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THE CROWN OF GEB WORN BY THE KINGS OF NAPATA

The god Geb has never received distinctive attributes in the Egyptian iconography until the beginning of the Ramesside Period.¹ However, one of those peculiarities is the so-called crown of Geb, that originally appears as a headgear for the king. Its first evidence dates back to Pharaoh Thutmose III, and it occurs for the first time in the temple of Deir El Bahari² (Fig. 1, A). Since then, it represents one of the common Pharaonic regalia. In the first example, a fragmentary relief coming from the third terrace of this funerary complex, one can see a scene with an offering of wine made by the king to the god. The crown of Geb is a composite headdress developed from the *andjety*, it is composed by a red crown surmounted by a small *atef*, generally placed on two horizontal and twisted horns of a ram species called *ovis longipes palaeoegyptica*. The occurrence of the crown with Thutmose III shows some elements which can be considered as “optional”, i.e., not common in the Pharaonic iconography of this headdress, but added only for a decorative purpose: a pair of long hathoric horns raising from the base of the *atef*, a solar disc between two cobras in the centre of horizontal and twisted horns which are above the headband of the *desheret*. In addition, a further pair of uraei go down from each side of the twisted horns. This type of crown found in Deir El Bahari will inspire the so-called Arsinoe II’s crown,³ and it will become the ideogram used in the Ptolemaic period as a determinative for the god Geb.⁴ According to recorded examples, this royal headgear has its success under the 18th Dynasty, in particular under the reign of Amenhotep III, with elaborate variants, to slip away until the Ramesside period,⁵ and then reappearing in Nubia under the Napatan period. Here, it is prob-

ably the first evidence, a simple model (with neither hathoric horns nor uraei) which decorates the head of Pharaoh Thutmose IV in a scene of the temple of Amada (Fig. 1, B) to serve the purpose of inspiration for other local following examples, although only few complete temple walls survived in Nubia, and much more might exist in the past with the king probably wearing this crown.

On the 6th pillar within this temple, the Pharaoh, wearing a long kilt pointed on the left side and with that headdress, is facing Amun, in a typical scene of divine embrace.⁶ As said above, under Amenhotep III, several scenes coming from the two main temples of Thebes show the king wearing the crown of Geb. In the hypostyle hall of the Amun temple in Luxor, the standing king wears a kilt with angular fold and a projecting front panel with two uraei, the left hand holds a long stick while the right one the *aba*-sceptre in front of an ithyphallic Amun of Opet. Here, the cylinder of the *desheret* is enriched by the *ssd*-headband which frames it all around, the floral motif knot drops back two ribbons at the level of shoulders (Fig. 1, C).⁷ In scenes of offering within the same temple engraved on column 3 and 4 of the hypostyle hall, the king, with the same short kilt, is wearing this headdress over a curled and short wig, before a couple of gods, Amun-Re-Khamutef and his partner, Amunet,⁸ offering cold water and incense to them. On these two columns of the same part of the sanctuary, Amenhotep III is before another couple of gods, Amon-Ra and Neith, pouring water from a *bes*-vase in the shape of an *ankh* in front of them.⁹ The Pharaoh, with necked chest, wears a short kilt, and the crown of Geb without the curled wig is on his head with the *ssd*-headband framing the *desheret* as a whole.

One more interesting scene is the one recorded on the south-eastern gate of the room called *wadjyt* (a colonnade of wooden and papyrus-like columns

1 Yoyotte 1950: 57.

2 Myśliwiec 1985: 155-158, fig. 2, 156, fig. 3a, 157, pl. 1.

3 Nilsson 2010: 60-61, 261-265, 272-273. The link with Geb is justified by the Ptolemaic interpretation of the queen-goddess as a daughter of the god Geb, see Sauneron 1960: 107, note 6.

4 Bedier 1995: 160.

5 Yoyotte 1950: 57-59, pl. VII. Here, it is the god Geb to wear this type of crown.

6 Abdel-Hamid/Dewachter 1987: 19, C32-33.

7 Gayet 1894: 45, pl. X, fig. 59; PM II2: 318. An almost identical scene in Gayet 1894: pl. LXVIII, fig. 212.

8 The Epigraphic Survey 1998: pl. 182, 183.

9 The Epigraphic Survey 1998: pl. 188, 189.

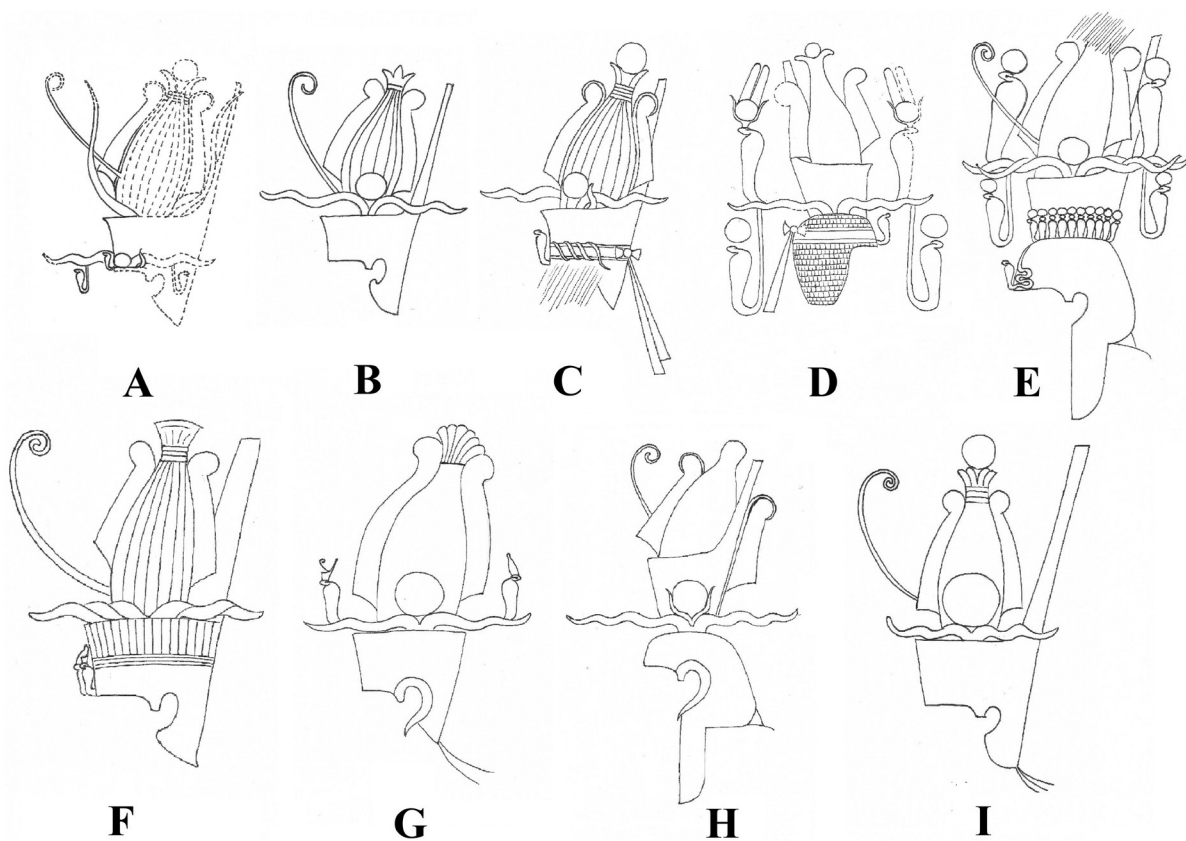


Fig. 1: Different types of the crown of Geb from Egypt to Sudan. Drawings made by Mr. Simone Musso. (A) after Myśliwiec 1985: pl. 1; (B) after Abdel-Hamid/Dewachter 1987: 19, C32-33; (C) after Gayet 1894: 45, pl. X; (D) after Loeben 1985: pl. 2, 219; (E) after Loeben 1985: pl. 6a, 223; (F) after Macadam 1955: pl. XVI c/d; (G) after Robisek 1989: 28-32, 117; (H) after Description de l'Égypte 1809-1817: pl. 36/3; (I) after Caillaud 1826: pl. LXI.

as the *w3d* stem),¹⁰ located between the 4th and the 5th pylons, at Karnak. Here, the crown of Geb is an elaborated composition: it is displayed with two cobras surmounted by a solar disc and hathoric horns at the edges of the horizontal horns, from which a further cobra is going down bearing a solar disc at each side.¹¹ The sovereign is depicted here as a monumental statue, he wears a short and curled wig framed by the *sšd*-headband (Fig. 1, D),¹² he holds a long stick in one hand, and the ritual mace in the other one. Horemheb, a few decades after Amenhotep III, was portrayed by inspiration following this scene, on the south wall within the courtyard between the 9th and 10th pylons, to the east of this last one. A row of uraei, each one with a solar disc or a *modium*, has been added to the cylinder of the *desheret* (Fig. 1, E).¹³ The Pharaoh is represented here in the ritual act of making offerings to Amun and Mut.

The last image, dating to the Ramesside period, shows Ramses III with the crown of Geb on the

north wall of the corridor of the monumental gate in Medinet Habu. The standing king wears a long and transparent kilt, he offers a bouquet of lotuses to Onuris-Shu who is followed by the goddess Mehyt, both in front of him.¹⁴

Later, a very few evidences are recorded in temples during the following periods before the Lagids: six examples date back to the 7th century BCE and come only from Nubia, while a seventh case dating back to the 6th-5th century BCE is from the Hibis temple, in the Kharga oasis.¹⁵

The unicity of the scenes from Nubia lies in the fact that only the sovereign wears the crown of Geb, and no god/goddess is here depicted with this head-

10 Gabolde 2013: 383-399.

11 Loeben 1985: 210, note 25, fig. 1, 215.

12 Loeben 1985: pl. 2, 219.

13 Loeben 1985: pl. 6a, 223.

14 The Epigraphic Survey 1970: pl. 610. During the Rameside period this crown is occasionally used, and more than rare in royal sculpture: the only example of sculpture in the round is the colossus of Sethy II holding a standard with a figure of the god Amun at the top. It comes from Karnak temple: he is standing, necked chest, with an elaborated kilt (Museo Egizio of Turin, C 1383). Here, the cylinder of the *desheret* hosts, in the centre, the *atef* based on twisted horns, flanked by two uraei, and a big solar disc is on its top. Connor 2016: 48, 80-81.

15 Winlock 1953: pl. 3-5.



dress on the basis of the survived material. Although studies on royal crowns in Kush have been carried out and published as monographies¹⁶ and articles,¹⁷ they never dealt with this kind of royal headdress until now. In “Temple T” of Kawa, Taharqa has the crown of Geb on his head in four occasions. In the first courtyard, on the east wall, even if the upper part of the wall is nowadays lost, one can still see the king in a mirror-like scene, on the left and on the right of the wall within the central register where he is striking some enemies (Libyans?) with his pear-headed mace between two deities. The figurative register is mounted within a frame of horizontal bands. On the left edge of the southern section (of plate XI), but outside this frame, Taharqa is depicted in a small size with a red crown, a big *wesekh* collar, and wearing a corselet with two strips and a short kilt with a belt to which the bull tail is attached,¹⁸ while on the right edge of the northern section, he is chest naked, with the same kilt, but on his head a crown of Geb is displayed.¹⁹ In these two registers, the Pharaoh, who urges all the followers to access the sanctuary after having performing the rite of purification, holds a long stick and a pear-headed mace in the same hand. One can suggest that the use of two crowns might explain the power over two countries, replacing here the white crown with the crown of Geb as the Napatans did elsewhere with the local skullcap.²⁰ Moreover, if the *hedjet* continues to represent here the power over Lower Egypt, the crown of Geb not only replaces the *desheret* but even symbolizes the domain of a wider territory, from Upper Egypt to Nubia as a whole. In addition, the choice of this royal headdress has an important and symbolic value as linked to the divine and direct transmission of kinship from the gods.²¹

In fact, the king is crowned as a ruler of Napata, he receives the kingship after his legitimization process held in different religious centres of the country (Napata, Kawa, Pnoub).²² Moreover, the Pharaoh followed here by the royal *ka*, appears as the *ka* of the god, whose strength and power guarantee a cosmic protection from any evil to the temple of Kawa.²³

On the surface of the door jambs that give access to the pronaos, here, again, under the starry sky, the

Kushite king is shirtless and dressed in a corselet with two straps and a short loincloth with a fringed front. He holds the stick and the pear-headed mace in one hand and the opposite arm is raised towards the resident deity, Amun of Gempaaten, on the left, and Amun of Napata on the right, and he wears the crown of Geb (Fig. 1, F) with two uraei on the front, one with the crown of Lower Egypt, the other one with the crown of Upper Egypt. Within the hypostyle hall, among the four columns of north-east, Taharqa built a stand (4 m x 4 m) for the god’s processional boat, its axis was perpendicular to that of the temple. The boat stand is now housed in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

On the south wall which gives access to the room, on the left door jamb, the sovereign wears the *pschent* and is accompanied by Ra-Horakhty, on the other, he has the crown of Geb, and he is accompanied by Atum.²⁴ Both are standing in these two scenes. In a mirror-like scene, the two creator gods of Heliopolis lay one hand on the king’s shoulder, dressed in the same way as in the previous scenes, and with the other they support the king’s elbow. Taharqa holds an *ankh* in one hand, his arm alongside his body, with the other hand he touches the shoulder of the god who looks him in the eyes. This divine hug, associated with the divine election of the pharaoh, creates an intimate connection between the two characters; holding the key of life by the king means that his nature is now divine while his power is already legitimized by the gesture of affection of the gods.

Here, once again, Taharqa confirms his cosmic role as a ruler of the world and a guarantor of *maat*: as the image-king of Ra-Horakhty, he fights, and he wins over Apophis every day, and as living-king and embodied image of Atum, his hypostasis,²⁵ he acquires the function of father/creator whose kingship is innate and formed *ex-nihilo*. At Jebel Barkal, Taharqa wears the crown of Geb in room 305 of temple B 300, dedicated to the goddess Mut. On the north-western wall, he makes an offering of two large pectorals to the Theban triad who is followed by Amon-Ra-Khamutef and Horus, lord of Ta-Sety.²⁶ The king, dressed here in a long kilt pointed on the right side, wears a *wesekh* collar around the neck, and a pair of sandals on his feet. The crown of Geb is here modified (Fig. 1, G): only the cylinder of the red crown remains, to which the circular ram’s horn all around the ear has been added; at its top, the two large twisted horns having a crowned uraeus

16 Russmann 1979: 49-53; Séguenny 1982: 117-119; Török 1987.

17 Pompei 2014: 591-601.

18 Macadam 1955: pl. XI a.

19 Macadam 1955: pl. XI b.

20 Török 1987: 7.

21 Grimal 1986: 392.

22 Török 1997: 241-246.

23 Török 2002: 93.

24 Török 2002: pl. XVII a.

25 Grimal 1986: 139-141, 147-151.

26 Robisek 1989: 28-32, 117.

at each end, are surmounted by the *atef*-crown. This compound headgear may have been inspired by a relief figured on an older, now lost pillar that was part of the southern chapel of the Elephantine temple complex (Fig. 1, H).²⁷ Here, Amenhotep III is represented in an embrace scene with an anthropomorphic god, whose identity is unknown; he wears the *nemes* falling on his chest, enriched by the circular ram's horn around the ear; above, the long-twisted horns show in the centre a solar disk on a lunar crescent (?), they support the crown of Geb, of which one of the ostrich feathers is located outside the *desheret*.

The last case from the Napatan period is represented by a scene engraved on the front wall, east side of the pylon forming part of temple B 700 at Jebel Barkal (Fig. 1, I). It has unfortunately disappeared today, but it was copied while still *in situ* by travellers such as Fr. Caillaud,²⁸ G. Hoskins and O. Felix²⁹ who visited the site in the 19th century. Senkamanisken, grandson of Taharqa, was displayed here, and for the first time, with this crown of Geb in a standard military scene, i.e., smiting a hoard of Libyan captives before Amun (Fig. 2). A long spear is held by the king's right hand, while the right hand holds the risen pear-headed mace to strike the enemies. The sovereign wears a *wesekh* and a short loincloth and is receiving by the god a sickle-shaped *khepesh* with a ram headed top with a sun disc. The scene is clearly "inspired" by a common pharaonic topos, but, as no text on the façade neither in the few documents ascribed to Senkamanisken quotes tribal raids from the deserts or any other battle, it seems likely that there is no historical event depicted here. This is just an ideological appropriation of the Egyptian visual and cultural memory.³⁰

The representation of this crown looks like the type reproduced in the reliefs of Taharqa at Kawa: it

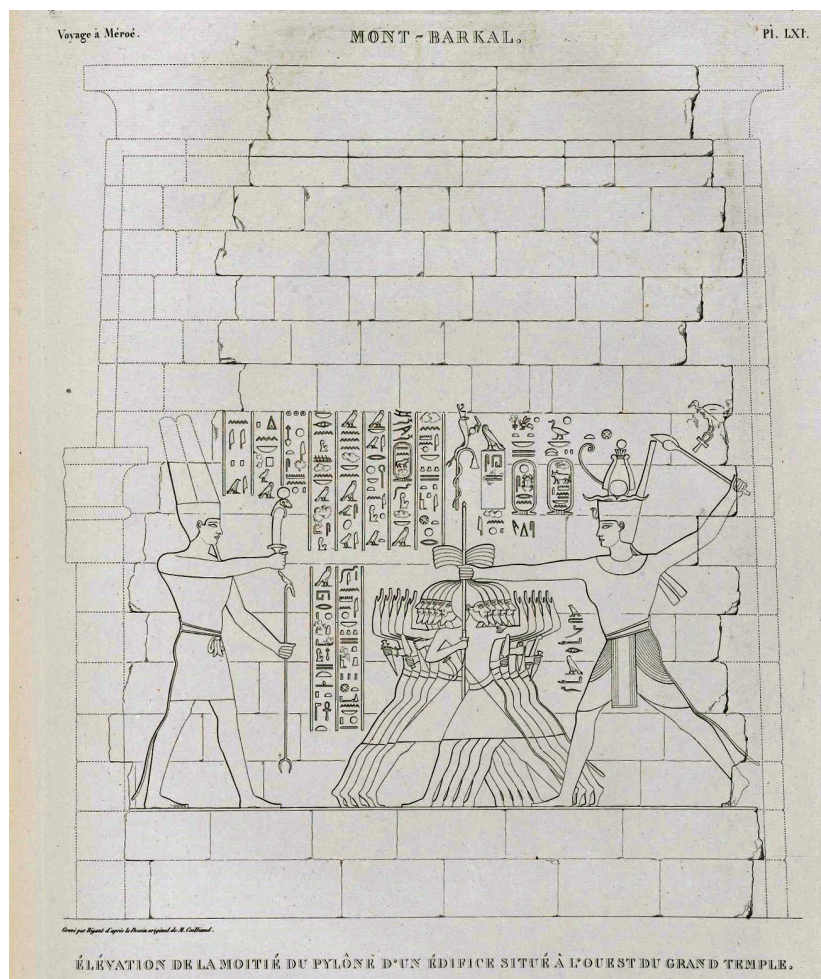


Fig. 2: East pylon of Temple B 700 at Gebel Barkal, still *in situ* at the beginning of XIXth century, after Caillaud 1826: pl. LXI.

is completed by its upper top component, which is here detached from the ostrich feather of the *atef*; this is attached to the centre of the top of the red crown, and sits on the twisted horizontal horns, the curl of the latter is traced again, and two ribbons come out from the back part of the cylinder of this headdress, a Kushite element already present in other types of royal headgears.

To sum up, the so-called crown of Geb which is worn in Nubia only by the king, and never by the queen or a god, symbolizes kinship by divine heiress transmission. According to the cases studied here, one finds this royal headdress in scenes of different kinds of offerings and divine embraces, especially when Amun or a hypostasis of this god (but not exclusively as a countermark) is displayed in the scene. Dresses, sandals, jewellery and gestures seem irrelevant for the meaning of this crown as none of them is specifically associated with it, as it is the case with other headgears in the Ptolemaic Egypt.³¹

27 Description de l'Égypte 1809-1817: pl. 36/3.

28 Caillaud 1826: pl. LXI; Griffith 1929: 26-28, pl. V.

29 Macadam 1946: 62-63, pl. X.

30 Luiselli 2011: 20.

31 Vassilika 1989: 83-121.



However, even if the king is sometimes empty-handed, he often holds emblems of power and domain such as the *aba*-sceptre, the long stick, the pear-headed mace, the long lance. Although it is not always evident what connotations the individual types of crowns had in Egypt³² and especially in Nubia, one can try an attempt of interpretation on the basis of the Napatan temple where it occurs for the last time. The king wears the crown of Geb generally in various parts of the temples, in the main sanctuaries and in small isolated religious centres, but it generally displayed on pillars, columns, walls of inner parts of the temples, and rarely on their gates, but always within the religious precinct, not accessible to everyone.

Senkamanisken is the first ruler to be represented with this headdress on the façade of the external pylon of a sanctuary. Moreover, he is also the only king depicted with this headgear in a smiting scene, as this is never attested in Egypt. This elaborated crown composed with the Egyptian red crown is associated to the primordial god of the Earth, and remarks the transmission of the royal power from father to son, and it is also symbolically connected with the sphere of fertility, rebirth, rejuvenation for the presence of the twisted horns.³³ B 700 is assumed to be the Napatan temple conceived for the cult of the ancestors-kings where the living sovereign confirmed his role, legitimized by the transmission of the royal *ka* from his predecessors.³⁴ In fact, Senkamanisken as a wearer of this regal headgear is not only displayed as the heir of an earthly large empire which is not existing any more, but he also confirms his rightful role through the ancestors and gods even assimilating himself to Geb, considered as a primeval king before Osiris in the ancient cosmogony.³⁵ He strongly affirms his long-lasting authority as a winner over the enemies, in a cosmic victory against any kind of opposers, considering that the copied text of the pylon (now lost) does not mention any historical raid or war against a particular enemy. In a political situation well described by Aspelta in his enthronization stela, where internal family fights for the succession endangered the throne, a strong propaganda was necessary, and it was more effective if based on the myth.³⁶

For that, the headdress might have assumed a specific value in the confirmation of the lawful power which was borrowed later by the royal Meroitic iconography, when it was worn even by the queens.³⁷

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32 Egbert 1995: 57.

33 Goebis 2008: 201-203. Brunner-Traut 1980: 9.

34 Kendall 2014: 677-678. For a re-analysis of the Osirian hymn in B 700 and the link with the Theban cult of Osiris *neb neheb*, a forthcoming article has been edited by the current author.

35 Yoyotte 1950: 60.

36 Even the terminology of the royal inscriptions is coming

from the Osirian myth and it is largely used with emphasis to enhance the legitimation of the royal heir. See Revez, 2010: 60-62.

37 In fact, this was used in the coronation scene of King Natakamani and Queen Amanitore in the Amun temple of Naga, see Török 2002: 97, note 269.



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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Krone von Geb, seit der Regierungszeit von Thutmosis III bekannt, wird in Ägypten zunehmend unter Amenophis III. genutzt. In der pharaonischen Ikonographie nach der 18. Dynastie ist sie selten, doch ist sie im Sudan seit König Taharqa belegt: sie wird vom Herrscher als Symbol seines göttlichen Königtums getragen, verbunden auch mit seiner irdischen Funktion als Garant des kosmischen Kreislaufs, als Vater und Ernährer seines Volkes. Die Szene am Tempel B 700 mit Senkamanisken, die diese Krone in der Szene „Erschlagen der Feinde“ zeigt, ist einzigartig, da sie in Ägypten nie bezeugt ist.