (Beg. N12) depicts King Taneyidamani with a collared dog under his seat, surveying two figures who seem to be bound prisoners.¹² The fact that the dog is depicted at a larger scale than the prisoners suggests not only its greater importance but also its imposing power over them. Another example, from the pyramid of Queen Nahirqo (Beg. N11), places a more modestly sized dog under the prince's throne, from where it surveys a line of nine tightly bound prisoners kneeling under the queen's throne; another canid appears in the form of a jackal-headed deity pouring a libation between the two seated figures (fig. 3.4). This example also displays the way dogs and lions are sometimes used interchangeably in Nubian iconography, with thrones variously embellished with canine or leonine heads.¹³ Other examples of this phenomenon occur occasionally in depictions of animals brutalizing prisoners: compare the dog eating a prisoner at Arikankharor's feet as he smites a group of enemies on a sandstone plaque (fig. 3.5) with the lions biting and clawing at prisoners on the pylon of the Lion Temple at Naga (fig. 3.6).¹⁴

In scenes where a dog interacts with subjugated enemies—whether surveying or attacking—the dog acts as “the triumphal warden of the prisoners,” which makes it also “the guardian of the royal authority”¹⁵—a function that may have underlay dogs' role in burial rituals (see below). A more ambiguous scene appears on the pylon of Nahirqo's pyramid (Beg. N11), where a striding, double-crowned Horus is accompanied by a small canid, which cannot be clearly identified as either a dog or a jackal.¹⁶ The combination of the funerary nature of the monument and Horus, shown here seemingly as a representation of kingship, lends this canid a dual role, allowing it to evoke both the jackal-headed funerary deities depicted in pyramids—including

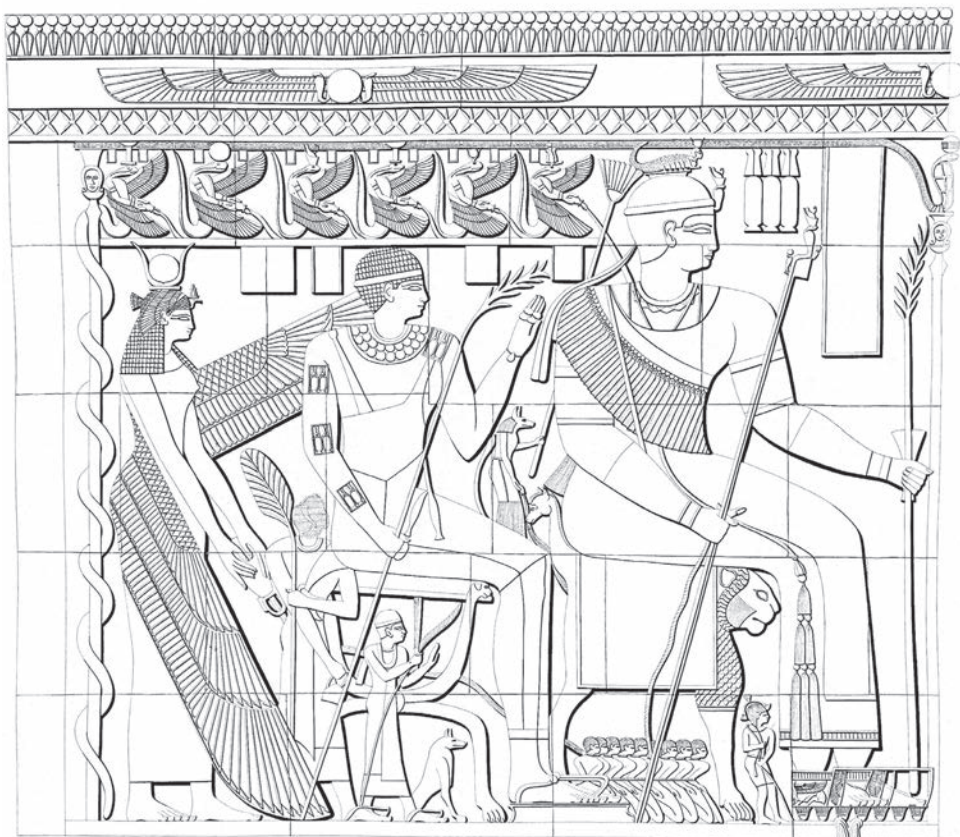


Figure 3.4. Relief from pyramid Beg. N11 at Meroe (Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 30).



Figure 3.5. Prince Arikankharor slaying his enemies. Worcester Art Museum 1922.145. **Cat. no. 56.**

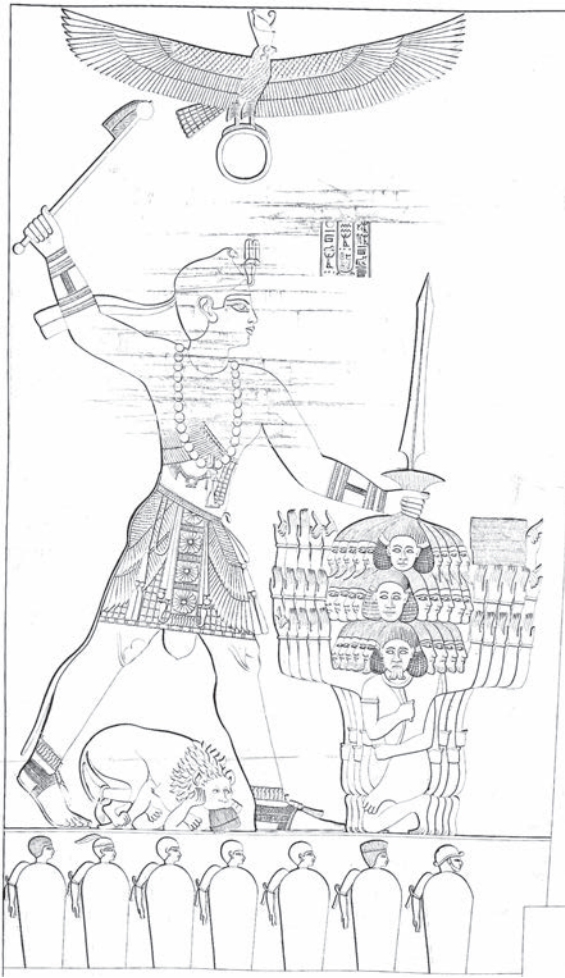


Figure 3.6. Scene on pylon of the Lion Temple at Naga (Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 56).

in this very pyramid (fig. 3.7)—and the dog as guardian of royal authority.

Movable Objects

Canids are also depicted on movable objects from Nubia—such as inlays, ceramics, and other vessels—where the animals play both decorative and iconographic roles. Ivory inlays from funerary beds dating to the Kerma period (ca. 2500–1550 BCE) include foxes or jackals (fig. 3.8), among other local fauna and deities. Other examples depict hunting dogs, such as an incised bronze bowl from Napatan-era (745–655 BCE) Meroe depicting a collared dog pouncing on an antelope (fig. 3.9) and a bronze

ewer from Meroitic-era Kerma with a handle shaped like a pouncing hunting dog.¹⁷ A Meroitic fine-ware jar from Ballana (fig. 3.10) bears a decorative border consisting of two reddish-brown, striding dogs whose ears, coats, and tails have been detailed to suggest shaggy fur, closely resembling the Nubian hunting dogs depicted in the New Kingdom tomb of Rekhmire at Thebes. That both dogs wear collars implies they belong to a human.

The relationship between dog and human is elaborated more explicitly on another Meroitic-period jar from the cemetery at Karanog (fig. 3.11), which shows a person leading a much more schematically drawn dog on a leash and holding a stick or staff of some kind, clearly depicting the human's control over the dog. Other examples of Meroitic pottery are decorated with similar motifs of humans controlling dogs, while a more unusual example from the cemetery of Faras shows a dog with a knife (or a leaf) following a bound prisoner



Figure 3.7. Anubis making offerings inside Beg. N11. Photo by G. Choimet.



Figure 3.8. Ivory inlay of a fox from Kerma tomb K1090, ca. 1700–1550 BCE. MFA 20.1553c. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

and two other humans in a procession (fig. 3.12), in a partial echo of the royal reliefs discussed above.¹⁸ Similar representations of canids (dogs or jackals) holding leaves or knives appear on a Meroitic jar from the same site.¹⁹

Archaeological Evidence

Both artistic representations and archaeological evidence of dogs (namely, skeletal remains) allow the identification of several types of dogs that lived in

ancient Nubia. They include the pariah type, the hound or sighthound type, and the larger mastiff type. (Note that these types are general and cannot be identified with modern breeds.) Within these three categories there existed great variability among individual ancient Nubian dogs.²⁰

Material remains of ancient Nubian dogs come primarily from cemeteries. Occasionally, dogs were buried in their own tombs; examples are attested from the A-Group culture (3700–2900 BCE).²¹ Most canid remains, however, come from humans' tombs that contain sacrificed animals.

Dog Sacrifices

Human burials that include dogs constitute a small but notable percentage of burials at a variety of Nubian sites, including Qustul, Kerma, Tombos, Abu Fatima, El Kadada, Berber, Gebel Moya, Ballana, and Firka, with variation in specific practices from site to site.²² No definitive statement can be made about how common the practice of sacrificing dogs was; although only a small number



Figure 3.9. Line drawing of a bronze bowl from Meroe tomb Beg. S155. Napatan period. MFA 24.900 (Dunham 1963, fig. 191).



Figure 3.10. Meroitic jar from Ballana decorated with shaggy dogs. ISACM E24137. **Cat. no. 57.**

of dog burials are preserved, dogs could have been included in other tombs that lack traces of them, or in tombs where early excavators ignored such traces.²³ However, animal sacrifice in general is especially (though not exclusively) associated with high-status burials.²⁴

The earliest dog sacrifices date to the Old Kerma period (2500–2000 BCE), with an uptick during the Middle Kerma (2000–1750 BCE) before a decrease in the Classical Kerma (1750–1500 BCE), when human sacrifices became more common.²⁵ Other dog sacrifices date to the Meroitic and post-Meroitic periods, attesting to a longstanding, if not necessarily continuous, burial practice. In many examples, the dogs were found alongside other animals and/or humans other than the tomb owner; the fact that they all appear to have died at the same time and been arranged intentionally in the tomb suggests the animals and humans other than the tomb owner were sacrificed and interred during a funerary ritual. The cause of death cannot be identified for all dogs found in burials, but in the cases of those whose cause of death can be



Figure 3.11. Meroitic jar with human and leashed dog from the Karanog cemetery. Penn E8193. Courtesy of Penn Museum.

determined—for example, the dogs whose remains were found in Kerma tombs 67 and 133, which died of strangulation and decapitation, respectively, and the many animals from Qustul whose remains show significant skull injuries²⁶—it is clear that they were violently executed, thus supporting the theory of sacrifice and ritual interment.

The dog burials largely follow a few patterns. In some cases, the burials consist of one person along with one or two dogs. For much of the twentieth century, these cases were interpreted materialistically: the dogs, often placed at the feet of the tomb owner, were theorized to be the deceased's favorite pets or guardians, which now accompanied their owner into the afterlife,²⁷ or a "sportsman's hounds [sacrificed] at the time of his interment."²⁸



Figure 3.12. Line drawing of the decoration on a jar from Faras. Ashmolean Museum AN1912.475 (Griffith 1924, pl. XXXIII).

In other cases, dogs appear with other sacrificed animals, often caprines; these arrangements have similarly been interpreted as a reflection of the dogs' role in life—in this case that of shepherds, rather than hunters or companion animals.²⁹ The third pattern consists of dog sacrifices that appear along with sacrificed humans, a phenomenon best known from the royal tombs at Qustul and Ballana and occurring as late as the fifth century CE.³⁰ These grave companions, too, have historically been interpreted as the deceased's human and animal servants in life, who now served him in death, though more recent work has called this assumption into question.³¹ One unusual example, tomb 3 at Qustul, contained forty sacrificed dogs, two sacrificed horses, and two sacrificed humans, perhaps evoking a royal hunting party and certainly reflecting the variety and multivalence of the various instantiations of burial sacrifices in ancient Nubia.³²

In recent years, scholars such as Patrice Lenoble and Rachael Dann have argued against traditional materialist interpretations of dog sacrifices (and of Nubian burials more generally), instead advocating for explanations that center not on the dog's function in life and its assumed continuation in the afterlife but rather on the funerary ritual during which the dogs were sacrificed, the symbolic meaning the ritual's performance was intended to effect, and the relationship of sacrificial rituals to broader social processes. Such a reframing, Lenoble argues,

integrates the archaeological remains—not only of dog sacrifices but also of burials and their associated equipment more generally—with Kushite and Meroitic art and iconography, as well as Egyptian sources reinterpreted and adapted by Nubians, thus enabling more holistic and informed interpretations. For example, in tombs that include both sacrificed dogs and humans—such as Qustul 17, with two dogs and seven humans—Lenoble sees a link with reliefs of dogs guarding prisoners (e.g., fig. 3.4) and suggests that the sacrifice of the dogs served as a demonstration of royal authority and that the sacrificed dogs symbolically enacted the role of royal guardian, just like the dogs in the reliefs.³³ Dann also favors Lenoble's suggestion of a triumphal sacrificial ritual and argues that “animals became the displaced focus of socio-political tensions concerning the holding of and the transmission of socio-political and magico-religious power” and, further, that the ritual significance of animal sacrifices rested on an “association between particular animals and the exercise of human power.”³⁴ In this way, sacrificed dogs are not simply guardians of the tomb or hunters for the deceased to enjoy in the afterlife but in fact symbols of humans', especially kings', power over other people and animals.

Conclusion

Textual, artistic, and archaeological evidence attests to the multivalence of canids in ancient Nubia. The

few Nubian textual sources that discuss canids—namely, inscriptions of Piankhy and Taharqo dating to the Napatan period (ca. 1000–270 BCE), with an Egyptian precursor at the New Kingdom temple of Amada—link these animals to royal power by comparing subjugated foreign enemies to submissive dogs. Both on Piankhy's Victory Stela and in Taharqo's Kawa inscriptions, the comparisons of enemies to dogs are quoted from Middle Egyptian poems. Later Nubian sources—namely, Meroitic royal reliefs and burial rituals—suggest that the precise relationship between dogs and displays of royal power was eventually reinterpreted: whereas in the Napatan texts the dogs are the object of royal power, Meroitic examples depict them as tools of that power's exercise over others.

Artistic representations of canids evince a sophisticated array of representational styles, from the schematic to the naturalistic to the iconographic, and show canids taking on a variety of roles, from those of hunters and companions in rock inscriptions and decorative art to funerary deities and participants in triumphal displays of royal

authority in reliefs. Taken together, the artistic representations of canids suggest that these animals played important roles in the lived experiences, as well as the religious, symbolic, and political imaginaries, of Nubian people.

Archaeological remains of canids consist primarily of sacrificed dogs in high-status burials, especially from the Old and Middle Kerma and Meroitic periods. While these burials were initially interpreted materialistically—that is, as evidence for the dogs' function during their lives, as well as the tomb owners' desire for that function to continue in the afterlife—more recent scholarship argues that dogs, along with other animals and often humans, were sacrificed as part of triumphal burial rituals intended to display the tomb owner's power and authority. Dog sacrifices constitute both the object and symbol of human power, thereby integrating canids' textual and iconographic symbolism from other sources: the living dog becomes an object of human power during the sacrificial ritual, after which its remains become an enduring symbol and guarantor of that power.

Notes

1. Youssef 1964.
2. Geoga in preparation.
3. Geoga 2022 and in preparation.
4. Lohwasser, Becker, and Blöbaum 2018.
5. Grimal 1981, 78–79, 284–86; Jasnow 1999, 196–97; Moers 2001, 131–33.
6. Howley forthcoming.
7. Leclant 1973b.
8. Hamdeen et al. 2021; Kleinitz 2007a; Cooper and Vanhulle 2019.
9. Kleinitz 2007a, 58, 71.
10. Leclant et al. 2000, REM 1165; Rilly 2020, 18–19.
11. For the recumbent jackals, see Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 43; for the weighing of the heart and sons of Horus, see Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pls. 44 and 46, respectively; other canid-headed deities appear in, e.g., Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pls. 26, 33–34, 36, 38–39.
12. Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 27; Budge 1907, vol. 1, 400–402.
13. See, e.g., Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pls. 19 and 23, for other examples of queens seated on lion-headed thrones. Ambiguity of representation is not limited to dogs and lions; for example, a relief in Beg. N17 has been interpreted as representing either a group of gazelles being led in a funeral procession (Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 111 with fig. 6) or a pack of royal hunting dogs (Lenoble 1999, 161).
14. Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 56; Baud 2010, 75 fig. 75.

15. Lenoble 1999, 171; see also Lenoble 1996.
16. Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 28b.
17. Bonnet 2001, 197, 215.
18. Adams 1986, 213–59, fig. 136.
19. BM EA51562.
20. Chaix in Bonnet et al. 1989, 37–38.
21. Hofmann 1967; Bonnet et al. 1989, 39.
22. See, e.g., Bonnet et al. 1989; Chaix 1999; Lenoble 1991, 1999; Guilbault 2016, 2017; on Tombos and Abu Fatima, also Stuart Tyson Smith, personal communication. Note that burials with sacrificed dogs are also attested in Egypt, e.g., in tomb 64 from Old Kingdom Elephantine (see Boessneck and von den Driesch 1982, 24).
23. Lenoble in Bonnet et al. 1989, 34.
24. Dann 2008, 111, with references.
25. Bonnet in Bonnet et al. 1989, 28; Flores 1996.
26. Chaix 1999, 112; Dann 2008, 111–12.
27. E.g., Chaix 1999, 110.
28. Garstang, Sayce, and Griffith 1911, 32; see also Lenoble in Bonnet et al. 1989, 32.
29. E.g., Bonnet et al. 1989, 28–30; Chaix 1999, 110, 117.
30. El-Batrawi 1935; Lenoble 1996; Dann 2007.
31. E.g., Emery 1948, 37, on Qustul tomb 2; cf. Dann 2007.
32. Lenoble in Bonnet et al. 1989, 34; see also Emery and Kirwan 1938, 37.
33. Lenoble 1999, 161; 2000, 107.
34. Dann 2008, 118.



4

Equids

Shayla Monroe

Horses and donkeys made an immense impact on cultural histories throughout the ancient Nile Valley and Sahara. The domesticated horse and the domesticated ass, or donkey, entered the cultural histories of Northeast Africa in very different ways, with the donkey being very likely an indigenous domesticate¹ and the horse an imported one. In ancient Sudan, horses and donkeys were present in depictions of life and in rituals at death. In Nubian art and ritual, equids signify political, economic, and religious ideals.

Donkeys

The importance of donkeys to the ancient Egyptian state has been well covered in the scholarly literature.² In addition to their crucial role in transporting goods into, out of, and within Egyptian territory, donkeys were used in agricultural activities such as threshing and plowing.³ Likely domesticated by Northeast African herders sometime around 4500 BCE,⁴ the earliest domesticated donkeys in Egypt are dated to 4600 BCE at Omari,⁵ and they appear on the Sudanese Nile, at Kerma, in the third millennium BCE.⁶ Donkey populations in ancient Kerma are difficult to estimate from the zooarchaeological evidence. Louis Chaix and colleagues report that horses and possibly donkeys were eaten at the Kerma center,⁷ but the ancient Egyptians recorded donkeys among livestock imported from the south,⁸ and depending on the magnitude of any donkey exports from Kerma to Egypt, zooarchaeological assemblages such as the ones examined by Chaix might yield low numbers of *Equus asinus* in a way that obscures the animal's economic importance.

Between 2500 and 1000 BCE, the donkey became indispensable to Egyptian transport and crucial Egyptian trade with other polities, including other Mediterranean states and polities toward the interior of Africa.⁹ In fact, donkeys were a key component in the cumulative effect that animals had on Saharan trade. Matthieu Honegger proposes that on the famous journey of the Egyptian trader Harkhuf along the Abu Ballas trail, the donkey caravan was escorted and facilitated by Kerman warriors.¹⁰ Harkhuf reported having returned with 300 donkeys carrying trade goods and tribute. It is possible that some of those donkeys were Kerman in origin.

Leather and wood saddle
from Qustul. ISACM
E20374A. **Cat. no. 60.**

In Saharan rock art, donkeys are generally underrepresented, likely because of one or more widespread religious taboos.¹¹ Any absence or underrepresentation of donkeys in Kushite art should be seen in the context of a widespread and long-lived avoidance of them in that medium, particularly in contrast to the horse, a closely related species that is abundantly depicted with passion throughout the Sahara from the eleventh century BCE onward. As Heiko Riemer and Frank Förster have stated, the reputation of the donkey in the ancient Sahara stood “in conflict with its economic importance.”¹²

The fact that donkeys, as Sethian animals, were considered to embody evil may have placed restrictions on how they could be bred or rendered.¹³ Dirk Huyge argues that donkeys were seen as “incarnations of evil and chaos,” which, according to Egyptian magical principles equating artistic representation with reality, would have been dangerous to draw or paint without a spear or knife pointed at the back of the donkey’s head to neutralize malignancy and render the depiction powerless.¹⁴ This taboo may not have had an exact or approximate equivalent on the Sudanese Nile, but it could give some regional context to any disparities between the iconographic presence of horses and that of donkeys in Nubian artistic traditions. Several donkey-shaped furniture inlays made of ivory were found in Classic Kerma funerary contexts (dating between 1700 and 1500 BCE; fig. 4.1). Mahmoud Emam reports images of donkeys on Meroitic funerary amulets.¹⁵

Horses

It is generally accepted that the domestic horse, *Equus caballus*, was introduced into ancient Egypt by the Hyksos in about 1700 BCE.¹⁶ The earliest horse specimen found in the Nile Valley south of the Delta is the “Buhen horse,” dated to 1675 BCE based on its archaeological context.¹⁷ Radiocarbon testing to date the Buhen horse failed, and although wear on one of its molars shows that the horse had



Figure 4.1. Ivory inlay of a donkey from Kerma. MFA 20.2134. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

worn a bit, consensus is lacking that a bit would have been the sole cause of the observed wear.¹⁸ Other horses from Nile Valley sites include specimens from Saqqara, Thebes, Soleb, and graves 211 and 212 at El-Kurru,¹⁹ with the most recent reports on Nile Valley specimens including horses from Tombos²⁰ and two previously unexamined horses from El-Kurru (graves 209 and 210).²¹ The Tombos horse dates to the early Napatan period (949±55 BCE) and, at the time of its discovery, marked the most complete skeleton in the Nile Valley before the Roman period.

Egyptian inscriptions confirm horse-drawn vehicles from 1290 to 1070 BCE, but based on the technology depicted in art, they may not have been the earliest chariots present in the Sahara. As early as the Eighteenth Dynasty, the viceroy of Kush under Pharaoh Tutankhamen, Amenhotep-Huy, was depicted in his tomb as traveling to Nubia and returning with horses transported in stalls on a boat.²² This scene may constitute the earliest

strong indicator that remarkable horses were part of Nubia's wealth and trade capital, in addition to gold and cattle.

Horses are prevalent in temple decoration throughout the various iterations of Kush, and the cultural symbolism and meaning of a horse seems to vary widely according to the context. Egyptian horse breeding proliferated during the Ramesside period,²³ but the scale of horse breeding in ancient Sudan eventually surpassed that of pharaonic Egypt. The social, political, and economic meaning of horses became more pronounced and intense during the Third Intermediate Period.²⁴ During the Napatan period, Kushites gained intercontinental status as outstanding horse breeders and trainers. Nubians were associated with excellent horsemanship and sought-after skills in horse training. Among several images of horses painted on Meroitic pottery, one shows the hand of a person holding a horse's lead rope while the horse pulls its head back; the overall image appears to illustrate the act of horse training.²⁵ By 729 BCE, the reputation of Kush's exceptional horses was recorded in Assyrian documents,²⁶ and it was established that horses constituted one of Kush's valuable economic assets.²⁷

Dar Dongola horses apparently underwent a reduction in size that may be related to prolonged

drought conditions.²⁸ This development begs the question of what sort of effort Kushite breeders expended to produce the long-legged horses they were known for in the ancient world. King Piankhy (747–716 BCE), the Kushite founder of Egypt's Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, is famous for his professed love of horses. An extended tribute scene engraved on the wall of his temple at Gebel Barkal shows multiple teams of horses being brought to Piankhy in tribute while attendants prostrate themselves before him (fig. 4.2).²⁹ It was Piankhy who initiated the custom of horse burials at El-Kurru and Gebel Barkal—a custom continued by his three successors, as discussed below.

Archaeologically, horse and donkey specimens are elusive throughout the Nile Valley and beyond. In the Sahara and along the Nile, equids are seldom found near food refuse or buried without other livestock. The best-known specimens are ritually buried and/or interred in human cemeteries. One might therefore assume that, as with the donkey, the archaeological record of horses in the Sahara does not fully represent their proliferation across the northern portion of the continent. Among the zooarchaeological evidence for horses in Nubia are horses that were intentionally buried, as well as specimens that may have been unintentionally

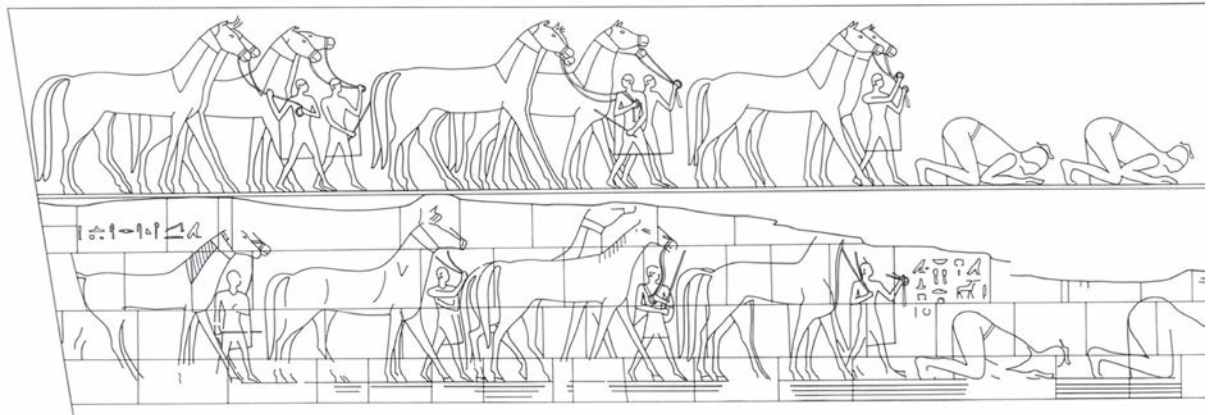


Figure 4.2. Procession of horses and prostrated foreigners facing Piankhy in a scene from the courtyard of the temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal (Wildung 1997, pl. 164).

buried. Exemplifying the latter, the archaeological context of the Buhen horse is not described as an intentional burial, since the remains were found between two defensive towers and beneath a layer of charred architectural material.³⁰

The history of intentional animal burials in the Middle Nile Valley dates to the beginning of the Holocene era with the bones of aurochs buried with humans at the site of Toshka.³¹ The ceremonial burial of equids apparently arrived in the Nile Valley with the Hyksos, and it was adopted by the Nubians but not the Egyptians.³² The relationship between equid burials and bovid burials may not be clear, but we do see that the presence of animal burials was consistent throughout Nubian history, with multiple traditions sometimes combined or syncretized in the same mortuary contexts. For example,

in the shafts leading into the burial chambers of the Meroe royal pyramids, nineteenth-century Italian treasure hunter Giuseppe Ferlini found the remains of horses as well as of camels and dogs.³³

Early excavators did not always prioritize the preservation of horse remains. The largest concentration of horse burials in the Nile Valley comes from the Kushite royal cemetery at El-Kurru (fig. 4.3). From these horses, twenty-four in all, four archaeological specimens were collected and found suitable for study. Two were transferred to Harvard University by George Andrew Reisner, where they were later analyzed in full by Sándor Bökönyi.³⁴ The other two El-Kurru horses were lost for a century after their remains were mixed with those of other animals and not clearly labeled when placed in storage.³⁵ These specimens were later uncovered

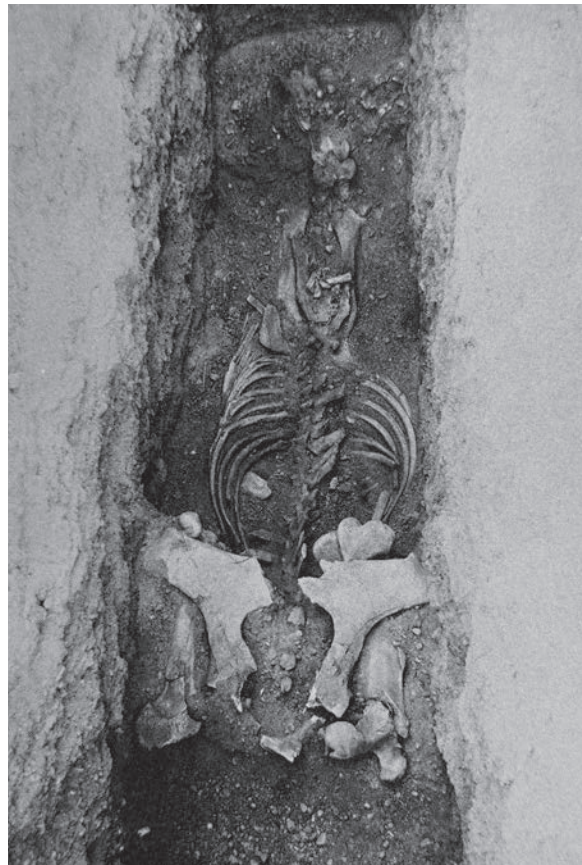


Figure 4.3. Grave pits with horse skeletons in situ at the necropolis of El-Kurru. Left: Ku 209; right: Ku 210 (Dunham 1950, pls. XXVIII.B and XXIX.A).

in the National Museum in Khartoum and analyzed by Claudia Näser and Giulia Mazzetti.³⁶

A consideration of artistic depictions and horse burials in the aggregate reveals some differences between the portrayal of horses in imagery and their physical remains. The horses in Egyptian iconographic representations are depicted as male, but the horse skeletons at Tombos and Tell el-Dab'a were sexed female.³⁷ Only further study can reveal whether these burials of mares were rare exceptions to a general rule or there is a true discrepancy between images of horses and the real-life management of herds. As a practice, were female horses separated into groups of brood mares and mares trained for battle?

Dows Dunham also reported horse remains from the Meroitic cemeteries at Begrawiya North and Begrawiya South, but these remains were not described or physically analyzed in any detail.³⁸ The loss of these data is perhaps made more unfortunate by the striking image in Pyramid 32 at Begrawiya North described by Timothy Kendall as a “fully caparisoned horse, wearing a bell collar, being led to sacrifice.”³⁹ Without the preservation of the specimen, another opportunity to compare visual and material data was lost.

Overall, seventeen horse skeletons from ancient Nile Valley burials have been studied.⁴⁰ Several horses have been thoroughly analyzed, including the Tombos horse, which was found fully articulated and intentionally positioned in the shaft of a tomb (figs. 4.4–4.5). This horse was an adult female with arthritis and osteological stress consistent with pulling a chariot.⁴¹ The trappings of the Tombos horse bear mention in that they show the intentionality behind the burial: they included an iron cheek piece (which would have been valuable and exclusive) and a burial shroud.⁴² Horse burials were also excavated on Sai Island and at the site of Soleb. Horses buried at Hillat al-Arab, near El-Kurru, were dated to 1250–750 BCE, and the remains were found associated with lavish indicators of wealth.⁴³

Each of the last four kings of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty—Piankhy, Shabaka, Shebitqu, and Tanwetamani—was attended by four to eight horses in death, and each horse was buried standing up and with its head facing away from the tomb as though ready to transport the king for travel.⁴⁴ The El-Kurru horses were lavishly decorated; their dressings included plume holders, amulets, and beads.⁴⁵ I consider the mortuary treatment of horses at El-Kurru to be distinctly Nubian/Kushite rather



Figure 4.4. Horse skeleton in situ in tomb at Tombos. Photo courtesy of Michele Buzon.

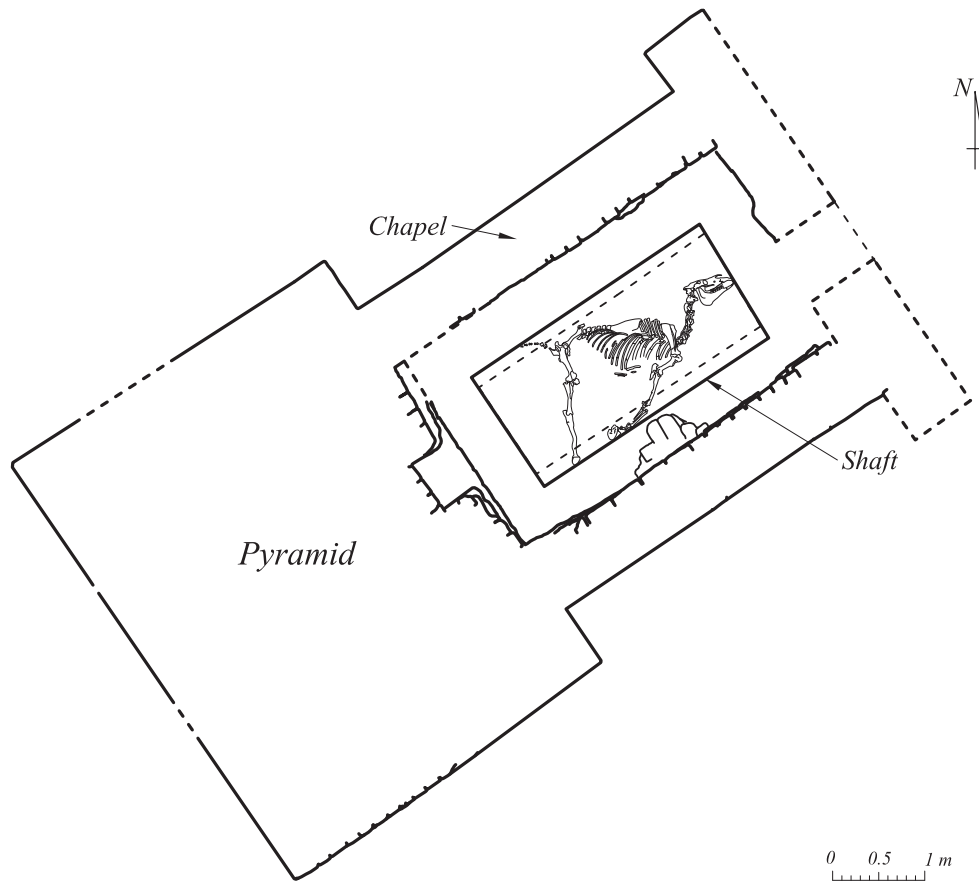


Figure 4.5. Position of horse skeleton in tomb shaft at Tombos. Line drawing courtesy of Michele Buzon.

than reflecting a practice shared with Egypt.⁴⁶ These burials, occurring 150 years after the Tombos burial, show the continuity of a Nubian tradition.⁴⁷

Horse riding came later to the Nile Valley, after chariotry was established, and it is riding that became especially associated with successive Nubian cultures. The image of the equestrian is prolific in engravings and graffiti throughout Kushite temples, including those at El-Kurru, Gebel Barkal, and Kawa. The Napatan king Nastasen writes on his stela found at Nuri that he traveled to the temple at Gebel Barkal on a “great horse” for his coronation.⁴⁸ It seems relevant that he describes himself as “on” the horse—that is, riding it rather than being in a chariot; this inscription reflects a common motif of the king as an equestrian, such as the scratched

pictograph of the mounted king at Banganarti. A graffito was later added to the depiction, along with representations of other mounted men.⁴⁹

Even with all the other meanings assigned to horses throughout Nubian history, it is difficult to decouple the image of the Nubian horse from the concept of war. The Meroitic temple known as M250 bears many engraved panels with fighters on horseback and scenes of cavalry warfare.⁵⁰ Horsepower was so important in Meroe that one of the few Meroitic words known to us is *mreke* “horse.”⁵¹ Meroitic horses even had prisoners of war depicted on their trappings and decorations (figs. 4.6–4.7).⁵² A battle-trained horse provides much more than active transport—the creature itself can also be a weapon, as attested by the “fighting” horses raised



Figure 4.6. Bronze horse bell decorated with kneeling captives. MFA 24.858a. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

in Dongola Reach during the Sudanic kingdoms.⁵³ Rock-art engravings of horses are reported from Mograt Island between the Fourth and Fifth Cataracts in Sudan, where a few pictographs of people fighting on horseback have been found.⁵⁴

During periods of imperial expansion and counter-imperial defense, horses became the key, make-or-break factor in the Nile Valley. If the archaeological definition of an empire is an expansionist state, boundaries and borders are subject to key advantages in distance covered at speed: in the ancient world, for the existence of an empire based on geographical territory reached and held, the horse was absolutely central.⁵⁵ It was a useful symbol that Kushite elites could employ to invoke the memories of prestige associated with chariotry and the military might of New Kingdom Egypt as often echoed in the way horses were depicted in its art.⁵⁶

Equids seem to serve an iconographic function in Nubian religion, though in some contexts we cannot wholly separate the religious and political meanings. One such place is Piankhy's temple at Gebel Barkal, where the walls bear depictions of warriors on horseback. To some extent, horses are also associated with solar gods in the Nile Valley at large.⁵⁷ In later antiquity, horses are a prominent theme in temple graffiti in which travelers included



Figure 4.7. Bronze horse bell decorated with bound captives. MFA 24.859. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

horses and other animals as components in images of religious pilgrimage. For instance, in graffito T9 at El-Kurru, a rider on a horse is specifically described as a "pilgrim,"⁵⁸ and it is important to consider that a pilgrimage is distinct from quotidian travel for mundane reasons.

In graffiti, at least, horses are sometimes depicted alongside other species—cows at El-Kurru, for example, and other domesticated and wild animals at Musawwarat.⁵⁹ In the El-Kurru graffiti, two running horses are shown next to a bird and two more horses are standing still. At some point, it may not be necessary to ascribe a specific meaning to every artistic representation created by Nubians observing their world. As Emberling and Davis point out, some representations simply record scenes from their everyday lives.⁶⁰



Figure 4.8. Horse riders in wall scene in Temple M250 at Meroe (Török 1997b, pl. 80).

Horses in Nubia continued to be important after the end of the last Kushite state. As we search for what is remembered in the art of later Sudanic kingdoms, the continuity of practices around horsemanship gives us occasional glimpses into similar values in late antiquity (figs. 4.8). For instance, the horses from Ballana and Qustul are known for their elaborate trappings, which hearken back to the lavish ornamentation of Nubian horses that date to the Third Intermediate Period.

Conclusion

It has been argued that the Tombos horse indicates ancient efforts to maintain the establishment of wealth and standing in a postcolonial setting.⁶¹ As Nubian equids served an iconographic role in mortuary contexts beyond the burial of their remains, so donkeys and horses served as a source of economic and social capital. These emblematic equids both represented wealth and created wealth for Nubian polities.

Notes

1. Kimura et al. 2013; Marshall 2016.
2. See especially Förster 2015; Marshall 2016; Mitchell 2018.
3. Marshall 2016; Mitchell 2018, 48.
4. Marshall 2016, 373, 394–95.
5. Boessneck and von den Driesch 1990.
6. Chaix 1993a.
7. Chaix, Dubosson, and Honegger 2012.
8. Honegger et al. 2009.
9. Förster 2007.
10. Honegger 2023.
11. Huyge 2007.
12. Riemer and Förster 2021.
13. Epstein 1971, vol. 2, 564.

14. Huyge 2007.
15. Emam 2023.
16. Heidorn 1997; Raulwing and Clutton-Brock 2009.
17. Clutton-Brock 1974; Raulwing and Clutton-Brock 2009.
18. Heidorn 1997; Raulwing and Clutton-Brock 2009.
19. Bökönyi 1993; Näser and Mazzetti 2020.
20. Schrader et al. 2018.
21. Näser and Mazzetti 2020.
22. Litecky 2021.
23. Epstein 1971, vol. 2, 30.
24. Schrader et al. 2018.
25. Török 1997c, 103.
26. Heidorn 1997.
27. Näser and Mazzetti 2020.
28. Żurawski 2019, 97–98.
29. Wildung 1997, 164–65.
30. Raulwing and Clutton-Brock 2009.
31. Gatto 2019.
32. Schrader et al. 2018.
33. Sanhoury Al-Rayah 1981.
34. Bökönyi 1993.
35. Näser and Mazzetti 2020.
36. Näser and Mazzetti 2020.
37. Schrader et al. 2018.
38. Heidorn 1997; Näser and Mazzetti 2020.
39. Kendall 1982, fig. 69.
40. Näser and Mazzetti 2020.
41. Schrader et al. 2018.
42. Schrader et al. 2018.
43. Raulwing and Clutton-Brock 2009; Schrader et al. 2018.
44. Emberling 2019, 7.
45. Schrader et al. 2018.
46. Davis and Emberling 2019b.
47. Schrader et al. 2018.
48. Ikram 2012.
49. Davis and Emberling 2019b.
50. Török 1997c, 80–81; 2009.
51. Rilly and de Voogt 2012, 194.
52. Ikram 2012.
53. Heidorn 1997.
54. Bakhiet 2019.
55. See Chaffetz 2024 for an in-depth discussion.
56. Schrader et al. 2018.
57. Ikram 2012.
58. Davis and Emberling 2019a, 150.
59. Davis 2019.
60. Emberling and Davis 2019, xvii.
61. Schrader et al. 2018.



5

Felines

Emily Teeter

The following felines are known to have inhabited Sudan:¹

- *Panthera leo* (lion)
- *Panthera pardus* (leopard)
- *Acinonyx jubatus* (cheetah)
- *Felis catus* (domestic cat)
- *Felis sylvestris libyca* (southern wild cat)
- *Felis sylvestris* (wild cat)
- *Caracal caracal* (caracal)

The lion, leopard, cheetah, and domestic cat are attested in ancient Nubia by faunal remains, reliefs, and inscriptions or by small finds dating from the A-Group culture through the Meroitic period (3750 BCE–340 CE). Reliefs and texts from Egypt also shed light on felines in and from Nubia. By far the most common feline shown in Nubian sources is the lion.

Faunal Record for Felines

The faunal record is sparse. Bones of leopards have been dated to the Early Holocene (9000–5000 BCE),² and a few examples of lion remains can be ascribed to the Middle Holocene (5000–3000 BCE).³ The burials of three “young” lions—one of them ornamented with an *udjat* amulet at its neck, another with a bead at its throat and on an ankle—were discovered at Sanam, dating to the Napatan era.⁴ The end of a lion’s humerus was found at Soba; the bone had cut marks, indicating that the animal had been butchered.⁵

Two bones from cats have been recovered at Meroe. The bones’ size indicates that these cats were domesticated.⁶ Cat bones have also been documented at Soba, but whether they were domestic or wild could not be determined.⁷

The Lion in Nubia

A-Group (3750–2900 BCE)

Perhaps the earliest representations of a lion in Nubia are rock drawings—at Hagar Zerga at the Fourth Cataract and at Bir Nurayet in the Red Sea Hills.⁸ Other examples have been noted on Boni Island and at Sihan near the Third

Wooden furniture leg
in the shape of a lion.
Brooklyn Museum
37.42E. **Cat. no. 51.**

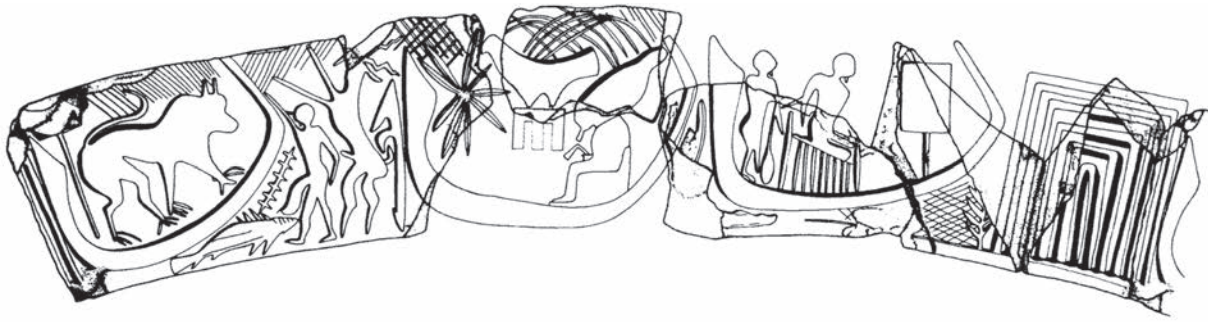


Figure 5.1. Incense burner decorated with the image of a feline in a boat (at far left) from tomb L 24 at Qustul. A-Group, ca. 3200–3000 BCE. ISACM E24069 (Williams 1986, pl. 24). **Cat. no. 64.**

Cataract.⁹ But overall, there are few graffiti of felines in Nubia.¹⁰

Early objects that portray a lion include clay figurines found at Mahal Teglinos in eastern Sudan dating to the mid-third to early second millennium¹¹ and a later, green-glazed quartz head of a lion from Sayala.¹² What has been interpreted as a lion appears on the A-Group (3200–3000 BCE) Qustul incense burner, on whose sides three boats are shown (fig. 5.1; **cat. no. 64**). One boat conveys a seated human figure who wears the White Crown of Upper Egypt; another carries a kneeling prisoner, whose arms are pinioned behind him; and in the third is the presumed lion.¹³ The facade of a palace appears between the feline and the prisoner. Although the exact significance of this symbol is unclear, the juxtaposition of the lion with a royal figure and a palace suggests that, even at this early date, the lion was associated with the power of the king.

C-Group (2400–1600 BCE)

The lion is not represented in the C-Group culture.

Kerma Period (2450–1550 BCE)

The Kerma period has rich lion imagery. Eighteen copper inlays of lions and one of ivory, which once decorated the footboards of beds, were recovered from tumulus KIII, graves K305 and K334, at



Figure 5.2. Appliqué with four lion heads from a leather cap found in grave K1044 at Kerma, containing a group of at least five individuals who were buried in the tumulus of their ruler. Classic Kerma period, 1700–1550 BCE. MFA 13.4283.9. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Kerma.¹⁴ Mica appliqués in the form of double lion heads that once decorated a leather cap came from tomb K1044 (fig. 5.2).¹⁵ Two large faience inlays in the form of a lion were positioned over the entrance of Kerma's Eastern Deffufa, the city's main temple (fig. 5.3).¹⁶ Blue-glazed quartzite statuettes of lions were recovered from Kerma funerary chapel KII and tumulus KIII.¹⁷ An extraordinary vessel from K318 is painted with an image of two lions attacking a man.¹⁸



Figure 5.3. Wall inlay in the form of a striding lion from the Eastern Temple (*deffufa*) at Kerma. Classic Kerma period, 1700–1550 BCE. MFA 20.1224. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Egyptian Occupation (1550 to ca. 1000/900 BCE)

References to felines in Nubia in this period are external and consist of images of lions, cheetahs, and leopards from Nubia in Egyptian paintings and reliefs (see fig. 8.5 in chapter 8). The Egyptian king is described as one who “roars” like a lion, and the animal may be seen running alongside the king in battle scenes. In Egyptian-commissioned scenes located in Nubia, the lion is a symbol of the pharaoh’s power, and a striding lion appears associated with the names of Thutmose I and Thutmose III at Kurgus.¹⁹ In a scene in the temple of Ramesses II at Beit el-Wali, the king is shown with his “pet lion,” perhaps imported from Nubia, next to his throne.²⁰ Here, the quasi-domesticated lion may symbolize the Egyptian king’s domination of Nubia.

The Egyptian lion-headed goddess Bastet was present in Nubia, as attested by a fine golden amulet of the deity found in a Napatan-era tomb at Meroe inscribed in Egyptian hieroglyphs for the “Great

Chief Pamay,” perhaps a chief of the Delta, and thus a foe of Piankhy. It has been suggested that the statuette was brought from Egypt as booty by the armies of Piankhy.²¹

Napatan Period (ca. 1000/900–270 BCE)

Lions are present in the iconography of the Napatan period, generally following the imagery of lions in contemporary Egypt. Taharqo’s reliefs in Temple T at Kawa show him as a mighty sphinx trampling his enemies,²² a motif known from at least the Egyptian Old Kingdom and exemplified by later scenes of Thutmose IV on a wooden panel from a throne and on the interior of the body of his chariot.²³ The association of the Kushite king and the lion in Nubia is clearly evidenced by sphinxes of Taharqo from Kawa,²⁴ Senkamanisken from Gebel Barkal,²⁵ and Shepenwepet II from Karnak,²⁶ which visually combine the power of a lion with the being of the ruler or a member of the royal family. The Taharqo

sphinx deviates from the original Egyptian model through its round face with high cheekbones and heavy lips, its ruff, the way the ears are portrayed (an archaizing feature from the Middle Kingdom sphinxes of Amenemhet III more than a millennium earlier), and the addition of the double uraeus symbolizing the domination of the Napatan rulers over both Kush and Egypt that appears from the Twenty-Fifth (Kushite) Dynasty of Egypt (747 BCE) onward.

Ivory game pieces in the form of lions were recovered from the tomb of King Shabaqo (Ku. 15).²⁷ A gilded-silver pendant of a ram-headed lion seated atop a column inlaid with colored glass, recovered from the tomb of the pyramid of an anonymous queen of Piankhy (744–714 BCE) at El-Kurru (Ku. 55), is unlike any Egyptian models (fig. 5.4). As with some of the lions from Meroitic palace B1500 at Gebel Barkal (see below), the sphinx's ram head is turned to the side.²⁸ This piece was found with five other amulets, some of which are firmly grounded in Egyptian design (a seated Maat, Thoth with a Maat feather, a faience winged-scarab pectoral), while others reflect an innovative combination of old and new forms,²⁹ such as a unique crystal pendant topped with the head of Hathor rendered in gold (see fig. 2.8 in chapter 2).³⁰ Another object with new features is a tiny and quite extraordinary faience sphinx amulet showing the animal seated, its front legs fully extended. Its prominent mammary glands and a peculiar short hairstyle set it apart from other such representations.³¹ Lions and sphinxes were also employed in the design of the feet of wooden furniture,³² such as beds and thrones (fig. 5.5).³³

Meroitic Period (ca. 270 BCE–340 CE)

62

The lion became very prominent in the Meroitic period, when the gods Apedemak, Arensnuphis, Mahes, and Dedwen assumed that form or acquired leonine epithets (see below). Foremost of these gods was Apedemak, an entirely Nubian god who gained special prominence in the Meroitic period. He was the protector of the king and the guarantor

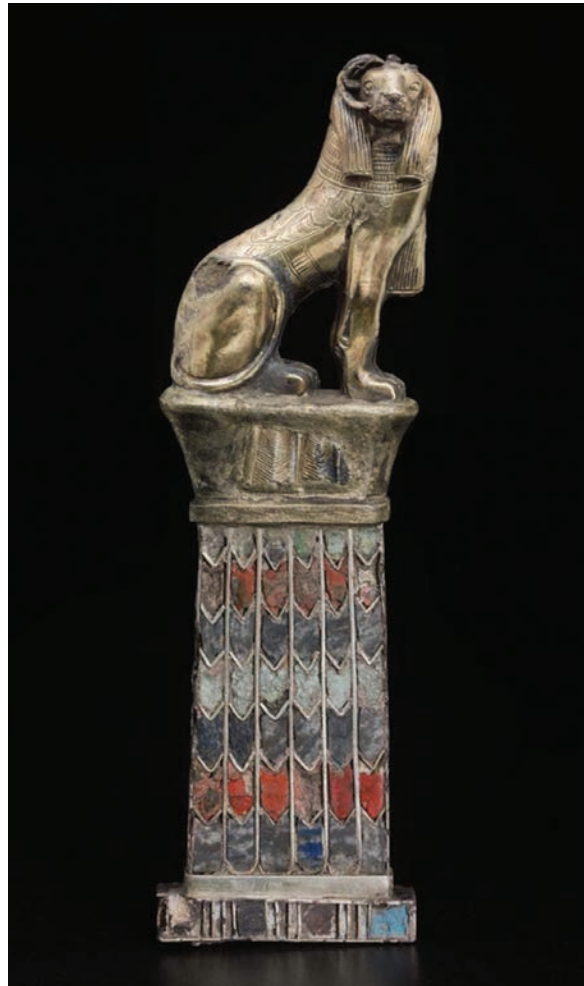


Figure 5.4. Pendant with a ram-headed sphinx from El-Kurru. Reign of Piankhy, 744–714 BCE. MFA 24.972. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

of his legitimacy. He was also associated with water and hence with fertility and the king's control and protection of water sources. His major temples are located at his pilgrimage center at Musawwarat es-Sufra, at Naga, and at Meroe on the Butana Plain,³⁴ the natural range of the lion in the Meroitic period.³⁵ His image as a lion was so prominent in temple reliefs, sculpture, and smaller votive figurines at Naga that the site has been dubbed "the City of Lions".³⁶ At Naga, a textual reference to "Apedemak of Tolkte [Naga]" dating to the late third century BCE indicates that he was known decades before temples were built in his honor in



Figure 5.5. Furniture leg in the form of a seated lion with the cartouche of King Aspelta on its chest, from Napata(?). Reign of Aspelta, ca. 593–568 BCE. Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 37.42E. Photo courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum. **Cat. no. 51.**

about 200 BCE.³⁷ The cult of Apedemak is attested first at Musawwarat es-Sufra, dated to about 225 BCE, although the iconography of the god may have developed earlier.³⁸

It has been suggested that Apedemak is the Nubian version of the Egyptian lion-headed god Mahe³⁹ and even a “creation of the Amun priesthood.”⁴⁰ The worship of Apedemak was not restricted to formal temples, as evidenced by two caves at Naga decorated with high-relief images of a lion head.⁴¹

Apedemak’s name is composed of *apede* (creator) + *mk* (god).⁴² Among his epithets are “Lord of Naga,” “Lord of Musawwarat es-Sufra,” “the Great

God,” “Foremost of Bowland,” “the Lion of the South,” and “Powerful of Arm.”⁴³ Most of these appellations are not unique to him.

The character of Apedemak is reflected in a third-century BCE hymn written in Egyptian hieroglyphs in the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra:

Great God, Who comes to him who calls upon him, bearer of the secret, (whose true) being is concealed, without his being seen by anybody. Who performs [. . .] for men and women, without <his> being repelled in heaven (or on) earth. Who makes food for all people, in this his name of “Sound Guardian.” Who shoots his fiery blast against his enemy; in this his name of “He-whose-might-is-great”; who slaughters rebels. . . .⁴⁴

Many of these divine characteristics are shared with the Egyptian god Amun.⁴⁵

In the Meroitic period, Apedemak became a “national symbol of kingship and renewal.”⁴⁶ He was the protector of the king and the source of life-giving water that guaranteed fertility and rebirth.⁴⁷ This association of the lion and water began in the Ptolemaic era, when the annual rise of the Nile was pegged to “when the sun is in the sign of the lion” rather than to the traditional month of Akhet.⁴⁸ The water sources themselves—basins (*hafirs*) and wells—were considered to be symbolic sources of the Nile.⁴⁹ They were connected with royal power and served as places where the legitimacy of the king was ritually expressed.⁵⁰ Appropriately, images of lions appear at water sources.⁵¹ Foremost among them is the water feature M94-194-195 (formerly known as the “royal baths”) at Meroe. The water inlets of the tank structure were decorated with lion protomes and with a statue of a recumbent lion.⁵² There were five large lions around the *hafir* at Basa,⁵³ four recumbent lions and three seated lions encircled the *hafir* at Umm Usuda,⁵⁴ and a small lion head decorated the spout for a basin in the Apedemak temple at Meroe.⁵⁵

The waterspouts of Meroitic temples take the form of lions,⁵⁶ presumably to be identified as

Apedemak because of the god's presence at water sources. Because waterspouts in Egyptian temples had the same form from the Fifth Dynasty (ca. 2450 BCE) through the Roman period,⁵⁷ the lion waterspout in Nubia appears to be an example of Nubian adoption and reinterpretation of northern styles.⁵⁸

Some vessels used for water offerings were decorated with lunar crescents, an emblem related to Apedemak.⁵⁹ Many depictions of the lion wear the *bembem*-crown with a lunar disk.⁶⁰

Apedemak appeared in many forms, including the following.

Lion

This manifestation of the god is very common, especially in the form of statues positioned at the entrance of a temple or palace. The lion can be seated and forward facing, as at the entrances to palace B1500 at Gebel Barkal, or the head may be turned to the left.⁶¹ The lion statues from B1500 retain traces of red, light-blue, and yellow pigment. When recumbent and viewed from the side, the lion may turn its head to the viewer.⁶² Pairs of lions are documented in front of building 2100 at Naga,⁶³ in front of the first pylon at Philae (fig. 5.6), and at the entrances of the Lion Temple (fig. 5.7)⁶⁴ and Temple 300 at Musawwarat es-Sufra,⁶⁵ and numerous statues in the form of lions were recovered from around the latter.⁶⁶ The Eastern Temple at Wad Ben Naga (WBN 500) "most likely" had seated lion statues at its main entrance, and lion statuettes were also found in the palace of Amanishakheto and in the Typhonium there.⁶⁷ A recumbent lion was recovered from the temple at Hamadab.⁶⁸ The Hathor chapel at Naga has antithetical pairs of lions over a doorway.⁶⁹

The reliefs on columns in the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra display lions with and without wings, one lion-headed figure riding a lion,⁷⁰ some lions attacking enemies, some wearing the *bembem*-crown of Apedemak (fig. 5.8),⁷¹ and some seated in a shrine.⁷²

A faience wall inlay with a lion head wearing the *bembem*-crown atop a lunar crescent was



Figure 5.6. One of a pair of lions at the entrance of the temple of Isis at Philae. These very Nubian-inspired monuments were positioned in front of Egyptian obelisks, illustrating the dual audience of the temple. Photo by E. Teeter.

recovered from Natakamani's palace (B1500) at Gebel Barkal.⁷³ Such faience wall inlays in the shape of lions or sphinxes were popular in Kushite temples and palaces.⁷⁴ The lion form of the god is also common as a decorative motif on the jewelry of Queen Amanishakheto.⁷⁵ An "ear ornament" excavated at Meroe in 1922 shows the head of the lion in profile atop a crescent, the composition surrounded by blue inlay (fig. 5.9).⁷⁶

Images of lions attacking slain enemies that, according to their Egyptian prototype, represent the power of the king may be seen on pylons of the Lion Temple at Naga (Temple 300), where they may also refer to the Nubian god;⁷⁷ in the Great Enclosure of Musawwarat es-Sufra;⁷⁸ and on a number of ceramics and small finds (fig. 5.10).⁷⁹ Statues



Figure 5.7. Lions at the entrance of the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra. Photo by G. Choimet.

of lions devouring a captive are known, such as the two lions that guarded the temple at Basa.⁸⁰

Many small objects in the form of a lion, presumably associated with the cult of Apedemak, have been recovered at archaeological sites, such as a faience amulet from Karanog⁸¹ and an amulet from Hamadab that depicts a lioness suckling her cubs.⁸²

Human with a Lion's Head, Usually Wearing the hemhem-Crown

This form of the god is very common in temples in the south, including on the south wall of the Lion Temple at Naga (fig. 5.11)⁸³ and on columns at Amara.⁸⁴ Apedemak appears many times in this form in the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra; on the south, north, and west exterior walls he is shown standing before the royal family,⁸⁵ and on the west, south, and north interior walls he is twice shown enthroned (north and west walls), and once

before the royal family, always holding his bow and arrows with a lion by his side or on a leash.⁸⁶ The god is also shown on many small objects, including a plaque in the Walters Art Museum,⁸⁷ a bronze and silver ring in the ISAC Museum in Chicago (fig. 5.12), and an alabaster statue from Hamadab.⁸⁸

Human with Four Arms and Multiple Lion's Heads, Topped with a hemhem-Crown

Apedemak appears thus on the back (west) exterior wall of the Lion Temple at Naga (fig. 5.13). The idea that this representation was inspired by Indian art⁸⁹ has been rejected, and it is now thought to represent the god involved in multiple simultaneous actions.⁹⁰ The overall composition and its location on the back wall have also been compared to Egyptian contra temples, where a god was available to provide solace to anyone who approached it.⁹¹ This utterly unique representation recalls the one found on a



Figure 5.8. Images of lions with and without wings, a griffin, and a lion-headed figure riding a lion in scenes of subjugation of wild animals or enemies on the columns of the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra. First century CE (Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 75).

terra-cotta seal from the island of Tila depicting a three-headed lion on a crescent moon, with its tail ending in a uraeus.⁹² The association of the lion and serpent is discussed further below.

Lion with a Serpent's Body

The best-preserved examples of this form appear on the exterior ends of the pylons of the Lion Temple at Naga (fig. 5.14).⁹³ The Naga examples are unique, for they depict the god with human shoulders and arms. Another example, enclosed in a cartouche, occurs numerous times on fragments of a leather garment from a Meroitic tomb at Semna South.⁹⁴ Other, incompletely preserved examples that are presumed to show the Naga form of the lion god occur on doorjambs at Temple 300 at Musawwarat

es-Sufra (fig. 5.15)⁹⁵ and on a piece of wood from the Meroitic pyramid of Prince Akinidad at Gebel Barkal.⁹⁶ At Naga and Musawwarat es-Sufra, the god emerges from an acanthus flower.

Serpent

Apedemak may appear in this form on the walls of the water feature at Meroe.⁹⁷

Unique Hybrids of a Lion and Other Animals

Assumed to be representations of Apedemak, these forms include a lion-headed frog at Faras;⁹⁸ a lioness-headed fly (identified as Sekhmet) from tomb W603 at Meroe;⁹⁹ and a lion-headed bee and lion-headed bull(?) that appear on rings of Amanishakheto, also from Meroe.¹⁰⁰ The lion is



Figure 5.9. Ear ornament with the head of Apedemak from Meroe. Meroitic period, 270 BCE–340 CE. MFA 24.495. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 5.10. Baked-clay vessel from grave 675 at Faras painted with a scene of lions attacking men—a composition that is rare on pottery but well known in temple reliefs, and also a rare representation of a nonroyal Meroite. Meroitic period, second to third century CE. Ashmolean Museum AN1912.321. Photo © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.



Figure 5.11. King Natakamani (at right) adoring Apedemak, shown as a lion-headed man, on the south wall of the Lion Temple at Naga. First century CE. Photo by G. Choimet.



Figure 5.12. Ring with lion-headed god Apedemak trampling a serpent, shooting a bow, and raising a mace(?), from tomb B242 at Ballana (ca. 100 BCE)—a rare representation of the god from Lower Nubia. ISACM E22771. **Cat. no. 54.**

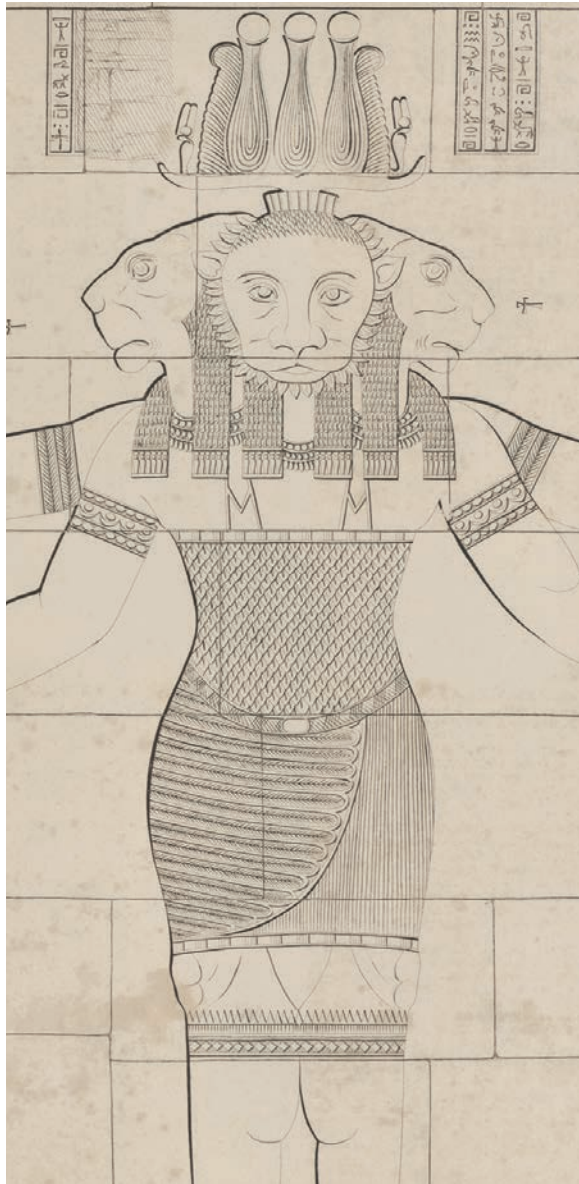


Figure 5.13. Three-headed Apedemak with hemhem-crown and four human arms on the back (west) wall of the Lion Temple at Naga. First century CE (Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 59).

also frequently hybridized with the ram, a creature referred to as a *criosphinx* that represents the god Amun of Pnubs (Kerma–Dokki Gel).¹⁰¹

Apedemak and the King

Apedemak was the protector of the king and his legitimacy, as shown in the king's coronation



Figure 5.14. Apedemak as a serpent with lion's head and human arms on the south face of the pylon of the Lion Temple at Naga. First century CE. Photo by G. Choimet.

rituals on columns 9 and 10 in the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat es-Sufra,¹⁰² where the god gives the king legitimacy and power over his enemies. As already noted, the entrances to Meroitic palaces (like those of the temples) were guarded by statues of the lion god—the palace of Natakamani (B1500) at Gebel Barkal had four statues at each entrance,¹⁰³ and Temple 300 at Musawwarat es-Sufra an engaged lion on each side of its entrance (see fig. 5.15).¹⁰⁴

The king was “identified with the living water of the inundation,” and his power was renewed with the annual flood at the new year.¹⁰⁵ Because the water sources were protected by Apedemak, images of the god appear on basins and tanks as symbols of the deity's support of the king.



Figure 5.15. Lions and (presumably) the serpent-headed Apedemak flanking the entrance to Temple 300 at Musawwarat es-Sufra. Meroitic, 240 BCE–50 CE. Photo by E. Teeter.

Many Meroitic royal pyramid chapels show the ruler sitting on a lion throne, its sides decorated with a striding lion,¹⁰⁶ a motif known from New Kingdom Egypt and revived later in the south. In some cases the lion is replaced by a dog, depicted seated, reclining beside the sovereign, or tearing enemies apart.¹⁰⁷

Lastly, the prominence of the leonine figure on numerous seals and sealings from the Meroitic period, particularly from Natakamani's palace at Gebel Barkal,¹⁰⁸ further illustrates the close association between lion imagery and the royal administration.

Other Leonine Deities of Nubia

Dedwen (also known as Dedum or Dedun), who is usually shown fully human, is also shown as a man with a lion's head at the Kalabsha temple.¹⁰⁹ Dedwen

is a war god, and like Apedemak he usually holds a bow and arrows and is clad in leather armor.¹¹⁰ His Nubian origins are clearly expressed in the Pyramid Texts, where he is referred to as "the youth of Upper Egypt who came out of Nubia."

Arensnuphis, who is paired with Sebiuemeker at the entrance to many southern temples,¹¹¹ is usually shown as a human but is referred to as the "Lion of the South" at Dakka and Philae.¹¹²

Shu, Egyptian god of the sky, in Nubia bears the "Lion of the South" and is shown with a human body and lion's head at Dendur and Dakka.¹¹³

Tutu, represented in Egypt as a sphinx, is shown in that same form in the pronaos of the Philae temple.¹¹⁴ There, in the temple of Arensnuphis, he bears the epithet "Great of Roaring."¹¹⁵ He is also present in the Kalabsha temple, where he appears as a human with a lion's head and wearing the *bembem*-crown.¹¹⁶

Mahes can be shown as a lion-headed man, usually with the solar disk and uraeus. He is known in Egypt from at least the Middle Kingdom. In the Egyptian pantheon, he was the son of Bastet or Sekhmet. In the Third Intermediate Period, his cult centers were at Bubastis and Tell Mukdam. He is shown in the Egyptian temples in Nubia at Philae, Dendur, and Dakka, so he was familiar to Meroites.¹¹⁷ In Nubia, Mahes protected the king from the forces of chaos. Louis Žabkar has posited that by the Thirtieth Dynasty in Egypt, the image of a lion devouring the king's enemies is to be identified as Mahes. The god is known from a faience cylinder from building M200–221 at Meroe, where, in the form of a striding lion, he is shown with three rams.¹¹⁸ This image is identified as Mahes rather than Apedemak because of the god's sun disk and uraeus, in contrast to Apedemak's lunar associations. With the multiplicity of images of lion gods, Žabkar concluded that many of the Meroitic examples show a local “syncretistic tradition” of depicting Apedemak in the roles of the Egyptian deity Mahes.¹¹⁹

Cheetah, Leopard, and Cat

The cheetah and leopard are attested in both Nubia and Egypt. They are liable to be misidentified and confused with each other. Aleksandra Hallmann has summarized the differences thus: the cheetah's eyes are outlined in black, its pelt has uniform dots, and its tail is striped; in contrast, the leopard's pelt has “symmetrically arranged dots” and a larger head.¹²⁰ The cheetah and leopard are best known from scenes in Egyptian tombs and temples, where they, or their pelts, are presented as tribute from Nubia (fig. 5.16). They were not only exotica but also valuable—indeed essential—because their skins were used to make vestments for funerary (*Iunmutef* and *sem*) priests. Despite the felines' similar appearance, they can be differentiated when there is a caption. Although both the leopard and the cheetah are called *b3* or *3by* in Egyptian, the leopard is qualified as being “of the south” and the cheetah as “of the north.” Unfortunately, most representations and textual references have simply *3by*.

Among the many examples in which the differentiation between leopard and cheetah cannot be



Figure 5.16. Nubian tribute, including pelts and gold rings, brought to the court of Tutankhamun as depicted in the tomb of Amunhotep-Huy (TT 40), ca. 1330 BCE (Davies 1936, vol. 2, pl. LXXIX).

made is the autobiography of Harkhuf at Aswan (Sixth Dynasty, ca. 2278 BCE), where he recounts that he brought *šby* skins to the king along with incense, ebony, ivory, and a living dwarf.¹²¹ In the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, the protagonist loads his donkey with goods that include *šby* skins.¹²² Likewise, in some of the depictions of feline pelts brought as tribute, the distinction between cheetah and leopard cannot be made, as in Theban tomb (TT) 84 of Iamunedjeh and TT 91 (name lost).

Cheetah

The cheetah (or its pelt) is frequently depicted in tribute scenes in Egyptian tombs and temples. In the tomb of Rekhmire, a live cheetah (to judge from the regular spots) is led on a leash.¹²⁸ A live

cheetah and skinned pelts are shown in the tomb of Sobekhotep (TT 63),¹²⁹ and pelts are looped over the arm of a bearer in the tomb of Haremhab (TT 78).¹³⁰ In the scene of Nubian tribute in the tomb of Amunhotep-Huy (TT 40, ca. 1330 BCE), spotted pelts, presumably of cheetahs, are slung over the arms of bearers (fig. 5.16). In the tomb of Meryre II at Amarna (ca. 1336 BCE), a delegation of Kushites presents a cheetah to the royal family.¹³¹

What appears to be a cheetah's skin is represented covering the back and shoulders of a Meroitic *ba* statue from the elite cemetery of Sedeinga (fig. 5.17),¹³² demonstrating that feline pelts were not exclusively reserved for the royal family and also that the post of *sem*-priest continued into Meroitic times.



Figure 5.17. Sandstone *ba* statue draped with the cheetah pelt vestment of a *sem*-priest, from Sedeinga (head: II T 361 d4; body: II T 354 d1). Meroitic, first century CE. Photos © SEDAU/V, Francigny (left) and © SEDAU / O. Cabon (right).

Leopard

In the tomb of Rekhmire, leopards are shown as tribute from Nubia along with other southern products, including ivory, ostrich eggs and plumes, small primates, and a giraffe.¹²³ Reliefs in the temple of Ramesses II at Beit el-Wali depicting tribute from Nubia show a Kushite leading a lion on a leash and a stack of feline pelts on an offering stand alongside other stands loaded with rings and bags of gold and trays of incense(?). In the lower register, a feline pelt is slung over the arm of another Kushite, and farther to the right, the king's son of Kush carries an overloaded tray of offerings that includes more pelts.¹²⁴ This theme of Kushites shown with pelts and other local fauna is attested as far away as Nimrud, by a carved ivory plaque (see fig. 8.5 in chapter 8).

Small objects from Nubia that portray a leopard include two box lids with a recumbent animal—one lid from Kumbur¹²⁵ and the other, showing an animal perhaps to be identified as a leopard, from Dangeil¹²⁶—and a glazed tile of a seated leopard (or cheetah—alternately referred to as a “feline” and a “leopard”¹²⁷) from the base of a shrine in the inner room of the Lion Temple at Naga.

Cat

A small, beautifully rendered amulet of a seated cat was recovered from the tomb of Queen Tabiry at El-Kurru (fig. 5.18).¹³³ Other cat amulets and scarabs are known from Meroe,¹³⁴ Sanam,¹³⁵ and Kawa.¹³⁶ A bronze mirror dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty found at Buhen depicts a young girl holding a small cat in her left hand.¹³⁷

Conclusion

Felines figure prominently in Nubia, from the iconography on the A-Group Qustul incense burner to the many scenes of valuable Nubian leopards and



Figure 5.18. Marble amulet of a seated cat from El-Kurru (Ku. 33). Reign of Piankhy, 743–712 BCE. MFA 21.305. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

cheetahs brought to the Egyptian court of the New Kingdom. The chiefs of Kerma decorated their funerary beds and temples with images of lions. The Napatan kings adopted the Egyptian imagery of the lion as a symbol of royal power, as exemplified by the sphinxes of Taharqo and Senkamanisken. The lion took on new prominence in the Meroitic period with the rise of the lion god Apedemak, who is shown in diverse forms in his temples in Upper Nubia. During that time, statues of lions guarded the entries to temples, palaces, and water sources, and, as recorded at the temple of Musawwarat es-Sufra, the lion god was central to the coronation of the Meroitic ruler. Smaller cats—the leopard, the cheetah, and even the presumably domesticated cat—also appear in Nubian iconography.

Notes

1. Animalia 2025.
2. Chaix 2019, 65.
3. Chaix 2019, 67.
4. Welsby 1996, 91; Lohwasser 2012, 54 fig. 24d.

5. Welsby 1998, 241, pl. 75.
6. Chaix 2010.
7. Bakhiet 2014, 1060.
8. Paner 2020, 1095, 1103.
9. Bakhiet 2014, 1060.
10. Kleinitz 2014, 101; Bakhiet 2019, 112.
11. Manzo 2019, 353–54.
12. JE 43885 in Firth 1927, pl. 18d–e.
13. Williams 1986, 140.
14. The copper inlays include Liverpool University SAOS 1566; the ivory inlay is MFA 20.1530. See Reisner 1923a, 150, 170–71, 185; Wenig 1978, 150.
15. MFA 13.4283.2, 13.4283.4–6, 13.4283.9, 13.4283.12–16; Reisner 1923a, 336; 1923b, 278, pl. 56.4; Markowitz and Doxey 2014, 100–103.
16. Doxey 2018, 28.
17. MFA 13.4229 (unpublished) and 20.1223; Reisner 1923b, 51, pl. 37.
18. MFA 20.1694a–d; Reisner 1923b, 473–74, fig. 340.9; Wenig 1978, 40 fig. 17.
19. Rondot 2022, 64–65.
20. Ricke, Hughes, and Wente 1967, 16, pl. 15.
21. Markowitz and Doxey 2014, 115, pl. 14; Rondot 2022, 69–70, fig. 13.
22. Macadam 1955, pl. IXb; Rondot 2022, 116.
23. Carter and Newberry 1904, 20–22, pls. VI, VII; 24–31, pl. XII.
24. BM EA 1770 (690–664 BCE); Wenig 1978, 168; Rondot 2022, 142.
25. SNM 1852 (643 BCE); Wenig 1978, 175; Welsby and Anderson 2004, 161.
26. Berlin ÄM 7972 (679 BCE); Rondot 2022, 268.
27. MFA 24.1004; Dunham 1950, 57, pl. XXXIVA.
28. Markowitz and Doxey 2014, 115, pl. 25.
29. Rondot 2022, 379.
30. MFA 21.321; Markowitz and Doxey 2014, 112, pl. 23.
31. MFA 24.630; Markowitz and Doxey 2014, 118, pl. 27.
32. Kuckertz 2014/15.
33. Louvre E17333; Berlin ÄM 19493; Brooklyn Museum 37.42E.
34. Török 1997a, 506; Wolf 2001.
35. Kröper, Schoske, and Wildung 2011, 54.
36. Kröper, Schoske, and Wildung 2011, 53–65, 67–69, 70–72, 75, figs. 59–60.
37. Kröper, Schoske, and Wildung 2011, 62.
38. Török 1997a, 501.
39. Žabkar 1975, 69.
40. Török 1997a, 502.
41. Kröper, Schoske, and Wildung 2011, 62.
42. Rilly 2010, 318–19, 369–70; Kröper, Schoske, and Wildung 2011, 25, 62; Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 55. For an alternative derivation of the god’s name as “the Protector,” an explanation that has now been definitively abandoned, see Žabkar 1975, 47, 95.
43. Žabkar 1975, 21; Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 55.
44. Török 1997a, 502; Kröper, Schoske, and Wildung 2011, 56, 61.
45. Török 1997a, 502.
46. Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 62.
47. Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 59.

48. Török 1997b, 76.
49. Maillot 2017, 127.
50. Maillot 2017, 125–26, 128–29; Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 61.
51. Pasquali 2015, 360–61.
52. Török 1997a, 502–3; 1997b, pls. 28–30, 32, 34. The exact nature of this structure is debated, especially its association with the Nile flood; see Török 1997b, 71–77; Yellin 2012a, 262.
53. Welsby 1996, 38 fig. 10, 148.
54. Crowfoot 1911, 23.
55. Liverpool World Museum 47.48.212; Wenig 1978, 257.
56. Hintze et al. 1971, pl. 40; Kröper, Schoske, and Wildung 2011, 61, figs. 61–63, 66; Maillot 2017, 125–26.
57. Clarke and Engelbach 1930, 159, 161; Maillot 2017, 126.
58. Žabkar 1975, 79, 119–20.
59. Sordi 2010, 183–84.
60. Maillot 2017, 124; Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 61.
61. Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 57–59, figs. 2, 4–5.
62. Zach 2018, 97–98; Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 59–60.
63. Török 1997b, 71–77; Yellin 2012a, 262.
64. Hintze et al. 1971, plan 3, pls. 23–24.
65. Wenig 2019, 857, fig. 11.
66. Hintze et al. 1971, pls. 44–46, 51.
67. Onderka 2016, 35.
68. Zach 2018, pls. 2–3.
69. Zach 2018, 97, pl. 7; Baud 2010, 91 fig. 105.
70. Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pls. 74–75; Žabkar 1975, pl. 20a = Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 75; Hintze et al. 1993, 148.
71. Hintze et al. 1993, 173 fig. 123.
72. Žabkar 1975, pl. 19b.
73. Maillot 2017, 124–25; Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 60 fig. 6.
74. Examples include SNM 2742 from Temple A at Kawa, SNM 18892/1–2 from the Amun temple at Tabo, and ROM 921.4.29 from Meroe; Sackho-Autissier 2011, figs. 14, 17.
75. Priese 1993, figs. 9, 28a and c, 39a.
76. MFA 24.495.
77. Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 56; Kröper, Schoske, and Wildung 2011, 122–23.
78. Hintze 1979, 139 fig. 3.
79. Griffith 1924, 163, pl. LII.4.
80. SNM 441; Baud 2010, 92 fig. 107.
81. Penn E8016.
82. Wolf 2002, pl. 5; 2014, 6, 18.
83. Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 62.
84. Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 69a; Žabkar 1975, pl. 11; Honzl 2022b, 12–13.
85. Hintze et al. 1971, plans 8a, 9a, 10a, pl. 96; Žabkar 1975, pls. 16–18.
86. Hintze et al. 1971, plans 10c, 12a–b.
87. Walters Art Museum 22.258; Schulz and Seidel 2009, 174–77.
88. Wolf 2014, 18.
89. Žabkar 1975, 47–48; 1977, 487, 495–47, 506.
90. Žabkar 1975, 48; Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 56; Onderka, Vrtl, and Honzl 2022, 109.
91. Honzl 2022a, 109.
92. SNM 20624; Choimet 2023, 417 fig. 9.

93. Žabkar 1975 36–44, pl. VIII; 1977, 488–95.
94. Žabkar 1975, 44–45, pls. XXIV–XXV; 1977, 497–500.
95. Žabkar 1975, pl. XV.
96. Dunham 1957, 92 fig. 62, 93; Žabkar 1977, 495.
97. Török 1997a, 503n514.
98. Griffith 1924, 161, pl. L.10; Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 43.
99. Dunham 1963, 9, 10 fig. 6d.
100. Berlin ÄM 1741 and 1738; Priese 1993, figs. 40a, 45a.
101. Griffith 1922, 112–13, pl. XLIV; 1923, 122, 134, pls. XXVII.47, LIII.10–11; Sauneron and Yoyotte 1952, 163n4.
102. Török 1997a, 439–40, figs. 18–21.
103. Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 57–59, pls. 2, 4, 5.
104. Žabkar 1975, pl. XV.
105. Ciampini and Bakowska-Czerner 2014, 695.
106. From Gebel Barkal see, e.g., Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pls. 20–23, 24; from Meroe, among many examples, see Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pls. 25, 30, 45–48, 50–54, 59.
107. Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pls. 27, 35, 45; Dunham 1970, pl. XXXIXa; Wenig 1978, 203.
108. Vincentelli 1993, figs. 1–2; Iannarilli, Callegher, and Pancin 2019, 61 fig. 7.
109. Otto 1975, cols. 1003–4.
110. Almansa-Villatoro 2018, 181.
111. Onderka 2019, 153–54.
112. Žabkar 1975, 21.
113. Žabkar 1975, 22.
114. Kaper 2003, 232.
115. Kaper 2003, 129, 232–33.
116. Žabkar 1975, 21; Kaper 2003, 129, 229–31.
117. Žabkar 1975, 54–57.
118. ROM 921.4.1; Török 1997b, 100, pls. 61–62.
119. Žabkar 1975, 69.
120. Hallmann 2023, 343, 345, 1024.
121. Sethe 1933, 127/1. Lichtheim (1973, 26) translates as “panther.”
122. Sethe 1959, 18/5–6.
123. Davies 1943, 19, pls. 17–19.
124. Ricke, Hughes, and Wente 1967, 12, pls. 7, 9; reconstruction in Baud 2010, 99 fig. 116.
125. SNM 23159; Baud 2010, 102–3, 121 fig. 162.
126. Anderson, Bashir, and Ahmed 2014, 75, pl. 15.
127. Welsby and Anderson 2004, 189; Kröper, Schoske, and Wildung 2011, 50.
128. Davies 1943, 19, pl. 19.
129. Dziobek and Abdel Raziq 1990, pls. 3b, 21a.
130. Brack and Brack 1980, pls. 47a–b, 49c.
131. Davies 1905, 38, pls. 37–38.
132. Rilly, Francigny, and David 2020, 82, figs. 19–20.
133. Markowitz and Doxey 2014, 113, pls. 28–29.
134. ROM 921.4.56.
135. Griffith 1923, 131, pl. XLVIII.5.
136. Welsby and Anderson 2004, 152.
137. SNM 18595; Wildung 1997, 133, no. 136.



6

Insects and Arachnids

Tasha Vorderstrasse and Brian Muhs

This chapter focuses on the depictions of insects and arachnids in Nubian art, specifically bees/wasps, flies, and scorpions. Studying insects in the ancient world is challenging; perhaps because of the “ick” factor, insects tend not to be perceived as cute and cuddly, and modern scholars have therefore devoted less attention to them than to other animals.¹ However, ancient Nubian art depicting insects and arachnids suggests that if the ancient Nubians were repelled by them, that sentiment is not reflected in their artistic depictions. A similar attitude prevailed in neighboring Egypt, whose ancient artistic renderings of insects and arachnids resemble those in Nubia, which imported ancient Egyptian objects and responded to those object types. Whereas certain categories of insects and arachnids (e.g., flies, bees, scorpions) appear frequently in Nubian art, other common types (e.g., grasshoppers/locusts, butterflies, spiders) are largely absent.² Certain artistic conceptions of insects, such as flies, appear to be originally Nubian and to have influenced Egyptian artistic conventions, while conversely, other artistic conceptions of flies and scorpions in Nubia appear to be the result of Egyptian–Nubian interactions. Together, these exchanges resulted in a very different Nubian conception of insects and arachnids than that reflected in Egyptian art.

Nubian depictions of insects and arachnids can be viewed as a perfect example of what scholars have termed “entanglement” between Egyptian and Nubian material culture. Drawing on the work of Michael Dietler and others,³ scholars of Nubia in the 2010s started using “entanglement theory” to examine the interactions between the Nubians and Egyptians more positively and productively than did previous arguments, which regarded Nubian culture as an inferior imitation of ancient Egypt’s. These scholars see both groups as adapting and changing their material culture as a result of contact with the other, each responding and reacting to the culture of its neighbor.⁴ There has been considerable discussion in some studies of Nubia about determining which objects are “Egyptian” versus which ones are “Nubian.” This chapter takes the approach that it is more productive to examine types of objects for what they tell us about Nubia in general rather than to determine what is or is not an import.

Faience necklace
with large inscribed
scarab and sixty-four
scarab beads.
ISACM E23879A–C.
Cat. no. 38.

Archaeological Evidence for Insects and the Production of Material Culture

Archaeological evidence for insect remains is rare in ancient Nubia, as it also is in other parts of the ancient world due to issues of preservation. The main evidence comes from the site of Qasr Ibrim in Lower Nubia, where archaeologists found the remains of grain pests, houseflies (*Musca domestica*), wood weevils (*Sitophilus granarius*), and cabinet beetles (*Trogoderma granarium*) dating to the Roman period (ca. 25 BCE–100 CE). Ancient DNA was successfully extracted from the flies, but they could only be compared with modern flies because of the limited number of similar studies on ancient insects. The Qasr Ibrim flies were found to be comparable to modern Egyptian and West Asian flies, as one might expect, but also to Indian, Japanese, and North American flies.⁵ By way of comparison, modern Sudanese bees are very different from both modern and ancient Egyptian bees. The ancient Egyptian bee is thought to be the *Apis mellifera lamarckii*—an aggressive, vicious bee with low yields of honey—while the modern Sudanese bee is the *Apis mellifera yemenitica*—a small, docile bee.⁶ The fact that the honey produced by these bees is different in appearance and flavor may explain why the ancient Egyptians are known to have imported honey from Nubia and elsewhere.

Far more abundant than the remains of ancient insects and arachnids are artistic depictions of them made by Nubian artists in Nubia and examples imported from Egypt. The objects on which these representations appear are usually small and were often worn as amulets or jewelry. Depictions of scarab beetles figure most commonly on such objects, which could also be used as administrative seals. While some exceptional portrayals of insects on items made of precious materials have received considerable attention, many scarab and fly amulets in the archaeological record are made of faience. Direct evidence for faience production remains scant, and it is difficult to differentiate between its

Nubian and Egyptian manufacture, but there is evidence that faience objects were produced locally beginning in the Kerma period and continuing into the New Kingdom and subsequent Napatan periods.⁷

Our knowledge of how the Nubians viewed insects and arachnids is also limited by a lack of information about the indigenous words used to refer to them. Some Nubians knew ancient Egyptian and doubtless could read hieroglyphs, and there were Egyptians living in Nubia from the Middle Kingdom onward, so we can expect that some people in Nubia knew the Egyptian words for insects and arachnids even if the words do not appear in any surviving inscriptions.⁸ Moreover, titles such as “King of Upper and Lower Egypt,” which uses the bee hieroglyph (until the Meroitic period; see below), do appear.

Scarabs

Scarab beetles (*Scarabaeus sacer*) are the most commonly depicted insect in Nubia, and the actual insect is found in both Egypt and Sudan. The inspiration for depicting scarabs in Nubia came from Egypt, as the ancient Egyptians first attached religious significance to the beetle based on its behavior of rolling dung balls, whose round shape resembles the sun, a divinity. As artifacts, scarabs found in Nubia exhibit the same form as those in Egypt: the top consists of a naturalistic depiction of an actual scarab beetle (or occasionally another animal, e.g., a grasshopper), though sometimes very stylized (and usually then referred to as a “scaraboid”), while the flat underside is decorated in a way that allows the scarab to be used as a stamp seal. Some scarabs that no longer survive are attested by the presence of clay sealings. Made from a wide variety of materials—including faience (most commonly), glazed steatite, stone, ivory, wood, and blue-glazed quartz—scarabs could thus serve an administrative function as well as be worn as jewelry.⁹ The undersides of scarabs are decorated with depictions of various animals (including scarabs themselves), gods, and

hieroglyphic inscriptions—usually the name of a Nubian or Egyptian pharaoh, the name of a god, or a short but beneficial hieroglyphic inscription such as *nefer* “good, beautiful, perfect” and *ankh* “life.”¹⁰ The fact that scarabs are frequently found in graves from the C-Group period onward suggests they also had apotropaic meaning. In some burials, however, the placing of scarabs on or near the hand of the deceased points to their administrative function.¹¹

Scarabs were popular in both Nubia and Egypt for literally thousands of years. New scarabs were continuously produced for centuries, but existing scarabs were also reused, so some scarabs could remain in circulation for hundreds of years. Since the undersides of some scarabs bear the name of a pharaoh (Nubian or Egyptian), one might assume that they date to the reign of that ruler. In fact, certain pharaohs were quite popular, and scarabs bearing their names were produced after their deaths.¹² But determining the place of production is challenging.

Scholars have assumed that scarabs with designs different from those found in Egypt were made in Nubia or that those made of certain materials must be Nubian rather than Egyptian.¹³ But

such assumptions tell us neither whether the person making the scarab was Nubian or Egyptian nor how the object was used in a Nubian context if it was imported from Egypt. Determining from the available evidence how (or even whether) Egyptian scarabs were transformed by their Nubian users is difficult,¹⁴ particularly when it comes to the presence of hieroglyphic texts. Indeed, many scholars assume a priori that scarabs inscribed with hieroglyphs could not have been produced, used, or accurately understood by Nubians even though it is clear that, well into the Meroitic period, some Nubians could and did read and write Egyptian hieroglyphs.¹⁵

Some inscriptions on the undersides of scarabs found in Nubia are quite lengthy. For example, heart scarabs are inscribed with Book of the Dead spell 30 (fig. 6.1). In this spell, the heart (where, according to the ancient Egyptians, emotions and intelligence resided) is ordered not to testify against the deceased when the heart is weighed in the presence of the god Osiris, thereby allowing the deceased to be found worthy to pass into the underworld. Heart scarabs have been found in Nubia in New Kingdom graves, but generally only in small



Figure 6.1. Heart scarabs found in Nubia. Left to right: Queen Asata, Nuri Pyramid 42, MFA 20.643; Amani-nataki-lebte, MFA 20.645; Shabaqo, MFA 21.301. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

numbers, except at Aniba and Sai.¹⁶ Nonfunerary scarabs, such as the scarab found at Soleb commemorating Amenhotep III's lion hunt, are rare in Nubia.¹⁷

The custom of burying the deceased with heart scarabs continued into the Napatan period in Nubia but seems largely to have been restricted to the tombs of kings and queens and to the earlier part of the period. Napatan heart scarabs with Egyptian-language inscriptions usually employ one of two versions of Book of the Dead spell 30. An absence of chronological trends suggests that the version used was a matter of personal choice. One version is very similar to Book of the Dead spell 30B, which is commonly found on heart scarabs in Egypt. The other version is loosely modeled on Book of the Dead spell 30A, which is usually *not* found on heart scarabs in Egypt. Most heart scarabs dating to the Napatan period are royal ones, but the presence of a heart scarab of the scribe Tuy from Tombos dating to the early Napatan period indicates that elites also used these expensive funerary objects.¹⁸ This trend is also seen in the elaborate faience scarab pectorals found in the graves of the queens of Piankhy, where the owners could be identified (fig. 6.2): like the heart scarabs, the fact that such pectorals are found in other elite contexts, such as at Gematon, means they were not exclusively owned by queens.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the presence of these scarab plaques only in women's tombs (at least as identified to date) argues for a gender-specific ownership of this type of object. From the Napatan period, scarabs continue to be found in graves, as well as in what appear to be separate deposits of objects (fig. 6.3). Scarabs remained in circulation in the Meroitic period and have been found in both graves and urban contexts from that time.²⁰ The objects continued in use into the Post-Meroitic period after they had ceased to be used in Egypt in the Roman period. But it does not appear that they continued to be produced in the Post-Meroitic period; rather, older examples were reused.²¹

Flies

Flies in both Nubia and Egypt have been studied extensively despite the fact that they are not very common in the material-culture record. Regarded as pests, flies appear in Nubian art with unclear meaning. They are frequently represented in jewelry, usually made from faience but also steatite, bone, semiprecious stones such as carnelian, and more expensive materials such as gold, silver, electrum, and ivory. Examples are found in Egypt as well as in Nubia. Fly amulets are long-lived items that appear already in the A-Group culture and continue into the Post-Meroitic period. The



Figure 6.2. Faience scarab pectorals found in queens' graves at El-Kurru. Left to right: Ku. 52 (tomb of Nefrukekashta), MFA 24.671; Ku. 52 (tomb of Nefrukekashta), MFA 24.672; Ku. 51, MFA 24.673. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 6.3. Scarabs found in a separate deposit (Beg. W846) at Meroe. Early Napatan period. MFA 23-M-716. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

most-studied type of fly is the large pendant with flat wings and a small body. Fly pendants usually have ivory wings and a head of ivory, gilded ivory, bronze, or electrum (fig. 6.4). Nubia has frequently been suggested as the place of origin for these fly pendants, which are found in both Egypt and Nubia in the Kerman culture, Second Intermediate Period, and New Kingdom. These expensive fly pendants are far less common than fly amulets made mostly from faience, which resemble Egyptian types. Fly amulets were not as popular as scarabs, but they do continue to be found in Napatan and Meroitic graves²² in addition to early Napatan-period hybrid

fly/lion-headed creatures (fig. 6.5), found in the graves of children, and bracelets or necklaces of golden flies from the Meroitic period (fig. 6.6).²³ Finally, there are also silver toe rings with flies from the Post-Meroitic cemeteries at Ballana and Firka.²⁴

The fact that Nubians frequently appear in Egyptian art wearing flies that look like the fly amulets found in Nubia²⁵ is not conclusive evidence for the popularity of flies in Nubia itself. Ancient Egyptian depictions of foreigners are stereotypical and tend to ossify; Egyptian artists continued to use certain motifs over long periods of time to designate an individual's "foreignness" whether or not it

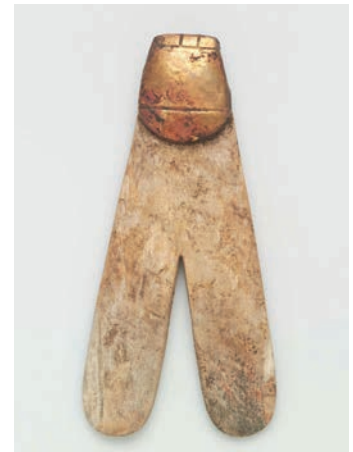


Figure 6.4. Fly pendants with ivory wings and heads of ivory, electrum, and gilded ivory. Left to right: Buhen, Penn E10347A; Semna, MFA 27.878A-B; Kerma, MFA 20.1776. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and courtesy of Penn Museum.



Figure 6.5. Faience hybrid fly amulets from Meroe. Left: Beg. W678, MFA 47.3906. Right: Beg. W603, MFA 23-M-214. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 6.6. Gold flies from El-Kurru and Meroe. Clockwise from upper left: El-Kurru, Ku. 16 (tomb of Tanwetamani), MFA 21.314; Meroe, MFA 24.538; Meroe, Beg. W179, MFA 24.1092. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

was still an actual identity marker. The frequent statement by scholars that flies appear in military contexts in Nubia and are symbols of bravery given in Egypt as military rewards²⁶ is unsupported by the archaeological evidence. Elizabeth Minor found

only one instance of fly amulets being found in a grave in which the deceased was buried with a weapon, and fly amulets have been found in Nubian graves of nonmilitary individuals, including children (see above), thus echoing finds in Egypt. These

discoveries suggest that fly amulets served an apotropaic function rather than being associated with military achievements.²⁷

Bees

In contrast to scarabs and flies, bees are far less commonly represented in Nubian material culture. While there has been little study of ancient Nubian beekeeping, records from Egypt make it clear that the Egyptians imported honey from Nubia and that honey was an important item of trade between the two areas—perhaps in part because the areas hosted different species of bee, which produced different types of honey (see above).²⁸ Bees commonly appear in Nubia in ancient Egyptian inscriptions from the Middle Kingdom onward. These inscriptions are found on temples and other monumental buildings, on prominently displayed rock inscriptions, and in royal titles on the undersides of scarabs; at least some of the inscriptions would have been clearly visible to Nubians.²⁹ The title *nswt-bity* “King of Upper and Lower Egypt” (literally “he of the sedge and the bee”) is used in Nubia into the Meroitic period despite the fact that the Nubians no longer controlled Egypt from the early Napatan period, after the end of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. The Nubians initially wrote the title with a clear bee hieroglyph—the same way the title is usually written in Egypt. The bee hieroglyph (fig. 6.7) is not a strict representation of an actual bee; rather, it is a combination of multiple animals, including wasps and hornets, and is thus not meant to show a specific species but instead a winged, stinging insect in general. Starting in the Meroitic period with the rule of the late third-century BCE king Arkamani II, the title is written with a sun disk and two pendant uraei rather than with a bee. This writing follows Egyptian trends in how the title is written for the Ptolemaic kings.³⁰

Apart from the appearance of bees in hieroglyphic inscriptions, these insects rarely figure in Nubian art. Bees appear in a few inlays from Kerma that would have decorated funerary beds (fig. 6.8),



Figure 6.7. Bee hieroglyph in Room P of the Eighteenth Dynasty Small Temple of Amun at Medinet Habu. Epigraphic Survey 2009, pl. 137.

and Minor suggests that the similarity of the type of bee there to the bee hieroglyph is evidence that it was inspired by Egyptian models, though she admits the Kerma bee is different in being shown in flight rather than at rest. Despite her belief that the Nubians would have been familiar with the “King of Upper and Lower Egypt” title (fig. 6.9), Minor does not associate the presence of ivory bees at Kerma with kingship; rather, she believes they reflect how the Nubians saw the natural world.³¹ Representations of bees continue to appear sporadically on objects in Nubia in the New Kingdom, on the undersides of scarabs in the royal titles of Egyptian pharaohs,³² and on Meroitic signet rings and clay sealings found at the so-called Palace of Natakamani at Gebel Barkal; the bees found on sealings include a standard bee, a hybrid lion-headed bee wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt and standing on a *nb*-basket hieroglyph, and a cobra-headed bee (fig. 6.10). One gold ring with a hybrid bee survives from the tomb of Queen Amanishakheto at Meroe (fig. 6.11). Steffen Wenig, followed by Irene Vincentelli, argues that both elements of this hybrid animal, the lion



Figure 6.8. Ivory bee inlays from Kerma. Left: MFA 13.4214a. Right: MFA 13.4214c. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 6.9. Name of the Egyptian pharaoh Neferkare on a vessel found at Kerma, demonstrating that the Nubians were aware of the bee hieroglyph in the Kerman period. MFA 13.4269. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 6.10. Sealings from the palace of Gebel Barkal decorated with standard and hybrid bees. Drawings after Vincentelli 1993, figs. 25–27, 32.



Figure 6.11. Lion-headed bee on a gold ring from the pyramid of Queen Amanishakheto. ÄM 1741. Courtesy of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung / Sandra Steiß.

and the bee, represented royalty but were often confused at Meroe because the Meroites no longer understood the ancient meaning of the word for bee.³³ Nevertheless, the Meroites would have been surrounded by inscriptions in which the bee hieroglyph appeared, so one cannot exclude the possibility that they were aware of the royal significance of the bee and recognized the hybrid, lion-headed bee as wearing the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Scorpions

In contrast to insects, scorpions are found in prehistoric rock art in Nubia, but not commonly. They are found more frequently in early Egyptian art, perhaps as a result of their association with royalty. This difference has led to the interpretation of some early depictions of scorpions in Nubia—such as that of a scorpion holding a captive with a rope in its pincers, at the site of Gebel Sheikh Suleiman near Buhen (fig. 6.12)—as Egyptian art appearing in Nubia.³⁴ There is no reason to assume that such depictions must be Egyptian, however, since scorpions appear elsewhere in Nubia in other contexts, including legless examples that emphasize the scorpion's stinger. Representations of scorpions on material dated to the A-Group appear on painted pottery and a pot stand from Qustul, as well as on amulets made from carnelian and quartz.³⁵ Scorpions also appear on

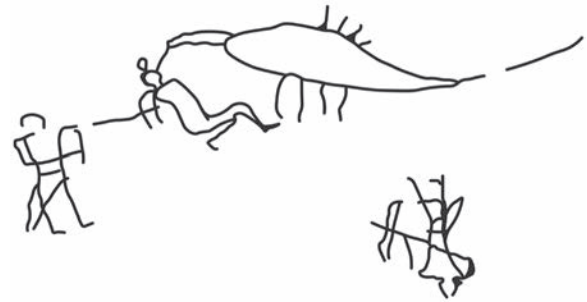


Figure 6.12. Prehistoric rock drawing at Gebel Sheikh Suleiman depicting a scorpion holding a captive with a rope in its pincers. Drawing after Needler 1967, fig. 1.

seals, including early C-Group button seals,³⁶ New Kingdom amulets,³⁷ and the undersides of scarabs and other seals (fig. 6.13).³⁸

Further evidence of Nubian interest in scorpions is provided by several scorpion plaques found at Kerma. The fact that two of these plaques, made from faience, have holes drilled in them suggests they may have been sewn onto clothing (fig. 6.14). They have been interpreted as having been made in Egypt, with



Figure 6.13. New Kingdom scarabs with scorpions depicted on their undersides. Clockwise from upper left: Semna, MFA 24.1577; Meroe, Beg. W685, MFA 23.865; Semna, MFA 29.1153; Meroe, Beg. W609, MFA 23.840. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

the holes added when they were exported, but they could also have been made locally. Another scorpion plaque, made from glazed quartz, is thought to have been produced locally (fig. 6.15).³⁹ Similar faience plaques have been found at Semna (fig. 6.16) and Kumma,⁴⁰ in addition to an apparently unpublished

mud example from Uronarti (fig. 6.17). A few examples of scorpions also appear on Meroitic pottery and in other isolated instances from this period, such as a graffito at Musawarrat as-Sufra and gold jewelry from the area south of Khartoum.⁴¹



Figure 6.14. Faience scorpion plaque with hole from Kerma. MFA 20.1731. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 6.16. Faience scorpion plaque from Semna. MFA 27.879. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 6.15. Glazed-quartz scorpion plaque from Kerma. MFA 20.1666. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 6.17. Mud scorpion from Uronarti. MFA 29.2314. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Notes

1. Evans 2015; Evans and Weinstein 2019.
2. Butterflies appear very rarely in Nubia and therefore are not discussed in detail here. For the faience vessel from Kerma, see Reisner 1923b, 167, pl. 45 (identified as a possible dragonfly); Keimer 1934, 183; Evans and Nazari 2015, 247 fig. 3 (map), 250 fig. 4 (no. 58), 253 table 1 (no. 58). This piece was defined by Keimer as a Twelfth Dynasty Egyptian import and included in the discussion of Evans and Nazari on Egyptian depictions without further commentary. An Eighteenth Dynasty clay figurine of a hippopotamus from Sai Island is said to be decorated with a butterfly, imitating Egyptian examples in faience (see Budka 2020, 232, pl. 92), but it is difficult to see. A New Kingdom grasshopper scaraboid from Nubia and an example found in a Post-Meroitic grave (see “Scarabs” section) are isolated examples and not discussed separately. On the lack of spiders in ancient Egyptian art, see Evans 2015.
3. Dietler 1998, 2010.
4. For a recent discussion, see Smith 2025 with bibliography. On the multiple meanings of faience objects, see Miniaci 2018, 64.
5. Simpson et al. 2020.
6. Woyke 1993; Beck 2021, 1–3.
7. Reisner 1923b, 134–35; Miniaci 2019, 25; 2020, 7; D’Itria 2023a, 167, 176, 178–79; Lacovara 2023 with bibliography.
8. The Egyptian word for “fly” is *ʕfy* < *ʕff* (Wb. I 182), Demotic *ʕf* and Coptic *ⲁϥ* (Crum CD 23b; cf. Černý CED 16) (see Seddik and El-Din Fouad 2022, 32), while the Egyptian word for “bee” is initially *bit* (Wb. I 434) but later *ʕfy n bit* (Wb. I 182), literally “fly of honey.” The latter continues in Demotic (*ʕfn iby*) and Coptic (*ⲁϥⲛⲉⲃⲓⲱ*, Crum CD 23b; cf. Černý CED 16). Other words for insects include Egyptian *snḥm* (Wb. III 461) and Coptic *ⲥⲁⲛⲛⲉⲣ* (Crum CD 345a; cf. Černý CED 155), *ⲕⲁⲧⲁⲓ* (Crum CD 123a), *ⲱⲭⲉ* (Crum CD 615a), and *ⲥⲟϣⲏⲗ* (Crum CD 835b), all meaning “grasshopper/locust”; Egyptian *ḥprr*, *ḥpri*, *ḥpr* (Wb. III 267), Demotic *mḥrr*, *mḥrrr*, and Coptic *ⲥⲁⲗⲟϣⲕⲥ* (Crum CD 810b) “dung beetle (scarab)”; *ⲭⲁⲗⲓⲗ* (Crum CD 669a) “beetle”; *ⲡⲉⲛⲛⲉ* (Crum CD 266a) and *ⲭⲉⲗⲕⲉⲥ/ⲭⲉⲗⲕⲏⲥ* (Crum CD 768a) “bug”; and *ⲁⲥⲟϣⲗⲓ* (Crum CD 18a) “butterfly.” Ancient names for arachnids include Coptic *ⲥⲧⲁⲭⲟϣⲗ* (Crum CD 367a) < **ⲥⲁⲧ-ⲭⲟϣⲗ* (Černý CED 166–67) “spinner (of) thread,” i.e., “spider”; and Egyptian *ḏḥr.t* (Wb. V 526), Demotic *ḏll(.t)*, and Coptic *ⲥⲗⲏ* (Crum CD 810a; cf. Černý CED 327) “scorpion.” Note: Černý CED = Černý 1976; Crum CD = Crum 1939; Wb. = Erman and Grapow 1926–63.
9. Andrews 1994, 50–56; Evans 2015; D’Itria 2018, 62. The corpus of scarabs found in Nubia is extensive, with scarabs starting to appear at both Middle Kingdom/C-Group and Pan Grave sites and continuing into the Kerman and New Kingdom periods, when they become increasingly popular. Scarab production increases considerably in the first millennium BCE, and scarabs continue to be found into the Post-Meroitic period. For more than a century, however, scarabs and clay sealings with scarab impressions have not been published in any systematic or standard way. See, e.g., Reisner 1923b, 70–88, figs. 168–69, pls. 40–41; Steindorff 1937, pls. 54–56; Säve-Söderbergh with Englund and Nordström 1981, 49 no. 19/1:17; Smith 1990; 1996, 43–48, 69–75; 2018; Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 89, 99, 123–24, 273 (the grasshopper scaraboid is 185/355.1, pl. 15); Andrews 2001; Minor 2012, 134, 138–41 with n175 and n181; Weglarz 2017, 214n88, 223; D’Itria 2018; Raue 2019, 303; Vincentelli 2024. For Egyptian examples of grasshopper scaraboids (also rare), see Andrews 1994, 66.
10. Schiff Giorgini with Robichon and Leclant 1971, 99; Säve-Söderbergh 1989, 97–98, 100; Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 91–92, 99, 102; Taylor 2024.
11. Firth 1912, pl. 42; Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 89; Minor 2012, 143–45 with n189; Weglarz 2017, 147, 160, 172, 175 fig. 5.27, 178, 181 fig. 5.33, 192, 274; D’Itria 2018, 56 table 1, 57 chart 1, 62.
12. Säve-Söderbergh 1989, 95; Weglarz 2017, 110 (no. 85), 138; Evans and Weinstein 2019, 722–23; Vincentelli 2024, 269.

13. For the suggestion that Nubian artisans could have made scarabs in general, see Minor 2012, 141; Lemos 2021, 263. For the suggestion that Kerman scarabs made from ivory, wood, and glazed quartz were locally made in Nubia, while other scarabs (the majority) are Egyptian, see D'Itria 2018, 61.
14. D'Itria 2018 claims that a faience scarab used as a necklace in Kerma and showing a figure wearing a pleated kilt and standing on a *nb*-sign was of Egyptian manufacture. She argues that the male figure it originally depicted was transformed into a female one by the individual in whose grave it was found, a woman wearing a leather kilt. There is no reason to assume Nubians would have prized hieroglyphic inscriptions as being “exotic,” as Minor (2012, 53, 75, 120) suggests.
15. Minor 2012, 15, 53, 131, 140–41; Weglarz 2017, 184. For hieroglyphic and hieratic inscriptions and ostraca in Nubia, see Dunham 1955, pl. CXXVI; Vrtal 2015; Parkinson and Spencer 2017; Raue 2019, 303; Vincentelli 2022, 88; D'Itria 2023a, 175.
16. Steindorff 1937, pls. 47–50 no. 29, 54–56; Schiff Giorgini with Robichon and Leclant 1971, 120–21, 217, 310; Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 144; Lemos 2020, 8–9, 11–13, 15–21, table 4, graphs 1–4; 2021, 254 table 1.
17. Schiff Giorgini with Robichon and Leclant 1971, 120–21. Lemos (2021, 260–62) argues that the person buried with the commemorative scarab could not read the text or was not interested in it. This assumption presumes that the person understood what a heart scarab was well enough to modify a similarly sized scarab to look like one, but at the same time was unable to read the inscription or notice that it was different from the actual heart scarab also buried with them in the tomb.
18. Dunham 1950, pl. XLVIII; 1955, pls. CXXIII–CXXV; Smith and Buzon 2014, 204, fig. 6.7, 208.
19. Dunham 1950, pls. XLIX, LII–LIII; Welsby and Taylor 2024, 85–86. The backs of some of these amulets are incised with hieroglyphs and other designs.
20. Dunham 1963, 36, 50–51, 294, figs. 25, 37–38 (including scarabs inscribed with the names of Thutmose III, Amenhotep III, and Ramesses I), 177; Williams 1991a, 108, 147, figs. 65, 80, 93, 99, 168; Török 1997b, 235, fig. 118 (Amenhotep III lion-hunt scarab found at Meroe); Wolf 2015, 118 (with bibliography of scarabs in the royal tombs at Meroe).
21. See, e.g., Emery and Kirwan 1939, 216–18, pl. 44 (including a grasshopper scaraboid); Säve-Söderbergh with Englund and Nordström 1981, 49 no. 416/22:1.
22. Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 128; Singer 2009, 79; D'Itria 2018, 55–57, chart 1, table 1, fig. 2; Lacovara 2022; Seddik and El-Din Fouad 2022, 31; Then-Obluska 2022, 9, 20, 35. For finds of flat-winged flies in elite contexts, see Kerma (Reisner 1923b, 131–32, pls. 44.2 no. 18, 49.1, 53.1; MFA 13-12-76, 14-2-803, 14-3-783, 13-12-642); Semna (Dunham and Janssen 1960, 101, fig. 59; MFA 27.878A–B); Buhen (Randall-MacIver and Woolley 1911, 134, 225, pl. 51; Penn E10374A); Seman (Emery and Kirwan 1935, 315); and Ginis East (Lemos 2022). For finds of other fly amulets, see Weglarz 2017, 273 table IV.1; Welsby and Taylor 2024, 95.
23. Dunham 1963, 9, fig. 6d–e (W603, MFA 23-M-214), 12, fig. 9b–c (W861, MFA 23.1459), 47 (W678, MFA 47.3906), 161, fig. 117e (W125, MFA 24.538), 184 (W179, MFA 24.1092). See the discussion in Then-Obluska 2018, 694.
24. Seddik and El-Din Fouad 2022.
25. Marshall 2015, 40; Lacovara 2022, 200–201, fig. 2; Then-Obluska 2022, 68, 266, 268–69.
26. Binder 2008, 28, 32–33, 49–50, figs. 4.14–4.17; Singer 2009; Marshall 2015, 39–40; Seddik and El-Din Fouad 2022, 32; Lacovara 2022, 199–201, pls. V, VII (JE 4694); Evans and Weinstein 2019, 722. It has also been extrapolated to the presence of flies in Nubian cemeteries; see Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 128.
27. Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 128; Minor 2012, 146–47. Minor suggests that one of the other graves has a military connection because it contained an inscribed Egyptian hieroglyphic vase that must have been taken from Elkab, but this claim is difficult to prove. For finds of flies in Egypt, see Singer 2009, 76–77; Lacovara 2022, 200–201; Sidpura 2022, 17, 24–25, 125, 146, 175–76, 178 (which also discusses finds in Nubia).
28. Woyke 1993; Kritsky 2015, 3; Beck 2021, 1–3, 52–55.
29. See, e.g., the administrative sealings in Vincentelli 2024, 274–76.

30. Evans and Weinstein 2019, 721–22. On the bee hieroglyph in general, see Kritsky 2015, 66–70. A relief at the temple of Dakka depicts King Arkamani II (reigned late third century / early second century BCE), whose throne name is preceded by the sun disk with two pendant uraei. We thank Foy Scalf, head of the ISAC Research Archives, for his assistance with the discussion of the writing of this title.
31. Reisner 1923b, 267–68; Minor 2012, 132, 169, 174, 176, 180, figs. 6.20a–b.
32. Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 185/400, 104, 275, pl. 16.
33. Wenig 1978, cat. no. 188; Vincentelli 1993, no. 32.
34. Needler 1967; Hellström and Langballe 1970; El-Hennawy 2011; Evans 2015; Evans and Weinstein 2019, 721; Heagy 2020, 107–9 and bibliography; Paner 2020. Scorpions are also rarely studied in modern times in Sudan but are common, with multiple species; see Siyam et al. 2023.
35. Williams 1989, 155, pl. 93 (ISACM E24248a), 156, pl. 95 (bowl); Huyge and Darnell 2010, 71–72, fig. 1 (BM EA25324; no provenience but possibly from Qustul); Roy 2011, 219–20; Nordström 2014, 41–42, 56, pl. 12b; Kwiecinski 2019, 106 (SNM 18176).
36. Säve-Söderbergh 1989, 96–97.
37. BM EA87311 (Amara West, Eighteenth Dynasty).
38. Schiff Giorgini with Robichon and Leclant 1971, 324. Examples include MFA 24.1577 and 29.1153 (from Semna); BM EA51323 (Eighteenth Dynasty, from Faras); and MFA 23.840 and 23.840 (from Meroe Beg. W685 and Beg. W609, respectively). At Ballana, Emery and Kirwan found a Nineteenth Dynasty steatite seal with a scarab carved on the underside and, in the same grave, a Post-Meroitic seal that also features a scarab, which they suggest copied the earlier Nineteenth Dynasty example (Emery and Kirwan 1939, 218, pl. 44).
39. Reisner 1923b, 51, pl. 37 (MFA 20.1666, local glazed quartzite), 131, pl. 44.2 no. 19 (MFA 20.1731 and SNM 1036); Ellis and Newman 2005; Ellis, Newman, and Barsanti 2008; Miniaci 2019, 24–25, 27; D'Itria 2018, 55 fig. 2, 56 table 1.
40. Dunham and Janssen 1960, 69, 83.
41. Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 120; Williams 1991a, 43.



7

Monkeys

Claude Rilly

Africa is the cradle of humanity but also of humans' closest relatives—namely, apes and monkeys, which on this continent display the greatest number and the greatest diversity of species. Surprisingly, Sudan does not currently house a wide variety of primates. Apes are absent, since only a few groups of chimpanzees have been observed in South Sudan, which is now a separate country. Four monkey species are attested: the grivet (*Cercopithecus aethiops*; fig. 7.1), the olive baboon (*Papio anubis*; fig. 7.2), the patas or red husar monkey (*Erythrocebus patas*), and the blue monkey (*Cercopithecus mitis*).¹ The first three species are common in the Gebel Marra region of Darfur, in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan, and in the Blue Nile state, with grivets extending their territory throughout the savanna belt. The blue monkey is rare in Sudan and restricted to the Blue Nile area.

Was this distribution identical in the past? In the 1960s, H. Butler noted that the distributional range of grivet monkeys had shifted southward since the nineteenth century, at which time it extended northward to the vicinity of the Fifth Cataract.² He assumed that no grivet monkeys were currently still living north of Abu Usher, 65 miles south of Khartoum. However, some specimens have recently been observed living free in Khartoum, even if it is difficult to know whether they migrated there from the bush or are the offspring of domesticated monkeys that returned to the wild. In antiquity, their distributional area extended farther north to the bends of the Nile, as attested by Pliny the Elder, who relies on the testimony of the centurions Nero sent to discover the sources of the Nile:

[They reported that] the island of Gagaude is located in the middle of this course [from Aswan to Meroe]; from there one can first see the parrots and from another island, whose name is Artigula, the animal called *sphingion*, and from Tergedum, dog-headed monkeys. From there to Napata, it is 80 miles.³

The *sphingion* is in all likelihood the grivet, and the dog-headed monkey (*cynocephalus*) is obviously the Anubis (olive) baboon, although the Latin name is now used by specialists to refer to the yellow baboon (*Papio cynocephalus*), which lives farther south in Africa. The location of the islands of Gagaude and Artigula

Bronze plaque depicting a Nubian tribute bearer with a monkey on his shoulder. Brooklyn Museum 56.101.
Cat. no. 62.



Figure 7.1. Grivet monkey (*Cercopithecus aethiops*). Photo by Anaïs Rilly.



Figure 7.2. Olive baboon (*Papio anubis*). Photo by Muhammad Mahdi Karim (Wikimedia Commons).

is unknown, but Tergedum is probably the locality known today as Tergis, in the southernmost part of the Nile loop and not far from Old Dongola, where the Meroitic temple of Soniyat was recently unearthed by a Polish team.⁴ The distance between this place and Napata (now Karima) by river is about 120 kilometers, which fits perfectly with the 80 Roman miles (i.e., 118 kilometers) cited by Pliny.

There are no monkeys in modern Egypt. In the Old and Middle Kingdom periods, they may still have been present in the wild. In the New Kingdom, they were imported.⁵ Monkeys from Sudan are represented in Egyptian reliefs and paintings depicting the Nubian tribute brought annually to Pharaoh during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties. A list of products included in the Nubian tribute of Papyrus Koller⁶ mentions grivets (Egyptian *g3fy.w*) and baboons (*3ʕʕny.w*). In the entrance hall of the temple of Beit el-Wali, built in Lower Nubia during the first years of Ramesses II's reign, the tribute of Kush is shown being brought before the king in a procession led by the viceroy of Kush, Amenemope.⁷ It includes stacks of luxury products from inner Africa such as elephant tusks, ostrich eggs and feathers, leopard skins, precious

oil, and gold rings, as well as manufactured items such as chairs, bows, and fans. Behind this pile of precious goods advance the Kushites, dressed in simple loincloths made of panther skins. They lead various animals on leashes, including a pair of oxen, an oryx, and a domesticated lion. In the lower register, men carry ebony logs and hold other animals: two cheetahs, a gazelle, two Sloughi dogs, another pair of oxen with typically deformed horns, a giraffe calf, and a gazelle fawn. They are accompanied by women with children. Four grivet monkeys are present in the procession: two sit quietly on the shoulders of a child and a man, while the other two try to escape from the Nubians who are holding them on leashes. No baboon is represented as part of the tribute.

Two Theban tombs of high-ranking officials who served during the Eighteenth Dynasty—the tombs of Rekhmire (TT 100) and Huy (TT 40)—are famous for their detailed depictions of Nubian tribute. Huy was none other than the viceroy of Kush under Tutankhamun. As such, he had to collect the Egyptian colony's tribute each year and hand it over to the king during a lavish ceremony. The scene in Huy's tomb in Qurnet Murai occupies

four registers on the west wall.⁸ The upper register details the tribute of Wawat, the northern province of Nubia, while the second register shows the tribute of Kush, the southern province. Notably, the tribute from both provinces consists mainly of gold and precious stones piled on trays. Elephant tusks and ebony logs are absent. Cattle are also brought to the pharaoh, but the only wild animal is a giraffe calf, appearing in the middle of the tribute from Kush. There are no cheetahs, no gazelles, and particularly no monkeys. How can we interpret the absence of these exotic animals and luxury goods that were so important to Egyptian royalty?⁹ Although historical evidence is lacking, it is possible that during Tutankhamun's reign, Egyptian influence over the countries south of the Dongola Reach was not as strong as it had been before the Amarna period or as it would be later, during the Nineteenth Dynasty. This reduced sway would explain the absence of products and animals—including monkeys—that were obtained from farther south.

The earlier tomb of Rekhmire, who was vizier under two kings, Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, is renowned for its magnificent paintings, which depict many aspects of Egyptian economic activity. It also includes four tribute scenes represented, one above the other, on the west wall of the hall and showing, from top to bottom, the tribute of Punt, Crete and the Aegean world, Nubia, and Syria.¹⁰ The Nubian tribute (fig. 7.3) is incredibly diversified as compared to its counterpart depiction in Huy's tomb. This difference can be explained by the greater control exercised over the southern regions of Nubia during the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, particularly in Napata, where the first temple dedicated to Amun was built and a policy of intimidation was implemented against its inhabitants.¹¹ The tribute of Nubia is depicted in Rekhmire's tomb below the tribute of Crete. The Nubians advance in procession and unload their goods in front of a scribe, who records them. The offerings form an impressive pile that includes rings of gold, baskets of precious stones, pots of ointment,

ostrich eggs and feathers, logs of ebony, elephant tusks, leopard hides, and even an aardvark skin. The Nubians carry additional offerings in their hands or on their shoulders and lead domesticated and wild animals, including a pack of greyhounds, a herd of cattle, a giraffe calf, and a cheetah. This time, monkeys are everywhere; behind the cheetah, a large baboon strides forward, followed by a grivet on a leash. Another leashed grivet is held by a Nubian, while two more grivets, apparently domesticated, are perched, one on an elephant tusk carried by a man and the other along the neck of the giraffe.¹² In addition, yet another grivet sitting on a stool between a basket filled with gold rings and a bouquet of ostrich feathers is part of the pile of offerings recorded by the scribe. In a different part of the tomb (called the "passage"), four grivets are depicted playing and eating on a floor covered with doum nuts, alongside other Nubian products offered to the temple of Amun.¹³

This last detail shows that monkeys, far from being mere objects of amusement or pets for the Nubians, were above all valuable goods. They were offered to members of the Egyptian elite and sent as diplomatic gifts. In the *Alexander Romance*, a fanciful biography of the Macedonian conqueror written in Greek around 350 CE, Queen Candace of Ethiopia (i.e., Kush) sends the hero lavish presents:

My ambassadors are bringing you 100 bars of solid gold, 500 young Ethiopians, 200 parrots, 200 grivets [*sphingias*] and, for our god Ammon, protector of the Egyptian border, a crown of emeralds and unpierced pearls.¹⁴

A painting from the same period as Rekhmire's tomb, found in the town of Akrotiri on the Greek island of Thera, depicts "blue monkeys" that have recently been identified as vervets (also known as grivets) native to Africa: importantly, "from an interregional cultural angle, it is relevant to indicate that Egypt was mostly the intermediary for the Minoan trade of primates or exchange of primate

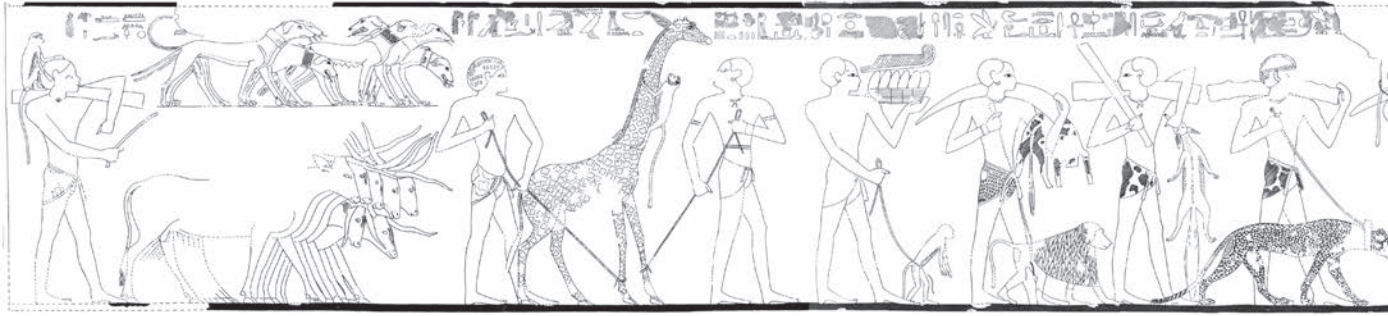


Figure 7.3. The tribute of Nubia as depicted in the tomb of Rekhmire (Davies 1943, pls. XVII–XIX).

imageries.”¹⁵ The presence of Minoans and Nubians side by side in the decoration of Rekhmire’s tomb vividly illustrates Egypt’s role as a crossroads of international trade between Mediterranean cultures and inner Africa.

Painted in the top register of the west wall in Rekhmire’s tomb, the tribute of Punt (fig. 7.4) expectedly resembles that of Nubia, as gold rings, elephant tusks, ostrich eggs and feathers, ebony logs, and leopard skins are also African products. Egyptologists have heatedly debated the location of this country, and their bibliographical references alone would fill a book. However, a location in the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia) and probably extending to Yemen on the other side of the Red Sea is now the most widely accepted hypothesis. The most prized product of Punt was incense; it appears in the tribute scene as lumps in various containers and even as a whole shrub carried in a large basket by two men. Again, living animals

take part in the procession: an ibex, a caracal,¹⁶ and two monkeys—specifically, a grivet and a baboon. This baboon differs from its Nubian counterpart in the color of its fur. It is painted blue-gray, whereas the Nubian baboon is green. They are, in fact, two distinct species: the Nubian one is an olive baboon (*Papio anubis*; see fig. 7.2 above), while the Punt one is a hamadryas baboon (*Papio hamadryas*). This latter species is less common, as its habitat is currently restricted to the Horn of Africa and the western part of Yemen—precisely the regions that, according to general consensus, once constituted the land of Punt. However, it was from this area that several sacred baboons, associated in Egypt with the cult of the god Thoth, were imported, as a recent study of baboon mummies from various locations in Egypt has shown.¹⁷ Isotopic analyses have demonstrated that two hamadryas baboon mummies dated to the New Kingdom and currently in the British Museum’s collection¹⁸ originated from the Horn of

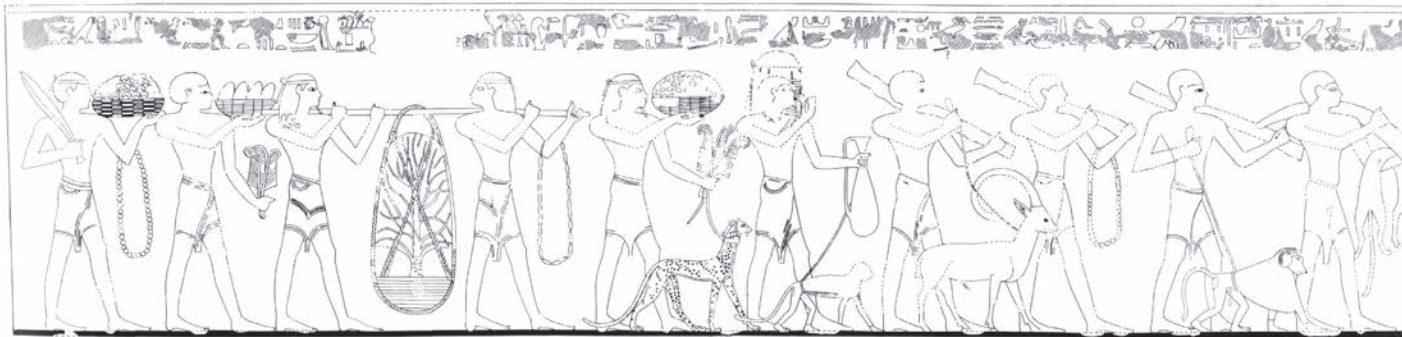
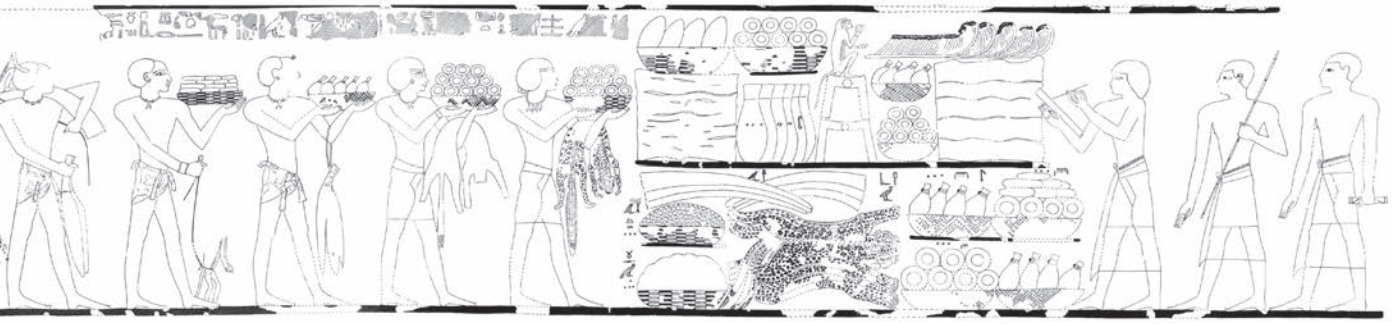


Figure 7.4. The tribute of Punt as depicted in the tomb of Rekhmire (Davies 1943, pl. XX).



Africa or Yemen. As a precautionary measure, these two animals had their formidable canine teeth removed. The death and mummification of one of them occurred shortly after its arrival in Egypt, while the other one appears to have lived for many years in Egypt. The study has also shown that the importation of hamadryas baboons—as far as can be archaeologically documented—was limited in time to a period between the reigns of Thutmose III and Horemheb—that is, after the resumption of trade with the land of Punt under Hatshepsut. These highly prized monkeys, some of which were found carefully embalmed in royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings, were often replaced by animals that were easier to obtain, such as olive baboons imported from Sudan and Barbary macaques from North Africa.¹⁹

The hamadryas baboon, and to a lesser extent the olive baboon, was considered to be an embodiment of Thoth, the god of wisdom and writing.

Although usually depicted as an ibis-headed human, Thoth sometimes took the form of a baboon, frequently crowned with a solar disk²⁰ because baboons were also associated with the worship of the sun god, Re. They were often portrayed with their hands raised in adoration before the sun disk or the solar bark. It was probably by observing these monkeys in the wild that the Egyptians thought the animals were greeting the rising sun in this way. In reality, this posture allows them to warm their stomachs after a cold night and stimulate their digestion.²¹ One of the most renowned monuments figuring baboons worshipping the rising sun is the base of the famous obelisk from Luxor that now adorns the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Transported to France with the obelisk, the base included sixteen statues of these monkeys standing on their hind legs, four for each compass direction. The scene on the base was deemed obscene because the baboons' genitals were overtly visible. It was

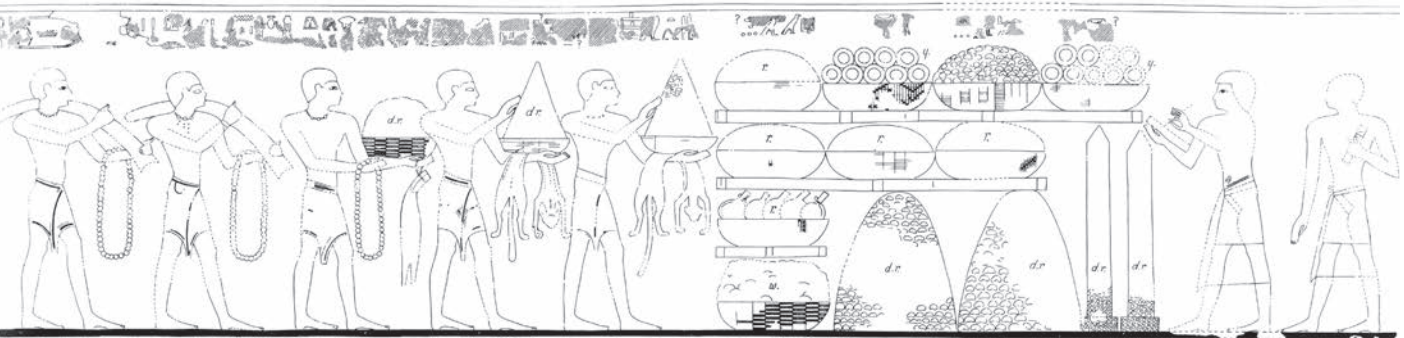




Figure 7.5. Baboons from the temple of Tabo. SNM 5159. Photo by Claude Rilly.

replaced by a modern pedestal depicting the transport of the monument, and the base was moved to the Louvre Museum.²²

A similar granite statuary group depicting four baboons in adoration was discovered in the temple of Tabo, in Sudanese Nubia, and is now kept at the Karima Museum (fig. 7.5). It probably dates to the construction of the great temple of Amun by Taharqo²³ and bears witness to the importation of Egyptian religion into the land of Kush, particularly during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. Another example of how Egyptian religious ideas reached the heart of the kingdom of Meroe is the design on a Meroitic fine-ware beaker found during the excavations of the French archaeological mission in 1998 at the provincial necropolis of Sedeinga (fig. 7.6).²⁴

Two pairs of squatting baboons are depicted with their palms outstretched in adoration toward a small sun disk flanked by uraei, while a fifth individual clutches what appears to be a rolled-up papyrus. This last monkey could be an incarnation of Thoth, the god of knowledge and writing.

Numerous amulets in the shape of squatting baboons, some of them crowned with a solar disk, also testify to the penetration of Egyptian beliefs among Napatan and Meroitic elites.²⁵ The Napatan tomb W507 in the Western Cemetery at Meroe yielded a set of nine blue-faience amulets representing seated cynocephalic figures.²⁶ A Meroitic tomb in the same necropolis, W634, contained three small amulets of highly stylized squatting baboons.²⁷ It is sometimes difficult to know whether representations of monkeys are linked to religious motivations.²⁸ A charming statuette of a seated grivet found in the Meroitic palace at Faras during the British excavations in 1911 probably depicts a pet monkey, as suggested by its collar (fig. 7.7).²⁹ Unlike baboons, grivets were not considered sacred. By contrast, a Meroitic sandstone statuette featuring a squatting baboon with an impressive gaze, discovered by Peter L. Shinnie in Temple M720 during excavations of the royal city of Meroe, represents a deity or a supernatural creature.³⁰

The walls of the Great Enclosure of Musawwarat-es-Sufra, a Meroitic pilgrimage compound south of Meroe dedicated mainly to the lion god Apedemak, are covered with graffiti depicting deities, humans, and animals, including several images of monkeys. One of the most significant engravings



Figure 7.6. Decoration of a fine-ware beaker from Sedeinga (II T 96 cl). Drawing by F. Cartier / Sedeinga Archaeological Unit.



Figure 7.7. Monkey statuette from Faras (Griffith 1926, pl. XV.1).

depicts a baboon seated on a stool and holding a writing tablet (fig. 7.8).³¹ Presumably carved from a wooden board and fitted with a trapezoidal handle at the top, it resembles the tablets that would later be used by students in Quranic schools. There is no doubt that this image represents the god Thoth, master of writing. It reminds us that this practice, although invented by the Egyptians, was imported to Kush and masterfully adapted to the Meroitic language.

Other Meroitic graffiti depict monkeys engaged in human activities. This type of parody involving humanized animals is found in many cultures around the world but is particularly common in Egyptian art.³² A rather crude engraving, again in the Great Enclosure of Musawwarat-es-Sufra, depicts two monkeys modeling a large grain jar, while a third monkey, with his arm raised, seems to be addressing them (fig. 7.9). A poorly preserved inscription in Meroitic cursive script is engraved

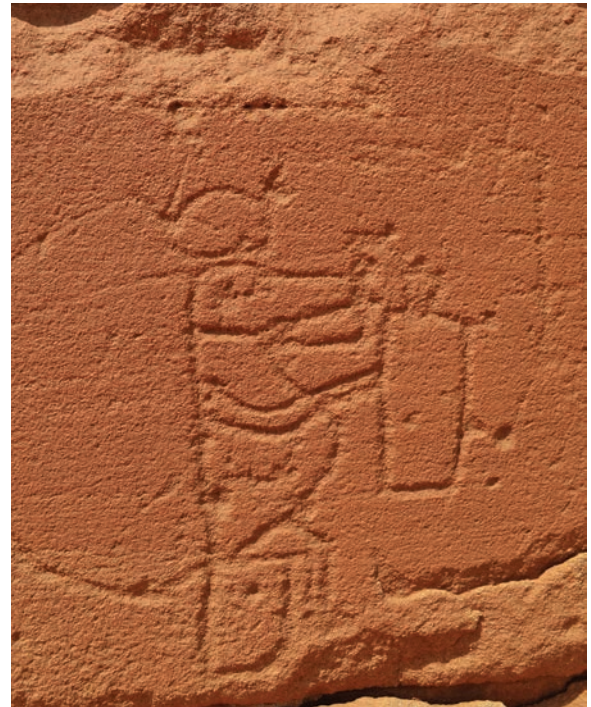


Figure 7.8. Graffito of Thoth as a baboon in the Great Enclosure of Musawwarat es-Sufra. Photo by Claude Rilly.

above the scene. It was read by Fritz Hintze as ⁽¹⁾*ab[.]mbto* ⁽²⁾*neqne : kq*.³³ Like many Meroitic inscriptions, especially graffiti, the text cannot yet be translated. However, new on-site photos taken by the present author and processed with image enhancement software have improved the legibility of the first sequence, which could instead be transliterated as *ab!xt*. The third letter is uncertain, as indicated by the dot below it. The pronunciation can be rendered as /abaʎaŋata/.³⁴ In Nile Nubian languages such as Dongolawi and Nobiin, the name for the grivet monkey is *abalaan*, but the fact that it is different in Western Nubian languages might indicate that the Nile Nubian word was borrowed from Meroitic. In Nara, a language spoken in Eritrea and related to Meroitic, the name for the grivet is *babooli*, which could be a good cognate of the Meroitic word. This inscription therefore adds a new element to the very short list of translatable Meroitic words: the name of the monkey.

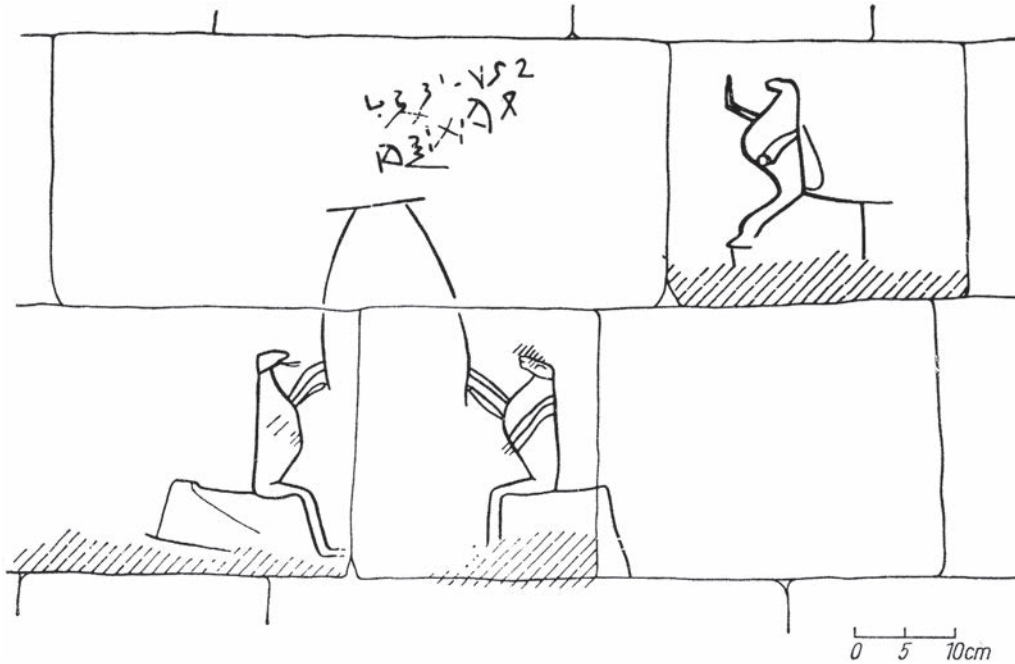


Figure 7.9. Graffito featuring monkeys as potters in the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat-es-Sufra. Drawing from Hintze 1979, 144 fig. 29.

Notes

1. Setzer 1956, 468–471; Butler 1966; Wilson 1979.
2. Butler 1966, 420.
3. *Naturalis Historia* 6.184. English translation by the author from Desanges 2008, 12; see also Eide et al. 1998, 884–88.
4. Drzewiecki 2018, 330. A rare faience figurine of a seated baboon was discovered here; see Żurawski 2005, 296–97, fig. 8.
5. Wassell 1991, vol. 1, 76; Maître 2018, 46 and n28 with further references.
6. Gardiner 1911. The document dates from the Nineteenth Dynasty.
7. Roeder 1938, 24–42, pls. 25–34; Ricke, Hughes, and Wentz 1967, pl. 9. An impressive color facsimile made by Joseph Bonomi in the 1820s is on display in the Nubian gallery of the British Museum.
8. Davies and Gardiner 1926, 21–28, pls. XXII–XXXI.
9. See Morkot 2000, 79–80, for the prominent place occupied by ivory and ebony—alongside gold—in diplomatic gifts sent to Near Eastern kingdoms; see Gatier 1996 for the use of giraffes as diplomatic gifts in later times. Gatier (1996, 913–14) states: “Adult giraffes are fast, tireless, and their kicks are dangerous. In the nineteenth century, people preferred to capture baby giraffes after killing their mothers. They were then raised on milk.” The same strategy was obviously used by Nubian hunters and explains the moderate size of these animals in tribute scenes.
10. Davies 1943, 17–30, pls. XVII–XXIII.
11. Morkot 2000, 73–74.

12. A similar scene in the tomb of Sobekhotep (TT 63), dated to the reign of Thutmose IV, depicts a grivet sitting on the shoulder of a Nubian tribute bearer and a baboon on a leash (BM EA922; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA922).
13. Davies 1935, pl. XIV; 1943, 46, pl. XLVIII.
14. Eide et al. 1996, 508.
15. Urbani, Binnberg, and Youlatos 2021.
16. The animal was identified as a cheetah in the publication of the tomb (Davies 1943, 19), but its smaller size and longer neck, compared to those of the cheetah depicted in the tribute to Kush, strongly suggest that it is actually a caracal.
17. Dominy et al. 2020.
18. BM EA6736 and EA6738.
19. This is the case for monkeys found in 1968 in the sacred animal necropolis north of Saqqara, dating from the Late Period (404–40 BCE); cf. Dominy et al. 2020, 4. It should be noted, however, that a graffito from the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat-es-Sufra (Sb. 124/54) likely features a hamadryas baboon in adoration, with its characteristic long mantle of fine fur; cf. Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 125, fig. 12.
20. Several minor deities in the Egyptian pantheon, such as Hedjwer, Baba, Isden, and Isdes, as well as certain hypostases of Khonsu, could also be represented in the form of a baboon; see Wassell 1991, vol. 1, 77, with further references. One of the four sons of Horus, Hapy, is depicted with the head of a baboon; the four brothers were responsible for protecting the internal organs of the mummified deceased, and Hapy was in charge of the lungs. Several examples of canopic jars with baboon-head lids have been found in Kushite royal tombs; see Dunham 1950, pl. XXXVI (Ku. 3, 4, 15, and 16).
21. See Dominy 2021 for a primatologist's interpretation of this behavior.
22. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDL3DvJVNik>.
23. Davies 2014, 10–11.
24. Other examples of baboons in Meroitic decorated ceramic iconography have been found at Karanog and Meroe; see, respectively, Woolley and MacIver 1910b, pl. 50 (Penn E8463), and Török 1997b, pl. 97.
25. See, e.g., Dunham 1963, 6 (tomb W630), 22 (W761), 36 (W609), 39 (W643), 44 (W634), 59 (W507), 294 (W571), and 320 (W787–88).
26. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MFA 47.3839 (<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/356971/amulets-of-baboons>).
27. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MFA 47.3899 (<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/358519/amulet>), 23.M.268, and 47.3900.
28. Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 123.
29. The monkey statuette, 33 centimeters in height, was found in Room 34 of the palace at Faras (Griffith 1926, pl. XV.1) and is now in the British Museum (EA51740); see Wenig 1978, 225, no. 149.
30. The statuette, 25 centimeters in height, is housed in the Sudan National Museum (SNM 24569); see Wenig 1978, 91 fig. 72; Wildung 1997, 279–80 (cat. no. 297). A sandstone block engraved with an image of two baboons with their hands raised in worship was part of the decoration of the Awlib temple in Sudan; see Borcowski and Paner 2005, fig. 7.
31. Cf. Hintze 1979, 142, fig. 27.
32. For two examples concerning baboons, see Maître 2018, 46–47. The Meroitic beaker Penn E8463 (see n24 above) displays a seated baboon playing the lyre.
33. Fritz Hintze, “Musawwarat Sekundär-Inschriften MS 1 ff” (unpublished manuscript); I am grateful to Pawel Wolf and Cornelia Kleinitz for providing me with a scan of this notebook. Hintze's transliteration of the inscription was recently corrected by Jochen Hallof (2024, 134) as ⁽¹⁾*ab[e]mbt* ⁽²⁾*ncq..kq*.
34. The grapheme *x* (formerly transliterated *b*) was most likely pronounced /ɲ/ (English *ng*) in native Meroitic words; see Cabon et al. 2022, 353.



8

Reptiles and Amphibians

Kiersten Neumann

Nubia's foundational relationship with the Nile River bred a visual repertoire replete with cold-blooded vertebrates whose livelihood depended on the river's moist environment. For millennia, the crocodiles that swam through its waters, the snakes and turtles that slithered and waddled up its banks, the frogs that hid among and hopped within its luscious green vegetation—this cast of creatures made its way onto the surfaces of portable objects and static landscapes in a variety of media, becoming active participants in people's daily lives throughout Nubia. Some of these objects also traveled beyond the borders of Nubia—through acts of trade, tribute, and migration—bringing Nubian artistic practices and visual imagery to neighboring cultures of Africa, West Asia, the Mediterranean, and beyond. In her study of reptiles and amphibians in art and science, Kay Etheridge remarks that these “loathsome beasts” historically have occupied the realms of magic and myth more than any other taxonomic group of animals, often being associated with evil and the otherworldly, and, whether presented in the context of fantasy or natural science, their images provide important advantages over specimens for study: “they can depict life cycles, place the organism in its habitat, portray behaviors, and illustrate magnified details of structure.”¹

This chapter tracks the portrayal and power of representations of reptiles and amphibians—known collectively as *herpetofauna*—in Nubian art from the Paleolithic through the Meroitic period. Albeit riddled with nuanced variations in form and function, this robust corpus is united by its creators' common desire through their depictions to embrace the aquatic ecosystem that sustained life in Nubia, harness its life-giving energy, and transform its inherent threats into artful sources of protection.

Modest Beginnings (Paleolithic to ca. 3500 BCE)

Despite being a cornerstone of the Nile ecosystem and a long-standing presence in the region—evidenced by faunal remains attested as early as the Holocene²—herpetofauna appear somewhat rarely in the visual repertoire, both monumental and portable, of Upper and Lower Nubia in the years prior to the middle of the second millennium BCE. Yet the attestations that have been recorded, considered alongside preserved reptile and amphibian remains (including those

Bottle from Ballana decorated with frogs and trees. ISACM E22658. Cat. no. 47.

found as burial deposits and as forms of personal or architectural adornment) suggest not only a visual appreciation of these creatures' natural forms but also a cultural significance imbued with symbolic associations.

Naturalistically drawn figures of wild and domestic land animals (particularly bovids but also gazelles, antelope, giraffes, and dromedaries) seem to dominate Nubian rock art. However, creatures associated with the water, along with mythical beings, highly stylized human figures, boats, and nonfigurative motifs, also claim their share of the spotlight in the more than 10,000 drawings so far recorded among the sandstone cliffs and granite outcrops of Nubia's cataract zones. The earliest engravings date to the Late Paleolithic period (ca. 14,000–13,000 BCE), though the practice seems to have peaked during the Neolithic (ca. 5000–3000 BCE) and continued through the Islamic period, with styles ranging between schematic and naturalistic.³

Among depictions of herpetofauna, snakes and crocodiles—some of which may in fact represent lizards—are the most frequently represented, with turtles appearing only occasionally. The heavy patination (surface weathering) of the snakelike designs documented near Gebel Gorgod, in the Third Cataract region of the Nile, and the dark rock varnishes over the figures of crocodiles—shown amid abstract designs representing fish traps—at El-Hosh, in the First Cataract region, speak to the antiquity of these herpetofauna rock drawings.⁴ Likely of the same Epipaleolithic date as the El-Hosh assemblages are the complex geometric compositions associated with crocodiles at Gharb Aswan to the south and in Wadi Atwani in the Eastern Desert (fig. 8.1).⁵ One particularly striking panel at Gharb Aswan, nicknamed “Crocodile Beach,” features a bask of crocodiles carved into a depression near a crack in the bedrock, evoking the image of sunbathing reptiles freshly emerged from the river.⁶ A recent rock-art survey of the Fourth

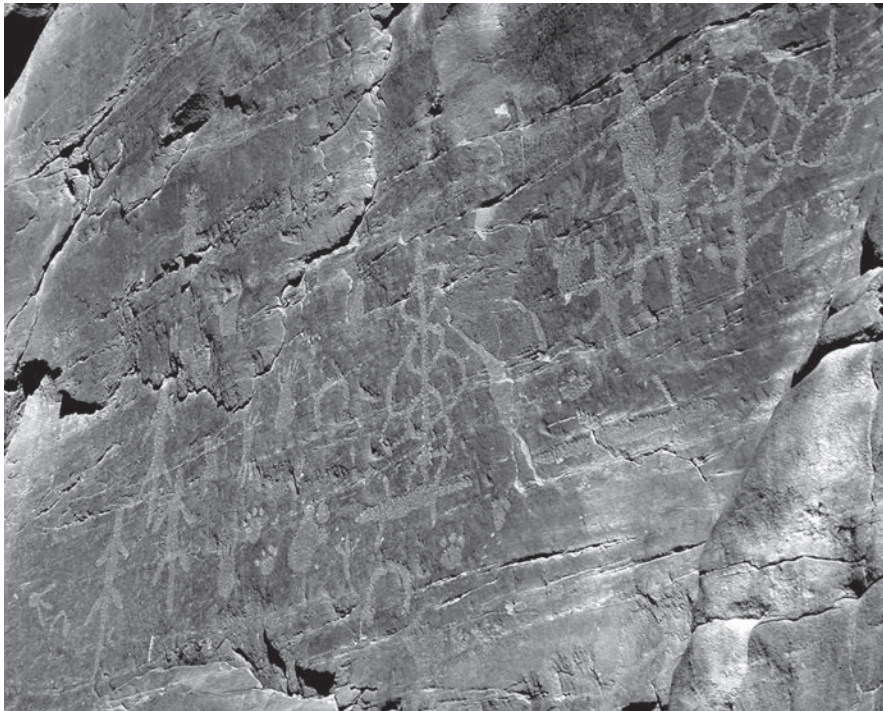


Figure 8.1. Drawings of crocodiles in Wadi Atwani, Eastern Desert, Egypt. Photo by P. Storemyr, 2003.

and Fifth Cataract regions yielded few examples of herpetofauna, with notable exceptions being a detailed drawing of a turtle on Us Island and a scene depicting a crocodile hunt on Boni Island.⁷ In contrast, the large turtle carved in sunk relief into the massif of Gebel Uweinat is hard to overlook, for it is strategically positioned at the entrance to the wadi of Karkur et-Talh, located in the triborder area where present-day Sudan, Libya, and Egypt converge in the eastern Sahara. This powerful representation, recorded already in the first quarter of the twentieth century, continues to draw scholarly attention (fig. 8.2).⁸

Important for such scenes carved into the living rock is not only their moment of creation during the prehistoric period but also an awareness of their continued interaction with and influence on people settled within and moving through these cataract zones—past and present—owing to the drawings' very public setting in the landscape. This fact, which increases the scenes' impact and meaning,

was understandably not lost on their creators, yet what their initial meanings were and the precise motivations behind their creation remain beyond our grasp:

It does seem quite reasonable to suppose that the early nomadic hunters who are responsible for this fascinating body of rock art, not unlike the Bedouin of more recent times, felt an irresistible urge to “mark their environment.” Whether this urge was fed by day-to-day worries or by metaphysical concerns is, of course, still far beyond our present understanding (and will probably remain so).⁹

Nonetheless, a rare example of a portable herpetofauna image—a three-dimensional clay head of a crocodile or hippopotamus from a Mesolithic settlement (ca. 8000–5000 BCE) at modern-day Khartoum—hints that such visual representations may also have held meaning in more intimate or domestic contexts during this early period.¹⁰



Figure 8.2. Drawing of a soft-shelled turtle at Karkur et-Talh, Gebel Uweinat, Sudan. Photo by András Zboray (www.fjexpeditions.com).

Expanding Horizons (ca. 3500–1500 BCE)

Beyond rock art, Nubian visual culture leading up to the mid-second millennium BCE—including that of Lower Nubia’s A-Group and C-Group cultures and Upper Nubia’s pre-Kerma and Kerma cultures—likewise features relatively few preserved representations of herpetofauna, yet the examples so far documented noticeably imprint a greater range of media. For example, in Lower Nubia, a fragmentary turtle palette excavated from a grave in Cemetery 76 at Gerf Husein and dated to the period of the A-Group culture presents, in stone, a form altogether reminiscent of the turtle rock art discussed earlier.¹¹ Amulets in the shapes of frogs and crocodiles—and, related to them, armlets, bracelets, and finger rings fashioned from turtle shell—stand as examples of the circulation of even smaller portable forms through the period of the C-Group culture (2400–1550 BCE).¹² Meanwhile, to the north, a relative lack of either reptile or amphibian representations persists until the Classic Kerma period (1700–1550 BCE), when a range of noteworthy trends emerge in the region.

At Kerma, the kingdom of Kush’s capital city in Upper Nubia, files of animals dominate the corpus of zoomorphic representations—a corpus formed in large part by wall paintings and inlays from elite funerary and royal cultic contexts (e.g., the Eastern Cemetery and the royal tumuli with associated funerary chapels).¹³ These decorative series, which served to “construct a narrative and worldview centered around movement,” primarily favored “animals that highlighted strength and fierceness,” in particular “lions, rams, hippopotami, and giraffes,”¹⁴ with herpetofauna represented sparingly. Forming a border around the well-preserved ivory inlays of winged giraffes and winged adaptations of the Kerman form of the Egyptian hippopotamus goddess Tawaret on select wooden funerary beds were a series of rectangular inlays with symmetrical forms that could be understood as stylized frogs.¹⁵

Several turtle and crocodile/lizard ivory inlays were also recovered (fig. 8.3).

Uniquely, representations of crocodiles also appear in several other media excavated at Kerma:¹⁶ (1) an estimated one-meter-long, glazed-quartz statue, of which two large sculpted fragments were discovered in the royal funerary context of tumuli KII and KIII; (2) two clay figurines from a foundation deposit in the Western Deffufa (Kerma’s main temple); and (3) crocodile-shaped amulets, including one of gold. The latter likely served to drive away the evil threatened by the animal itself: to quote Angelika Lohwasser, “a danger is blocked by visualizing it. To depict the feared animal on a magical object means to stop it.”¹⁷ Crocodiles were also present as decoration: (1) as incised figures on an ostrich eggshell excavated in a Middle Kerma (2050–1700 BCE) house and on a spouted bowl found alongside the burial pit of a child, and (2) as modeled figures on ceramic pitchers with zoomorphic spouts. Further, the body of a large crocodile appears in a wall painting in funerary chapel KXI, dominating the center of an expansive scene of fishing in the marshes (see fig. 1.11 in chapter 1). The reptile’s rough skin is evoked through a grid-like pattern mimicking that of nearby nets; its head is not preserved, however, having possibly been destroyed intentionally by later visitors as an act of protection against the ferocious animal. Also noteworthy are individual amulets in the forms of a frog, a turtle, and possibly a snake, along with dagger handles with turtle-shell grips, the latter recalling the turtle-shell accessories of the C-Group culture noted above.¹⁸

The intentional incorporation of select herpetofauna forms by Kerma’s elite and royal court in their monumental and portable material-culture practices underscores the significance of reptiles and amphibians in the local Nubian iconographic repertoire—independent of possible Egyptian influence. Depicted for both their aesthetic appeal and their symbolic meanings, these motifs were crafted from materials such as precious metals, semi-precious stones, baked clay, and vibrant pigments,

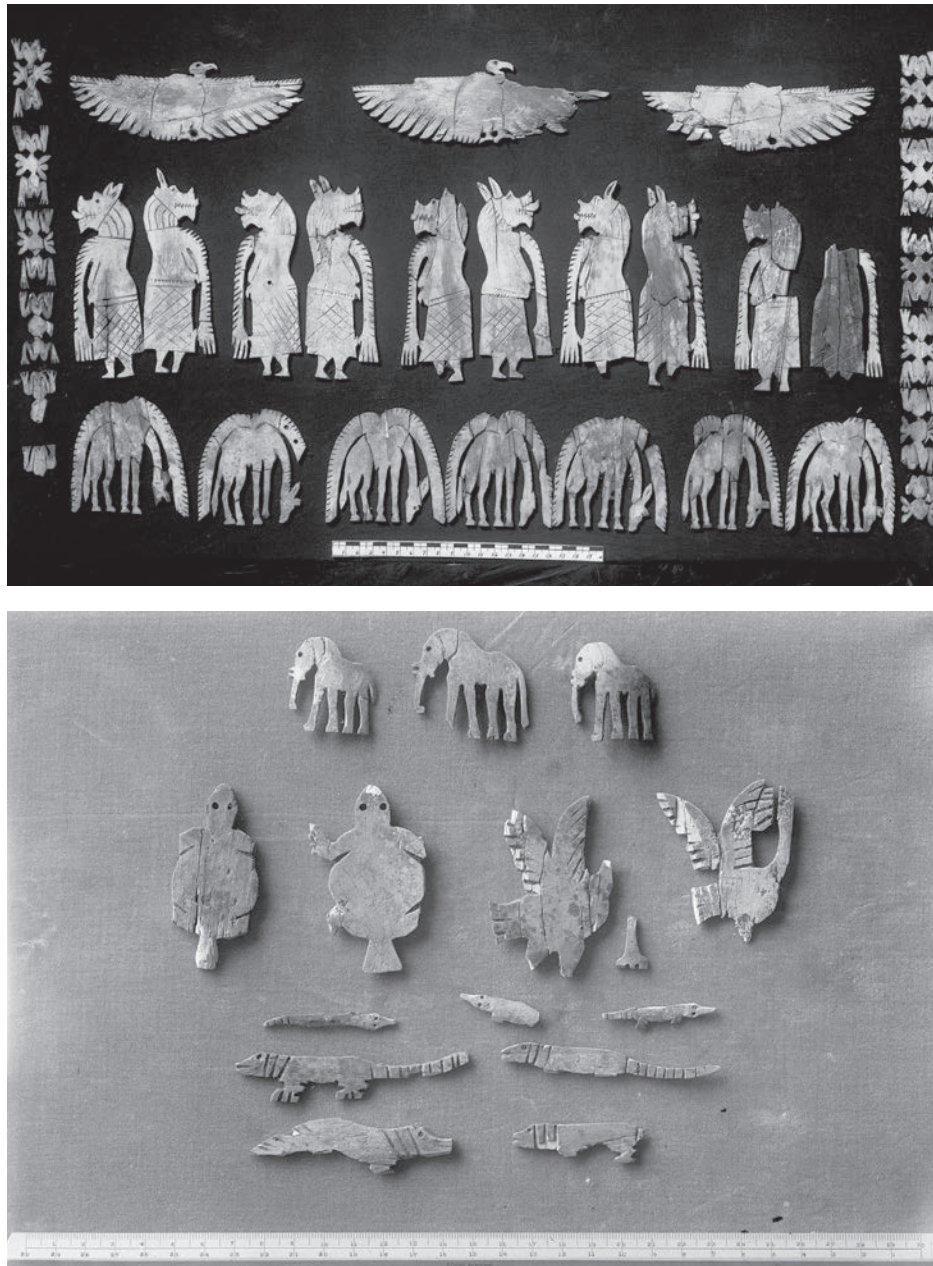


Figure 8.3. Ivory bed inlays from K309 (top) and KVX (bottom), Kerma, Sudan (G. A. Reisner negatives A2180 and B2435). © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

further enhancing their cultural significance. Even without written confirmation of their intended meanings, we can confidently assert that such animal representations were likely associated with power and protection and possibly with renewal and regeneration—affective properties associated

with these creatures and the Nile River that would have held value in both domestic and funerary contexts. Of interest is a passage from the Twelfth Dynasty (1985–1773 BCE) text *The Teaching of King Amenemhat I*, which, in describing the king's military campaigns in Lower Nubia, seems to compare

its people with crocodiles: “I subdued lions, I captured crocodiles, I enslaved the men of Wawat, took prisoner the Medjay.”¹⁹

Most archaeological evidence for the subsequent New Kingdom period (1550–900 BCE)—when Nubia was under Egyptian control—derives from Egyptian colonial sites. Similarly, the early first millennium BCE has so far yielded little in the way of indigenous animal representations. A truly remarkable shift occurs, however, during the Napatan period (750–270 BCE) and the subsequent Meroitic period (270 BCE–330 CE) in both Upper and Lower Nubia, with a veritable wealth not only of animal but also specifically of reptile and amphibian depictions throughout Kushite visual culture. It is worth considering that some of the practices related to herpetofauna representations from the Middle and Classic Kerma periods and earlier, discussed above, may have been precursors to these distinctly Nubian artistic traditions of the first millennium BCE and onward.

A Golden Age (ca. 750 BCE–330 CE)

The Napatan and Meroitic periods (750 BCE–330 CE) represent a flourishing era for herpetofauna imagery, with a remarkable array of reptiles and amphibians prominently peppering the Kushite visual landscape. Whether imbued with fierceness, serenity, or the divine, depictions of these cold-blooded creatures adorned architectural features and portable objects alike and appeared in contexts ranging from daily life to ritualized and funerary practices. Notably, by the Meroitic period, such representations evolve beyond the familiar and traditional to embrace uniquely distinctive and, at times, particularly precious forms, thereby continuing to engage in a dynamic dialogue with the surrounding natural world.

Fierce Foes

Objects from the site of Sanam near the Fourth Cataract and dating to the Napatan period confirm that the Kushites continued to harness the power

of images to ward off the ferocious and potentially deadly crocodile. Both a metal staff attachment from the site’s treasury and a faience plaque from its temple depict the reptile’s defeat by a male figure—either a god or a king—shown standing on the animal while spearing its back, its snout securely bound.²⁰ This trope persisted into the Meroitic period, appearing on similar types of portable objects, including amulets and ceramic vessels, as well as in architectural decoration.

Among the extensive graffiti and carved reliefs throughout the Meroitic temple complex of Musawwarat es-Sufra in central Sudan is a series of crocodile figures whose modes of display underscore their subjugation.²¹ On the pylon of the Lion Temple—erected by the Nubian king Arnekhamani and dedicated to the Kushite lion god Apedemak—a pacified crocodile is depicted in profile beneath the god Arensnuphis. This motif is echoed elsewhere in this same temple, with either a god or a king shown standing on the reptile’s back. Meanwhile, the site’s Great Enclosure shows a variation of this theme, with a reclining lion over a subdued crocodile. Presenting an altogether different yet similarly themed narrative carved into this same structure are images of the hunting crocodile—one devouring a human, leaving only his upper body visible, and another about to attack an antelope. Interestingly, a variation of this scene is found on a large painted jar fragment from the Meroitic cemetery at Kerma whose preserved section shows one of a pair of crocodiles devouring a human headfirst.²² The preceding motif—of a figure trampling a crocodile—also appears in an elaborate faience amulet, set in gold and discovered in a tomb at Meroe, that depicts the Egyptian protective deity Pataikos standing on top of a crocodile while wrangling a snake in each hand (fig. 8.4).²³ A wall painting in Room 12 of the fortress at Karanog in Lower Nubia brings us back to architectural decoration, the scene depicting, in addition to a camel, jackal, and ship, a figure on horseback attacking a crocodile.²⁴ A partially preserved openwork

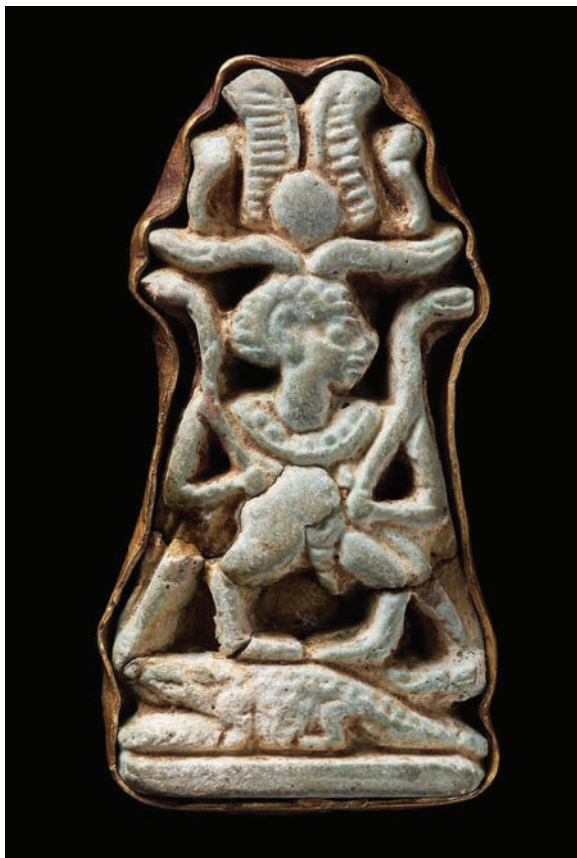


Figure 8.4. Meroitic faience and gold amulet including a crocodile from Meroe, Sudan. MFA 23.345. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

relief likely from Faras (also in Lower Nubia) and dating to the end of the Meroitic period (fourth century CE) presents a relatable depiction, attesting to the continued relevance of this motif: the sandstone sculpture represents the falcon-headed god Horus as a horseman driving a spear into the back of a crocodile trapped between the horse's legs.²⁵

As the faience amulet from Meroe illustrates, imagery portraying snakes as adversaries to be subdued and defeated was also in circulation in Nubia during the Napatan and Meroitic periods, its goal similarly being to avert evil from humans. For instance, a Napatan bronze statuette—reportedly from Nuri near the Fourth Cataract²⁶—depicts a figure, either a god or a king, gripping a snake in one hand. Interestingly and somewhat contrastingly

(for what it says about the figure's relationship with snakes), the figure also wears the so-called Nubian cap with a uraeus—the stylized upright cobra symbolizing royal or divine authority; widely recognized as an Egyptian symbol, it takes on a distinctly Meroitic expression here. Also worth mentioning is an eighth-century BCE (and thus contemporaneous) Phoenician-style carved ivory excavated at the complex known as Fort Shalmaneser in the Assyrian capital city of Kalḫu (modern Nimrud); depicting a Nubian tribute bearer bringing, as gifts for the king, wild animals native to his homeland—an oryx, a monkey, and the skin of a leopard—the carving shows the figure wearing a short kilt intricately embroidered with several geometric motifs and the bodies of two undulating snakes stacked one above the other (fig. 8.5). Considering that the carving portrays the tribute bearer as dominant over the oryx, monkey, and leopard, the same may be true of the snakes, their inclusion on the figure's dress symbolizing his dominance over them.²⁷ For the Meroitic period—and from the architectural side—Suzanne Davis and Geoff Emberling documented a well-worn drawing of a poisonous horned viper (graffito T25) in their study of Meroitic figural graffiti in the funerary temple (Ku. 1500) at El-Kurru, remarking in their publication that scribes sometimes “killed” this deadly reptile in Egyptian writing (the viper hieroglyph representing the sound *f*) by depicting its body severed in two.²⁸ Finally, representations of snakes have also been identified among the graffiti of Musawwarat es-Sufra, their presence likely similarly reflecting the animal's perceived threats and, in turn, its appropriation as a protective symbol.²⁹

Despite this array of stark, hunter-prey imagery, not all representations of crocodiles and snakes from the Napatan and Meroitic periods emphasize these animals' ferocity, as the example of the uraeus suggests. Instead, many representations affirm the creatures' positive associations with the life-giving properties of water and thus their symbolic roles in regeneration and renewal—and here we can



Figure 8.5. Ivory carving of a Nubian tribute bearer from Kalhu (modern Nimrud), Iraq. MMA 60.145.11. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

welcome back to the discussion our old friends, the frog and turtle.

Peaceful Encounters

The greatest abundance of peaceful herpetofauna depictions for this period appears on Meroitic painted ceramics, renowned for their skillfully rendered, predominantly wheel-made forms and polychromatic designs. Drawing on Nubian, Egyptian, and Hellenistic motifs, this flourishing industry produced a wealth of portable products distinguished by distinctly Meroitic innovation and artistry. The decorative programs of these fine wares feature a recurring repertoire of geometric and representational designs derived from a limited yet refined

corpus.³⁰ Although well attested in the archaeological record—especially from the first through third centuries CE—this record is heavily skewed toward the practices of sedentary elite society (with most materials coming from burial contexts), leaving the material practices involving herpetofauna imagery of nomadic and seminomadic peoples comparatively less understood for this period.³¹

The elongated bodies of snakes and crocodiles were especially well suited to Meroitic painted ceramics, with craftsmen wrapping the animals' forms around the circumference of various vessel types. Typically placed on the shoulders and outer bodies of vessels, these designs feature either a single animal—such as an undulating snake—or a procession of creatures, including slithering snakes and sequential crocodiles. A jar from Cemetery B at Ballana, located near the Egyptian–Sudanese border, illustrates the latter by featuring a procession of alternating and sometimes overlapping stocky, red and brown crocodiles on its shoulder; interestingly, some of the crocodiles are missing legs (fig. 8.6).³² A similar crocodile procession, painted in red and black, is found on a spheroid jar from the Meroitic cemetery at Kerma; a dense garland of grape clusters below the crocodiles suggests the jar may have been used to store wine.³³ Exemplifying the single-animal design is a ceramic rectangular box lid decorated with a crocodile in profile, rendered in red paint on a light background; one upturned end of the lid is decorated with a face, likely human, including the eyes, nose, and mouth.³⁴ A tall-necked jar with a globular body excavated in the Meroitic cemetery of Semna South, near the Second Cataract, underscores the design of a single snake elongated around a vessel: here the creature is depicted with a vine—a common motif in Hellenistic and Meroitic vase painting—weaving inside its undulating body, which extends around the vessel's full circumference (fig. 8.7).³⁵

In addition to an assortment of flora, snakes are also frequently paired with the ankh sign; the combination of these creatures with a popular symbol for “life” continues the themes of renewal,



Figure 8.6. Meroitic vessel with crocodiles from Ballana, Egypt. ISACM E22631. **Cat. no. 46.**



Figure 8.7. Meroitic vessel with a snake and vine from Semna South, Sudan. ISACM E36379. **Cat. no. 49.**

regeneration, and the life-giving forces of the Nile. A cylindrical jar from Cemetery B at Ballana, for example, is decorated with a procession of slithering cobras carrying ankhs in their mouths (fig. 8.8),³⁶ while a globular jar from the cemetery at Karanog includes, around its shoulder, a single undulating snake spitting several ankh signs;³⁷ a frieze of foraging giraffes processes below.³⁷ An ankh-carrying snake also takes up most of the outer surface of a cup from Ballana's Cemetery B, the reptilian motif here being accompanied by several lotus buds.³⁸ Several vessels present a variation of this pairing, with ankh signs depicted both above and below the bodies of undulating snakes, some of them with ankhs in their mouths.³⁹

Programs of a similarly playful tone depict a crocodile accompanied by fish and its companion or “guardian” bird, the Egyptian plover (*Pluvianus aegyptiacusi*). One particularly endearing scene

shows a bird perched on the crocodile's tail.⁴⁰ These ensemble motifs take inspiration from the natural local environment, illustrating symbiotic relationships between these animals. A vessel fragment from Adindan in Lower Nubia, for example, depicts all three animals in harmony: a bird is perched on the crocodile's tail, while fish are shown swimming gracefully above and below its beak.⁴¹ In comparable fashion, the crocodile's inseparable relationship with the water's edge is mimicked in several additional ways on Meroitic vessels: (1) painted ceramics that pair crocodiles with lotus flowers; (2) a bronze bowl featuring a crocodile centerpiece, designed to emerge as the liquid contents recede; and (3) “offering tables” or trays featuring three-dimensional crocodiles crouched at their rims.⁴² The latter motif recalls Napatan-period ceramic vessels embellished with crocodile appliqué affixed to their rims and bodies.⁴³ Interestingly, a ceramic bowl from Faras similarly includes “meandering snakes painted inside the bowl.”⁴⁴

The frog—whose depiction, unsurprisingly, evokes a sense of peaceful encounter—similarly appears with notable frequency in designs that emphasize its connection to the natural world and the Nilotic ecosystem. Most vessels integrate the frog into decorative bands encircling their shoulders or outer bodies, alternating the amphibian with vegetation such as lotus flowers and other aquatic motifs. A kaolinite cup with a flat base and straight walls from Faras perfectly exemplifies this decorative program, featuring beautifully articulated line-drawn frogs interspersed with similarly scaled lotus flowers.⁴⁵ Another particularly endearing example is preserved on a jar with an especially vibrant red exterior excavated in Ballana's Cemetery B: the decorative band on its shoulder features a pair of especially charming crouched frogs, separated by various floral elements (fig. 8.9).⁴⁶ A noteworthy variation of this arrangement appears on Late Meroitic / Post-Meroitic bronze bowls, where a continuous frieze of frogs encircles the vessels above a row of large, stylized lotus flowers.⁴⁷



Figure 8.8. Meroitic jar with snakes spitting ankhs from Ballana, Egypt. ISACM E22563. **Cat. no. 45.**



Figure 8.9. Meroitic jar with crouching frogs from Ballana, Egypt. ISACM E22658.
Cat. no. 47.

The frog also appears alongside other animals with links to water, including the heron.⁴⁸ Furthermore, like the snake, the frog is depicted both with ankh signs in its mouth and flanked by ankhs, further evoking its deep connection to life-giving water and regeneration broadly.⁴⁹ A strikingly different style of possible frog representation appears on a black ceramic bowl whose white, impressed decoration closely resembles the stylized, symmetrical “frog” design seen among the Kerma inlays discussed above. This vessel, from a Meroitic burial in the Karanog cemetery, features a row of frog-like figures encircling the body, framed above and below by bands of diamond-patterned ornamentation (fig. 8.10).⁵⁰

The frequency of herpetofauna in peaceful compositions on Meroitic ceramics not only reflects the abundance of these creatures in the Nile’s floodplains but also underscores their broader cultural

significance and associations with fertility, renewal, and the cyclical nature of life, as well as protection. What is more, these decorative trends extend beyond ceramics, with reptiles and amphibians peppering the surfaces of various other portable art forms, including amulets, rings, stamps, figurines, and carved ivories.

Excavations in the Western Cemetery of Meroe undertaken in the 1920s by the Harvard University–Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Expedition uncovered several herpetofauna amulets dating from the Napatan through Meroitic periods. These miniature figures, especially of frogs and crocodiles in the round, were carefully crafted of faience, stone, and metal and were either perforated or equipped with a suspension ring.⁵¹

An especially noteworthy example features two blue-glazed faience frogs crouched side by side on a rectangular plaque (fig. 8.11). A related piece,



Figure 8.10. Meroitic bowl with incised decoration from the Karanog cemetery, Egypt. Penn E8734. Courtesy of Penn Museum.



Figure 8.11. Meroitic faience amulet with two frogs from Meroe, Sudan. MFA 23.755. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

though lacking a means of suspension, is a lead figurine of a frog crouching on a base, its back adorned with incised circles.⁵² Incised designs on seals, scarabs, and plaques similarly include frog and crocodile imagery. A clay sealing from Meroe, for instance, has no fewer than six complete or partially preserved impressions of a stamp seal depicting a seated frog, while a ceramic sherd from the same site bears rows of stamped frogs separated by painted bands.⁵³ Additionally, several jar sealings from the cemetery at Karanog adorned with cobra motifs, some accompanied by frog figures, attest to the presence of these creatures in such small-scale forms.⁵⁴ Finally, a steatite plaque from Faras includes the figure of a crocodile above a fish of similar proportions, while a fragment of an ivory inlay from the same site embodies the shape of a frog.⁵⁵ Also crafted of steatite is a rare turtle-shaped amulet, discovered during excavations of the Napatan-period cemetery at Sanam, along with one crocodile- or lizard-shaped amulet and several frog-shaped amulets made of faience and various stones.⁵⁶

The proximity of these object types to the human body made them particularly appealing for imagery associated with the very qualities these creatures embodied. Illustrations of frogs connect well with the Nilotic context of Kushite sites and concepts of regeneration and renewal, while objects featuring crocodile imagery more explicitly evoke their powerful and protective qualities. What is more, the raw materials with which these herpetofauna motifs were created likely further reinforced the perceived potency of these objects, the affective properties of metal, faience, or semiprecious stones, for example, contributing to the objects' ability to ward off evil or impart regenerative and life-affirming properties to the wearers.

Nonportable depictions of herpetofauna that align with these animals' peaceful and life-giving associations are also nestled throughout the Kushite urban landscape. Uniquely, two distinctive stone sculptures of crouching frogs measuring 60 and 68 centimeters in height, respectively, were discovered

during the early twentieth-century excavations of the reservoir (*hafir*) at Basa in central Sudan. Their original placement within this aquatic context underscores the frog's symbolic associations with water and regeneration.⁵⁷ In 1970, the sculptures were relocated to the Sudan National Museum, where they were once again reunited with water by being positioned along the banks of a water channel in the museum's garden. Related to this pairing of herpetofauna sculptures and water, representations of frogs and snakes were uncovered during the excavation of the "water sanctuary" located within the royal city at Meroe, the creatures here being included in both its architectural and its sculptural programs. Positioned at the northern, eastern, and western edges of this Hellenizing monument's water basin were sandstone lion and bull protomes, while its southern side was marked by a wall with sculptural and painted decoration that included, in its later phase, two red snakes facing toward the center and the figure of an elephant above. Decorating the wall below the snakes was a series of faience plaques that included ankh signs and rosettes, a grouping reminiscent of the snake-with-ankh motifs on Meroitic ceramics discussed above.⁵⁸

Divine Signifiers

Building on the idea of peaceful herpetofauna are select representations that explicitly suggest some of these creatures' divine associations. This connection for the crocodile, well established in Egyptian visual culture through the worship of the crocodile god Sobek, seems to permeate into Nubia, where the reptile was venerated and its deified attributes adapted within local traditions. A Napatan plaque from Sanam, for example, includes a pair of crocodiles above and below a baboon with a sun disk, the baboon shown squatting below a canopy created by the tails of two uraei.⁵⁹ This crocodile-baboon pairing is also found on two finger rings from Meroe—one of gold and one with gold overlay—their bezels including in their registers a series of seated baboons and elongated crocodiles.⁶⁰ Moving

into the Meroitic period, we find a particularly striking visual attestation of the crocodile's divine association on the bronze bowl from Gammal, located near the Second Cataract. Incised into the outer surface of the bowl is an offering scene with a human figure (either a priest or a king) and several gods of both composite and zoomorphic forms: at one end is a crown-wearing crocodile deity perched atop a podium, and at the other end is the god Amun in the form of a ram, similarly shown lying on a podium.⁶¹ Comparable imagery from an expertly crafted bronze seal also excavated at Meroe similarly suggests the importance of the crocodile's association with the cult of Amun-Re in the Kushite context. The seal's pyramid-shaped openwork cage contains two modeled figures—a crouching crocodile and Amun-Re in the form of a ram-headed sphinx wearing an Egyptian headdress and sun disk—while the hieroglyphic inscription on its base reads “house of Amun-Re,” suggesting that this object was an official seal of the temple of Amun-Re, likely at Meroe.⁶² To quote Frances Welsh, “although not named, the crocodile is not in a subsidiary position or of inferior size. The important ram-headed figure is not placed centrally in its open cage, but space is provided beside it for the crocodile figure to be inserted as having equal importance.”⁶³

Depictions of snakes also underscore this creature's associations with the divine. A most impressive example is preserved on the southern side of the south pylon of the single-roomed Lion Temple (Naga 300) dedicated to the lion god Apedemak in the Meroitic city of Naga. Here, relief decoration renders the god in monumental form with a lion's head, human upper torso, and body of a lengthy coiled snake emerging from a lotus or acanthus flower (see fig. 5.14 in chapter 5).⁶⁴ Although no parallel examples of the god with such a snake body are preserved from antiquity, this motif is widespread today, including its use as the cover graphic for *Kush: Journal of the Sudan Antiquities Service*. Cobras specifically also feature prominently in this category,

often paired with the solar disk as an expression of the uraeus motif. A faience plaque with feathered cartouche from El-Hassa, for example, includes a series of six cobras with solar disks in the lower register, while a ceramic vessel from Meroe is decorated with a procession of ankh-carrying cobras wearing solar disks and painted in black, red, and gray.⁶⁵ A similarly playful rendering of multitudes appears on a vessel from Karanog, where numerous cobras with solar disks are arranged in two rows, encircling the vessel's body in procession-like formation.⁶⁶ Interestingly, a cobra statue of Amenhotep III was transferred by a Kushite king, likely sometime in the early Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, from the Egyptian king's temple at Soleb to the Meroitic religious center of Gebel Barkal, thus speaking to the common appreciation of the divine associations of such a reptilian representation.⁶⁷ This divine association of the snake is reinforced by the presence of friezes of uraei in Meroitic temples—for example, in the Great Enclosure of Musawwarat es-Sufra.⁶⁸

Bringing together the discussion of the divine associations of these two reptiles—the crocodile and the snake—is a painted vase fragment excavated at the Meroitic royal city of Muweis. Decorating its surface is the figure of a crowned crocodile crouched on a cornice, with an Eye of Horus (*udjat*) below it and a rearing cobra or uraeus in front of it; lotus flowers and geometric designs flesh out the scene. The combination of this imagery with the preserved features of the vase itself suggests it was used for carrying water, likely in ritualized contexts.⁶⁹

Conclusion

What survives of herpetofauna representations in Nubian art from prehistoric times through the Meroitic period reveals a sustained and celebrated interplay between nature, material traditions, symbolism, and artistic innovation, the representations' creators synthesizing local traditions with broader regional influences as they transformed Nile Valley fauna into enduring symbols of regeneration, renewal, and protection. Albeit not an exhaustive

account of all preserved examples, the preceding consideration of medium, function, and audience for a range of herpetofauna depictions shows how these representations operated on multiple levels: from functional ceramics and portable amulets that inserted apotropaic and life-giving motifs into daily interactions and burial spaces to rock drawings and monumental temple reliefs that visually articulated associations with the realm of the gods. Pairings with nonherpetofauna elements further reinforced

naturalistic and empirical themes—crocodiles and birds reflected observed symbiosis, while lion-crocodile depictions evoked shared attributes of fierceness and duality—land and water, predation and protection. By celebrating both the “beasts” and the “beauties” of the Nile, Nubian representations of reptiles and amphibians mediated the human experience and its perilous and harmonious relationship with the natural world.

Notes

1. Etheridge 2007, 64.
2. Chaix 2019, 65–68.
3. Selected publications on Nubian rock drawings include Hellström and Langballe 1970; Otto and Buschendorff 1993; Edwards 2006; Le Quellec, Flers, and Flers 2005; Huyge 2009; and Bakhiet 2019.
4. Allard-Huard 1982, 128, fig. 4; Huyge 2009, 116, fig. 11.
5. Storemyr 2008.
6. Storemyr 2008, fig. 12.
7. Bakhiet 2019, 112–13, fig. 7.10.
8. Le Quellec, Flers, and Flers 2005, 342–43; Zboray 2018, 674.
9. Huyge 2009, 118.
10. Arkell 1949, pl. 56, fig. 1.
11. MFA 47.3090.
12. On the amulets, see Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 28; and Bonnet 2000, 121, with references; on the turtle-shell accessories, see Reisner 1910, 39, 41, 135–37, 161–62, 180, 185–86, 211–12, 245, 248, 252, 337, pl. 66b.17–18; Firth 1912, 56, 65, 82, 83, 85, 86, 126, 172, 174, pl. 37c.8–9.
13. Principal sources for the Kerma material here discussed include Reisner 1923a, 1923b; Bonnet 2000; Minor 2012, 2022; and Manzo 2023.
14. Minor 2022, 142.
15. Kendall 1997, 97, cat. no. 29 (MFA 13.4223a). In contrast, Elizabeth Minor (2012, 172) has proposed an alternative interpretation, suggesting they represent stylized animal pelts.
16. On the crocodile representations from Kerma referenced in this section, see Bonnet 2000, 83, 135–37, 168, figs. 51, 62, 98; and Manzo 2023, 244–45, both with references.
17. Lohwasser 2011, 383.
18. On the amulets, see Reisner 1923b, 127–32, pls. 43–44; and D’Itria 2018. On the dagger handles, see Reisner 1923a, 79, 215–16, 222, 284; 1923b, 188–89, pl. 50.1.
19. Following the translation of Simpson (1972, 170), “Wawat” can be understood as referring to Nubia—more precisely, Lower Nubia as distinct from “Kush” farther to the south—while the Medjay are defined as a nomadic group from the region southeast of Egypt, likely the Nubian or Sudanese Eastern Desert, who were later employed as mercenaries and police in Egypt, especially during the New Kingdom.
20. Lohwasser 2011, 384, fig. 2, with references.
21. Hintze 1979; Lohwasser 2002, 52–54, figs. 4–6; 2011, 384, fig. 3.
22. Kendall 1982, fig. 80, cat. no. 87 (MFA 13.4035).
23. Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 43n112.

24. Woolley 1911, 20.
25. Rondot 2024, 24–25, fig. 3 (Louvre E 4850).
26. BM EA57325. The object's provenience is recorded as Nuri in the British Museum's online record, which documents that the statuette was purchased in 1924 from Panayotis Kyticas, an antiquities dealer based in Cairo.
27. Aruz, Graff, and Rakic 2014, 146–47, fig. 3.35 (MMA 60.145.11).
28. Davis and Emberling 2019a, 156; 2019b, 31n10, 35.
29. Kleinitz and Casties n.d.
30. Adams 1986; Hofmann and Tomandl 1987; David 2019.
31. Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 10.
32. Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 401 fig. 243a; vol. 2, pl. 30 (ISACM E22631).
33. Baud 2010, fig. 91 (MFA 13.4038).
34. Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pl. 98 (Penn E8737).
35. Williams and Heidorn 2019, 379 (ISACM E36379).
36. Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 383 fig. 222h; vol. 2, pl. 34a (ISACM E22563).
37. Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pl. 41 (Penn E8183).
38. Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 423 fig. 270b.
39. Examples from Ballana's Cemetery B include a bottle (Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 366 fig. 202d; vol. 2, pl. 33c [ISACM E22457]) and a single-handled jar (Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 347 fig. 179c; vol. 2, pl. 53c [ISACM E22402]), and from Qustul, a cup (Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 289 fig. 117c [ISACM E21333]).
40. Randall-MacIver and Woolley 1909, pl. 26.1; Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 113, 183, figs. 32–33; Török 1987b, figs. 66–68; Lohwasser 2011, fig. 4.
41. Wenig 1978, 299, no. 254; Török 1987b, fig. 67.
42. Lenoble 1999, 175–76n129, figs. 16–18; Lohwasser 2011, 383, 385, with references.
43. Welsby and Anderson 2004, 155, cat. no. 139.
44. Griffith 1924, pl. 51.7; Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, fig. 11.
45. Baud 2010, cat. no. 128 (BM EA 51448).
46. Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 410 fig. 252; vol. 2, pl. 37 (ISACM E22658); see also Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pl. 41 (Penn E8257).
47. Lenoble 1999, 173–74, figs. 8–9.
48. Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, fig. 29.
49. Selected examples include Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pls. 54 [Penn E8163], 60 [Penn E8205], 66 [Penn E8238]; Török 2011, pls. 131 [SNM 27368], 141 [SNM 18875]; see further Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 122, with references.
50. Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pl. 102 (Penn E8734). While the decorative style of this vessel recalls C-Group incised black-polished ware, several attributes of grave 292, from which it was excavated, confirm its Meroitic dating—most notably, the positioning of the deceased on their backs and the presence of a kohl stick and wooden kohl box among the burial goods (Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910a, 166–67).
51. Selected museum registration numbers in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, include, for frogs: MFA 23-M-404, 23-3-119, 47.3854, 23.789, 23.790, 23-1-171, 47.3901; and for crocodiles: MFA 24.853; 24.838, 24.849, 24.784, 22-2-509b.
52. MFA 24.984.
53. Baud 2010, cat. no. 329 (WM 47.48.75, 49.47.814).
54. Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910a, 79, nos. 1–3.
55. Griffith 1924, 171, 175, pls. LXI.15, LXIV.20.
56. Griffith 1923, 136–37, pl. LVII.1, 9–18.
57. Crowfoot 1911, 15, pls. IV, VII.14–15.
58. Török 2011, 139–88, with references.

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59. Griffith 1923, pl. LI.1; Lohwasser 2011, fig. 6.
 60. MFA 23.307, 23.1461.
 61. Bates and Dunham 1927, pl. LXV.4; Lohwasser 2011, fig. 9 (MFA 24.365).
 62. Welsh 2002; Lohwasser 2011, 386, fig. 8 (Petrie UC 43960).
 63. Welsh 2002, 246.
 64. Török 2011, 323.
 65. Baud 2010, cat. no. 78 (SNM HAS 156); Török 2011, 291, pl. 139 (Louvre AF 12839).
 66. Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pl. 67 (Penn E8250).
 67. Dunham 1970, 28, fig. 21, pl. 26; Kuckertz 2018, 139 (MFA 21.11699).
 68. Wenig 2019, 854–55, fig. 8.
 69. Baud 2010, 112, cat. no. 134 (SNM 33239).



9

River and Savanna Animals

Gabrielle Choimet

The Middle Nile Valley is home to a rich variety of wildlife thriving across several ecosystems: the banks of the Nile and its tributaries (alternately fertile and barren); the savannas with their expansive, grassy plains; and the vast desert and semidesert regions that stretch east and west. From the end of the Neolithic era (6000–3500 BCE), wild animals were no longer a major food source, as evidenced by the scarce presence of their remains at most archaeological sites. It is noteworthy, however, that in the city of Kerma the material evidence of large, wild mammals consists primarily of cranial elements—perhaps indicating that skulls were deliberately displayed.¹

From early antiquity, literary and iconographic evidence links Nubia and Central Sudan with certain wild animal species, particularly giraffes, elephants, hippopotami, and rhinoceri, as well as felines and monkeys (see chapters 5 and 7). Having disappeared from neighboring regions, most of these animals found refuge in Sudanese territory and persisted there until relatively recently. They became emblematic of the kingdom of Kush, which exported them—either alive or in the form of by-products such as ivory (from elephants and hippopotami), hides (from felines and giraffes), and ostrich feathers and eggs (see chapter 1)—to Egypt, the Near East, and the Mediterranean world (fig. 9.1).

Such goods were notably among the tribute paid by the Kushites to the pharaoh during the period of Egyptian colonization (1550–1000 BCE). Later, among artisans of the Mediterranean basin, giraffes, elephants, and other representatives of the Middle Nile fauna were regarded as the quintessential animals of so-called “Ethiopian” landscapes, as seen, for instance, in the Hellenistic tomb paintings of Marisa (Israel) or the Roman mosaic of Palestrina (Italy).² This tradition endured into the medieval period, during which Nubian kingdoms occasionally sent giraffes, elephants, or leopards to Byzantium, Latin Europe, and the Dār al-Islām.

The Elephant: Subject of Intensive Hunting and Possible Royal Symbol

Sparsely depicted despite its significance in the Middle Nile Valley, the elephant is often attested in archaeological contexts solely through its tusks. One of the earliest recorded references to elephant tusks as a trade commodity appears in the account of Harkhuf, a high-ranking Egyptian official of the Sixth Dynasty,

Steatite plaque with two crocodiles and two hippopotami. ISACM E23884. **Cat. no. 33.**



Figure 9.1. Relief showing a Kushite delegation bringing a giraffe and an elephant tusk. Apadana, Persepolis, Iran (ca. 500 BCE). ISACM P. 28981.

who led four expeditions to the land of Yam—the ancient name for the kingdom of Kerma—around 2250 BCE. In his tomb, located near the First Cataract, he records having brought back large quantities of coveted African goods such as ebony, aromatic oils, incense, leopard skins, throwing sticks, and elephant tusks. The Middle Nile Valley indeed served as a pivotal corridor in the ivory trade from at least the third millennium BCE onward throughout its history. Kushite ivory was exported to the Near East and the Mediterranean, thereby supporting the economic growth of the Napatan (1000–270 BCE) and Meroitic (270 BCE–330 CE) kingdoms. Significantly, the Meroitic name for the elephant, *abore* (pronounced /abur/), is the etymological root of the Latin *ebur*, from which the English word “ivory” ultimately derives.

As early as the Neolithic period, elephant ivory was fashioned into bracelets, tools, and combs. In the iconography of the Kerma period (2500–1500 BCE), elephants are relatively scarce—perhaps a reflection of their growing rarity in the region, as

they may have already retreated in search of more favorable ecosystems.³ Nevertheless, numerous ivory inlays depicting a wide array of animals—including elephants—have been discovered in tombs, where they adorned the footboards and headboards of funerary beds. Similarly, daggers were often fitted with handles made of ivory, suggesting that the kingdom had, whether directly or indirectly, access to these animals. Lastly, elephant hair appears to have been used in the making of mesh bags, and elephant hide was used to produce sandals.

Following the collapse of the kingdom of Kerma, elephants experienced a trajectory similar to that of other species such as giraffes and rhinoceri (see below): having disappeared from Egypt by the Predynastic period, interest in them was rekindled with the conquest of Nubia—a region that served as a gateway to the trading goods of sub-Saharan Africa. Elephant tusks are thus prominently featured in depictions of tribute brought by the Nubian provinces of Kush and Wawat to the Egyptian pharaoh alongside ebony logs, gold,

shields, animal skins, and exotic fauna. Likewise, in the reliefs at Deir el-Bahari chronicling Hatshepsut's expedition to the land of Punt—a Red Sea kingdom probably located between modern-day Eritrea and Somalia⁴—elephant tusks are depicted among the items brought back.

In the first millennium BCE, following the retreat of the Egyptians, the inhabitants of the Middle Nile Valley continued to trade in ivory, as evidenced by vast storage facilities filled with elephant tusks at the Napatan site of Sanam Abu Dom and the Meroitic palace of Wad Ben Naga.⁵ While it remains unclear whether the Kushites themselves hunted the elephants or relied on external groups with whom they traded, they certainly organized the marketing and export of ivory to the Mediterranean and the Near East. For instance, Kush features at the top of the list of lands that supplied ivory to the Persian artisans working on Darius's palace at Susa in the sixth century BCE. As for the elephants themselves, by the third century BCE their northernmost distribution range lay in the vicinity of the Fifth Cataract, and later around the region of Meroe.

During the third and second centuries BCE, the Ptolemaic dynasty then ruling Egypt established elephant-hunting outposts along the Red Sea, in what are now Sudan and Eritrea. These stations—notably Ptolemais Theron, or “Ptolemais of the Hunts”—served as logistical platforms for inland elephant-hunting expeditions, likely targeting the lowlands along the Atbara (Tekeze) River and the slopes of the Eritrean and Ethiopian highlands, where elephant populations were still attested in the nineteenth century CE.⁶ Captured elephants were tamed and trained for military purposes, primarily to intimidate and disrupt enemy formations. Indeed, Indian war elephants, formerly used in battle, had become inaccessible because the route to India was under the control of the Seleucid Empire—a rival power to the Ptolemies established in West Asia and parts of Central Asia. Initially transported overland along the Nile Valley⁷—where some hunters left inscriptions—the Nubian

elephants were later conveyed by sea aboard specialized vessels known as *elephantegoi*.

In addition to their military utility, elephants were sought by the Ptolemies for use in triumphal processions and for their ivory—Ptolemy II is said to have displayed some 600 tusks in a grand parade.⁸ Following the disastrous battle of Raphia in 217 BCE against the Seleucid army of King Antiochus III, in which the elephants deployed by Ptolemy IV panicked and caused the collapse of his own cavalry, Egyptian elephant-hunting expeditions gradually diminished and then ceased during the subsequent century. The exact species of elephant captured by the Ptolemies in Nubia was long debated, but recent DNA analyses have confirmed it was the African bush elephant (*Loxodonta africana*, also known as the African savanna elephant)—the largest land mammal, which has large, angular ears and upward-curving tusks—and not the smaller forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), which has rounded ears and straight, downward-pointing tusks.⁹

During the Roman period, demand for ivory surged, prompting the Romans to seek supplies in both Asia and Africa. Ivory was used for an array of luxury items: furniture, chariots, statues, musical instruments, scepters, scabbards, combs, brooches, and more. Expeditions were launched across the Red Sea—and even to the African coasts of the Indian Ocean—to procure not only ivory but also tortoiseshell, aromatic resins, and spices. Centuries of intense hunting pressure led to a significant contraction in elephant populations, contributing to the extinction of Syrian elephants (*Elephas maximus asurus*) and, later, North African elephants. In Sudan, however, elephants could still be encountered in the southern and eastern parts of the country as recently as the twentieth century CE.

Beyond depictions of elephant hunts in rock art, such events may be commemorated in two exceptional representations, though they might also illustrate a local myth or folktale. One is an ornamental, lattice-type window carved from sandstone found at Qasr Ibrim in Egyptian Lower Nubia and showing a naked man bearing a miniature elephant



Figure 9.2. Left: Meroitic sandstone window grille from Qasr Ibrim. BM EA82812. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Right: Watercolor copy of a mural painted on plaster from Meroe (Hintze 1978, 104 fig. 75).

on his shoulders (fig. 9.2, left). The other, now lost, was a fresco at Meroe depicting a similar scene, but with two small elephants suspended from a pole carried across the man's shoulders (fig. 9.2, right).

At Meroe, worked elephant tusks have been discovered across all occupational levels of the city, indicating intensive ivory craftsmanship at the heart of the kingdom. Also found at the site are a lamp decorated with two elephant heads and a beaker engraved with two pachyderms, both items made of bronze. Additionally, elephants are commonly portrayed on rock panels in Nubia and Central Sudan. Still, elephants are surprisingly rare in Kushite iconography, and it is curious that they are so rarely depicted on pottery, unlike giraffes, for example (see below). Musawwarat es-Sufra, in the Butana region, is the notable exception.

The site of Musawwarat es-Sufra—whose Meroitic name, *Aborepi*, or “Place of the Elephant,” evokes this animal—has a uniquely strong association with the proboscidean pachyderm. Indeed, elephants are more frequently represented there than anywhere else in the entire Nile Valley, a fact that may correlate with their historical presence in

the surrounding region. In particular, the Great Enclosure—a vast complex once (erroneously) hypothesized to be an elephant training camp—features a wall, flanking the terrace of Temple 100, that is shaped in the form of an elephant carved in full relief (fig. 9.3, left). Nearby, in the Lion Temple, a column relief depicts a figure wearing the Double Crown of Egypt—possibly the Kushite god Sebiuwerker—riding an elephant bareback and guiding it with reins that pass behind the animal's ears.¹⁰ This riding technique, evidently borrowed from horse riding, is ill-suited for elephants and suggests the artist had never observed a mounted elephant. At the rear of the temple, another elephant—its back draped with an ornate covering—holds a rope in its trunk with which kneeling captives are bound (fig. 9.3, right). While some scholars have interpreted these images as representations of war elephants, possibly trained by Kushite mahouts,¹¹ no conclusive evidence supports the use of elephants in Meroitic military campaigns. Nevertheless, the possibility remains that the Meroites had learned to tame and command these mighty animals.



Figure 9.3. Left: Wall terminating in the figure of an elephant in the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat es-Sufra. Right: Elephant leading bound prisoners on the rear wall of the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra. Photos by G. Choimet.

At Musawwarat, elephants are also frequently associated with lions—an unusual pairing seen elsewhere only on a wooden plaque from the tomb of Prince Akinidad at Gebel Barkal. A graffito from the Great Enclosure, for instance, shows a lion seated atop an elephant, while several columns are jointly supported by lions and elephants. In the Lion Temple, multiple reliefs portray the lion-headed god Apedemak (Musawwarat’s tutelary deity) and the god Amun holding both animals on leashes. Although its symbolism remains somewhat enigmatic, the elephant, like the lion, was probably associated with royal and divine power.¹² In that respect, it is worth noting that elephants were regarded as royal animals in the neighboring Kingdom of Aksum, in modern-day Eritrea and Ethiopia, where they were used as symbols of regal display and power.¹³

The Noble Captive: The Giraffe as a Popular Motif and Royal Gift

Roaming the grassy savanna and browsing on trees and shrubs, the giraffe¹⁴ saw its habitat gradually retreat around 3000 BCE. By that time, it had become scarce in Egypt and ultimately found

permanent refuge farther south, in Nubia and Central Sudan. In these regions, it was frequently depicted on rock panels both in the Nile Valley and in the surrounding desert hinterlands to the east and west.

At Seyala, an Egyptian Lower Nubian site belonging to the so-called A-Group culture (3700–2900 BCE), a gold-plated mace handle discovered in a tomb depicts a giraffe in relief alongside other animals, with details such as the giraffe’s reticulated coat meticulously engraved. Another tomb yielded an ivory comb whose teeth are topped by a delicately rendered giraffe bending toward its calf. At roughly the same period in Qustul, slightly farther south, four pairs of giraffes were painted on a large, now-fragmentary bowl along with other animals—at least one of which appears to be a herbivore, perhaps an antelope—as well as vultures scavenging vanquished enemies.¹⁵ These artifacts, reminiscent of the Naqada decorative repertoire in Upper Egypt at the time, suggest that by the end of the fourth millennium BCE these graceful animals had not yet fully withdrawn from the region.

A few centuries later, in the kingdom of Kerma, giraffe hair and tails were highly prized materials,

as evidenced by numerous bracelets made from giraffe hair found in tombs. In Egypt, a fable from the Eleventh Dynasty, *The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, preserves the memory of this luxury item: “Then he gave me a shipment of myrrh and *ḥknw*-oil, *jwdbn*-resin [. . .], galena, tails of giraffe, big lumps of incense, teeth of elephant, hounds, monkeys, apes: every good specialty. Then I loaded it onto that boat.”¹⁶ Beyond its ornamental value, giraffe hair was used in the manufacture of fly whisks and fine conical nets likely employed as beer strainers. Incidentally, in both Egyptian and Sudanese rock art, giraffes are sometimes depicted with exaggeratedly long tails or oversized tufts, thereby underscoring the prestige associated with this appendage.

As in the Neolithic period, giraffes were also engraved on ostrich eggs, either alone or alongside human figures, crocodiles, boats, and cattle. During the Classic Kerma period (1750–1550 BCE), giraffe-shaped ornaments were cut from mica sheets and sewn onto garments or headdresses, especially caps. Similar decorations, made of ivory, adorned wooden furniture, particularly headboards. Among these decorations, one local mythological creature stands out: a giraffe shown bending its long neck toward the ground as though to drink, with two long wings protruding from its back and draping its body (fig. 9.4).

These giraffes echo the winged creatures found in Egyptian and Near Eastern ornamental art that proliferated from the early second millennium BCE onward. Much like the motifs of two goats flanking a tree, two-headed birds, and two-headed lions—all of which were also present at Kerma—the winged giraffes belong to the “International Style” that spread across the eastern Mediterranean at that time.¹⁷ Yet they distinguish themselves by incorporating a local bestiary. The transmission of such iconographic elements likely occurred through the movement of decorated objects—such as ivory carvings or seals—across regions. It is well established that the kingdom of Kerma engaged in



Figure 9.4. Ivory inlay from Kerma in the form of a winged giraffe. MFA 20.1547b. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

long-distance interactions, notably with the Hyksos and, by extension, the Levantine coast. This mode of transmission becomes all the more plausible considering that such fantastical creatures appear toward the end of the Kerma period, precisely when Kush was emerging as a major regional power and expanding its political and economic influence.¹⁸

Finally, the giraffe holds a place of honor in the funerary chapel KXI at Kerma, which dates to approximately 1750–1650 BCE. The large mammal is depicted in the first chamber (on the western or left wall), in the sanctuary (on the left wall and inner face of the corresponding doorjamb), and in the corridor linking the two (on the right wall).¹⁹ In each case, lines of giraffes appear to move inward, toward the heart of the structure. On the jamb, the best-preserved giraffes are large animals, about 1 meter in height; they are outlined in black, with bodies painted in yellow ocher, heads accented in red ocher, and coats marked by a small grid pattern. Like the hippopotami also depicted in the chapel’s mural program (see below), each giraffe seems to be individually characterized. Most are shown at rest, though some are clearly in motion, with forelegs

extended and tails raised. Faint traces of red paint between the giraffes' legs likely represent bushes, signaling—uncommonly in Kushite art—the intent to depict the animals' natural environment.

The singularity of these paintings in Nubian iconography complicates their interpretation, though their symbolic significance is unquestionable. A few observations are nevertheless in order. First, the depiction of giraffes in large numbers and with a realistic treatment suggests that these animals still roamed the vicinity of the Kerma Basin during the second millennium BCE. Moreover, other walls of chapel KXI feature rows of cattle and hippopotami mirroring the giraffe friezes. The tombs of Kerma have yielded thousands of bucrania—remnants of a substantial cattle herd that was attributed not only economic but also evident symbolic value (see chapter 2). In this light, the numerous giraffes depicted in the chapel may likewise be understood as representing a material or symbolic reality. Their predominant placement on western walls—in the direction of the Libyan Desert—may signify real or asserted control by the princes of Kerma over the vast territories west of the Nile and, by extension, their resources.²⁰ Indeed, as noted earlier, giraffe hair—and possibly hides as well—constituted a valuable raw material in the Middle Nile Valley.

It is worth noting that no faunal remains from this period—or any subsequent ones—have been found that would indicate the consumption of this animal in the Sudanese Nile Valley. Giraffes may have been regarded as sacred, or perhaps their butchering occurred far from the Nile, at the site of their capture. As a matter of fact, giraffe bones—and even a complete skull dated to 2200 BCE—have been found west of the Nile, between Abu Ballas in the north and the Wadi Howar in the south, where wild fauna seems to have played a more substantial role in the subsistence strategies of pastoralist societies in the Libyan Desert.

During the period of Egyptian colonization (1550–1000 BCE), the appeal of the long-necked animal became largely confined to its status as an exotic

curiosity in the eyes of the Egyptians. The Kushite giraffe appears to have transitioned from the sacred domain of Kerma to that of royal Egyptian menageries. Giraffe tails and hides retained considerable value—so much so that the Nauri Decree, issued by Pharaoh Seti I in the thirteenth century BCE, imposed a penalty of 100 lashes for the theft of such items.²¹ Indeed, giraffe tails are easily identifiable in Egyptian tomb scenes depicting tribute brought by the Kushites to the Egyptian ruler (fig. 9.5), often alongside live giraffes that appear perfectly accustomed to the presence of humans. In the Egyptian imagination, the animal was also emblematic of the land of Punt, as evidenced by a relief in the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari showing a giraffe being loaded onto an Egyptian ship along the shores of Punt.

Beyond the boundaries of its natural habitat, the giraffe evoked fascination: much like the Egyptians before them, the Achaemenids, Persians, Greeks, and, later, the Romans were captivated by this elegant creature. They sought to acquire the “noble captive,”²² paraded it in public processions, and described it as they grew more familiar with it. Numerous ancient authors reference the giraffe, all attributing its origin to the region of Kush. Because its coat bears the spots of a leopard and its size and shape resemble those of a camel, it was called *camelopardalis* (“camel-leopard”). It appears the giraffe was first shown to the Greeks during the celebratory procession marking the enthronement of Ptolemy II in Alexandria, around 270 BCE.²³ The Roman world first encountered the animal during the games hosted by Julius Caesar in 46 BCE.²⁴ A century later, Pliny the Elder noted that giraffes were occasionally seen in Rome and that the “Ethiopians”—understood to mean the Kushites—called it *nabu*.²⁵

Over time, however, the triumphant and spectacular connotations associated with the giraffe faded, giving way to a primarily diplomatic function.²⁶ Regarded as a rare and highly prized creature, the animal became a diplomatic gift of choice, particularly in the context of forging relations



Figure 9.5. Egyptian painting (ca. 1400 BCE) from the tomb of Sobekhotep in Thebes (Upper Egypt) showing three Nubians bringing gold rings, ebony logs, semiprecious stones, a leopard skin, and live monkeys; the figure in the middle carries a giraffe's tail in his left hand. BM EA922. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

with royal or imperial foreign courts. Although other exotic species—such as elephants, rhinoceri, zebras, and large felines (including lions, leopards, and cheetahs)—also served this purpose, it was the giraffe that most frequently fulfilled this role. This was the case even though transporting giraffes required considerable logistical effort and proved less resilient to long-distance travel than did, for instance, elephants.

Seldom depicted during the Napatan period—aside from two faience plaques, one from the tomb of Queen Nefrukekashta, sister and wife of King Piankhy, at El-Kurru, and the other from a tomb in the Western Cemetery of Meroe—the giraffe regained its former prominence during the Meroitic period, particularly in ceramic art. Giraffes served as a favored subject for ceramic artisans, who alternately rendered the animal in a highly naturalistic

fashion—with cloven hooves and a long, slender tail—or in an extremely schematic, almost cartoonish manner, suggesting that some depictions were based on secondhand descriptions (fig. 9.6). The coat was often marked with stippling or hatching to indicate its characteristic spots, though some images featured polka dots or both patterns simultaneously—an imaginative interpretation of the giraffe's actual reddish-yellow reticulated pelt. In addition to its long neck, identifying features included the mane, ossicones (horn-like structures), and tufted tail. On ceramics and small objects, giraffes are sometimes shown in association with humans, snakes, frogs, and Hathor heads but most frequently with trees, from which they graze.

In rock art, where the giraffe is abundantly depicted, it is often shown interacting with humans or other animals. Hunting scenes are common: the giraffe may be chased by dogs, archers, or riders and captured or killed using throwing-sticks, pit traps, or lassos. The image of a giraffe held on a leash is

also frequent in rock engravings, though its exact meaning remains elusive. Equally widespread—and equally enigmatic—is the motif of the giraffe depicted beside a tree.²⁷ One particularly cryptic panel from Gebel Gorgod in Middle Nubia shows a giraffe being bitten on the neck, back, and flanks by three crocodiles and three dogs. Finally, on the walls of the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat es-Sufra, a remarkable and finely proportioned frontal depiction of a giraffe's head shows the animal with detailed ears, ossicones, and a narrow snout.

The giraffe's enduring appeal during the Meroitic period seems to have persisted into the medieval era. The Nubian kingdoms continued an ancient tradition—dating back at least to the Egyptian colonial period—wherein the giraffe served as an instrument of foreign diplomacy, offered as a gift or tribute. The practice of sending envoys accompanied by exotic animals persisted well into modern history, as evidenced by the giraffes presented by the viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad Ali,

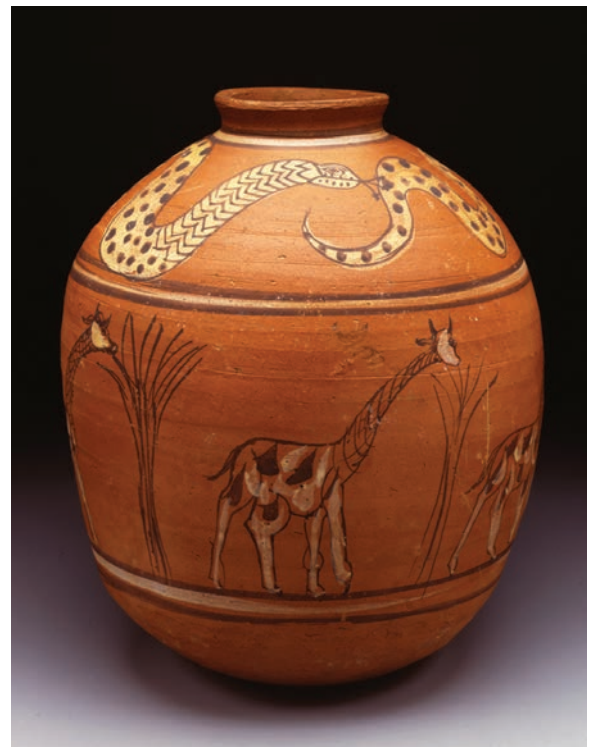


Figure 9.6. Two Meroitic jars decorated with giraffes. Left: Penn E8293. Right: Penn E8183. Courtesy of Penn Museum.

to Emperor Francis I of Austria, King George IV of England, and King Charles X of France—giraffes that had been captured in Sudan, where the species survived until the nineteenth century.

There can be no doubt that in the Middle Nile Valley the giraffe held major symbolic—and possibly spiritual—significance, particularly during the Kerma period. Contrary to earlier assertions, the figure of the giraffe is an entirely indigenous motif, rooted in a local belief system that evolved over time but whose origins reach deep into antiquity. Although prominently represented in the elite chapels of the Kerma necropolis, the giraffe appears to have disappeared gradually from royal and cultic contexts, as though its symbolic relevance had shifted. It is indeed striking that giraffes, more than any other animal, consistently served as princely gifts even as their formal representation in official contexts diminished. Perhaps traditional beliefs faded among the elites while persisting among the general population.²⁸ Finally, it is worth recalling that many contemporary East African communities express deep respect and fascination for the giraffe and that several African cultures identify this very animal in the constellation we know today as the Big Dipper (Ursa Major).

The Fearsome and Wondrous Rhinoceros

The African continent is home to two species of rhinoceros: the white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*) and the black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*), both of which were once found in Sudan. Of course, this taxonomic distinction is recent and was of no concern to ancient populations. The white rhinoceros, larger and heavier than its black counterpart, is distinguished by a longer head; a fatty hump over the shoulders; and a broad, flat mouth. The black rhinoceros, on the other hand, has a relatively short head, a gently sloping neck lacking a prominent hump, and a hooked upper lip that enables it to browse on twigs—unlike the grazing white rhinoceros, which is less suited to arid environments.

The rhinoceros is depicted only rarely in the rock art of the Middle Nile Valley. When it does appear, it is often rendered as a rudimentary quadruped with an upturned nasal appendage²⁹—sometimes with large ears that bring it closer in appearance to an elephant. However, a few objects from the Kerma period offer exceptions. Among them is a 22 × 12 centimeter piece of leather cut in the shape of a rhinoceros, discovered in a royal tomb in the necropolis of Kerma (fig. 9.7). Although its snout is damaged and it shows only one horn (the other one likely lost), the animal can be identified with confidence as a rhinoceros because both African species have two horns, one of them significantly longer than the other.³⁰ The object's function remains unknown; since it has no stitch holes, it may have been inlaid into a wooden object. Ivory inlays in the form of rhinoceri, also from Kerma, adorned the frames of funerary beds. These depictions, all highly realistic, have been identified as white rhinoceri because of the vertical carriage of the head and the pronounced swell of the neck.

During the New Kingdom, Pharaoh Thutmose III was said to have slain a rhinoceros in the Nubian region of Miu (likely near the Fifth Cataract). The event was commemorated on the facade of the temple of Armant in Upper Egypt. The scene, carved in low relief, proved to be somewhat fanciful, as the sculptors had to work from descriptions given to them. The animal, which some have identified as a black rhinoceros, had by that time become so rare in Egypt that its proportions were greatly exaggerated to emphasize its fearsome and marvelous nature: the height of its foreleg, for example, was claimed to be 5.5 cubits (nearly 3 meters), the circumference of its foot 2 cubits (more than 1 meter), and the girth of its chest 13 cubits (about 7 meters).³¹

In the third century BCE, an “Ethiopian” rhinoceros—meaning a Kushite specimen—was reportedly part of the aforementioned procession of Ptolemy II in Alexandria.³² As a creature from the far reaches of the known world, the rhinoceros

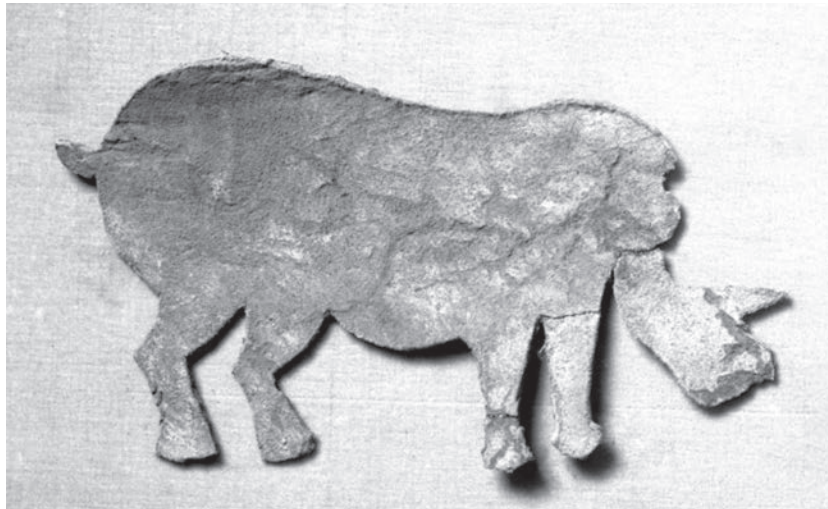


Figure 9.7. Leather rhinoceros from Kerma, photographed after its discovery. MFA 20.1778 (G. A. Reisner negative A2169). © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

intrigued Greek and Roman geographers and historians,³³ who noted its presence around Meroe and among the Trogodytes—that is, the peoples along the African Red Sea coast.³⁴ In Rome, Cassius Dio recorded the presence of a rhinoceros in the triumphal parade of 29 BCE organized by Octavian following his victory over the forces of Mark Antony and Cleopatra,³⁵ though it is unclear whether this specimen was an African or Indian rhinoceros. A two-horned (and thus African) rhinoceros also appears on coins issued under Emperor Domitian between 83 and 96 CE.

In the Levant, one of the tombs at Marisa features a relatively well-proportioned elephant followed by a rhinoceros, painted in red with an exaggeratedly large head and ears. Only the inscription and the two small horns on its snout confirm its identity as an African rhinoceros, likely from the Middle Nile Valley. The roughness of this depiction, executed by Alexandrian artists around 200 BCE, betrays their unfamiliarity with an animal that had, by then, withdrawn much farther south. In contrast, at Musawwarat es-Sufra, a graffito portrays a man holding a shield and preparing to hurl a spear at a charging rhinoceros—a fictional scene, to be sure, but one whose schematic rendering reflects more realistic proportions (fig. 9.8).

The Dual Nature of the Hippopotamus: Both Feared and Venerated

More frequently depicted than the rhinoceros—especially on the rock panels of the Middle Nile Valley—the equally formidable hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) may also have been consumed occasionally. Archaeological sites from all periods have yielded remains of this large aquatic mammal, which is in fact the most commonly represented wild animal in the city of Kerma. Yet, more than for its meat, the hunting of the hippopotamus appears to be primarily associated with two practices: controlling the harmful creature and exploiting its valuable raw materials, particularly the ivory from its teeth.

Once widespread along the banks of the Sudanese Nile, hippopotami were genuine scourges of agriculture that devastated crops in their nocturnal foraging and posed serious threats to settlements and villagers. In Sudan, hippopotamus hunting persisted into the nineteenth century CE, when farmers lit large fires at night to scare off the herds. The creature was especially prized for its teeth, many of which have been found in urban contexts, such as at Kerma, Meroe, and Muweis.³⁶ One hippopotamus

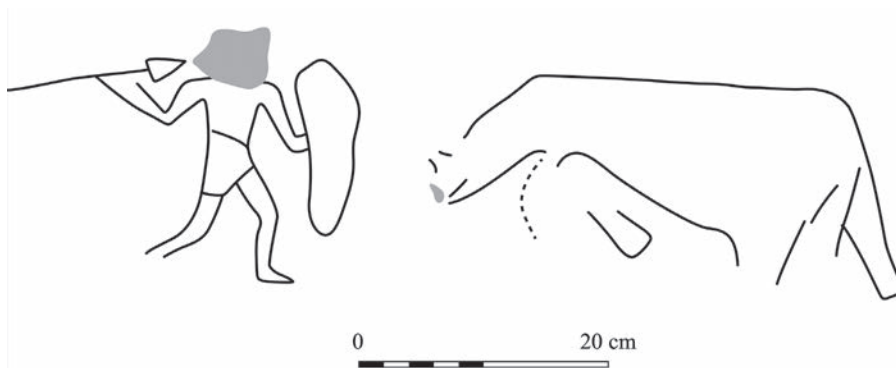


Figure 9.8. Man with spear and shield about to engage in single combat with a rhinoceros (graffito in the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat es-Sufra). Photo and drawing by G. Choimet.

mandible found at Kerma was missing all its teeth, which had likely been carefully extracted for use in the manufacture of small objects. Though harder than elephant ivory and therefore more difficult to carve—but also more durable, hence its predominance among ivory artifacts unearthed in the Nile Valley—hippopotamus ivory was used as early as the Neolithic period to craft bracelets, combs, and various containers.

In addition to its teeth (and possibly its flesh), the hippopotamus was a valuable source of leather,

used in the manufacture of shields—such as the one discovered at Sedeinga, in Middle Nubia—and, though more rarely, everyday items such as sandals. The animal's tendons and hide were also employed in the making of thongs or straps, a practice exemplified until recently in Sudan by the *rabat*, a kind of skirt consisting of a waistband from which hang leather strips adorned with shells and beads.

Terra-cotta and stone figurines of hippopotami have been recovered from A-Group contexts, especially at Qustul. One striking example—of

which only the head survives—was originally about 1 meter long and shows an animal with bulging eyes and large nostrils. Later, the hippopotamus appears widely at Kerma sites, where it is represented in amulets, figurines (sometimes coated with red ocher), mica ornaments, ivory furniture decorations, and vessels.

The hippopotamus possesses a dual symbolism: it is simultaneously a dangerous beast to be eradicated and a figure of protection—especially for pregnant women and children. In Egypt, this latter aspect is embodied by female hippopotamus deities such as Taweret and Ipet, likely because of the protective instincts hippopotamus mothers demonstrate toward their young. From the kingdom of Kerma, a large number of anthropomorphic

depictions of hippopotami are known, especially among mica decorations and ivory inlays. Standing upright on their hind legs and often clad in long, pleated skirts, they are sometimes adorned with a crest or mane, a crocodile's tail, and, in some cases, what resemble folded wings, whereas others brandish a knife (fig. 9.9). While associations with the Egyptian goddess Taweret have frequently been proposed—and comparable figures in the Near East and Crete suggest a widely shared symbolic repertoire across the ancient world—the anthropomorphic hippopotami of Kerma possess unique traits. Certain distinctive features suggest not purely Egyptian influence but rather a local ideology shaping the adaptation of an exogenous figure.³⁷ Notably, the skirts worn by some of these figures



Figure 9.9. Ivory inlays of anthropomorphic hippopotami from Kerma. *Left*: MFA 13.4220c. *Right*: MFA 20.1515. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

are similar to those historically worn by women in Kerma society.³⁸ Likewise, winged hippopotami represent a distinctly Kushite creation, the meaning of which remains difficult to ascertain.

In the aforementioned chapel KXI at Kerma, nine superimposed rows of hippopotami are preserved on the western wall of the vestibule (to the left upon entering) and on the doorjambs leading to the first chamber (fig. 9.10). Rendered in red ocher,³⁹ all the animals are oriented toward the interior of the chapel. On the eastern jamb, the lowest hippopotamus appears to be baring its teeth aggressively, while several others display the characteristic neck folds of the species. Like the giraffes discussed



Figure 9.10. Wall and doorjamb in chapel KXI at Kerma with friezes of hippopotami painted in red ocher (Bonnet 2000, fig. 69).

earlier, the painted hippopotami of Kerma are arranged in horizontal registers on the chapel's western walls, which appear to have been dedicated to representations of local wildlife.

In contrast to pharaonic Egypt—where animal inventories typically concerned domestic livestock, especially cattle—chapel KXI at Kerma represents scenes featuring dangerous wild animals depicted outside their natural environment, a theme of undeniable originality. The prominence accorded these massive beasts in a sacred space suggests that in Nubia—unlike in Egypt, where they were often perceived negatively—hippopotami were not viewed in a predominantly hostile light. On the contrary, their presence in a funerary chapel represents an intentional inversion of the malevolent forces embodied by such fearsome creatures, one that transforms them into protective forces. The same likely applies to the threatening anthropomorphic beings that decorated Kerma beds, which are thus to be understood not as menacing figures but rather as guardians endowed with a protective function.

The hippopotamus is also closely associated with the Nile and water, as evidenced by ceramic jugs with spouts in the form of hippopotamus heads and known among archaeologists as “teapots.” Some of these vessels also feature the crocodile—another aquatic animal—possibly symbolizing a deeper connection between these two species. Finally, as in Egypt, vessels and figurines in blue faience are either adorned with or take the form of a hippopotamus set within a decorative scheme evocative of a marshland environment. The prominent role of these pachyderms in the Kerma cultural imagination and the adoption of features linked to hippo-headed Egyptian divinities are undoubtedly tied to the central place the creatures held in both the fauna and landscapes of the Middle Nile Valley. It is also plausible that their prominence during the Kerma period reflects the existence of an older Nubian cult devoted to the hippopotamus.⁴⁰

During the pharaonic period, several hippopotamus skeletons were deposited in a house at

Buhen, in the Second Cataract region, though the purpose of this gesture remains unknown. Later, during the Napatan and Meroitic periods, the hippopotamus—like the giraffe—nearly disappeared from official art. From the Napatan era, terra-cotta figurines of Taweret buried beneath the pyramid of King Anlamani as foundation deposits have come down to us, along with a few scarabs depicting quadrupeds with massive bodies, though it remains uncertain whether these images represent hippopotami, wild boars, or other animals. At Meroe, the schematic outline of a hippopotamus was engraved on the pyramid of King Amanitenmomide, and hippopotamus- or Taweret-shaped amulets in gold and faience have been unearthed in tombs within the nearby Western Cemetery and in the city itself.

The Elusive Hyena

Hyenas are rare in Kushite art, perhaps because they are sometimes difficult to distinguish from other canids such as foxes, jackals, or fennecs. Nonetheless, they can generally be recognized by their sloping dorsal line and the mane that runs along their spine. As in the present day, ancient Sudan was home to two hyena species: the striped hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*), which is also found in Asia, and the larger spotted hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*), which is exclusively sub-Saharan and distinguished by short, rounded ears.

It is likely a hyena that appears next to a leopard at the lower end of the golden mace handle from Seyala. At Kerma, several funerary beds were adorned with ivory inlays shaped like hyenas (fig. 9.11). These figures—striped hyenas, as indicated by the bands crossing their bodies and



Figure 9.11. Top: Ivory inlays from Kerma set in a wooden bed frame. MFA 20.1494. Bottom: Detail of a hyena. MFA 13.4221e. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

limbs—are consistently placed on the lower register of the beds, along with giraffes, while birds are generally depicted at the top of the panels. On the reverse side of a Napatan faience amulet representing the dwarf deity Pataikos, a highly stylized hyena appears next to a tree, a solar disk, and a uraeus (fig. 9.12). Finally, on a Meroitic ceramic cup dated to the first century CE, a canid with a striped body and a bristled back—rendered with remarkable finesse—can be identified with certainty as a striped hyena.

Hyenas were occasionally exported to and exhibited in Rome,⁴¹ where the striped species—of either African or Asian origin—was known. By contrast, ancient authors explicitly referred to the animal known as the *crocotta* (alternatively, *corocotta* or *crocutta*) as an “Ethiopian” beast, meaning Kushite. Some of them further asserted that it was the offspring of a male hyena and a lioness and even claimed it could imitate the human voice to lure its prey.⁴² It is true that the spotted hyena, being more social than the striped hyena, possesses a much richer repertoire of vocalizations.



Figure 9.12. Napatan faience plaque depicting a hyena. MFA 24.781. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Porcupines and Hedgehogs: Everyday Companions from Field to Tomb

While Kushite artists clearly favored larger animals for depiction, certain small mammals were not entirely overlooked—most notably the hedgehog and the porcupine, two species that can be difficult to distinguish based on iconography alone. As in the present day, Sudan in antiquity hosted several species that prefer habitats near human dwellings or on the edges of the desert and are primarily nocturnal: the African hedgehog (*Atelerix pruneri*), the desert hedgehog (*Paraechinus aethiopicus*), and the African crested porcupine (*Hystrix cristata*).

Though relatively infrequent in the material culture of the Middle Nile Valley, these insectivorous animals appear mainly in the form of seals or amulets. They are typically recognizable by their small ears, pointed snouts, and backs rendered with spiked lines, dotted patterns, or cross-hatching intended to represent quills. Actual porcupine quills have been recovered from funerary contexts, either individually or in bundles. These finds suggest that even modest creatures such as porcupines had a role, however minor, in daily life and, perhaps, in ritual practices.

Rabbits and Hares: Valued Game Animals

These small herbivores of the savanna are almost exclusively depicted in hunting scenes, where they are typically pursued by a dog. One such scene appears on the walls of the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat es-Sufra, where the greyhound of a certain Netarora is shown about to seize a long-eared hare (see fig. 3.3 in chapter 3)—very likely a desert hare, also known as the Cape hare (*Lepus capensis*). This remarkable graffito is a reminder that such dogs were bred in this region until relatively recently, specifically for the purpose of hare hunting. Indeed, hares appear to have been consumed as supplementary food in ancient Nubia and Sudan,



Figure 9.13. Meroitic jar from Semna with hare, guinea fowls, and hyenas. ISACM E35579. **Cat. no. 65.**

as their remains are often attested at archaeological sites in faunal assemblages.

As for their representation in material culture, the Napatan and Meroitic cemeteries have yielded a few rare amulets depicting one or the other member of the Leporidae (the family of rabbits and hares). One notable example—a lapis lazuli amulet—was found in a tomb in the Western Cemetery of Meroe. On the ovoid body of a Meroitic jar from Semna, a hare is shown between two guinea fowls and two hyenas (fig. 9.13). Between the hyenas, a rock formation possibly evokes a cataract landscape. While the precise meaning of this scene remains unclear, the object stands out as exceptional. It also recalls the many traditional African tales—especially from West Africa—that delight in bringing these three animals together as protagonists.

Conclusion

The wild fauna of the Middle Nile Valley—whether riverine or savanna dwelling—held a central place in the societies of ancient Nubia and Sudan, one that far exceeded its mere ecological presence in the region's ecosystems. From as early as the Neolithic

period, the symbolic and economic significance of Africa's large mammals—particularly elephants, giraffes, and hippopotami, and to a lesser extent rhinoceri—gradually came to eclipse their value as sources of subsistence. Despite a marked decline in their consumption, the prominence of these animals in funerary assemblages, religious iconography, and monumental architecture attests to their enduring importance in the Kushite cultural imagination. These species inspired the artistic creativity of their contemporary humans, who intentionally selected and integrated them into the visual repertoire of the successive kingdoms of Kerma, Napata, and Meroe, both through rock art and in everyday material culture.

Not all animals of the river and savanna were represented, and some appear to have found their place solely within unofficial, popular art, especially graffiti. The occasional presence of smaller wild mammals—such as hyenas, porcupines, and hares—whose role in the artistic and symbolic registers is decidedly more modest, reflects a differentiated engagement with the surrounding environment. The recurring appearance of fantastical creatures, often winged, points to a mythological imagination rooted in deep antiquity, perhaps as far back as prehistory, yet simultaneously shaped by intercultural exchange. Nubian belief systems developed unique expressions of the local wild bestiary that were influenced both by endogenous traditions and by the external cultural spheres with which the Middle Nile maintained contact—most obviously Egypt and the Near East to the north, but also, though less well documented, regions to the south, east, and west.

These same animals also played a critical role in the political economy of the Nubian kingdoms, particularly through the production and long-distance export of prestige commodities of animal origin, such as ivory, hides, and even live animals. Giraffes, for example, frequently depicted during the Kerma period, were highly valued as diplomatic gifts, thereby functioning as both economic resources and symbols of elite status. Embodying power, territorial control, and diplomatic prestige,

this bestiary came to define the visual identity of Nubian culture beyond its borders. Whether through craftsmanship, art, trade, ritual practices, or even oral traditions, the treatment of wild animals in ancient Nubia and Central Sudan provides

a privileged lens through which to apprehend how Kushite societies envisioned the world—and themselves. It offers unique insight into their mythological conceptions, popular beliefs, elite tastes and aspirations, and regional identities.

Notes

1. Chaix 2000, 163. It should be noted that these very species are those most frequently depicted in portable art and mural paintings of the period.
2. Dating from the late second century BCE, the Nile mosaic of Palestrina portrays a plethora of wild animals in their natural habitats. Notably, the section representing the Middle Nile Valley is distinguished by showing a higher concentration of animals—and hunters—than other regions.
3. Indeed, elephants require substantial amounts of water and forage and can inhabit only areas with permanent water sources available year-round, far removed from sustained human presence.
4. It is plausible that the land of Punt also extended to the Arabian shore of the Red Sea.
5. Griffith 1922, 117, pl. LIIIb; Vercoutter 1962, 280, pl. XXb; Vincentelli 2011, 272, 277, fig. 9.
6. Fattovich 2012. The neighboring kingdom of Aksum should not be overlooked as a source of supply. In the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*—a travelogue written in Greek by an unknown author from the early centuries CE—the Aksumite city of Koloe (possibly Matara or Qohaito) is cited as a major center for the ivory trade.
7. Estigarríbia 1982, 283–84. Both Strabo (*Geography*, XVI, 4, 8) and Claudius Ptolemy (*Geography*, I, 15, 11) reference a route connecting Meroe to the Red Sea.
8. The Egyptian hunting expeditions likely also served as opportunities to capture other animals whose exotic nature intrigued the Ptolemaic dynasty—particularly birds, some of which are known to have been brought back from Nubia by these same hunters.
9. Brandt et al. 2013; see also Schneider 2016.
10. Shinnie 1967, 95; Hintze et al. 1971, pls. 96c, 97, 98c; Hintze 1993, 125. In this depiction, a kneeling figure supports the elephant's trunk, while a winged cobra atop a *neb*-sign completes the scene. This bas-relief, now fragmentary, is known solely through a drawing by Ernst Weidenbach (Lepsius 1859, vol. 5, pl. 75).
11. Shinnie 1967, 101; Hintze 1978, 89; Estigarríbia 1982, 282. Some scholars have even suggested a contemporary Indian influence (Hofmann 1975, 126; Haaland 2013, 153). Conversely, see Török 1997a, 396; Paul 2024. Also noteworthy are two bronze elephants connected by a chain and housed in the Aswan Museum, one of which bears an armed rider (Charles and Singleton 2019). Although their provenience remains unknown, they are considered of Meroitic origin—erroneously, I believe.
12. Hintze et al. 1993, 257. On the association of the lion with the sovereign, see chapter 5. The elephant is also among the few animals—alongside the lion (or sphinx), crocodile, and vulture—to appear on large seals, where it is associated with royal authority (Hajduga 2021, fig. 18b–c; Vrtal 2023, 588–90).
13. Charles 2018.
14. This species likely refers to the Nubian giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis camelopardalis*), still present today in southern Sudan and Ethiopia.
15. This scene recalls the decorative palettes from the late fourth millennium BCE, particularly the “Four Dogs Palette” in the Louvre (E 11052), whose obverse depicts four canids flanking two giraffes, themselves symmetrically arranged around a palm tree. Their manes are rendered using the same small, bristling strokes.
16. Allen 2015, 44–45.
17. Feldman 2006.
18. Although cultural exchanges with other African regions are probable, no definitive evidence for them has yet been found, largely because of the still-limited archaeological knowledge of those areas (Manzo 2023, 239, 260–62).

19. Reisner 1923a, 264; Bonnet 2000, 76–83, figs. 59–61; Chaix 2000, 165. Now vanished, rows of giraffes were also painted in another funerary chapel, KII, again on the western walls of the monument (Reisner 1923a, 132; Bonnet 2000, 83).
20. Bonnet 2000, 95–96; Manzo 2023, 238. Some have interpreted the giraffe as an animal with solar connotations, although current evidence remains scant (Bonnet 2000, 252).
21. Edgerton 1947, 225.
22. Buquet 2012.
23. Athenaeus of Naucratis, *Deipnosophistae*, V, 32, 201.
24. Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, XLIII, 23.
25. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VIII, 27.
26. Gatier 1996, 918–19.
27. E.g., Almagro Basch and Almagro Gorbea 1968, fig. 9. The meaning of the composite motif pairing a giraffe with a tree—either browsing its leaves or standing peacefully beside it—remains unexplained. It could represent a simple naturalistic depiction or carry symbolic or metaphorical significance; see Kleinitz 2007a, 56–57; 2007b, 225.
28. Kilroe 2023a, 191.
29. For example, a pair of pecked rhinoceri appear on a rock panel at Ginefab (Smith and Herbst 2005, fig. 11), and a single-horned rhinoceros created using the same technique is found at Mograkka (Vila 1976, figs. 22.1, 23.1). A sandstone block housed in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin (ÄM 25949) depicts a rhinoceros with an elevated tail (Wildung 1997, 24); featuring a pronounced swelling at the base of the neck and two exaggeratedly long horns, it has been identified as a black rhinoceros (Störk 1977, 159). Other, more schematic rock engravings of rhinoceri are known from the Abka region in Sudanese Nubia (Hellström and Langballe 1970, corpus I), the El-Ga'ab depression west of Dongola (Störk 1977, 161), and northern Darfur (Arnell 1937, 284, pl. XV).
30. Here, given the position of the remaining horn, it is the anterior (nasal) horn that is missing. In antiquity, only the two aforementioned African species and the single-horned Indian rhinoceros were known. The small size of the posterior (frontal) horn of the African white rhinoceros may have led to its identification as a unicorn rhinoceros (Desanges 1978, 204).
31. Mond and Myers 1940, 25–27, 159–60, pl. IX. See also stela S. 443, erected by Thutmose III in the temple: “He [the king] bagged a rhinoceros when shooting in the southern desert region of Nubia, when he went to Miu to seek out him who had rebelled against him in that land” (Mond and Myers 1940, 183, pls. LXXXVIII, CIII).
32. Athenaeus of Naucratis, *Deipnosophistae*, V, 32, 201 (after Callixenus of Rhodes, *History of Alexandria*).
33. Writers and artists from the Mediterranean Basin sometimes confused the rhinoceros with the elephant, or even with the hippopotamus (Vendries 2016, 307, 318, 321, 324–25).
34. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, III, 35, 2; Strabo, *Geography*, XVI, 4, 15; Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 455 (after Agatharchides of Cnidus, *On the Erythraean Sea*); Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VI, 185; Claudius Ptolemy, *Geography*, I, 8, 5; I, 9, 6–7.
35. Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LI, 22, 5.
36. Chaix 1982, 39; Morkot 1998, 148; Millet 2013, 87–88.
37. Manzo 2023, 239, 244, 255.
38. Davies and Gardiner 1926, pls. XXIII, XXX; Reisner 1923b, 303–5; Bonnet 2000, 89, fig. 63.
39. The choice of this color is unsurprising, as the animal’s hide is often reddish-brown as a result of its secretion of hipposudoric acid, which protects it from both the sun and microbes.
40. Manzo 2023, 255.
41. *Historia Augusta: Antoninus Pius*, X, 9.
42. E.g., Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 72, 32 (after Ctesias, *Indica*); Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, III, 35, 10; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VIII, 30.



10

Swine

Laura Harris

Two species of swine lived in ancient Nubia—the common warthog and the domestic pig.

Warthogs (*Phacochoerus africanus*)

Warthogs are medium sized and have gray bodies covered sparsely with hair. They are distinguished from pigs in having four large tusks (both lower and upper canines); facial warts; a straight tail, which is raised upright when the animal is running; and a band of long hair down the back of the neck forming a mane. Common warthogs—now extinct in Nubia, the most northerly ones being found in South Sudan¹—are not found in forests; they prefer open areas, such as floodplains and the savanna, and require access to water for wallowing. Similarly to domestic pigs, warthogs are omnivorous and able to eat a large variety of food types, including birds, invertebrates, mammals, fungi, and bark. However, their diet consists mainly of vegetation, such as grasses, seeds, sedges, and rhizomes. Female warthogs live in matriarchal sounders (groups or herds) consisting of a female, her newest piglets, and a number of piglets from the previous litter.² Matriarchal sounders headed by females that are related, such as sister warthogs or a mother and her adult daughters, can have overlapping territories and share food and burrows. Males form bachelor sounders and, as they age, leave the sounder to become solitary.

The common warthog was one of the many animals hunted by Nubians in the Neolithic period (ca. 10,000–3000 BCE).³ Warthog bones have been found at numerous sites in both Lower and Upper Nubia, including Debeira West,⁴ El Darner,⁵ and El Zakiab.⁶ A small number of warthog remains found at Meroe suggests that these animals were still being hunted in the Meroitic period (ca. 270 BCE–300 CE).⁷

Infrequently, warthogs are depicted in rock art and shown with other wildlife. At the first-millennium CE site of Wadi Diib (“Valley of Wolves”) in the Red Sea Hills, a warthog is represented above an elephant(?) (fig. 10.1). The animal is carved with its most recognizable features: a short, round body with a narrow, triangularly shaped head; a long tusk; small ears; short legs; and a raised tail. The rock art at Wadi Diib is believed to have been used for magical ceremonies.⁸ In a similar scene located at the site of Abka, also in Lower Nubia, a warthog is visible

Faience amulet in the shape of a sow. ISACM E17521. **Cat. no. 3.**

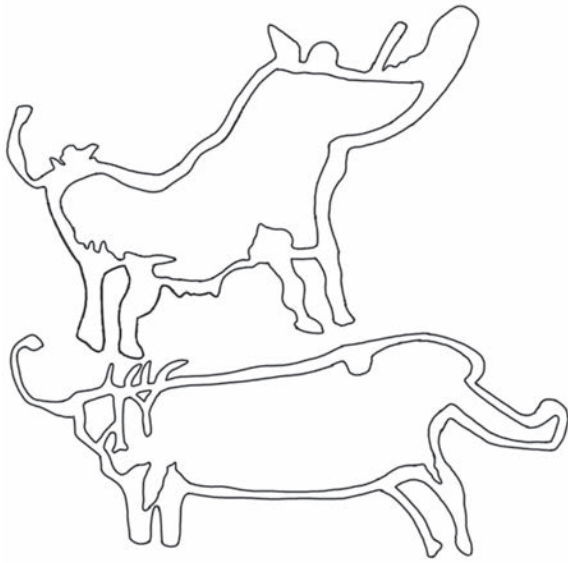


Figure 10.1. Rock art of a warthog and an elephant(?) at Wadi Diib in the Eastern Desert of Lower Nubia (Pluskota 2003, fig. 10).

among a variety of animals, including elephants, giraffes, rhinoceri, gnus, and ostriches.⁹

Domestic Pigs (*Sus scrofa domesticus*)

Pigs are the domesticated form of wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), which had an extensive range that included most of Eurasia and North Africa and which were domesticated in two independent events. Boars were first domesticated in northern Mesopotamia

(ca. 8200–7500 BCE) and then in China (by 6000 BCE).¹⁰ Although wild boars are native to Nubia, domesticated pigs were brought there from Egypt. Pigs and warthogs behave similarly: both eat a large variety of foods, and free-roaming pigs, like warthogs, live in matriarchal sounders. Unlike warthogs, however, pigs are smaller in size, and sows can have up to two litters per year. The frequent litters and the ability of pigs to eat almost any type of food make them the ideal resource for meat consumption.

There is very little evidence for pigs in Nubia before the Christian period (ca. sixth to thirteenth centuries CE), likely because cattle were the primary animals used by the Nubian cultural groups (see chapter 2). As symbols of wealth and elite status in Nubia, cattle constituted the dominant animal in artistic representations, and remains of such animals, especially bucrania (skulls), formed part of the funerary assemblage in elite and royal tombs.

Some of the earliest artistic evidence for pigs comes from the Nubian C-Group culture (ca. 2500–1700 BCE).¹¹ The C-Group peoples lived in Lower Nubia and were contemporary with those of the Old and Middle Kingdom periods in Egypt to the north and the Early to Middle Kerma periods in the south. Many of the graves in a C-Group cemetery at Toshka, south of Kom Ombo in present-day Egypt, included decorated, incised pots, including one example that depicts a possible pig next to a river with cattle, an ostrich, a bird, and a dog (fig. 10.2).¹²



Figure 10.2. Pot decoration depicting a possible pig next to a river with cattle, an ostrich, a bird, and a dog, from the C-Group cemetery at Toshka (Emery and Kirwan 1935, pl. 24.XXII).

The pig is represented with a short, squat body; a small tail; and a triangularly shaped head.

Clearer examples of pigs come from the Egyptian fortresses at Buhen and Serra East, which were built during the Egyptian annexation of Lower Nubia in the twentieth to nineteenth centuries BCE, ending the C-Group culture.¹³ The conquest of Lower Nubia began during the reign of Senwosret I and was completed by Senwosret III. The strongholds at Buhen and Serra East were part of a line of fortresses constructed along the Nile starting at Ikkur, below the First Cataract, and extending as far south as Kumma (Semna East), past the Second Cataract. The Buhen fortress was the second-largest one and the administrative center, having a small town within its walls. Copper production was a major industry at Buhen, and many pottery bellows in the shape of pigs' heads have been found at the site (fig. 10.3).¹⁴ The ears and nose of the pig form the legs of the bellows, and two holes represent the eyes. On the opposite end, an animal's skin was placed over the top to form the bellows. The metalworker would squeeze the bellows with his hands, pumping air into the fire and thereby



Figure 10.3. Pottery bellow in the shape of a pig's head from the Buhen fortress. Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology, University College London, UC 21376.



Figure 10.4. Sow amulet symbolizing the Egyptian goddess Nut or Isis. MFA 24.837. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

increasing its temperature to the required level for smelting copper.

Artistic depictions of pigs increased greatly during the Meroitic period (ca. 270 BCE–340 CE). The Meroitic pantheon included a number of Egyptian deities, such as Amun, Osiris, and Isis, and small faience or golden amulets of sows (fig. 10.4) symbolizing the Egyptian goddess Nut or Isis have been found at many Upper Nubian sites, particularly in the elite tombs at Meroe and at Hamadab, south of Meroe.¹⁵ The amulets are in the form of a walking sow with her face lowered to the ground; that they frequently have suspension rings on their backs indicates they were likely worn on necklaces.

The design of the amulets parallels that of Egyptian sow amulets from the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1069 BCE) to the Late Period (ca. 664–332 BCE). The Egyptian deity Nut was the goddess of the celestial heavens who separated the earth from the primeval waters of Nun and the mother of the heavenly bodies that were believed to enter her mouth each morning and then be given birth by her every night. Sows were seen as a representation of Nut, for they, too, eat their newborn young, though they do so only when placed under severe stress—for example, due to overcrowding, nutritional

deficiency, or isolation.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Nut in the form of a sow was viewed as a symbol of motherhood and as a protector of expectant mothers, so it is likely that these amulets had an apotropaic function. Alternatively, Isis in her role as the mother of Horus and thus as a symbol of motherhood was also depicted as a sow and bore the epithet “Great White Sow of Heliopolis.”

At Muweis, south of Meroe, zoomorphic figurines were found that included those of pigs (fig. 10.5). Dating to the third to first centuries BCE, these hand-modeled figurines had reduced features consisting of the basic swine characteristics of a short body and legs, a triangularly shaped head, and two short ears. The function of the pig figurines is unknown; however, it has been proposed that they and the other animal figurines were associated with a Meroitic fertility cult for the local inhabitants’ herds.¹⁷ A small proportion of pig bones found at Meroitic settlements suggests that limited numbers of pigs were kept in this period.¹⁸

Pigs may also have been sacrificed in this period. The 1840s Prussian expedition to Egypt and Nubia

led by Karl Richard Lepsius documented a religious scene in Pyramid 9, located in the northwestern pyramid field (Group A) at Meroe. His later publication describes a funerary(?) scene in which pigs are sacrificed but does not include a drawing of the image.¹⁹ If Lepsius’s identification is correct, then the inclusion of pigs as part of the sacrificial requirements of the tomb owner supports the existence of sounders.

Small numbers of pigs were similarly kept in Lower Nubia. At Qasr Ibrim (Primis), south of Aswan, a Roman fort was constructed during the reign of the emperor Augustus in 24 BCE and was garrisoned until 21 BCE. Although the fort was occupied for only a short period of time, a large amount of archaeological material was preserved there, including about 150 papyri. Three papyri are private letters informing the soldiers stationed at the fort of the delivery of live pigs.²⁰ The fact that no other animals are mentioned in the letters indicates that large numbers of pigs were not readily available for the soldiers at the garrison. This conclusion is supported by the small number of pig bones at the



Figure 10.5. Pig figurine from Muweis. SNM 33245. Courtesy of the Sudan National Museum.

site compared with the large numbers found at other Roman fortresses throughout Egypt.²¹

The presence of sounders is recorded at Kalabsha, also south of Aswan. The temple of Mandulis was built by King Arqamani of Meroe in the late third to early second centuries BCE and expanded by Augustus in the first century BCE. By the third century CE, the temple had fallen into such disuse that swineherds were allowing their pigs to forage within the temple's grounds. This practice was halted in 248/49 CE by Aurelius Besarion, strategos of Ombos and Elephantine, who issued a decree ordering the herdsmen to remove their pigs within fifteen days.²² The decree was carved on the wall of the temple's pronaos (fig. 10.6), reflecting the significance of the temple's restoration.

Only in late antiquity, with the rise of the Christian kingdoms of Nobadia, Makuria, and Alodia (sixth to thirteenth centuries CE), did the keeping of pigs become widespread in Nubia. These kingdoms were formed after the end of the Meroitic empire. At their peak, they controlled land from the First Cataract to the region situated between

the White Nile and the Blue Nile. From the Early to Classic Christian periods (sixth to twelfth centuries CE), pig remains represented approximately 15 percent of all livestock remains in the capital at Old Dongola and the religious center at Banganarti to the south.²³

The Limited Artistic (and Zooarchaeological) Evidence for Pigs in Ancient Nubia

The limited evidence for pigs throughout ancient Nubia strongly suggests that both the Lower and Upper Nubian cultures had little interest in keeping them. This situation differs greatly from that of their Egyptian neighbors, who throughout Egyptian history consistently kept pigs for human consumption of their meat; furthermore, in the New Kingdom period (ca. 1550–1069 BCE), the Egyptians used these animals to tread seed into freshly sown fields. The question of why pigs were not kept in large numbers by the Nubians has been examined by several scholars, whose explanations fall into two

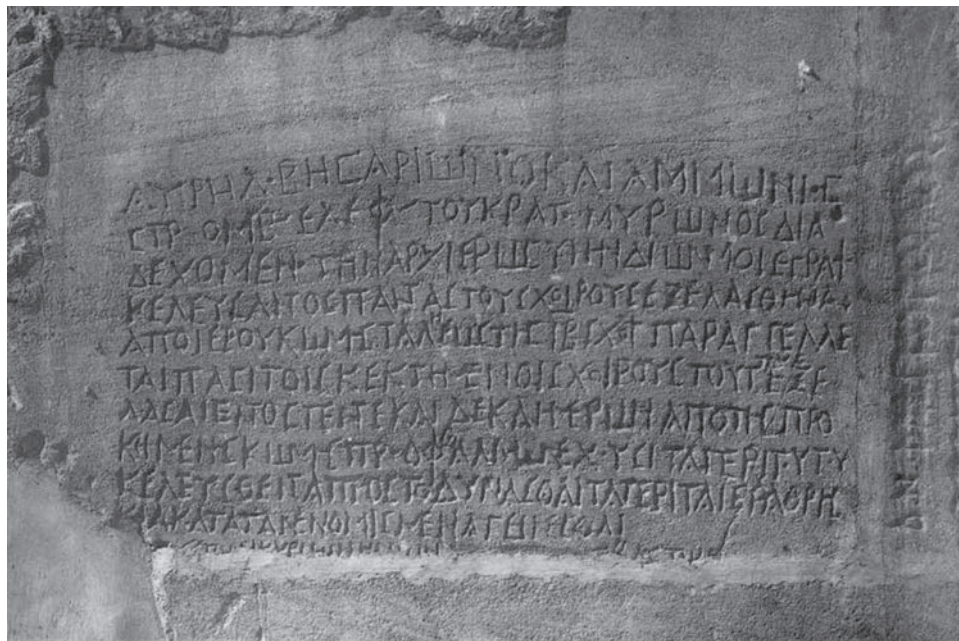


Figure 10.6. Decree ordering the removal of pigs from the temple of Mandulis at Kalabsha (Gauthier 1911, pl. LXIX.A).

categories: religious/cultural taboos and environmental/behavioral restrictions of swine physiology. The latter interpretation is discussed first.

Some scholars have proposed that the Nubian cultural groups generally did not keep pigs because the animals' physiology is not suited to the Nubian palaeoenvironment or the pastoral life of many cultures.²⁴ Pigs lack the ability to sweat and pant effectively, so they are unable to regulate their body temperature in hot climates. When temperatures exceed 82 degrees Fahrenheit, pigs reduce their body temperature by wallowing in a water source.²⁵ Because of the hot and dry palaeoclimate of ancient Nubia, pigs would not have survived easily. However, pigs are a resilient and highly adaptable species, and if they are provided with shelter and a water source they can survive in extreme heat. For example, active wild pigs have been observed in Iran when the daytime temperature exceeded 120 degrees Fahrenheit.²⁶ And not to be overlooked is the fact that all the sites discussed above are located along the Nile, so animals there likely had access to water. Two present-day Nilotic cultures in South Sudan, the Nuba and Fung, keep pigs, which roam around their villages.²⁷

It has also been proposed that the diet of pigs was not suited to the Nubian environment—it would have put them in direct competition with other livestock and the Nubians themselves—and that these “high costs” are the reason pig-keeping was not undertaken.²⁸ But pigs' well-known ability to eat almost anything makes them a village's animal par excellence; a family of four can produce enough garbage to feed four pigs,²⁹ and pigs “remove waste and recycle it into pork.”³⁰ Additionally, the ecology of the Nile—which supports insects, small animals (including frogs, reptiles, and mammals), carrion, and roots and plant stems—would have provided sufficient feed for pigs along the river's edge and in the marshes. None of these food types except the latter are eaten by cattle, sheep, or goats, so pigs would not have directly competed with them in this way.

The Nubian cultures were primarily pastoralists who kept sheep, goats, and cattle. Cattle symbolized wealth and elite status, and the animals' cultural significance reached its peak in the Kerma culture of Upper Nubia (ca. 2450–1500 BCE). Bucrania were placed in rows around the tumuli in Kerma's Eastern Cemetery, with the royal tombs featuring hundreds of skulls.³¹ Though pastoralism is not conducive to rearing pigs, since only with great difficulty can they be herded over long distances,³² this disadvantage would not have prevented Kerma or the other Nubian cultures from keeping pigs in their permanent settlements, such as the city of Kerma itself.

Furthermore, these observations do not account for why pigs were kept in sufficiently large sounders in Lower Nubia as to warrant the strategies of Ombos and Elephantine's decree to remove them from the grounds of the temple of Mandulis. Nor do they explain the emergence of pig husbandry following the end of the Meroitic period. As mentioned above, in the Christian kingdoms that succeeded Meroe, pork consumption rose in popularity, though in this period the remains of pigs (representing 15 percent of the total meat consumed) did not exceed those of cattle, sheep, and goats. It has been proposed that this smaller amount was due to Byzantine cultural influence on the emerging Christian kingdoms, as well as the need for animals that reproduced quickly in order to provide adequate amounts of food for those stationed at the many military outposts of the time.³³ Therefore, the reason for the near absence of pigs from Nubia is likely cultural.

Pigs may have been taboo, and a number of scholars have put forward this explanation for the scarcity of pigs in Nubia, citing the Roman decree inscribed in the temple of Mandulis.³⁴ But the decree's order that pigs be removed from the temple's grounds does not necessarily imply that the animals were viewed as unclean. The temple precinct was sacred, so it is likely that all livestock were banned from entry there. Livestock are not physically clean

animals—they have mud and dirt on their hooves, their hair is often dusty, and they observe no restrictions as to where they defecate. Pigs may have been singled out by the decree because swineherds were the only herdsmen who took advantage of the abandoned temple to use the grounds for feeding and housing their animals. Moreover, a pig taboo does not explain the presence of pig figurines and sow amulets during the Meroitic period. Since there appears to be no evidence for a clear cultural aversion to or disgust for swine in Nubia, the taboo interpretation may have stemmed from the misconception that pigs were taboo in ancient Egypt.³⁵

An alternative explanation for the scarcity of pigs in Nubia is the possibility that they were not culturally significant for or needed by the Nubians. Cattle played the dominant role in Nubian society and culture, and sheep and goats to a lesser extent (see chapter 2). The food from these animals' bodies—meat, bone marrow, fat, and dairy products—supported most of the Nubians' nutritional requirements. The body parts of livestock were used to produce tools, such as glue manufactured from their bones and hooves, and their skin was made into leather. The Nubians appear to have had little need for pigs, as reflected in the limited evidence for swine in the primarily pastoral A-Group, C-Group, Pan Grave, and Kerma cultures.

The increase in evidence for pigs during the Meroitic period in Nubia may be due to Greek and Roman influence. Lower Nubia was a frontier zone between Egypt and the Meroitic empire, and it fluctuated between Meroitic and Egyptian (Ptolemaic and then Roman) control. Pork was a large part of both Greek and Roman diets, so it is likely that the Nubians addressed in the temple of Mandulis decree adopted pig-keeping from Greco-Roman Egyptians. However, this explanation does

not account for the almost total lack of zooarchaeological evidence for pigs in Lower Nubia. This lack may be due to the modern construction of the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s, which created Lake Nasser and flooded many Lower Nubian sites so that modern excavations there are not possible.³⁶ Additionally, when excavations were carried out prior to the completion of the dam, zooarchaeological evidence frequently went unrecorded. Excavations during this time focused on cemeteries, temples, and fortresses, with the recording of architecture, wall scenes, human remains, and significant finds such as jewelry being prioritized. The lack of attention to zooarchaeological evidence likely resulted from the majority of the excavations being emergency salvage operations, with very limited time for documentation; therefore, animal remains were not the excavators' focus. Furthermore, the fact that scholarly research at this time was largely anthropocentric likely had an impact on what was considered archaeologically important to record.

Conclusion

Although there is limited artistic and zooarchaeological evidence for warthogs and pigs in ancient Nubia, swine nevertheless played a small part in Nubian culture. Warthogs were depicted in rock art, and they were hunted and eaten in small quantities. By the Meroitic period, pigs were kept in small numbers in Lower Nubia, and sow amulets were worn because of their association with the goddesses Nut and Isis as a symbol of motherhood and as protection for expectant mothers. With the rise of the medieval Christian kingdoms, pigs rose in popularity and were kept in large numbers. This situation did not last, however, and from the Late Christian period onward the pig once again fell into obscurity.

Notes

1. Mohammed et al. 2023; Butynski and de Jong 2018, 87.
2. Butynski and de Jong 2018, 93.
3. Gatto 2011, 95.

4. Perkins 1965, 57.
5. Crawford 1954, 29.
6. ElMahi 1988, 19, table 3.
7. Carter and Foley 1980, 301.
8. Pluskota 2003, 189.
9. Myers 1960, 175.
10. Cucchi et al. 2011, 20; cf. Price and Hongo 2020, 597, 599–600.
11. For the revised chronology of this cultural period, see Schröder 2023, 215.
12. Emery and Kirwan 1935, 496, pl. 24.XXII.
13. Hughes 1963, 128.
14. Nibbi 1993, 70–71.
15. Dunham 1963, figs. 18g, 28a, 39c, 44c, 47c, 175.3, 179.13, 182.4, 183.14; Wolf and Nowotnick 2021, fig. 27.9b; Wildung 1997, 334–35 (cat. no. 384).
16. Baxter and Edwards 2018, 81.
17. Sackho-Autissier 2010a, 116.
18. Wolf and Nowotnick 2021, 528.
19. Lepsius 1913, 298.
20. Derda, Łajtar, and Plóciennik 2019, 141–42, 144.
21. Derda, Łajtar, and Plóciennik 2019, 146, 148–49.
22. Gauthier 1911, 193, pl. LXIX.A; Török 1998, 978.
23. Osypińska 2016, 528, table 1.
24. E.g., ElMahi 1996.
25. Carr et al. 2018, table 10.6.
26. Redding 1991, 23.
27. Seligman and Seligman 1932, 368, 401–3, 406, 409, 435, 443.
28. ElMahi 1996, 144–45.
29. Miller 1990, 130.
30. Price 2020, 23.
31. Chaix, Dubosson, and Honegger 2012, 193, fig. 2.
32. Price 2020, 23.
33. Osypińska 2016, 533.
34. E.g., Török 1998, 978.
35. Volokhine 2014; Price 2020.
36. Derda, Łajtar, and Plóciennik 2019, 149n29.

PART II

Catalog



11

An Exploited Resource

Marc Maillot

Ancient Nubia, a region located along the Nile River in what is today southern Egypt and northern Sudan, had a long-standing relationship with both wild and domesticated animals—swine, cattle, bovids, fish, and others—that played a crucial role in the region’s economy, culture, and symbolism. However, the relationship between humans and animals in ancient Nubia is still poorly understood because of a scarcity of excavations and modern studies devoted to fauna. From an archaeozoological standpoint, only a few species of African fauna are present in Nubia, and in most cases the low ratio of wild animals to domesticated animals (in particular livestock animals) is remarkable. From the Late Neolithic (ca. 4500 BCE) forward, hunting wild animals was no longer a priority for humans, even if predation still played a minor role in the economy. A clear break occurred at the end of this period: extensive crops testify to the almost absolute importance of domestic animals, of which livestock species formed the overwhelming majority. As has already been demonstrated in other geographical regions, the presence of domestic animals—mainly cattle and goats—in or near a given habitat frees its human inhabitants from the random and expensive search for wild proteins, such that hunting becomes a prestige activity or one with rare products as its prize.

Swine (cat. nos. 1–3)

Swine were present in Nubia from prehistoric times. Mostly identified as warthogs (*Phacochoerus africanus*) or domestic pigs (*Sus scrofa domesticus*), some were easily domesticated. The general body shape of swine breeds in Nubia is slightly different from that seen in other areas of North Africa and West Asia, being usually smaller and slenderer with an elongated, narrow groin. Most representations of swine in Nubia appear in the form of clay figurines, rock art, or amulets that, particularly in later periods, almost exclusively represent sows (referring to the breastfeeding goddess Nut).

Bovids and Cattle (cat. nos. 4–10)

Domesticated cattle in Nubian culture are represented mainly by zebu-type and long-horned cattle. Zebu likely came from the East (India or the Arabian Peninsula), while long-horned types descended from indigenous African

Sandstone stela with an incised cow and calf.
ISACM E23303A–C.
Cat. no. 9.

aurochs. Cattle were central to agriculture (plowing), food (meat and dairy), and social status (wealth). Owning cattle was a marker of high status. That cattle skulls and complete skeletons have been found in elite burials suggests that cattle also played spiritual or symbolic roles. At Kerma, a major Nubian city, royal tombs included cattle skulls arranged in rows as offerings. Cattle were connected to fertility, strength, and kingship, and they may have been symbolically linked with solar cults, especially in later periods when Egyptian influence grew. Sacrificial offerings of cattle, often buried with the dead or in ceremonial contexts, were part of religious practices. Nubian rock art (especially in the Eastern Desert and along the Nile) includes iconography of long-horned cattle, often in herding or ritual scenes. The main archaeological evidence comes from sites of various periods. At Kerma, cattle burials have been extensively documented. At Tombos and on Sai Island, cattle-related remains and artistic representations are numerous.

In addition to domesticated cattle, sheep were among the earliest domesticated animals in the Nile Valley. As evidenced in the Kerma culture (ca. 2500–1500 BCE), sheep were herded for both wool and meat. The breeds in ancient Nubia were likely fat-tailed sheep, which were well suited to arid climates, much as they are today. Sheep were sometimes used for ritual sacrifice, especially in rituals associated with elite burials. The sheep bones found in funerary contexts suggest they are the remains of offerings or had symbolic importance.

Goats were a particularly resilient livestock highly valued for their adaptability to dry, rocky terrain. Used for milk, meat, and sometimes hides, goats were less water dependent than cattle, a trait that made them more practical and favored by herders in semiarid parts of Nubia. Indeed, Nubians practiced a mixed agropastoral economy, combining crop farming with animal herding. Caprids were an integral part of transhumance, in which herders moved livestock seasonally between grazing lands. Evidence for the practice is rather common

at archaeological sites, including Kerma, Meroe, and Sai Island. As a flexible source of protein and secondary products and exploited for trade (e.g., as barter), they were still identified as markers of status.

The wild counterparts of cattle, such as antelope and ibexes, are, despite their close symbolic proximity to cattle, described in the next chapter.

Birds and Fish (cat. nos. 11–24)

Nubia's rich and diverse environment supported a wide range of bird species. Birds held ecological, symbolic, and sometimes economic importance in Nubian culture. As a result of its varied geography—deserts, the Nile River, and seasonal wadi beds—Nubia hosted many bird species, including the ibis (sacred to Thoth in Egyptian religion), heron, stork, duck, and goose, possibly domesticated (being first introduced in Egypt, then in Nubia, from the Near East at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period) in addition to being hunted. Falcons and hawks, as well as vultures, were revered in both Egyptian and Nubian iconography. Larks, finches, and sparrows were also common in the savanna and desert margins. Depicted in rock art and on pottery used in rituals or offerings, they were most often represented in jewelry and decorations—especially their feathers or in stylized forms. Bird bones found at Nubian sites such as Qasr Ibrim, Kerma, Napata, and Meroe demonstrate that birds were consumed and possibly offered ritually. Wall paintings and carvings sometimes show birds in natural or ceremonial scenes.

In Nubian art, birds played both symbolic and decorative roles, often drawing influence from neighboring Egypt but also developing unique local meanings. The kingdoms of Kerma, Napata, and Meroe (ca. 2500 BCE–350 CE) incorporated birds into religious, funerary, and royal contexts. The falcon/hawk, symbol of kingship and divine power, was adopted from Egyptian Horus iconography and modified according to local needs. Nubian deities and rulers, particularly in the Napatan

and Meroitic periods, wore falcon-headed crowns or were shown with falcons above their heads. Vultures were associated with royal protection and motherhood. In the Egyptian tradition, the goddess Nekhbet (vulture-headed protector of Upper Egypt) also influenced Nubian religious symbolism, specifically goddesses' and queens' costumes. Vultures appear on temple walls and royal regalia in Nubia, especially in the Lion Temple complexes at Naga and Mussawwarat es-Sufra. The ibis was also depicted in Nubia, especially in temples such as those at Tabo or Napata, where its imagery reflects religious syncretism with Egyptian deities. Birds such as ducks, geese, doves, and pigeons were part of ritual offerings in temples and tombs. At the temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal, birds appear in decorative motifs alongside Egyptian-style gods. Bird motifs were common on Meroitic ceramics and ostraca, and geometric and naturalistic bird forms appear in painted and incised decoration from very early in Nubian history until the medieval period. Feathers and bird forms were used in pendants, amulets, and royal attire, and birds were believed to be messengers between worlds, especially *ba*-birds that represented part of the soul. Tombs at El-Kurru and Nuri contain artwork with bird symbolism linking royalty to divine rebirth.

Fish in ancient Nubia were an important part of daily life as a key source of food. The Nile and its seasonal tributaries provided a wide variety of fish, including tilapia, catfish, Nile perch, and the *Bagrid* and *Alestes* species. Fish remains found in Nubian settlement sites and graves show that they were roasted, dried, and possibly salted and brined. Fishing tools such as hooks, nets, and harpoons have been uncovered in archaeological excavations

(e.g., at Kerma and Meroe). Fish played notable roles in Nubian religion and art, particularly in connection with the Nile River, which was central to Nubian life both spiritually and economically. Although not as prominently symbolic as cattle or lions, fish still held important ritual, artistic, and cultural significance, especially in relation to fertility, regeneration, and the divine realm of water. Fish symbolized life, abundance, and fertility, likely because of their association with the annual Nile flood, which brought renewal to the land. As in Egypt, people in Nubia may have viewed fish as creatures of rebirth emerging from the life-giving waters. Fish, as inhabitants of this divine river, were associated with deities connected to water, such as the Nile god (possibly linked to the Egyptian Hapy). Spiritual transitions (life to death, or mortal to divine) were also symbolized by the fish. Some fish (e.g., catfish or Nile perch) may have been seen as protective or magical, possibly even taboo in ritual contexts. Representations of fish could be used in amulets, much as they were in Egypt. They were commonly painted or incised on Meroitic and Napatan pottery. Designs ranged from stylized, geometric fish to naturalistic profiles. Fish-shaped amulets made of faience, stone, or bronze have been found in burial contexts as prophylactic charms and symbols of rebirth. Fish were consumed both in daily life and potentially in ritual meals, especially in temple complexes, and the remains of fish have been found in archaeological contexts at Kerma, El-Kurru, Sai Island, and Meroe. These findings suggest that fish served both sacred and practical roles in ancient Nubia, as their use alternated between ritual offering and subsistence resource.



1. Amulet in the Shape of a Sow Rooting in the Ground

Faience

Egypt

Late Period, Dynasty 26 (664–525 BCE)

Purchased in 1919

ISACM E10154



2. Amulet in the Shape of a Sow Rooting in the Ground

Faience

Egypt

Late Period, Dynasty 26 (664–525 BCE)

Purchased in 1919

ISACM E10156



3. Amulet in the Shape of a Sow Rooting in the Ground

Faience

Egypt

Late Period, Dynasty 26 (664–525 BCE)

Purchased in 1944

ISACM E17521



4. Relief-Decorated Bowl

Faience

Egypt/Sudan

Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 25 (747–656 BCE)

Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 1916

Brooklyn Museum 74.98.1

The base of this semicircular faience vessel is adorned with a lotus flower, and the body is decorated with a procession of four cows—possibly symbols of the goddess Hathor—through a setting of lotus flowers. Although it was once believed to date to the Eighteenth Dynasty (ca. 1550–1295 BCE), the vessel is more likely a work of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. It once had a blue-green glaze and has been heavily restored.



5. Bowl Reproduction with Cattle and Herdsmen

Bronze electrotpe reproduction of the
original in Cairo (JE 41017)

Nubia, Karanog, tomb G187

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Original excavated in 1908

University of Pennsylvania Museum of
Archaeology and Anthropology E7156

The pastoral scene on this bowl illustrates perfectly the importance granted to cattle herds in seminomadic contexts. Apart from the cattle procession, two elements are of particular interest. The first is the circular, thatched hut, probably a representation of a type of light structure made from perishable materials. This kind of construction is still in use in Sudan, such as in Abu Erteila and Soba. Contemporary cylindrical huts with a conical roof (*tukul*) in Soba, south of Khartoum, are also reminiscent of the huts engraved on this bowl. Second, the surprising wealth of some of the costumes represented, with their jewelry and elite adornments, may indicate a cult of the ancestors rather than a strictly bucolic scene. Indeed, in front



of the hut appear a couple (or two women) and their daughter (or an adolescent girl). They receive a vessel of milk from a herdsman. Preceding this human group are three pairs of cows, a pair of bulls, another herdsman, and two cows with their five calves. The sun disk or ostrich egg surmounting the hut adds another layer of meaning to the scene by identifying the shelter as a shrine. The variations in the shape of the cattle's horns reflect the East African shepherds' common practice of purposely deforming them, often to mark ownership and to signal the herdsman's prestige. These horn shapes also appear in offering processions in the Egyptian Nile Valley as early as the New Kingdom, in the rock art of Sudan, and in the Eastern Desert.

Literature:

Dubosson 2016

Wildung 1997, 382–83, no. 453

Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910a, 59–60, 248

Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pls. 26 (bottom), 27

See also figure 1.4 in chapter 1.



6. Camel/Cattle Bell with an Iron Clapper

Copper alloy, iron

Nubia, Qustul, tomb Q264

Early X-Group period (370–410 CE)

Excavated in 1962–63

ISACM E20887

This bell was recovered from a pit containing five camels, three of which were killed by a blow to the head; a saddle; parts of a bridle; and ropes. Iron tools and weapons found in X-Group tombs at Ballana and Qustul attest to the importance of military equipment as grave goods. Individuals in battle were often equipped during this period with a short iron sword with an angled tip; weapons with blades up to a meter long were found in the royal tombs. The camel was imported from the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt by nomadic populations in the first half of the first millennium CE. The animal had already been known for a few centuries, as evidenced by bone and dung remains discovered, in particular, at the Roman garrison of Qasr Ibrim.

Literature:

Williams 1991b, 224 fig. 95a, pl. 83g



7. Black-Incised Bowl

Baked clay

Nubia, Adindan, tomb 223, east of superstructure

C-Group period (1900–1750 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E23452

This bowl is decorated with three registers of cattle, some of them with their calves. Each animal is set apart by the shape of its horns, the pattern of its hide, and the position of its tail. The background of the registers was homogenized by applying a notched stone to the bowl's surface. The beautifully decorated rim with chevrons is reminiscent of leather lashing.

Literature:

Wenig 1978, 137

Williams 1983, 102–3 figs. 9–10, 105, 181, pls. 17A, 19, 46



8. Stela with an Incised Cow and Calf

Sandstone

Nubia, Adindan, tomb 101

C-Group period (1900–1750 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E23281A–B

Literature:

Williams 1983, 149, pl. 97



9. Stela with an Incised Cow and Calf

Sandstone

Nubia, Adindan, tomb 39

C-Group period (1900–1750 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E23303A–C

Literature:

Williams 1983, 133, pls. 95–96



10. Stela Fragment with the Figure of a Cow

Sandstone

Nubia, Adindan, tomb 264, surface

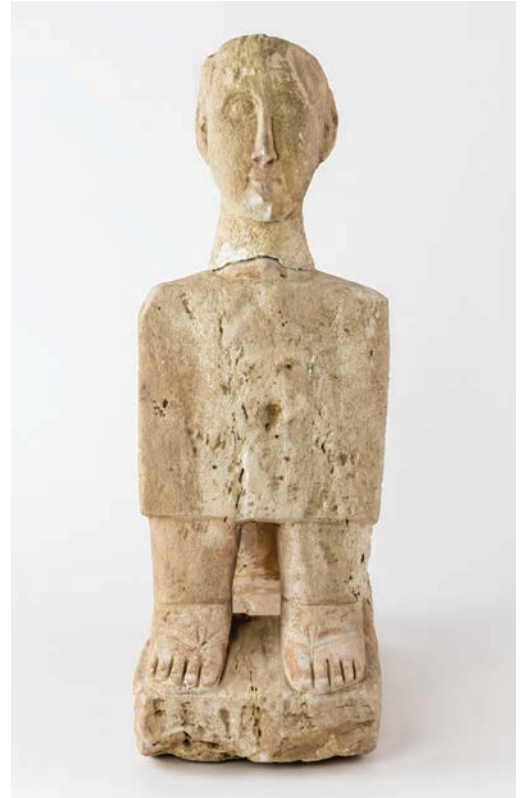
C-Group period (1900–1750 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E23864

Literature:

Williams 1983, 195, pl. 98B



11. Ba Statue

Sandstone, paint

Nubia, Ballana, tomb B245

Meroitic phase IIIB–IV (225–300 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E22487

Objects from tombs at Qustul and Ballana reflect the Meroitic conception of the afterlife, which envisioned the soul of the deceased living on in the divine celestial sphere. Texts invoke the Egyptian funerary deities Isis and Osiris, and solar references alluding to eternity are included both on objects decorated with the winged sun disk and statues that represent the soul (*ba*) of the deceased in the form of a human with the wings of a bird. Offering tables in or near miniature chapels built against the eastern sides of wealthier Meroitic tombs enabled the deceased to receive food offerings in perpetuity.

Ba statues were deposited in Meroitic tomb chapels to receive offerings. The belief that the *ba* could fly out of the body into the world was an Egyptian tradition adopted by the Nubians. However, the Nubian conception of the *ba* differed in that it had human legs rather than a bird's legs. The breast of this statue is flattened as though intended for an inscription. Recent excavations at the Sedeinga necropolis have uncovered a set of *ba* statues with similar features but several additions, including a cheetah's skin that covers the upper part of the body (see fig. 5.17 in chapter 5). This feature identifies those *ba* statues as priests associated with royal power.

Literature:

Rilly, Francigny, and David 2020

Teeter 2019a

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 256; vol. 2, pl. 112a



12. Zoomorphic Vase in the Shape of a Duck

Baked clay

Nubia, Buhen, locus J28

New Kingdom, Dynasty 18 (1550–1295 BCE)

Excavated in 1910

University of Pennsylvania Museum of
Archaeology and Anthropology E10604A

Literature:

O'Connor 1993, 138

Randall-MacIver and Woolley 1911, 230



13. Jar with Three Birds and a Guinea Fowl(?)

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Qasr el-Wizz, area II-UU

Medieval period (ca. 900 CE)

Excavated in 1965

ISACM E42001

The Wizz Vase, named after the site of Qasr el-Wizz (“Castle of the Flying Geese”) where it was excavated, is incomplete but of comprehensible shape. The fabric is a pinkish-gray clay whose unique coloring stems from the sandstone of the Faras region that eroded into the shoreline clay deposits. The rim diameter is 12 centimeters, the body diameter 26 centimeters, and the height 30 centimeters. Atop an overall beige-brown slip have been painted a guilloche rim band and, below a ridge, a frieze of six panels separated by bands of vertical guilloche. The frieze and rim band are painted in red and dark red-brown. The frieze includes a guinea fowl or an antelope with large ears, twisted horns, and a tendril drooping from its mouth (its interpretation

as an antelope is uncertain because the portion displaying the bottom part of the body is missing). A bird with wings and tail feathers painted frontally but with head, body, and claws oriented to the right follows in the next panel. A large, central panel then presents a bird in profile, wings deployed and tail feathers drawn frontally. It is succeeded by two half-palmettes divided by a tendril with a looped floral design. A rigidly symmetrical basket-weave panel completes the decoration. This masterfully executed frieze illustrates the artistic skill of the medieval painters at the monastery of el-Wizz. Certainly associated with the diocese of Faras, the master painter was probably a member of a workshop that executed several works of art for the clergy, exemplified by similar jars and manuscripts discovered in religious complexes in the vicinity.

Literature:

Adams 1961

Scanlon and Hingot 1968



14. Amulet in the Shape of an Ibis

Bronze

Nubia, Serra East

C-Group period (1900–1750 BCE)

Excavated in 1962

ISACM E19693

Literature:

Then-Obluska 2022, 181n209

Williams 1993, 96 fig. 48c, pl. 33b



15. Ostrich Eggshell with a Round Hole at the Bottom

Eggshell

Nubia, Qustul, tomb S4

A-Group period (3200–3100 BCE)

Excavated in 1962–63

ISACM E21384

Several cemeteries from the A-Group period were excavated at Qustul, with its Cemetery S containing the largest tombs of the necropolis. The hole at the bottom of this egg was drilled for drainage. Parallels, sometimes decorated with animals and hunting scenes, have been discovered at sites in Egypt and Nubia covering all chronological periods. The egg shape was praised by artisans, who reproduced it in stone and ceramic vessels. The funerary context of this egg suggests that it carried a powerful spiritual significance and was considered a marker of prestige, possibly associating the deceased with the divine to ensure eternal life.

Literature:

Scalf 2012b

Williams 1989, 103



16. Faience and Eggshell Beads (Restrung)

Faience, garnet, eggshell

Nubia, Serra East, tomb C6

Pan Grave period (1700–1520 BCE)

Excavated in 1963–64

ISACM E24440

Literature:

Then-Obłuska 2022, 254, no. 288

Williams 1993, 130



17. Statue of a Hawk

Limestone

Nubia, Qustul, tomb Q551

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1962–63

ISACM E21690

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 119; vol. 2, pl. 113c



18. Jar with Six Ibises with Long, Curved Beaks and a Crescent Frieze

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Ballana, tomb B51B

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1962–63

ISACM E22413

Birds are commonly depicted across all periods of Nubian art, and ibises are regularly represented. Ibises are sometimes confused with guinea fowl, but the latter are generally depicted with dotted or checkered bodies (see ISACM E22415, where the two birds are depicted side by side). This frieze probably displays a hadedah ibis (*Bostrychia hagedash*), to judge from the iridescent stripe in the middle of its wing—a common motif in Sudan.

Literature:

Rondot and Licitra 2018

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 359 fig. 194a; vol. 2, pl. 29a



19. Stela with a Guinea Fowl

Sandstone with blue pigment
 Nubia, Adindan, surface
 Early X-Group period (370–410 CE)
 Excavated in 1964
 ISACM E23633

The guinea fowl appears to have been one of the most popular birds in ancient Nubia. The helmeted guinea fowl (*Numida meleagris*) is one of nine species of guinea fowl that constitute the family of Numididae, widespread on the African continent. This species has a featherless head, the “helmet” referring to a protrusion on the bird’s crown. Guinea fowl were a favored decorative subject on Meroitic jars. Short legged with plump bodies, their narrow heads and down-turned tail feathers make them easily recognizable.

Literature:

Rondot and Licitra 2018
 Wyatt 2012



20. Incised Sherd with a Bird Motif

Baked clay

Nubia, Serra East

New Kingdom (1550–1295 BCE)

Excavated in 1963–64

ISACM E24643



21. Bowl Fragment Decorated with a Fish Symbolizing Jesus Christ

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Serra East, area SN

Late medieval period (1025–1300 CE)

Excavated in 1961–64

ISACM E24710

From the sixth to the fifteenth century CE, Nubia had flourishing Christian kingdoms, including Nobadia, Makuria, and Alodia. During the Christian period, most ceramics displayed patterns inspired by Coptic manuscript illumination, but possibly also by Byzantine pottery decoration and Christian art in Ethiopia. The ichthys, a well-established early Christian pattern symbolizing Jesus Christ, may have been known in Christian Nubia and reproduced in pottery art. Potter's marks consisting of simplified triangles could also represent the ichthys.



22. Bottle Decorated with Two Fish

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Ballana, Cemetery 221, surface

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1961–64

ISACM E24139

Literature:

Mohamed Ahmed 1992

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 446 fig. 296



23. Plaque with an Incised Fish

Faience

Nubia, Dorginarti, locus D81

Early first millennium BCE

Excavated in 1963–64

ISACM E24398



24. Dish in the Shape of a Fish

Alabaster

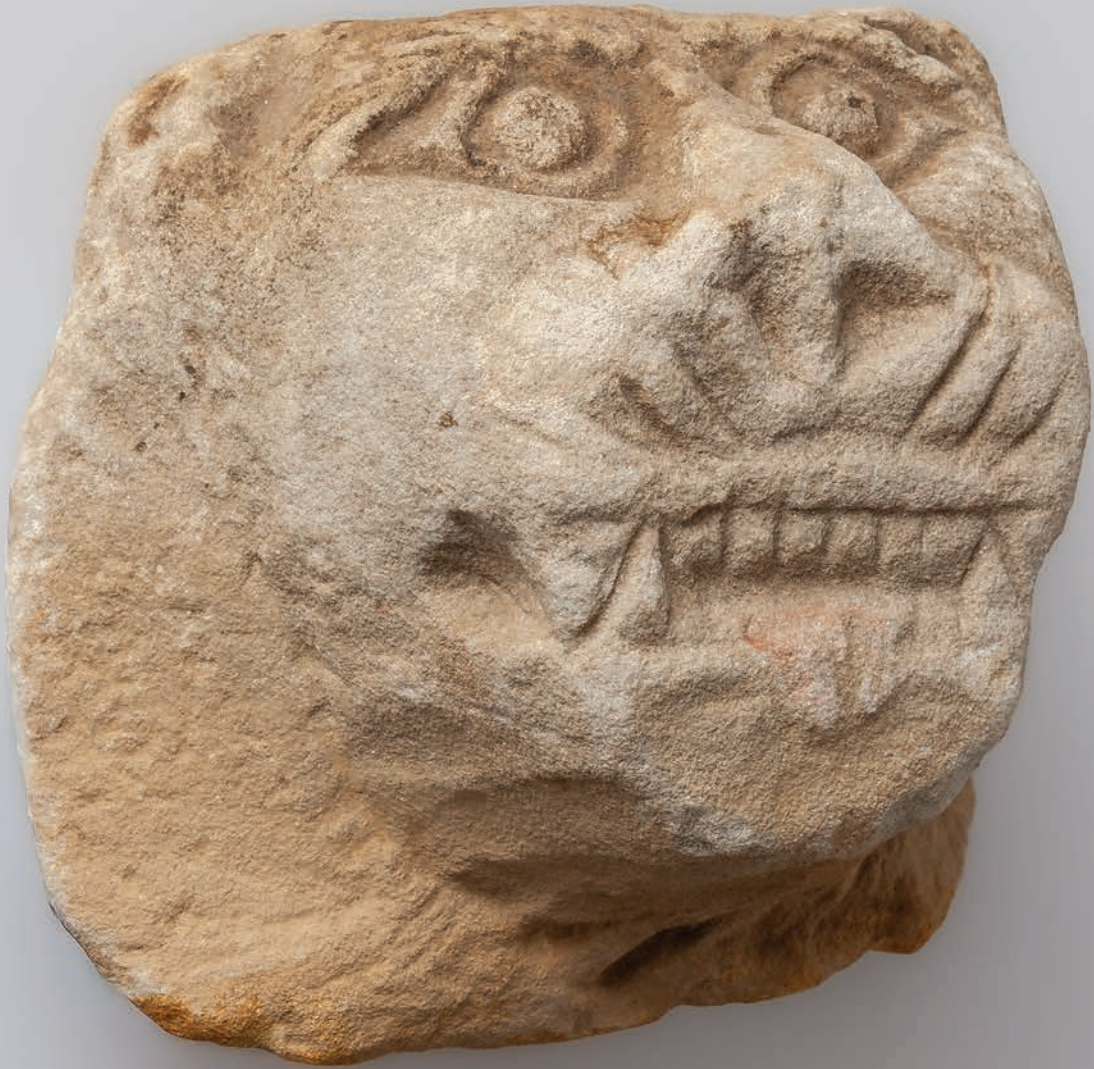
Nubia, Aniba, locus An 32

New Kingdom, Dynasty 19 (1295–1186 BCE)

Excavated in 1911

University of Pennsylvania Museum of
Archaeology and Anthropology E11180





12

Wild and Dangerous

Marc Maillot

Ovids and Wild Bovids (cat. nos. 25–28)

Nubia was home to various wild bovids, including antelope such as oryxes and hartebeests. These animals appeared regularly in Nubian and Egyptian art and may have been hunted for their meat, hides, and horns or featured in symbolic and funerary contexts, particularly in the C-Group period, when antelope skins and horns were displayed in tombs. Along with monkeys and dogs, they are often represented on bronze plaques as companion animals to humans.

Among the many subspecies of ovids, the ram plays the most important symbolic role in the Nubian cosmogony. Identified as the patron god of the Kushite kings and dwelling in the “pure mountain” of the city of Napata (i.e., Gebel Barkal) during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, the ram-headed Amun appears for the first time on a stone stela at Kurgus (ca. 1520 BCE). Even though the anthropomorphic Amun of Thebes was clearly syncretized with the ram-headed Amun of Napata following the Egyptian colonization of Nubia in the New Kingdom, a Nubian ram deity already existed in the Middle Nile Valley; two species of rams—*Ovis longipes paleoaegyptiaca* with horizontal horns and *Ovis aries platyura aegyptiaca* with horns wound around the ears—were present in early Nubia, whence they may have spread to Egypt.

Ancient Napatans used different vocabulary in texts to distinguish between domesticated ovids and wild ones—a separation likewise observed in chapter 11 of this catalog. The fact that they also used more general terms for defining herds, particularly cattle, as opposed to caprids further reinforces this separation between the various categories of domestication. Papyrus Koller, dating to the Ramesside period and currently housed in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, describes Nubian tribute separated into categories of cattle, as well as antelope and other wild ovids.¹ This is also the case on the Nastasen stela, which lists the animal offerings to Amun in segregated categories.² Throughout Nubian history, wild ovids are depicted for their own sake, particularly in the early periods, highlighting the importance of hunting as a marker of status.

River and Savanna Animals (cat. nos. 29–34)

In ancient Nubia, the savanna environment hosted a range of wild animals that were both part of the natural ecosystem and deeply integrated into the culture,

Sandstone lion head.
ISACM E36372.
Cat. no. 55.

economy, and symbolism of Nubian societies. Their archaeozoological remains are frequently unearthed in small numbers in Nubian faunal assemblages, while numerous depictions testify to their presence in both art and the religious sphere. However, some oft-depicted species, such as elephants, giraffes, and hippopotami, are very rare in the faunal spectra. This observation mirrors the situation in the Franco-Cantabrian region during the Upper Palaeolithic period, where there is a marked discrepancy between the importance of certain species as attested in bone remains and their frequency in prehistoric cave paintings and rock art.³

African elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) were highly valued for the ivory of their upper incisors (i.e., tusks), which was a major trade commodity. Symbols of military strength and royalty, they were common in ancient Nubian savannas, particularly near the valley and grasslands of the Nile River. In Egypt and Sudan, these animals were present as early as the Pleistocene and during the Holocene, as evidenced by various finds. In historical periods, elephants fled farther south, along the Atbara River at the foot of the Eritrean and Ethiopian plateaus. Elephants and crops are not compatible, and extensive agriculture pushed the animals to migrate. Their presence is inversely proportional to that of humans.

North of Aswan, the predynastic site of Hierakonpolis has yielded two large pits, each containing the skeleton of an elephant—one eight years old at death, and the other, a male, ten to eleven years old at death. These discoveries attest to special care for these individuals and the role they may have played in this city. Some scholars believe they were domestic elephants, but their diet, consisting of rushes and reeds, seems to indicate pasturing outside the city. In Nubia, elephants were present in the Neolithic but became extremely scarce during the following periods. In most cases, the faunal remains are fragments of tusks and, rarely, remains of molars. The presence of the latter, which are unusable for making objects, attests to the presence of at least a

skull or mandible. Strangely, elephant bones, which are very large and robust, are extremely rare in the archaeological record, and their absence cannot be explained by taphonomic phenomena. Hunting this pachyderm thus must have occurred far from the archaeological sites where remains are attested. The abandoned carcasses of the hunted animals are the subject of a complex taphonomic history that resulted in a significant dispersion of the bones and the disappearance of certain elements. Despite its rarity in archaeological material, the elephant is abundantly represented in rock art in Nubia. The animal plays an important role in the Meroitic period, as evidenced by the sculptures and bas-reliefs of Musawwarat es-Sufra.

From the Late Pleistocene era, the hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*), like the elephant, frequented a good part of the eastern Sahara before the desert became dessicated; it also frequented the Nile Valley and Nubia, as evidenced by many sites that have yielded its dental and bone remains. The hippopotamus is associated with rivers and permanent swampy areas, as well as with grassy meadows. In Nubia, the Nile and its tributaries were favorable to the animal, which was sought for the ivory of its canines and incisors. In modern times, environmental changes and even greater human pressure have considerably reduced its distribution—in Upper Nubia, the last hippopotami were reported in the Dongola region in 1905.

Insects and Other Invertebrates (cat. nos. 35–40)

Insects played an important role in the ecosystem of ancient Nubia, particularly regarding pollination and decomposition. Insects had both positive and negative effects on farming as pollinators and crop pests, respectively. Ancient Nubians practiced agriculture along the Nile floodplains, which, along with the hot, arid climate, created fertile environments for many insect species.

Bees were likely used for honey and wax, as in Darfur today. Honey may have had culinary,

medicinal, and possibly ritual significance. Flies and mosquitoes are common in the Nile Valley. Likely a nuisance and possibly associated with disease, they were also celebrated as symbols of persistence. Scarab beetles had powerful symbolic and religious meaning in Nubia, as well as in Egypt. While Egyptian-style scarab amulets and motifs are found in Nubian tombs and temples, especially from the Napatan and Meroitic periods, their exact symbolic significance in Nubia may have been different. The scarab (dung) beetle in Egypt symbolized the sun god Khepri and rebirth; it is possible that the Nubians adopted or adapted this symbolism, especially during the colonization of Nubia by the Egyptians in the New Kingdom.

Scorpions are not commonly depicted in Nubia despite their popularity in Egypt. Associated with royal power, they appear very early in Nubian art, especially in prehistoric rock art. Depictions of scorpions are noticeable on A-Group pottery, particularly at Qustul. Scorpions also appear on seals, amulets, and scarabs. At Kerma, they were a distinct motif on faience plaques that potentially adorned clothing, perhaps for prophylactic purposes.

Reptiles (cat. nos. 41–50)

Among the many species of snake known in ancient Nubia, the cobra plays the most important symbolic role. This ophidian lives in both dry and humid areas, and it sometimes enters homes. When threatened, it adopts an intimidating posture by drawing up the front of its body vertically and dilating its neck. As a last resort, the cobra can spit venom or kill its prey by biting it. The cobra is most often represented in this aggressive attitude, particularly when it adorns the foreheads of Nubian sovereigns in the form of the uraeus. The uraeus originated in Egyptian cosmogony, according to which the sun god, Re, sent his eye, transformed into the lion goddess Sekhmet, to devastate rebellious humanity. The eye returned to its owner after victory; but Sekhmet, furious at being replaced, was metamorphosed by Re into a female cobra, which he placed

on his forehead. The pharaoh, as the heir of Re, wore the uraeus, symbolizing the ability to reach the enemy from a distance. With that interpretation in mind, both the lion and the cobra embodied the strength and power of the king.

Felines (cat. nos. 51–55)

During prehistoric times, the lion—the most popular feline representative in the cosmogony—roamed the Nubian savanna. Desertification pushed it back to the Nile and water sources where gazelles and other prey gathered. The lion, as the main predator of the Saharan steppes, dominated the other fauna. Its image is thus frequently invoked to recall the function of the sovereign, who must triumph over his enemies to restore order. A perfect example is the sphinx, which often combines a human face and a lion's body, thus highlighting the double nature of the king as both human and divine. The lion is regularly depicted on pieces of furniture, such as beds and chairs, to ensure the safety of their owners and the protection of their users. This strength is also celebrated in monumental complexes associated with water, since the mouth of the lion was thought symbolically to control rainfall and the Nile floods. Consequently, lions are represented in the form of statues around water reservoirs in the Sudanese hinterland and as waterspouts in temples.

Small felines, such as the leopard, cheetah, and cat, are often confused in ancient Nubian art; the difference resides mainly in their pelts, with the cheetah's displaying uniform dots and a striped tail. They are regularly depicted in tribute scenes, and their skins were reserved for the costume of priests of Amun. This feature links them directly with kingship, particularly in the case of the most famous Kushite king, Taharqo, whose Meroitic birth name can be translated as "It is he, the leopard." This use of the leopard skin to identify the king as the high priest of Amun is also present during the reign of King Taneyidamani, as demonstrated by a granite stela discovered by George A. Reisner at the entrance of the Amun temple in Gebel Barkal, in front of the

first pylon. The decoration of the reverse side of the stela shows the standing king wearing a leopard's skin and flanked by Amun of Thebes and Amun of Napata. In a graffito from a sandstone quarry

near Gebel Suweikat, 5 kilometers north of Gebel Barkal, an unknown sovereign—possibly named Patakhedateqo—is also represented as wearing a leopard's skin and facing Amun of Napata.

Notes

1. Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung P. 3043.
2. Berlin ÄM 2268.
3. Louis Chaix, personal communication.



25. Ram's-Head Amulet

Gold

Egypt/Sudan

Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 25 (747–656 BCE)

Gift of Norbert Schimmel Trust, 1989

Metropolitan Museum of Art 1989.281.98

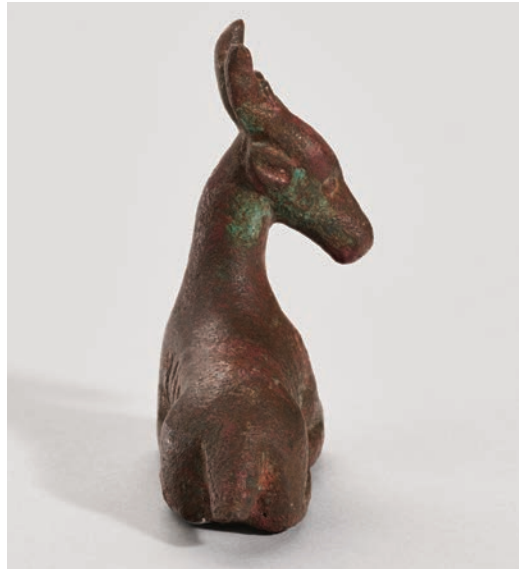
This amulet was probably made for a necklace worn by one of the Kushite kings. Representations show these pharaohs wearing a ram's-head amulet tied around the neck on a thick cord, the ends of which fall forward over the shoulders. Sometimes a smaller

ram's head is attached to each end. Rams were associated with the god Amun—particularly in Nubia, where he was especially revered. Of special note is the sun surmounting the uraeus snake in the shape of a globe, not a disk.

Literature:

Daninos 1911, 18, pl. 49 (no. 454)

Wildung 1997, 198–99 (no. 223)



26. Figure of a Reclining Antelope

Bronze

Sudan, Meroe

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Gift of Sir Robert Mond, excavated in 1909–10

Royal Ontario Museum 912.4.24

Literature:

Garstang, Sayce, and Griffith 1911



27. Goat and Antelope Skulls

Bone, paint
 Nubia, Adindan, tomb K82
 Pan Grave period (1700–1520 BCE)
 Excavated in 1964
 ISACM E23196

Seminomadic Pan Grave communities have often been identified as belonging to the “Medjay,” a name used in ancient Egyptian texts to refer to people usually associated with the Eastern Desert. Depositing the skulls and horns of sacrificed animals in or near the tomb of the deceased was a common practice in Nubia. The skulls with red and black paint shown here were excavated in Pan Grave burials; those from Adindan were buried in rows.

Literature:

Williams 1983, pl. 131



28. Horn of an Antelope

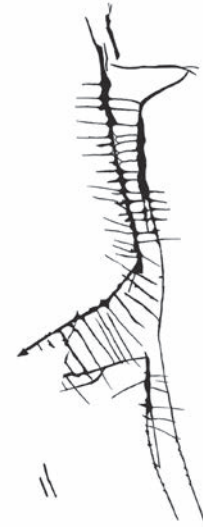
Horn

Nubia, Qustul, tomb Q104

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1962–63

ISACM 20264



29. Incised Ostrich-Egg Fragment with a Giraffe

Eggshell

Nubia, Adindan, tomb K17

A-Group period (3200–3100 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E30288

The giraffe was scarce in Egypt from 3000 BCE, when Nubia and Central Sudan became its permanent retreat. Frequently depicted in rock art in the Eastern Desert, its image is particularly widespread on painted pottery and cosmetic equipment, such as combs. Often associated with Nubian envoys in tribute scenes, to the Egyptians the giraffe conveyed the idea of the exotic. Although rarely depicted in

the Napatan period, apart from a few representations at El-Kurru and in the Western Cemetery of Meroe, the animal regained its popularity during the Meroitic period. Giraffes were prized by pottery artisans, often with great freedom in interpretation. They are regularly associated with humans, snakes, frogs, and trees.

Literature:

Kilroe 2023b

Silverman 1997, 304–5

Williams 1989, 9, pls. 8–9, 10a

Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910b, pl. 41



30. Incised Cup with a Giraffe

Baked clay

Nubia, Qustul, tomb Q406

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E31938

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 285 fig. 112; vol. 2, 78



31. Figurine of a Hippopotamus

Limestone

Nubia, Qustul, tomb L24

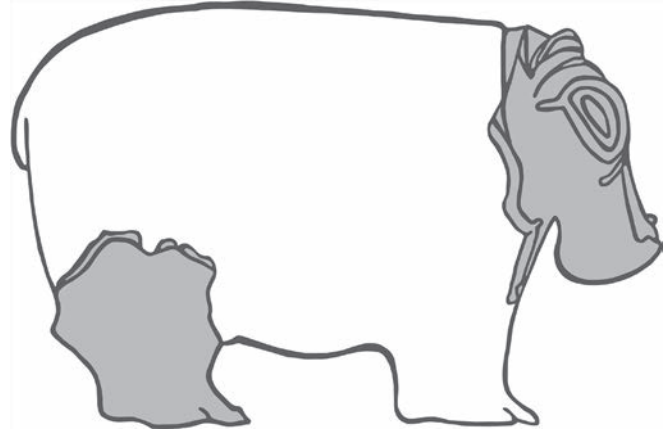
A-Group period (3200–3100 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E23698

Literature:

Williams 1986, 359, 360 fig. 171a; pls. 103b, 104a



32. Head of a Hippopotamus Statuette

Baked clay

Nubia, Qustul, tomb L19

A-Group period (3200–3100 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E23845

Nubian A-Group Cemetery L at Qustul consisted of wealthy burials of high officials, often equipped with Egyptian imports. Traded for gold and ivory, these Egyptian goods included faience objects and alabaster vessels alongside locally made zoomorphic statues. Originally measuring one meter in length, this statue represents a feared animal in the Middle Nile Valley, the hippopotamus. Hippopotami regularly devastated crops and were a major threat to settlements. They were also hunted for their teeth, as attested in urban contexts of multiple periods, such as at Kerma, Meroe, and Muweis. The hippopotamus is also regularly represented in the form of amulets and figurines in funerary contexts—specifically, women's and children's graves, such as at Fadrus. The animal symbolized fertility and protection, as female hippopotami fiercely protect their offspring.

Literature:

Williams 1986, 314, 315 fig. 140b, 330; pls. 98–99, 102



33. Plaque with Two Crocodiles and Two Hippopotami

Steatite

Nubia, Qustul, tomb W43

Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 25 (747–656 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E23884

Tomb W43 at Qustul contained the burial of a woman and a newborn child. Among the grave goods were handmade and wheel-made Nubian ceramics, as well as vessels imported from Egypt. The jewelry that adorned the woman's arms, hips, ankles, hands, and feet also exhibits a mix of material-culture traditions, including Egyptian-style scarabs and this incised Nubian plaque.

Literature:

Williams 1990, 60, 61 fig. 10b, pl. 10b



34. Sculpture of a Hedgehog

Sandstone

Sudan, Meroe

Meroitic period (270–350 CE)

Gift of Sir Robert Mond, excavated by John Garstang
in 1909–10

Royal Ontario Museum 921.4.21

The hedgehog is rarely represented in Nubian iconography except on seals and amulets, most often hybridized with scarabs. The pointed snout, small ears, and quills (rendered with geometric lines and cross-hatched patterns) can cause the hedgehog to be confused with the porcupine, also present in Nubian funerary contexts.

Literature:

Garstang, Sayce, and Griffith 1911



35. Faience Fly Pendant and Beads

Faience

Nubia, Qustul, tomb V74

New Kingdom (1550–1069 BCE)

Excavated in 1962–63

ISACM E21836A–D

Representations of flies, usually in the form of pendants or amulets grouped in a row of three, were particularly common in collars and necklaces of the New Kingdom. In Egypt and Nubia, flies—often made of precious materials, such as gold—have been discovered in the tombs of high-ranking military officials. This association reinforces the interpretation of the fly as persistent and brave, relentlessly harassing the opponent. A strictly apotropaic function for fly amulets has also been suggested.

Literature:

Sidpura 2022, 446

Then-Obłuska 2022, 316n340

36. Fly Amulet and Beads

Steatite, faience

Nubia, Qustul, tomb Q267

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1962–63

ISACM E20574

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 233 fig. 46g; vol. 2, 36





37. Ornament

Leather

Nubia, Qustul, tomb Q74

X-Group period (370–410 CE)

Excavated in 1962–63

ISACM E20186

This ornament is shaped like an insect, with a tooled rosette pattern on the “abdomen” and a tooled design on the “thorax.” The “legs” are represented by strips of leather joined under the thorax and twisted to form the underbody.

Literature:

Williams 1991b, 272



38. Inscribed Scarab with Sixty-Four Scarab Beads

Steatite, faience

Nubia, Qustul, tomb W43

Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 25 (747–656 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E23879A–C

Part of the equipment of tomb W43 at Qustul, containing the burial of a woman and a newborn child, this necklace features an Egyptian-style scarab. The inscription reads: “[When] Amun-Re is behind, there is no fear.”

Literature:

Williams 1990, 60; 61 fig. 10c, e; 62 fig. 11i–l, n–o



39. Jar with Floral Motifs, Ankh Signs, and Mantis

Baked clay, paint

Egypt/Sudan

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Purchased in 1949

ISACM E28491



40. Scarab with an Antelope and a Fox(?)

Faience, green glaze

Nubia, Napata, Cemetery 1, grave 1057

Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 25 (747–656 BCE)

Gift of Oxford University Expedition to Nubia, 1926

Metropolitan Museum of Art 26.4.36



41. Cup with Snakes and Ankh Signs

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Qustul, tomb Q430

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1962–63

ISACM E21333

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 289 fig. 117c; vol. 2, 84



42. Jug with Snakes and Ankh Signs

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Ballana, tomb B18

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E22402

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 347 fig. 179c; vol. 2, 175,
pl. 53c



43. Bottle with Snakes and Ankh Signs above Red Crescents

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Ballana, tomb B67

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E22457

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 366 fig. 202d; vol. 2, 196,
pl. 33c



44. Jar with a Winged Goddess, a Human-Headed Frog, and Flowers

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Ballana, tomb B66A

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E22480

This exceptional frieze groups together two hybrid (animal/human) representations—a winged goddess and a human-headed frog. The human face of the frog has been interpreted as a reference to the god Bes, protector of the household and family, who is regularly associated with popular animal representations of the Meroitic period, such as the lion and the uraeus. It could also refer to the frog goddess, Heqat, associated with fertility and abundance and often depicted with a human face and the body of a frog. The winged goddess has a spike-shaped body, a capped head, and wings bent downward—a motif relatively frequent in amulets and costume decorations.

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 205 fig. 8d, 365 fig. 201a;
vol. 2, 196



45. Jar with Cobras Spitting Ankh Signs

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Ballana, tomb B130

Meroitic period, phase IIIA–B (150–250 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E22563

Some of the finest pottery in Nubia was made during the Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE). Following Nubian tradition, Meroitic potters still made black incised pots by hand. However, they also started producing a new type of wheel-made, painted pottery of superior quality, characterized by thin walls and elaborate polychrome decoration combining Nubian, Egyptian, and Hellenistic motifs. The Meroitic period of the Kushite kingdom coincided with the rule of Ptolemaic Greeks and then Romans in Egypt. The military strength of the Meroitic kingdom and the difficult logistics of waging campaigns into Nubia discouraged Greek and Roman attempts to conquer it. However, Meroitic rulers maintained diplomatic and trade relations with the classical Mediterranean world. The decoration of this painted jar is illustrative of that multicultural production. The snakes are spitting ankh (life) signs from their mouths, thus giving life instead of death.

Literature:

Teeter 2019b

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 201 fig. 8c, 383 fig. 222h;
vol. 2, 215, pl. 34a



46. Bottle with Four Crocodiles

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Ballana, tomb B194

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E22631

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 203 fig. 6h, 401 fig. 243a;
vol. 2, 238, pl. 30



47. Bottle with Frogs and Trees

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Ballana, tomb B208

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E22658

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 410 fig. 252; vol. 2, 243,
pl. 37



48. Cup with Uraei Snakes over Rosettes

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Ballana, tomb B330

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E22888

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 441 fig. 290b; vol. 2, 287



49. Jar with Snake Motif

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Semna South, tomb N224

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E36379

This jar with a tall neck and globular body is decorated with a broad band filled by a fat serpent with a vine on its body. The undulating vine was a common motif in Alexandrian vase painting, while the serpent has been a featured subject in vessel decoration in Nubia since the time of the A-Group culture (3800–3100 BCE).



50. Cup with Frogs and Geometric Motifs

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Semna South, tomb M124

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E42861



51. Lion-Shaped Furniture Leg

Wood (sycamore fig, *Ficus sycomorus*)

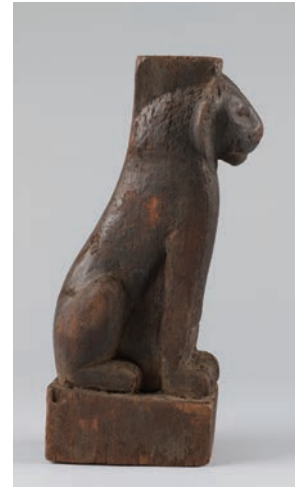
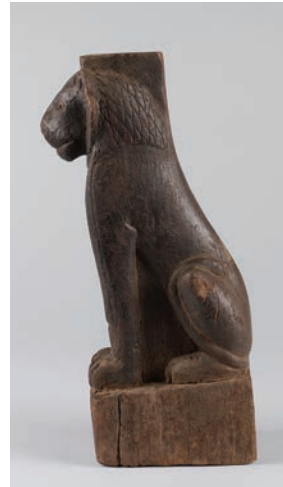
Egypt/Sudan

Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 26 (664–525 BCE)

Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 1948

Brooklyn Museum 37.42E

This wooden element, possibly part of an item of temple furniture, is carved in the form of a lion seated on a base. An inscription running down the front of the mane contains the titles and name of Aspelta, one of the most renowned Napatan kings at the time of the campaign of the Saite pharaoh Psamtik II against the Kushites (592 BCE). It was perhaps then brought to Egypt. The lion is coarsely carved, and the body is elongated, with the tail curved around the left haunch. The mane is represented by a protruding, disk-shaped area around the face, with hair indicated by zigzag lines; a bib-like front reaching down past the knees and scored



vertically; and another portion covering the back of the head, from top to shoulders, with an overlapping zigzag pattern. The piece seems to have been coated with plaster and then possibly painted.



52. Menat of King Taharqo

Faience

Egypt/Sudan

Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 25 (747–656 BCE)

Bequest of W. Gedney Beatty, 1941

Metropolitan Museum of Art 41.160.104

This *menat*, or necklace counterpoise, is decorated with a relief scene showing Taharqo as a child nursed by the feline goddess Bastet. The Double Crown worn by the king and the inscription on the reverse identify Taharqo as the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the son of Re, and “beloved of Bastet,” the latter two epithets reflecting his divine status. The scene in the lower part represents the king in the shape of a falcon wearing the same crown and flanked by two guardian figures—the vulture goddess of Upper and Lower Egypt, Nekhbet, and the snake goddess Uto.

Literature:

Fazzini 1988, pl. 6.3

Jansen-Winkel 2009, 187 (cat. no. 48.114)

Kuckertz and Lohwasser 2016

Leclant 1961, 251 and passim, pl. 1, fig. A–B

Russmann 1969, 148–49, figs. 2–3

Wildung 1997, 196 (no. 221)



53. Statue of a Reclining Lion

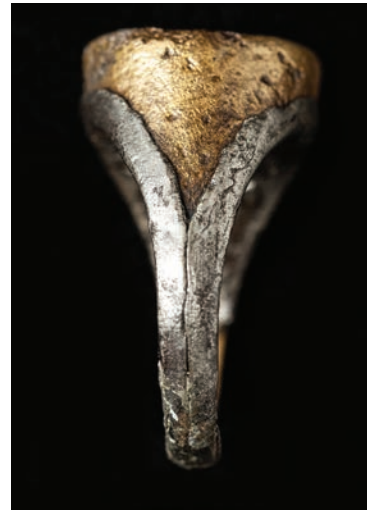
Sandstone

Nubia, Qustul, surface

Medieval period (550–1400 CE)

Excavated in 1962–63

ISACM E19855



54. Signet Ring

Copper, tin alloys

Nubia, Ballana, tomb B242

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E22771

This ring, which belonged to an official, depicts the Nubian god Apedemak holding the Meroitic kings' weapon of choice: the bow. Stepping on a snake, the god protects the wearer from hostile forces. The design, created in negative on the ring, would produce an image in relief when impressed into clay. Tin alloys were used to cover part of the copper ring.

Literature:

Williams 1991a, vol. 2, 255, pl. 74a



55. Lion-Head Fragment

Sandstone

Egypt, Bab Kalabsha, upper shrine

Medieval period (550–1400 CE)

Excavated in 1960–61

ISACM E36372

Literature:

Ricke 1967, pl. 30





13

Humans' Best Companions

Marc Maillot

A limited number of animal species were welcomed by the ancient Nubians as part of their household. Dogs and cats were particularly favored, and monkeys were a source of entertainment. Through careful observation of their behavior, artists and craftsmen often represented these companions as mimicking human poses and attitudes, thus demonstrating that the iconography of such animals should be understood as reflecting human traits. The monkey is the most subject to that claim—to the point, in fact, where it can serve as a substitute for humans in pursuing certain activities, such as brushing the hair of its master, setting the course of a boat, or pressing grapes for making wine.

Canids (cat. nos. 56–58)

The dog was domesticated as early as the sixth millennium BCE. Several species of dog exist in the Nile Valley. The oldest ones, with erect, pointed ears and a curled tail, are similar to the basenji. One of the most popular was the saluki, with floppy ears and a thin muzzle, slender body, and long tail. The dog is renowned for its speed in hunting, which explains the numerous representations of canids in rock art. Dogs are often represented wearing a collar and on a leash, signs of their domestication since prehistoric times, and they are ideal companions that sit beside their master or under a chair. Dogs are also used for security, as they bark to warn of intruders when guarding a house; they also guard prisoners, as demonstrated on a British Museum jar from Faras (BM EA51562), and can replace the lion as an embodiment of the king's strength—a specific Nubian feature. At Kerma and in the post-Meroitic period, dogs were sometimes buried alongside their master, similarly to the horses accompanying Piankhy in the afterlife at the necropolis of El-Kurru.

Equids (cat. nos. 59–61)

The horse is closely related to the art of war. Introduced into Nubia through Egypt around 1650 BCE, the horse is most often associated with war chariots, which were particularly efficient on the battlefield as a mobile shooting platform. Nubian horsemen, renowned for their mastery of archery, were sometimes hired as mercenaries. A Twenty-Fifth Dynasty bas-relief in the Louvre Museum (E25486), probably from Sanam in Sudan, depicts a horseman and a soldier

Bone gaming piece with a dog's head. ISACM E19794. **Cat. no. 58.**

climbing into a chariot. The scene reflects the growing importance of cavalry in military contingents, inspired by Assyrian military warfare. Indeed, horses raised in Nubia were regularly imported by Assyrian kings.

The respect devoted to the horse by Napatan kings is famously described in the Victory Stela of Piankhy (Cairo JE 48862), which details the victory of the Kushite ruler against Prince Tefnakht of Sais in Egypt's Nile Delta. After conquering the city of Hermopolis, Piankhy was moved and angered by the discovery of the city's stables, where the horses were in a state of starvation. When addressing the subjugated Prince Nemlot, the text says that "His Majesty [Piankhy] went to the stables and saw the horses starving and said: 'As true as I live and as Re loves me, as true as my nose is full of life, it is more painful to me to see my horses starving than all the crimes that you committed.'" Piankhy had horses depicted at the top of this stela, as well as on the

walls of the temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal, the sacred city of the Kushite kings. He also began the practice of entombing horses in a cemetery near the royal burial site of El-Kurru, located just east of the Nile's Fourth Cataract.

Monkeys (cat. nos. 62–63)

Two species of monkey were well known in the Nile Valley: the cercopithecus and the baboon. Through Nubia, Egyptians imported small monkeys, also known as green monkeys, from the sub-Saharan region south of modern-day Sudan and Eritrea. However, only the wealthiest individuals could afford to acquire this animal. Monkeys lived in their master's house, where they sat under a chair or grabbed doum nuts from a basket. From keen observation of their behavior, artisans also depicted monkeys in human postures, such as that of a mother holding her child.



56. Prince Arikankharor Slaying His Enemies

Sandstone (exhibition replica in resin)

Unknown location (Meroe?)

Meroitic period (270–350 CE)

Purchased in 1922

Worcester Art Museum 1922.145

Contemporary with imperial Rome, the Meroitic civilization flourished along the fertile banks of the Nile River in the land of Kush in Sudan. This empire traded not only with Egypt to its immediate north but also with Greece, Rome, and the Near East. Consequently, official Meroitic art reflects external influences adapted to serve local needs.

Arikankharor was a crown prince of Kush, whose capital was Meroe. This raised relief shows him as a victorious conqueror holding his enemies by the hair. Behind him floats a female winged victory, the goddess Taleya, who brushes flies away (the Worcester plaque is the sole depiction known of this deity, who otherwise is mentioned only once in an inscription at the necropolis of Sedeinga). Meanwhile, between Arikankharor's legs, a dog mutilates a fallen enemy. Distinctly Meroitic in style and detail are the compact proportions; the prince's round head, curly hair, oversized eyes, fleshy neck, and broad shoulders; and the fear portrayed in the

faces of the vanquished. The imperial stride, smiting pose, and convention of showing the body in profile are attributes assimilated from Egyptian art.

Ritual scenes showing the smiting of enemies are a traditional theme of Egyptian military iconography that continues almost uninterrupted from the fourth millennium BCE until the second century CE. One of the most famous examples of this theme is carved on the facade of the Lion Temple in Naga, Sudan, featuring the brother of Arikankharor, King Natakamani, and their mother,

Queen Amanitore. On the walls of both sides of the temple, Prince Arikankharor is depicted as worshipping Egyptian and Nubian deities. However, the Naga temple's facade shows King Natakamani and Queen Amanitore slaying the enemies of the state and helped in the task by a lion at their feet instead of a dog—an idiosyncratic version of a classic scene of royal propaganda.

Literature:

Cabon et al. 2022, 274



57. Bottle with Two Painted Dogs

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Ballana, Cemetery 221, surface

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E24137

Literature:

Adams 1986, fig. 82

Williams 1991a, vol. 1, 447 fig. 297



58. Gaming Piece with a Dog's Head

Bone

Nubia, Serra East, locus S1

Meroitic period (270–350 CE)

Excavated in 1961–62

ISACM E19794



59. Bowl Sherd with an Image of a Horse-Riding Saint Spearing Enemies of Christianity

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Serra East, surface

Late medieval period (1025–1300 CE)

Excavated in 1961–62

ISACM E19530

During the Christian period, most ceramics were made on a potter's wheel using refined materials. The decoration was professional and precise. Patterns were drawn from Coptic manuscript illumination but possibly also from Byzantine pottery decoration and Christian art in Ethiopia, with very little influence from earlier Kushite painted pottery. The patterns are mostly linear, but Christian symbols, such as the fish and the cross—which appear on a variety of object types—and motifs common across Africa, such as solid triangles, are also present.



60. Saddle

Leather, wood

Egypt, Qustul, pit Q39

X-Group period (370–410 CE)

Excavated in 1963

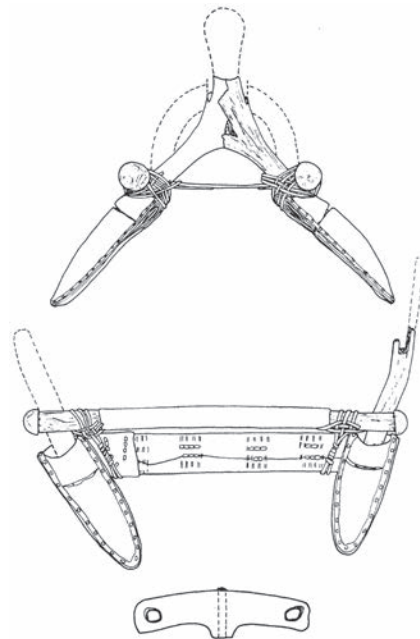
ISACM E20374A

Horses were introduced into Nubia through Egypt around 1650 BCE. Saddles were usually made of a wood frame covered with leather. The legs of the frame were inserted into the pockets at each corner of the leather cover. This saddle was discovered in a pit that contained the remains of horses, donkeys, and camels, along with fragments of pommels, cantles, and attachments for cinches.

Literature:

Teeter 2019d

Williams 1991b, 119–20, 121–22 figs. 56–57, 233, pls. 29a–b, 70



Reconstruction of an X-Group saddle (Williams 1991b, 125 fig. 60).



61. Quiver

Leather

Egypt, Qustul, tomb Q62

X-Group period (370–410 CE)

Excavated in 1963

ISACM E20398A

Nubian warriors were buried with their equipment, including bows, quivers of arrows, archers' rings, and sometimes leather wrist guards. Nubian gods, such as the lion god Apedemak, could also be represented with the same military accoutrements. The design of this quiver, with its geometric patterns and a crocodile on the flaps, indicates that it was a marker of status for the deceased. It was discovered alongside a leather saddle and a woven blanket.

Nubian hunters and warriors excelled as archers, and their weapon became a symbol for Nubia. "Land of the Bow" is the meaning of *Ta-Seti*, an ancient Egyptian term used for millennia in antiquity to refer to Nubia.

Archers formed the core of Nubian armies that vied with Egypt for control over parts of the Nile Valley, conquered Egypt in the eighth century BCE, and confronted the troops of the Assyrian Empire. The skill of Nubian archers made them valued mercenaries, as evidenced in Egyptian texts as early as 2400 BCE and in representations in tomb models, reliefs, and paintings. Nubian archers also served in the imperial army of Persia in the first millennium BCE.

Burials of Nubian rulers in the fifth century CE show that the bow and arrow remained their weapon of choice. Elite warriors released their arrows from horseback and employed wooden, stone (granodiorite), or bone thumb rings to increase their strength and accuracy and also to protect themselves from injury.

Literature:

Teeter 2019c



62. Plaque for Attachment

Bronze

Egypt/Sudan

Ptolemaic period (300–250 BCE)

Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 1955

Brooklyn Museum 56.101

224

This plaque depicts a standing Nubian holding a basket with a gazelle, a monkey, and a cheetah skin draped over his right shoulder. He grasps an ostrich feather in his right hand. The bronze cast is thin, and the surface is slightly convex. The attachment area is missing from the top, and one nail is preserved at the base.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art houses a close parallel in ivory (MMA 60.145.11; see fig. 8.5 in chapter 8) that was found with five similar statuettes in Fort Shalmaneser, a royal building at Nimrud, Iraq. The room in which these statuettes were found was probably used to store tribute collected by the Assyrians and potentially dates to the seventh century BCE. The two Brooklyn and Metropolitan Museum of Art examples present the same composition: a striding, frontally facing male with his lower body in profile grasps the horns of an antelope. On the Metropolitan Museum of Art's plaque, the male figure's eyes, necklace, and armlet

are emphasized in a way that suggests the piece was carved to receive colored glass or semiprecious stone inlays in these areas. The man wears a short kilt belted with a long sash and embroidered with decoration composed of small dots, rosettes, chevrons, and circles alongside solar disks framed by uraei. In comparison, the man on the Brooklyn Museum's plaque wears a decorated kilt mimicking leather with two strips crossing his chest. In both examples, a monkey sits on the man's shoulder and grasps his hair. The man's arm is extended to support the elaborately patterned cheetah skin in an offering posture.

The plaques from both museums reflect the permanence of the ancient Nubian topos as a provider of exotic animal by-products. Originally, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's plaque was

attached to long ivory plinths and perhaps arranged in a procession of foreigners bringing animal skins as tribute to the Assyrian king. This interpretation appears to be confirmed by another parallel in the Louvre Museum (E8879), a copper-alloy plaque depicting a Syrian foreigner as a tribute bearer that is also part of a furniture plinth. The gazelle represented at the feet of the Syrian tribute bearer symbolizes the submission of the desert to the pharaoh's power.

Literature:

Cooney 1956, 41–42, pl. 65 (cat no. 48A)

Mallowan 1966, vol. 2, 657n121

Parlasca 1979, 318

Webb 1978, 34



63. Facsimile of Nubians with a Giraffe and a Monkey

Nina de Garis Davies (1881–1965)

Tempera on paper

Original: Egypt, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna,
tomb of Rekmire (TT 100)

Original: New Kingdom, Dynasty 18
(ca. 1504–1425 BCE)

Rogers Fund, 1931

Metropolitan Museum of Art 31.6.40

In the first half of the twentieth century, Nina and Norman de Garis Davies dedicated most of their careers to recording Egyptian wall paintings. Head of the Graphic Section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Egyptian Expedition from 1907 to 1940, Norman was continuously accompanied by Nina during the recording of the Theban tombs. Most of their work, notably Nina's facsimiles, are housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This painting is representative of the identification of Nubians as providers of exotic animals in tribute processions. The giraffe has tied legs, and the monkey, whose facetious character is emphasized here, is represented as climbing the giraffe's

neck. This motif is a variation of a more regular pattern in which the monkey climbs a doum-palm tree. Imported from Nubia and Sudan, monkeys were particularly popular among the Egyptian and Nubian elite and often joined dogs and antelope alongside their owner in depictions. They are frequently shown grooming the hair of their master or substituting for humans in certain chores. In this painting, the species chosen is the African green monkey (*Chlorocebus sabaenus*), also known as the vervet monkey, native to sub-Saharan Africa

and notable for its green fur. The giraffe is scaled down compared to its actual size—a feature regularly encountered in Egyptian art, the artisans favoring harmony in the composition over realistic proportions.

Literature:

Hintze 1979

Smith 1958, pl. 106

Wilkinson 1979, 40 fig. 44

Wilkinson and Hill 1983, 86



14

The Nubian Landscape and Ecosystem

Marc Maillot and Gabrielle Choimet

Climate Evolution and Faunal Changes

The Middle Nile Valley underwent significant transformations from the Late Neolithic through the early medieval period, with profound consequences for animal populations—foremost among them being climatic changes and the development of agropastoralism. While the climate of earlier periods—when a savanna-type environment with lakes and alluvial areas flourished—has been extensively studied, the climate of antiquity has received less attention. Before the Sahara’s desiccation, the Saharan fringe of Sudan featured an extensive fluvial system covered with shrub savannas and grasslands. Lakes, seasonal rivers, and fertile alluvial areas provided habitats for both terrestrial and aquatic species by supporting abundant megafauna, such as antelope, giraffes, ostriches, and large carnivores.

At the end of the Neolithic period, a gradual shift toward aridity began. Reduced rainfall led to a drastic decline in tropical trees and Sahelian herbaceous vegetation, transforming rich pastures of short grasses and perennials into deserts. The contraction of these vital grazing resources pushed human and animal populations toward the more hospitable Nile Valley. This ecological stress prompted profound changes in human lifestyles, including the emergence of more complex and productive communities—notably, pastoralist groups with greater ranges of movement. By the first millennium BCE, hyperarid conditions had become established in present-day Sudan. Large herbivores such as elephants, buffalo, and antelope, heavily dependent on water and trees for food and shade, retreated to refuges farther south.

Today, Nubia exhibits a desert climate with cold, dry, windy winters and hot summers, while central and southern Sudan experience a semidesert climate with mild, dry winters, a hot early summer, and a subsequent rainy and humid season. Evidence from archaeological sites such as Meroe and Gala Abu Ahmed suggests higher rainfall and more efficient water-retaining ecosystems in the past than today, making the climate slightly more favorable in desert areas during antiquity. For example, the lower Wadi Howar—a tributary of the Nile now completely dried up—had higher rainfall and a greater variety and density of vegetation cover than are currently observed. Recent geomorphological studies also indicate that certain areas along the Nile probably benefited from partly insular

Limestone incense burner
from Qustul. ISACM
E24069. **Cat. no. 64.**

environments—with numerous paleochannels watered at least seasonally, thereby creating marshier conditions favorable for grazing and aquatic life—thus highlighting localized ecological refuges in an otherwise arid landscape.

Vegetation in Nubia was almost absent except along riverbanks and wadi beds, but species such as gazelles and ostriches were able to adapt to these arid conditions. Farther south, bush landscapes of acacia trees and thorny shrubs flourished along rivers and seasonal wadis, and the Butana provided fertile pastures that allowed a large number of wild and domestic species to graze. The region also supported a diversity of plants, including one from the Acanthaceae family (*Blepharis* spp.) that constitutes excellent fodder for livestock. Even today, agropastoralism between the Nile and the Butana continues in some areas. Finally, in the southern part of Sudan, the vegetation becomes more abundant and the landscape more hospitable, even at a distance from the Nile.

The Pressure of Farmers, Pastoralists, and Hunters

Human pressure was the other factor influencing the distribution of wild fauna in the Middle Nile Valley. Since the behavior of wild animals conflicts with agricultural and pastoral needs—especially in arid regions—clashes with farmers and pastoralists were constant, particularly along intensively cultivated Nile banks and in grazing lands, despite the ideal living conditions these areas offer for wildlife. Areas along the Nile thus witnessed the early displacement of fauna, which led to a decrease in the presence of elephants and savanna ungulates, the result being an inversely proportional ratio between wildlife and human population. The expansion of pastoralism in the Butana also intensified competition with these same species traditionally living in this area, which progressively became inaccessible to antelope because of excessive loads of domestic stock. Savanna animals are known to memorize resource locations to optimize migrations, and this

knowledge must have prevented them from retaining routes densely occupied by human populations, livestock, and crops.

Low reproductive rates in arid regions and intensive hunting for skins, horns, and ivory led to local extinctions in some regions. Historical evidence shows that hunting pressures were long-standing; for instance, in the third and second centuries BCE, the Ptolemies sent hunters to Nubia for elephants. To this testimony must be added the enormous quantities of elephant tusks unearthed at the Napatan site of Sanam Abu Dom and in the Meroitic palace of Wad Ben Naga, which provide clear evidence of the intense interest in Nubian ivory, of which Kush became the privileged exporter.

Nonetheless, some species remained widespread and even locally abundant well into the twentieth century. For example, the last scimitar-horned oryx was captured in the western Wadi Howar in 1973. In the nineteenth century, European and Arab travelers documented Sudanese wildlife. On May 27, 1821, Frédéric Cailliaud reported the presence of giraffes and hippopotami at a short distance from present-day Khartoum. During his visit to Naga in March 1822, Louis Linant de Bellefonds described a valley full of antelope, gazelles, wild donkeys, hares, and guinea fowl. He also mentioned a lion prowling around his camp at night. Most of these animals, well attested in Nubian iconography, eventually disappeared by the late nineteenth or during the twentieth century, having fallen victim to the combined effects of agricultural expansion, increasing climatic aridity, and intensive hunting. Beyond meeting local needs, hunting also responded to a growing Western demand for skins, trophies, live specimens, and even specific manufactured objects, such as piano keys made of elephant ivory.

Today, desertification has accelerated as a result of human activity, including dam construction, overexploitation of plant resources for construction or firewood, and soil degradation. The remaining wildlife is confined to a few isolated areas, such as

the Red Sea Hills, and to parks in the southeastern part of the country; yet pastoral expansion, poaching, and recurrent conflicts keep populations of lions, hyenas, buffalo, and hartebeests at very low densities, while elephants are regarded as probably extinct in Sudan.

The three objects selected for this section illustrate how the Nubian animal world was represented by human contemporaries—namely, as symbolic embodiments of the landscape and prevailing political structure. The Qustul incense burner (**cat. no. 64**), whose representation of a palace facade is among the first evidence of a centralized power in the Nile Valley, displays an almost complete menagerie impersonating the power of the king. That the same animals are mobilized until the medieval period demonstrates the exceptional permanence of these motifs in royal pageantry. They are all aboard boats in a procession floating on the Nile toward the house of the pharaoh, thereby underlining his control over the land.

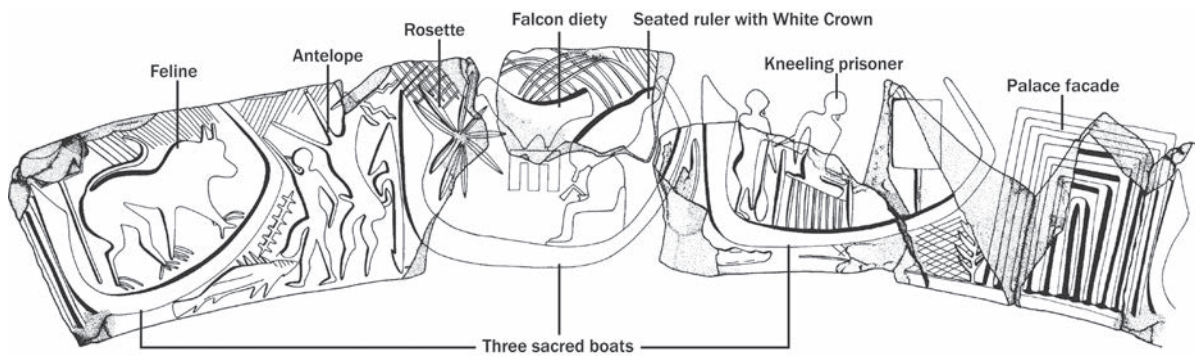
The jar with an animal procession that includes two hyenas, or “Hyena jar” (**cat. no. 65**), is also illustrative of the evocative power of fauna in Nubia, but through a different lens. The juxtaposition of these animals (including a stylized hyena in a predatory stance) within a frieze whose central design is a rocky cataract—a most salient marker of

the Nubian landscape—conveys a taste and keen eye for the observation of nature. The funerary context in which the jar was discovered reinforces its importance to the elite owner and potentially carries a supplementary layer of meaning.

The bowl with a tree and another animal procession (**cat. no. 66**), also discovered in a funerary context, is particularly rich in symbolic significance. The animals represented are literal metaphors of the landscape within which victory against the enemies of the state and the evil forces of nature is ensured by the unifying power of the king over the land. The focal point of the bowl’s decoration is the shrine, represented by vertical poles surmounted by emblems, which places the restoration of order under the patronage of the divine. The bowl was meant to be displayed in public before its transfer to the deceased’s viaticum, thereby reinforcing the eloquent messaging evoked by the animal world in ancient Nubia.

Literature:

Kröpelin et al. 2008
Kuper and Kröpelin 2006
Pachur and Kröpelin 1987
Paul 2024
Wolf et al. 2015



64. Incense Burner

Limestone (with modern restoration)

Egypt, Qustul, tomb L24

A-Group period (3200–3100 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E24069

The Qustul incense burner, discovered in a massive tomb belonging to a wealthy individual, shows a scene with elements once thought to be exclusively Egyptian. The figures, carved in a style typical of rock art, include a procession of boats with bent prows and splayed sterns that approach a niched *serekh* (palace facade). The lead boat, equipped with a sail and towing the others, contains a bound man kneeling on a platform and held by a cord grasped by a man who also holds a mace. The second boat contains a pharaoh, as indicated by the White Crown he wears. In front of him are a rosette and the Horus falcon, the latter probably atop a small

serekbh. The last boat contains a feline—probably a lion—representing a deity, as indicated by the standard with a falcon behind it. To complete the description, a crocodile’s head is visible under the first boat, an antelope stands on its hind legs between the second and third boats, and a fish is pierced by a harpoon under the third boat.

X-ray florescence analysis conducted by the ISAC Museum and the University of Chicago’s Department of Geophysical Sciences revealed the burner to be made of limestone, a mineral resource absent from the Qustul area. It confirms that trade interactions between A-Group Nubia and Upper Egypt existed during the late A-Group period. The burner’s carved decoration also finds a contemporary parallel in limestone objects from Abydos and in First Dynasty Egyptian and Nubian rock graffiti,

such as the Gebel Sheik Suleiman inscription in Sudanese Nubia.

This unique tableau demonstrates that the formal culture we identify as Egyptian emerged in A-Group Nubia and Egypt well before the First Dynasty. Evidence of this shared cultural development is seen in numerous objects and representations from Cemetery L at Qustul, as well as elsewhere in Nubia, with the Qustul incense burner being among the most remarkable examples.

Literature:

Wenig 1978, 117

Seele 1974

Williams 2011a, 162–63; 2011b, 86 fig. 9.7

Williams 1986, 138–45 with figs. 54–56, 357,
360 fig. 171b, pls. 34, 38



65. Jar with an Animal Procession

Baked clay, paint

Sudan, Semna South cemetery, tomb N224

Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE)

Excavated in 1966–68

ISACM E35579

This finely decorated jar, excavated at the site of Semna South, has a typical Meroitic shape. Originally built as a Middle Kingdom fortress, Semna was used as a cemetery in the Meroitic period. The jar was discovered in one of its graves. The animals painted on it—a hare, two hyenas, and two guinea fowl—are indigenous to East Africa. The composition may portray a bucolic scene, as the pile of stones depicted between the two hyenas may represent a rocky cataract in the Nile River or possibly a cave. The significance of the animals themselves is unclear, but the scene may evoke a tale or fable whose meaning is lost. The two hyenas, and the two guinea fowl, may in fact represent the same animal depicted at different moments in the narrative.

Although the guinea fowl is only rarely encountered, numerous African folktales feature the hare and the hyena—the former often outwitting the latter through its legendary cunning. Such fables

occur in West Africa among the Shilluk (South Sudan), Tiv (Cameroon, Nigeria), and Mande peoples and in the region of Lake Victoria among the Wasukuma. Among the Maasai and Wakamba of Kenya, numerous tales involve a hare and a hyena in a cave—perhaps rendered on the Semna jar by the rocky formation shown before the leaping hyena—which often contains meat. Although caution is advisable regarding the seeming survival of ancient narratives in modern oral literature, especially

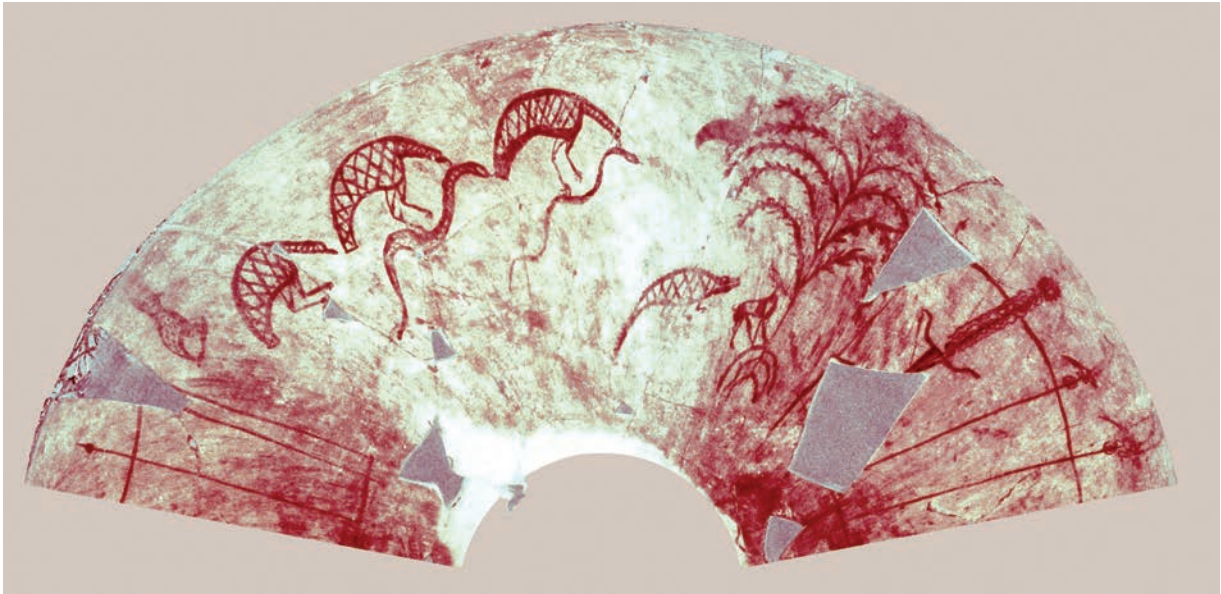
considering the extent to which literary motifs must have evolved since the Meroitic period, representations of animals that seem to be natural opposites are common in Kushite art.

Literature:

Funk 2012

Hofmann 1988

Žabkar and Žabkar 1982



66. Bowl with an Animal Procession and a Tree

Baked clay, paint

Nubia, Qustul, tomb L23

A-Group period (3200–3100 BCE)

Excavated in 1964

ISACM E24119

This large bowl from the elite tomb L23 at Qustul in Lower Nubia is made from a marl-clay fabric and decorated with red paint. Tomb L23 is one of the largest tombs in the elite Cemetery L at Qustul. This bowl, part of a rich funerary deposit, was discovered broken in the burial chamber. The bowl's large size (height 38 centimeters, diameter 50 centimeters) and its narrow base indicate that it was originally



Drawing by Josh Tulisiak.

intended to be displayed, with a visual meaning to be shown publicly. Upon the death of its owner, the bowl was included among the deceased's grave goods.

Two of the three vultures depicted on the bowl are each killing a snake. The vulture-and-snake combination represents the destruction of evil forces. In front of the vultures is a palm tree, to the left of which are a gazelle and a crocodile. A bird sits on a branch of the tree. The bird shows little detail and is difficult to identify, but, thanks to contemporary parallels, its combination with the palm tree suggests it is a guinea fowl. The tree has symmetrically curved branches, but unexpectedly missing is the motif of a giraffe, which at Qustul is usually associated with the palm tree. The animals depicted may represent the desert (gazelle), the river (crocodile), and the sky (guinea fowl). It is also possible to interpret the crocodile as a simple threat to the gazelle, embodying the negative aspect of the reptile. The palm tree has been interpreted as a symbol of power and possibly a substitute for the king or a depiction of a unified state.

The building with a framework of poles is a crucial part of the bowl's decoration. Two poles are surmounted by small crocodile figures, to be interpreted as emblems of a shrine. The closest parallels are from Hierakonpolis in Egypt and from Qustul,

where constructions with vertical sections are present on incense burners. Crocodiles on poles also occur in rock art, such as in the Wadi Maghar in the Theban Western Desert. On this bowl, each crocodile has two curved feathers on its back, referring to the feathers worn by hunters as a trophy. To be understood, the crocodile emblems must be associated with the third pole, which has a circle with long, wavy lines hanging from it. The lower ends of these lines touch the head of a bearded person, probably a man (a prisoner?) standing in front of the shrine.

An easily overlooked animal representation on the bowl is an additional small bird behind the three vultures. It is a plover, the hieroglyphic sign *rekhyt*, designating the general population or the subordinates or dominated enemies of the king. The plover's position at the same height as the crocodiles on the shrine's poles indicates that it was part of the shrine's decoration and reinforces the triumphant and victorious scene that the bowl celebrates.

Literature:

Förster and Hendrickx 2022, 59–88, 264, pl. II
Williams 1986, 348 fig. 163c, 349, 353, pls. 84–85
Williams 2011b, 89 fig. 9.13

List of Catalog Objects

Cat. no.	Registration no.	Excavation no.	Description
1	ISACM E10154	–	Amulet in the shape of a sow rooting in the ground
2	ISACM E10156	–	Amulet in the shape of a sow rooting in the ground
3	ISACM E17521	–	Amulet in the shape of a sow rooting in the ground
4	Brooklyn Museum 74.98.1	–	Relief-decorated bowl
5	Penn E7156	G187	Bowl reproduction with cattle and herdsmen
6	ISACM E20887	Q1079	Camel/cattle bell with an iron clapper
7	ISACM E23452	B1098	Black-incised bowl
8	ISACM E23281A–B	B926	Stela with an incised cow and calf
9	ISACM E23303A–C	T39	Stela with an incised cow and calf
10	ISACM E23864	B1520	Stela fragment with the figure of a cow
11	ISACM E22487	B320	<i>Ba</i> statue
12	Penn E10604A	J28	Zoomorphic vase in the shape of a duck
13	ISACM E42001	65-11-69	Jar with three birds and a guinea fowl(?)
14	ISACM E19693	1S136A	Amulet in the shape of an ibis
15	ISACM E21384	Q1598	Ostrich eggshell with a round hole at the bottom
16	ISACM E24440	2S18	Faience and eggshell beads (restrung)
17	ISACM E21690	Q1919	Statue of a hawk
18	ISACM E22413	B44	Jar with six ibises with long, curved beaks and a crescent frieze
19	ISACM E23633	B1284	Stela with a guinea fowl
20	ISACM E24643	2S234	Incised sherd with a bird motif
21	ISACM E24710	2S342	Bowl fragment decorated with a fish symbolizing Jesus Christ
22	ISACM E24139	B1798	Bottle decorated with two fish
23	ISACM E24398	D96	Plaque with an incised fish
24	Penn E11180	An 32	Dish in the shape of a fish
25	MMA 1989.281.98	–	Ram's-head amulet
26	ROM 912.4.24	–	Figure of a reclining antelope
27	ISACM E23196	B840	Goat and antelope skulls
28	ISACM E20264	Q426	Horn of an antelope

Cat. no.	Registration no.	Excavation no.	Description
29	ISACM E30288	K(17)	Incised ostrich-egg fragment with a giraffe
30	ISACM E31938	Q406	Incised cup with a giraffe
31	ISACM E23698	B1351	Figurine of a hippopotamus
32	ISACM E23845	B1501	Head of a hippopotamus statuette
33	ISACM E23884	B1541	Plaque with two crocodiles and two hippopotami
34	ROM 921.4.21	–	Sculpture of a hedgehog
35	ISACM E21836A–D	Q2084	Faience fly pendant and beads
36	ISACM E20574	Q751	Fly amulet and beads
37	ISACM E20186	Q345	Ornament
38	ISACM E23879A–C	B1536	Inscribed scarab with sixty-four scarab beads
39	ISACM E28491	–	Jar with floral motifs, ankh signs, and mantis
40	MMA 26.4.36	–	Scarab with an antelope and a fox(?)
41	ISACM E21333	Q1545	Cup with snakes and ankh signs
42	ISACM E22402	B33	Jug with snakes and ankh signs
43	ISACM E22457	B92	Bottle with snakes and ankh signs above red crescents
44	ISACM E22480	B118	Jar with a winged goddess, a human-headed frog, and flowers
45	ISACM E22563	B201	Jar with cobras spitting ankh signs
46	ISACM E22631	B269	Bottle with four crocodiles
47	ISACM E22658	B296	Bottle with frogs and trees
48	ISACM E22888	B330	Cup with uraei snakes over rosettes
49	ISACM E36379	N-224-1	Jar with snake motif
50	ISACM E42861	M124	Cup with frogs and geometric motifs
51	Brooklyn Museum 37.42E	–	Lion-shaped furniture leg
52	MMA 41.160.104	–	<i>Menat</i> of King Taharqo
53	ISACM E19855	Q2	Statue of a reclining lion
54	ISACM E22771	B410	Signet ring
55	ISACM E36372	BK22	Lion-head fragment
56	Worcester Art Museum 1922.145	–	Prince Arikankharor slaying his enemies
57	ISACM E24137	B1796	Bottle with two painted dogs
58	ISACM E19794	1S201	Gaming piece with a dog's head

Cat. no.	Registration no.	Excavation no.	Description
59	ISACM E19530	1S13	Bowl sherd with an image of a horse-riding saint spearing enemies of Christianity
60	ISACM E20374A	Q540	Saddle
61	ISACM E20398A	Q564	Quiver
62	Brooklyn Museum 56.101	–	Plaque for attachment
63	MMA 31.6.40	–	Facsimile of Nubians with a giraffe and a monkey
64	ISACM E24069	B1727	Incense burner
65	ISACM E35579	N224-3	Jar with an animal procession
66	ISACM E24119	B1778	Bowl with an animal procession and a tree

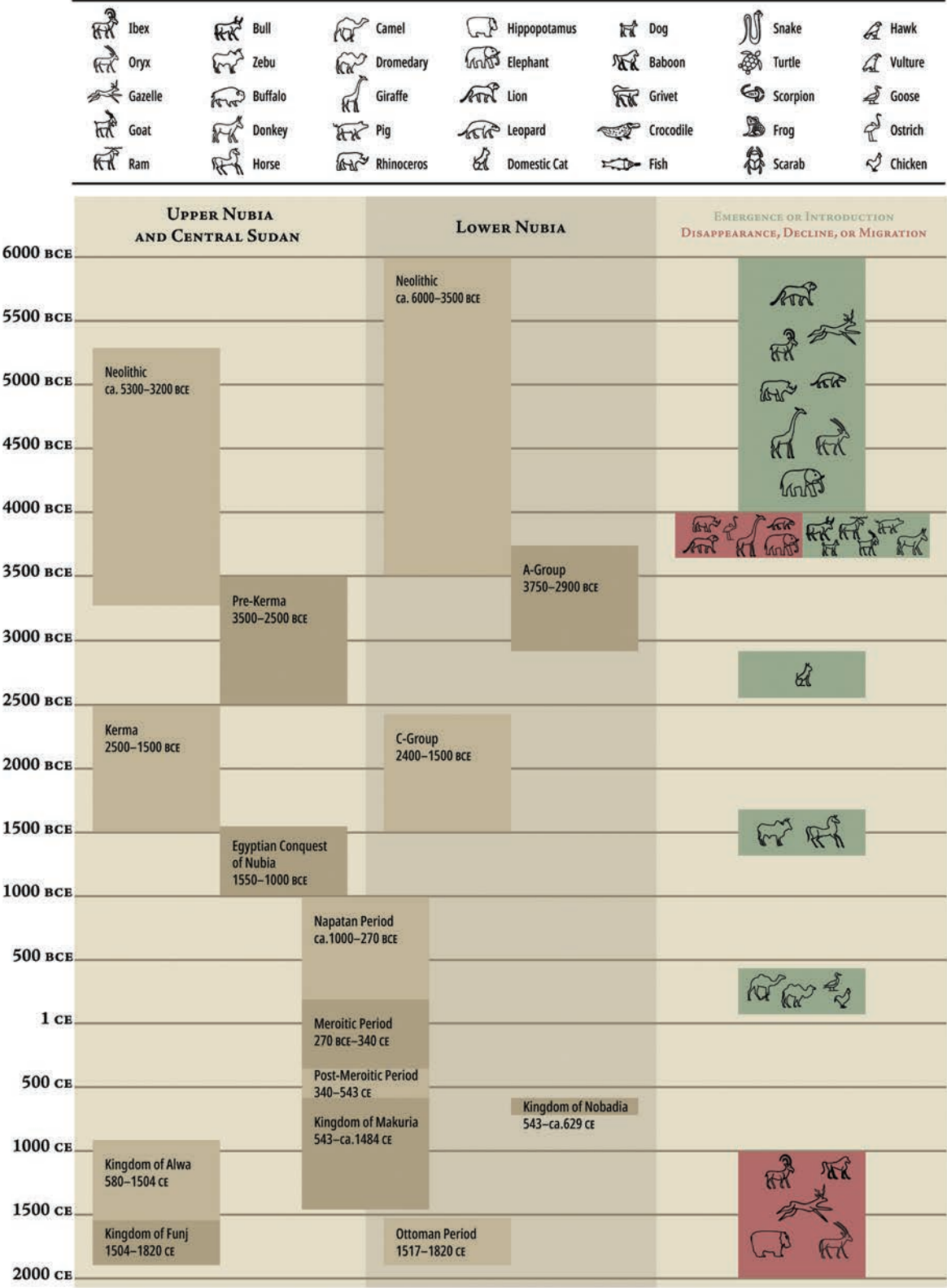
Concordance of Museum Registration Numbers

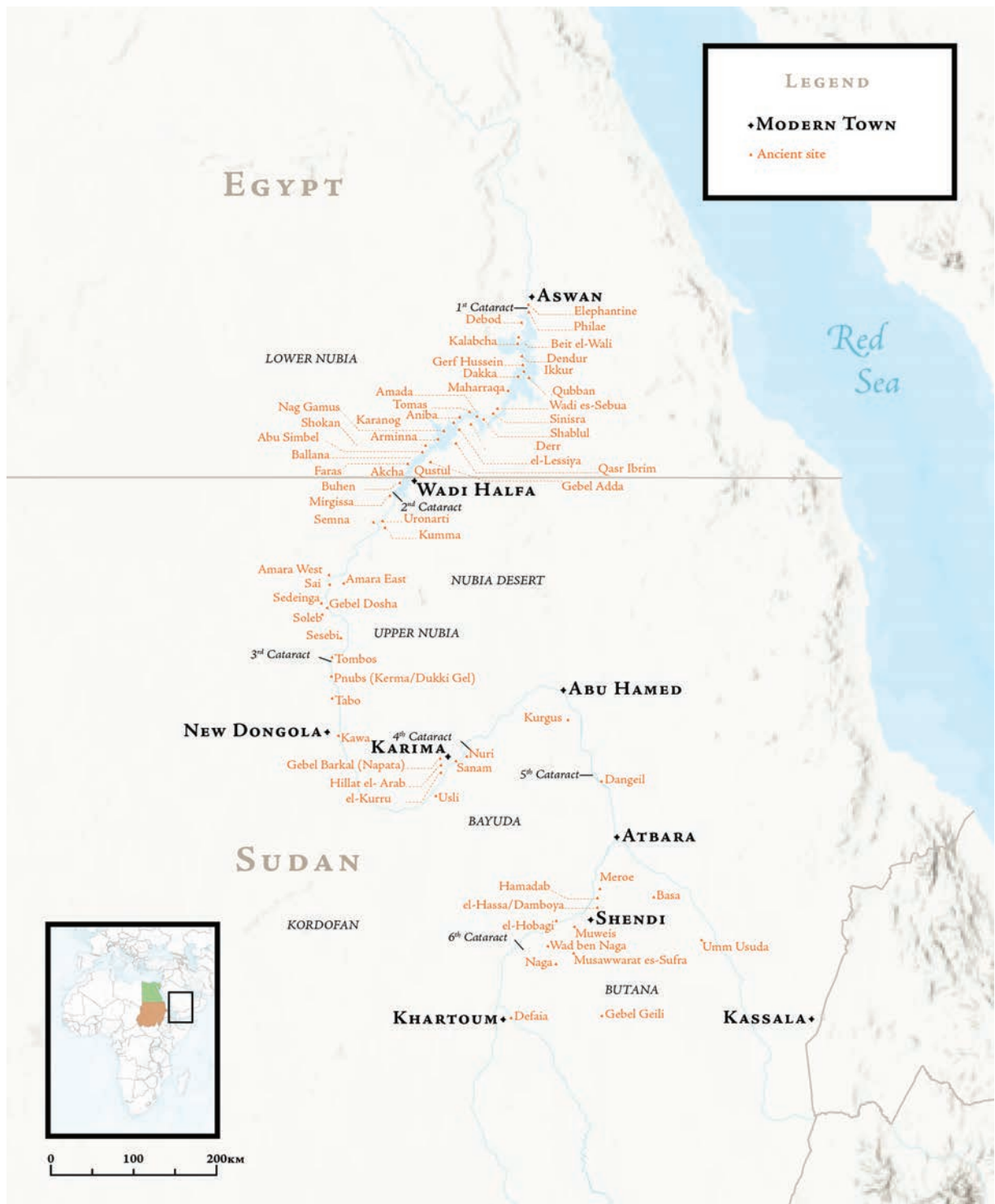
Registration no.	Excavation no.	Cat. no.	Description
Brooklyn Museum 37.42E	–	51	Lion-shaped furniture leg
Brooklyn Museum 56.101	–	62	Plaque for attachment
Brooklyn Museum 74.98.1	–	4	Relief-decorated bowl
ISACM E10154	–	1	Amulet in the shape of a sow rooting in the ground
ISACM E10156	–	2	Amulet in the shape of a sow rooting in the ground
ISACM E17521	–	3	Amulet in the shape of a sow rooting in the ground
ISACM E19530	1S13	59	Bowl sherd with an image of a horse-riding saint spearing enemies of Christianity
ISACM E19693	1S136A	14	Amulet in the shape of an ibis
ISACM E19794	1S201	58	Gaming piece with a dog's head
ISACM E19855	Q2	53	Statue of a reclining lion
ISACM E20186	Q345	37	Ornament
ISACM E20264	Q426	28	Horn of an antelope
ISACM E20374A	Q540	60	Saddle
ISACM E20398A	Q564	61	Quiver
ISACM E20574	Q751	36	Fly amulet and beads
ISACM E20887	Q1079	6	Camel/cattle bell with an iron clapper
ISACM E21333	Q1545	41	Cup with snakes and ankh signs
ISACM E21384	Q1598	15	Ostrich eggshell with a round hole at the bottom
ISACM E21690	Q1919	17	Statue of a hawk
ISACM E21836A–D	Q2084	35	Faience fly pendant and beads
ISACM E22402	B33	42	Jug with snakes and ankh signs
ISACM E22413	B44	18	Jar with six ibises with long, curved beaks and a crescent frieze
ISACM E22457	B92	43	Bottle with snakes and ankh signs above red crescents
ISACM E22480	B118	44	Jar with a winged goddess, a human-headed frog, and flowers

Registration no.	Excavation no.	Cat. no.	Description
ISACM E22487	B320	11	<i>Ba</i> statue
ISACM E22563	B201	45	Jar with cobras spitting ankh signs
ISACM E22631	B269	46	Bottle with four crocodiles
ISACM E22658	B296	47	Bottle with frogs and trees
ISACM E22771	B410	54	Signet ring
ISACM E22888	B330	48	Cup with uraei snakes over rosettes
ISACM E23196	B840	27	Goat and antelope skulls
ISACM E23281A–B	B926	8	Stela with an incised cow and calf
ISACM E23303A–C	T39	9	Stela with an incised cow and calf
ISACM E23452	B1098	7	Black-incised bowl
ISACM E23633	B1284	19	Stela with a guinea fowl
ISACM E23698	B1351	31	Figurine of a hippopotamus
ISACM E23845	B1501	32	Head of a hippopotamus statuette
ISACM E23864	B1520	10	Stela fragment with the figure of a cow
ISACM E23879A–C	B1536	38	Inscribed scarab with sixty-four scarab beads
ISACM E23884	B1541	33	Plaque with two crocodiles and two hippopotami
ISACM E24069	B1727	64	Incense burner
ISACM E24119	B1778	66	Bowl with an animal procession and a tree
ISACM E24137	B1796	57	Bottle with two painted dogs
ISACM E24139	B1798	22	Bottle decorated with two fish
ISACM E24398	D96	23	Plaque with an incised fish
ISACM E24440	2S18	16	Faience and eggshell beads (restrung)
ISACM E24643	2S234	20	Incised sherd with a bird motif
ISACM E24710	2S342	21	Bowl fragment decorated with a fish symbolizing Jesus Christ
ISACM E28491	–	39	Jar with floral motifs, ankh signs, and mantis
ISACM E30288	K(17)	29	Incised ostrich-egg fragment with a giraffe
ISACM E31938	Q406	30	Incised cup with a giraffe
ISACM E35579	N224-3	65	Jar with an animal procession
ISACM E36372	BK22	55	Lion-head fragment
ISACM E36379	N-224-1	49	Jar with snake motif
ISACM E42001	65-11-69	13	Jar with three birds and a guinea fowl(?)

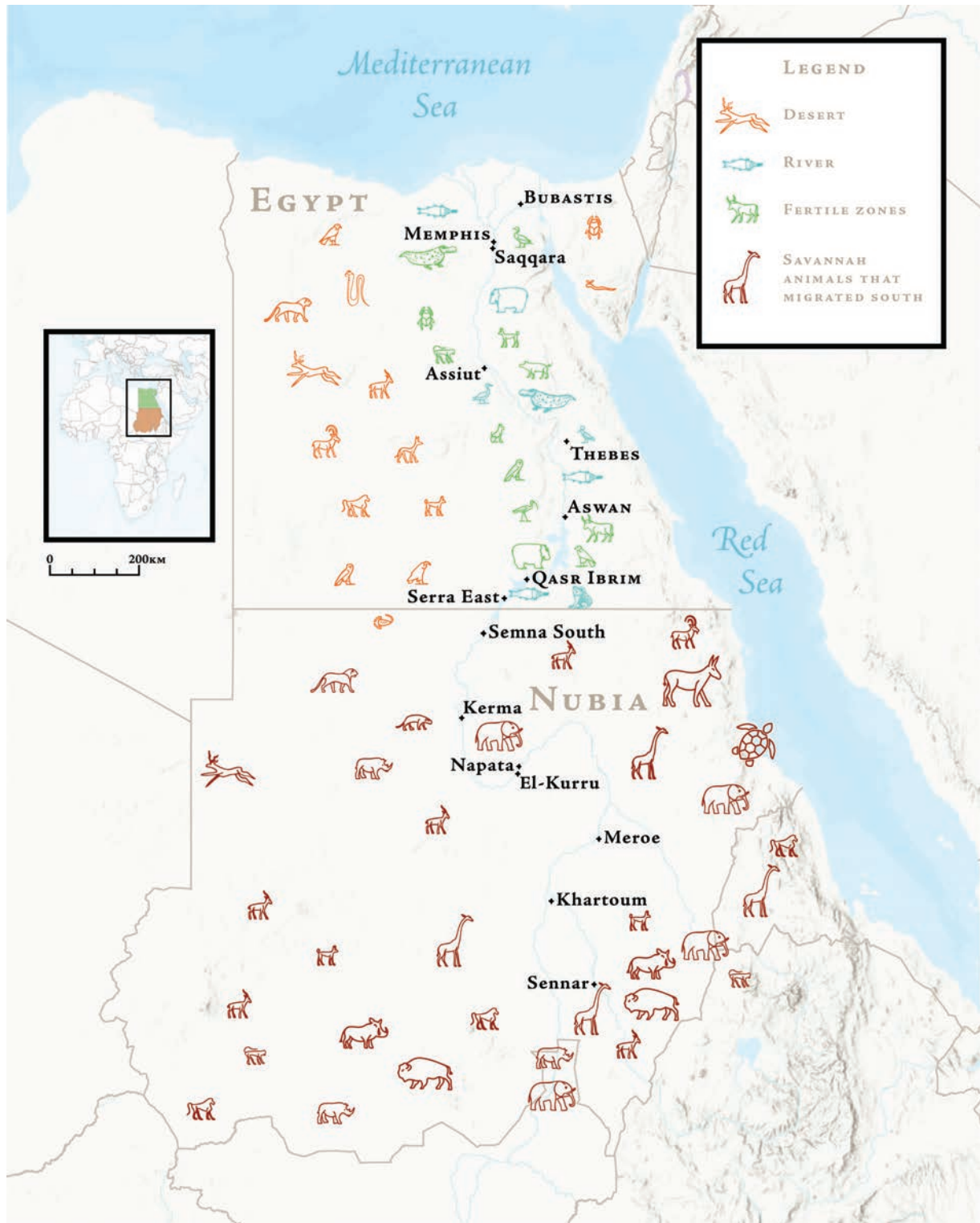
Registration no.	Excavation no.	Cat. no.	Description
ISACM E42861	M124	50	Cup with frogs and geometric motifs
MMA 1989.281.98	–	25	Ram's-head amulet
MMA 26.4.36	–	40	Scarab with an antelope and a fox(?)
MMA 31.6.40	–	63	Facsimile of Nubians with a giraffe and a monkey
MMA 41.160.104	–	52	<i>Menat</i> of King Taharqo
Penn E10604A	J28	12	Zoomorphic vase in the shape of a duck
Penn E11180	An 32	24	Dish in the shape of a fish
Penn E7156	G187	5	Bowl reproduction with cattle and herdsmen
ROM 912.4.24	–	26	Figure of a reclining antelope
ROM 921.4.21	–	34	Sculpture of a hedgehog
Worcester Art Museum 1922.145	–	56	Prince Arikankharor slaying his enemies

Chronology and Maps





Map of Nubia showing the location of sites.



Map of Egypt and Nubia showing the distribution of fauna.

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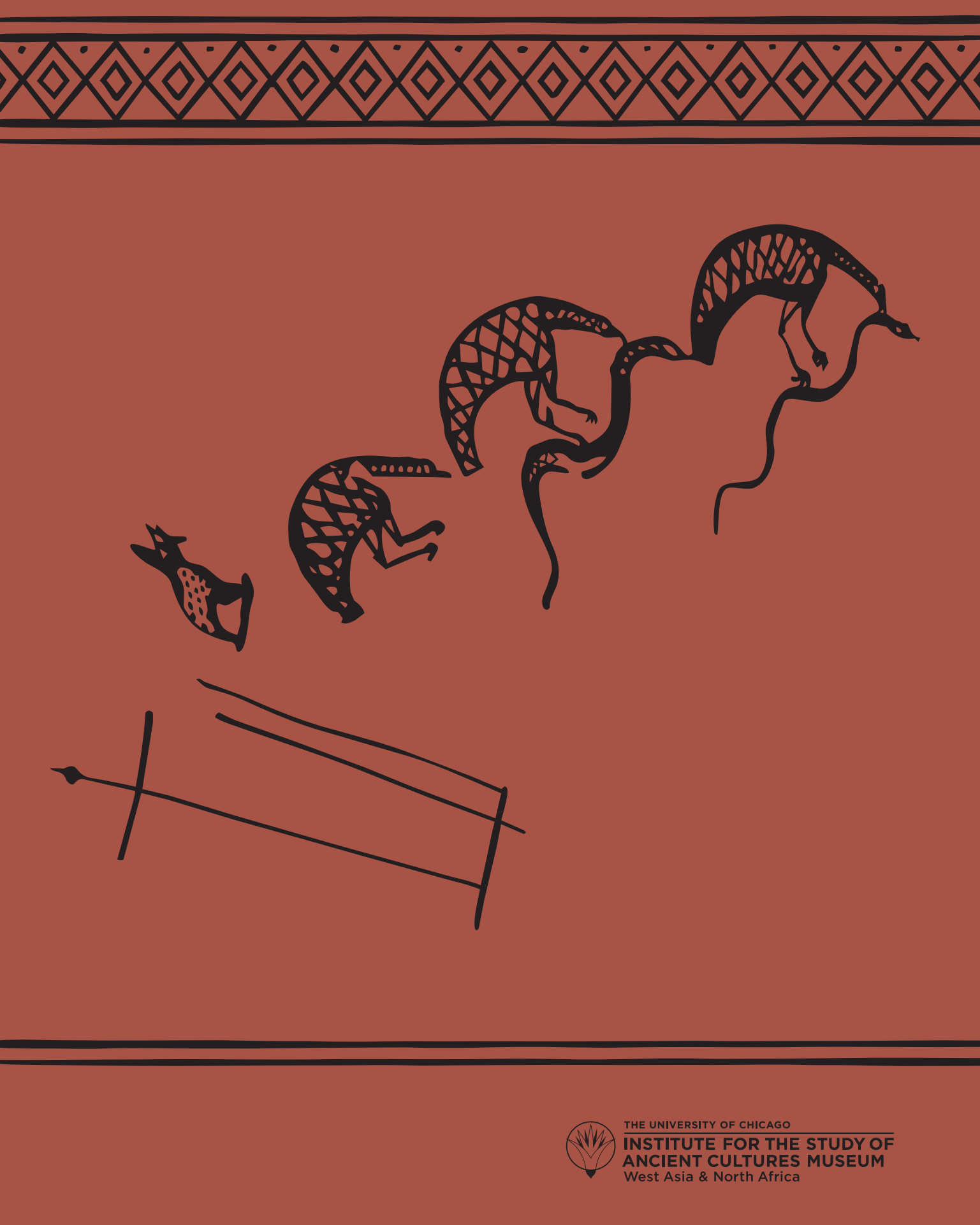
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