

AN UNUSUAL MEROITIC OSIRIS STATUE

In 2023 I had the opportunity to inspect and document an extraordinary object in Sudan. Due to the current situation in Sudan, the context of the find and its current location should not be published at this time to protect it. As the object most likely arrived at the site secondarily and was also found in a waste area, the specific location of the find is also of secondary interest. However, as it is a unique object, I have received permission to publish it as a single specimen.¹ (Fig. 1).

STATE OF PRESERVATION

The object is a former gold-covered, bronze statue of the god Osiris. The figurine is completely preserved; only the base of the statue is missing. The tenon underneath the feet of the statue for mounting in a base is present. The surface of the object is partially corroded. Most of the former gilding has been lost, but a few small remnants are still visible: on the left side of the crown at the front, on the back of the right Atef-feather and the right arm at the back, under the left arm, at the front in two grooves in the fringe at knee level, on the right rear calf, and on the right shoulder at the back.

MATERIAL AND DIMENSIONS

Material: Copper alloy (bronze). Reddish colour, green patina in some places, particularly noticeable in the area of the gold leaf on the back of the arm. Formerly covered in gold leaf.

Weight: 200g

Dimensions: H total: 137 mm, W maximum 33 mm

Figure: H 122 mm, B at elbow 33 mm, B at knee 10 mm, T at pelvis 15 mm, T at upper body 14 mm

Atef crown: W 28mm, H 29 mm, D with uraeus 18.5 mm,

Tenon: slightly conical cuboid, H 15 mm, L 13 mm, W 11 mm

DESCRIPTION

General

Standing figure of Osiris. The body is wrapped in a cloak with a vertical fringed hem reaching to the ankles and a fringed hem along the bottom of the cloak. The feet are visible in contrast to the standard mummy form of Osiris with covered feet. In his hands he carries an ankh, a flagellum and a whip (?) instead of the expected Heka sceptre. On his head he wears an Atef crown with uraeus and a beard of the gods. A crown band hangs down his back.

Posture

The figure stands upright with legs closed and arms held across the chest, but not crossed. While the body is shown as flat at the front, the buttocks are clearly protruding at the back and the weight of his lower torso appears to be shifted backwards.

Face

The head of Osiris, which is 18.5 mm wide at the ears, sits on a neck which is 11 mm wide. The upper part of the face is framed by the crown. The straight nose ends in rather narrow nostrils, which are indicated by small dots. Two relatively fleshy lips are visible just below the nose, enclosing a short, straight mouth. The corners of the mouth are indicated by small indentations. The cheeks are defined by recessed nasolabial folds and the eye wrinkles, which are also recessed. The cheekbone is accentuated by the beard, which is cut slightly into the cheeks. The eyes are almond-shaped; the lower eyelid is thinner and the upper eyelid is more curved. The inner corners of the eyes are set about 1 mm from the bridge of the nose. The right outer corner of the eye ends at the beginning of the beard tie (also the end of the crown lobe). The left outer corner of the eye is about 1 mm before this point. The eyes themselves are modelled to protrude slightly. The eyebrows are curved above the eyes in the shape of the upper eyelid, the right one being slightly shorter due to the position of the right eye and ending directly at the crown lobe. The eyebrows appear recessed because of the pronounced eyelid. The left eyebrow extends to the outer corner

¹ I would like to thank Janice Yellin and Martin Fitzenreiter, who helped me with many comments and additional references!

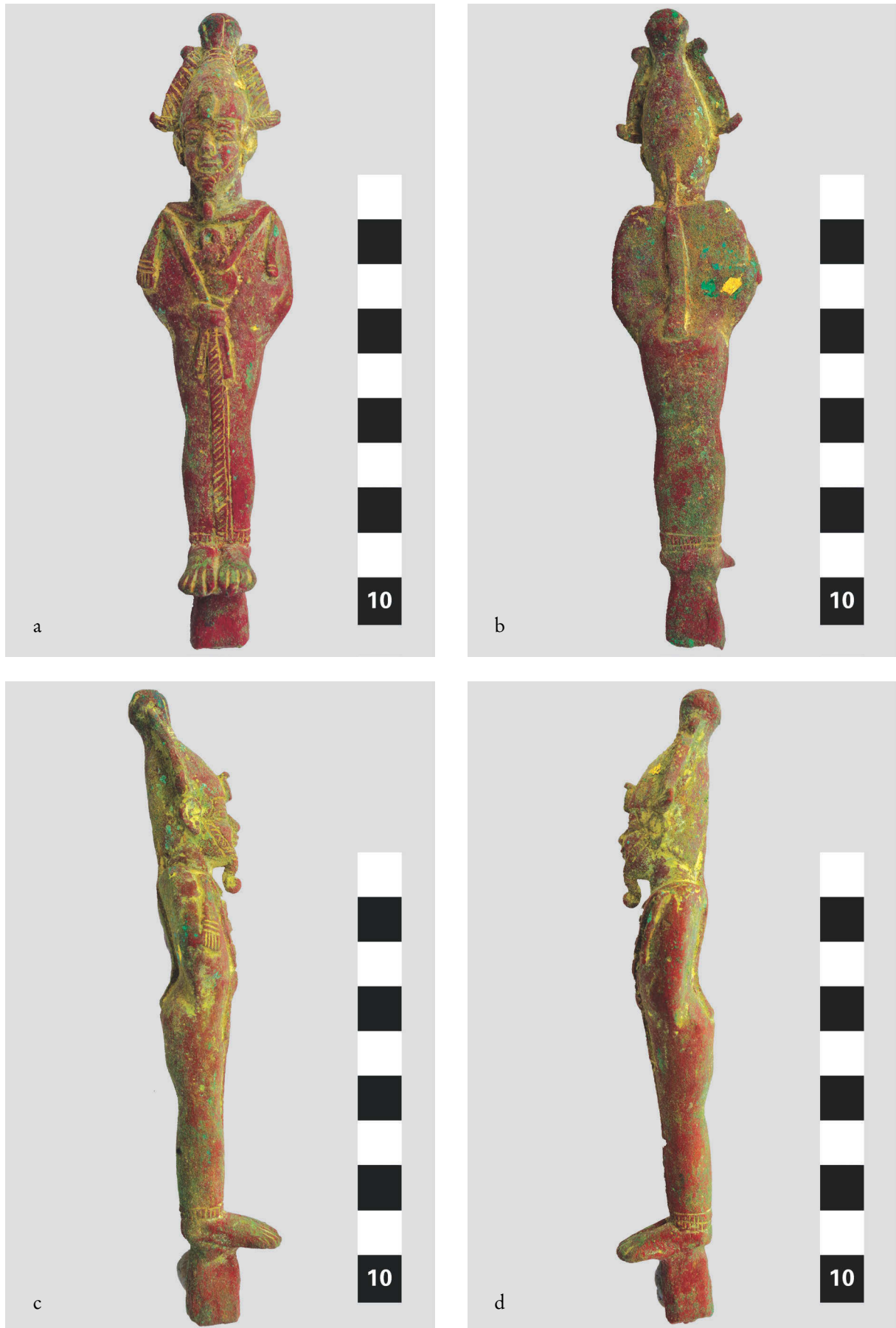


Fig. 1: Figure of a Meroitic Osiris (Photos: Lohwasser).



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of the eye. The two ears are located just below the ram's horn and are enclosed by the upper half by the crown lobe. Their shape clearly shows the auricle with internal markings and earlobes.

The 9 mm long and 3 mm wide beard of the god starts at the chin and hangs down to the lower end of the collar on the chest. It is noticeable that the beard hangs freely from the chin and is not attached to the neck and chest or connected by a rod, as is common in comparable metal statuettes. It is curved forward and ends in the shape of a snail. Its braiding is indicated by an incised, serrated pattern. The 2 mm wide beard tie runs from the earlobes over the cheeks to the chin and is decorated with incised lines – three horizontals, three diagonals and three horizontals.

Crown

This is a finely crafted Atef crown with many details, but only on the front.² The body of the crown is conical, the spherical top separated by a band of three transverse grooves. Its globular top is decorated with a central and probably two lateral upright petals, corresponding to the upper end of a bundle crown. Attached to the lower end of the corolla and projecting laterally are two 7 mm long ram's horns, the inner pattern of which consists of fine incisions. These run diagonally downwards when near the head and then flare horizontally at the outer end. On either side of the horns, a 19 mm high and 5 mm wide feather projects upwards along the body of the corolla. The inner feather markings are indicated by diagonal incisions along the corolla. Above the transverse band, the feather bends outwards and has a roughly horizontal incision. The lower end of the crest is horizontal on the forehead, but rounded around the ears at the level of the ear holes. At the back of the neck, the crown continues to an imaginary hairline. Starting 5 mm above the lower end of the crown (about the middle of the ears), the crown's band hangs down the back of the Osiris to his buttocks. In the centre above the forehead, there is an uraeus (H 7 mm, B 5 mm). The head is arched forward, the swollen neck underneath is wider than the head.

² According to the typology of Macadam, who made an initial classification on the basis of the many Osiris bronzes found in Kawa, our Osiris belongs to type 3 (Atef-crown with ram's horns, but without the sun disk; Macadam 1955, 145). The bulbous end of the White crown of our Osiris is formed by petals, which does not occur in any other type. In addition, the ram's horns are much shorter than in the Kawa specimens. According to the typology of Weiß, our Osiris corresponds to type 86 (Weiß 2013, 177–178, Tf. 25), but with the left hand over the right.

Coat

The tightly wrapped cloak envelops the figure from the shoulders to above the ankles. A decorated hem (fringe?) hangs down in the centre below the hands. These are diagonal incisions set between two vertical lines to represent a fringed border (4 mm wide). At the ankles, the coat appears to be gaping slightly open. The lower hem is also decorated with vertical incisions (2.5 mm) to indicate fringes or a border. On his left foot, two such strips with incisions can be recognised one above the other. These extend around the back of the statue to his right ankle, where the two strips merge into one and end in a border only 2 mm wide. A 4 mm wide collar placed around the neck is only visible on the front. It also forms the top of the cloak. The wrapping of the figure does not reveal any internal contours of the body which means that they cannot be used for chronological classification.

Hands

The arms are hidden under the coat, but the hands are visible and held in front of the chest. The left arm is bent slightly upwards so that the left hand is approximately at the bottom of the breastbone, and the right arm is bent slightly downwards so that the right hand is approximately at the navel. The arrangement of the hands is unusual as, when recognisable, hands are either held parallel or the right hand is above the left.³ Both hands are clenched into fists as they hold objects. The fingers of both hands are represented by two small indentations.

The left hand holds an ankh vertically, covering the chest area almost up to the bottom of the collar. The loop of the ankh is 1.5 mm wide, and the crossbar is 3 mm wide. In Osiris's left hand he also holds an elongated object, 2 mm wide, pointing diagonally towards his left shoulder. Usually in this position is a Heka sceptre, but here it seems to be misinterpreted: Although the staff of the sceptre is recognisable, the curve does not make the typical sweep backwards in an open semicircle. Instead, it looks as if there is a rope hanging from the top of the staff, starting at the shoulder and ending just above the inside of the elbow. It is slightly curved and therefore probably represents flexible material. Decoration is indicated by two small incisions just at its end. In his right hand the figure holds a flagellum. The staff is held diagonally across the upper body towards the right shoul-

³ Weiß 2013, 377–378. This is also the case with the Kushite specimens known to date. However, in the depictions in the pyramid chapels the fists of Osiris meet in the center of his chest (I owe this observation Janice Yellin).



der from which the flagellum's straps hang down in a long triangle along the upper arm. In its upper two thirds, the straps are indicated by two longitudinal carvings. The lower third has three transverse incisions marking its end that create six straps divided by five short longitudinal incisions.

Feet

The feet (L 21 mm, W 16 mm) are parallel. The toes are marked by incisions. Four toes are clearly visible, the small toe is indicated by a very short and faint incision on each side.

Back

The back is smooth, with only the crown band (L 39 mm, B max. 5 mm) and the two fringes on the lower edge of the coat visible. The lower back is curved to form a hollow so that the buttocks protrude slightly. The hollows of the knees are also clearly marked by a concavity.

DISCUSSION

Dating

The statuette of Osiris is of exquisite craftsmanship with delicate modelling and fine incised lines. It is remarkably well preserved, with only a few areas of slightly corroded metal. The style is unmistakably Meroitic, the thick lips and slightly bulging eyes pointing to the Middle Nile Valley. The iconography also indicates that this is a Meroitic artefact, especially the "fringed cloak", as well as the mistaking of a Heka sceptre by the artisan for a whip (?).

However, it is difficult to securely place the object in the Meroitic period, as it was found in a waste deposit and has no known parallel. At present, the only possibility for attributing it is a stylistic comparison of the individual elements.

Style

The eyes are quite round and somewhat protruding. The eyes of the finely crafted Osiris bronzes from Kawa, which can be dated with certainty to the 25th dynasty, are slightly larger and more curved. The mouth and nose are similar to the bronze statue of a king from Tabo.⁴ Here, too, the mouth is small and

horizontal, with the lips slightly compressed. The nose is shaped like an acute triangle. The eyes are similar to those of the god Sebiuwerker from Meroe, which is made of stone.⁵ While the King of Tabo is dated to the 2nd century BC, the statue of Sebiuwerker is dated to around the turn of the millennium.⁶ A bronze statuette of Sebiuwerker is also stylistically comparable to our Osiris. It comes from Kawa and is dated to the 3rd to 1st century BC.⁷ Sebiuwerker's beard has a curled end, and the internal design of the beard band is similar to that of our Osiris. Although the mouth and nose are also comparable, Sebiuwerker's eyes show an elongated make-up line. Sebiuwerker's statuette has been restored so all the fine internal detail is clearly visible. Although our Osiris statuette is exceptionally well preserved, it must be considered that the lines and fine modelling are obscured by a light layer of corrosion.

On the basis of a stylistic comparison of the face, the statue can be dated to the last two centuries BC.

Iconography

Several elements of the iconography of this figure are unusual, or at least remarkable. First of all, the Atef-crown with the flower-shaped end should be mentioned. This variant does not appear in the typology of crowns of bronze statuettes of Osiris found in Kawa.⁸ The different types are made with or without a sun disk at the top and with or without horizontal ram horns at the bottom of the crown. The other Osiris figurines from Nubia known to date also show no bundling and no incised petals on the spherical top. However, this may also be due to corrosion, which causes these fine lines to disappear. A variant of this crown can be found in some reliefs of the Meroitic pyramid chapels, in which the original form of a bundle of plant stems tied together at the top is still

⁵ Found in temple M 282 (KC 102), SNM inv. no. 24564 (Kormysheva 2006, 174–175).

⁶ Wildung 1996, 280.

⁷ SNM inv. no. 2715 (Wildung 1996, 283). Wenig (1978, 217) dates it to the 1st century BC or earlier.

⁸ Macadam 1955, 145. Also in the typology of Egyptian Osiris statuettes by Roeder (1956, 133–170), the White crown with the spherical finial is always indicated as the base crown. However, as an exception he mentions two examples (without illustration) which bear a bundle crown instead of the White crown (Roeder, 1956), 178. Weiß (2013, 28, Fig. 3.2) calls the Atef crown, with the White crown as its main component, the typical crown of Osiris from the New Kingdom onwards. The bundle crown and Atef combination occurs on bronzes, but mainly on animal-headed gods (Weiß 2013, 30–31, fig. 3.4). Osiris with a bundle crown as an Atef component is not mentioned.

⁴ Baud 2010, 180–181, fig. 229, 230, and cover of the catalogue.

visible.⁹ In both cases, a sun disc is placed at the top. The Atef-crown of our Osiris also shows this form, although the stems of the plant are not visible, the bundling and the leaves are.

The beard is also worth mentioning. In fact, only a few in the round sculptures of gods are depicted with a typical curved beard of the gods. It is mainly figures of Osiris and Sebuimeker that are shown in this way.¹⁰ The distinctly curved end, which is noticeable on our Osiris, is also present on the bronze statuette of Sebuimeker from Kawa, as well as on two well-preserved Osiris bronzes from the 25th dynasty, also from Kawa.¹¹

The objects Osiris holds in his hands are the ankh and the flagellum and an elongated curved element in the place of the Heka. This is probably an unusual interpretation of the Heka, although this kind of staff is clearly documented in Meroitic depictions, too.¹² Only Aqedis holds a similar whip-like object in his hands on the outer southern wall of the Lion Temple of Naqa, together with a flagellum and a Was-sceptre.¹³ However, since no other object in Osiris' hands is plausible, a Meroitic variant of the Heka or a misunderstood rendition should be assumed.

What makes the figure of Osiris unique, however, is that he is depicted wearing a fringed cloak and uncovered feet. First I will focus on the unusual depiction of the visible feet. Up to date, no presentations of Osiris in the round sculpture with bare feet are documented. The manifestation of Osiris in statuary is exclusively mummiform. However, we do have depictions of Osiris with naked feet in relief: in several pyramid chapels in the royal cemetery of Meroe we find this god with outward-facing and uncovered feet. On the west walls he is shown *en face* as a cult focus, and although his feet in particular are sometimes destroyed,¹⁴ they have been preserved in some examples (Fig. 2a).¹⁵ Osiris is relegated to the west walls almost exclusively and, where they are

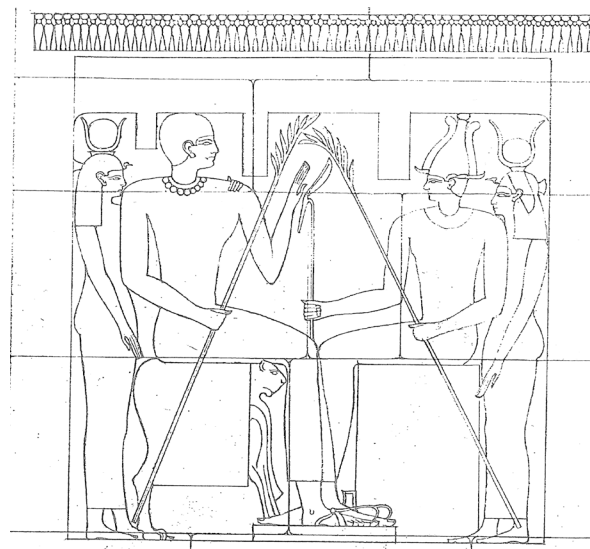
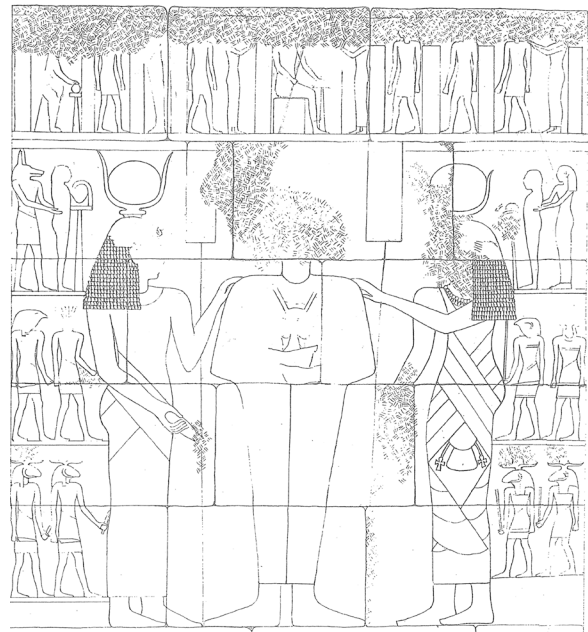


Fig. 2: Osiris in the reliefs of the pyramid chapels of Meroe (Beg. N 13: Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 12A; Beg. W 14: Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 21 E).

9 Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 10C (Beg. N12); 14D (Bar. 2).

10 Occasionally there are also other gods, e.g. from the 25th Dynasty a bronze of Amun and one of Min-Amun from Kawa (Kormysheva 2006, 122–123).

11 Macadam 1955, 145–148, pl. LXXXIc; Bagh 2015, fig. 2.55.

12 See e.g. Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 22.C (Beg. N19). It is shown with mummiform deities together with the Was-sceptre and flagellum, as with Chons in the Lion Temple of Musawwarat es Sufra (Wenig 1993, 205).

13 Visible in the drawing Gamer-Wallert (1983, sheet 5b), labelled as a crook.

14 Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 14.C (Bar. 3), pl. 14.D (Bar. 2).

15 Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 12.A (Beg. N13), pl. 22.B. (Beg. N19).

preserved, shows up on them frequently. When the tomb owner is shown in his presence it means that he has passed the judgment and being worthy of the offerings being made on the longer walls. However, in the core belief of the funerary cult in which the deceased merges with the god Osiris is best expressed on the west walls in which the deceased is either shown as Osiris or in his presence.¹⁶ In all cases in which Osiris is shown, he wears a long cloak that does not cover his hands. The cloak ends at about the ankles and the feet are not shown frontally but turned outwards to avoid foreshortening them. However, in

16 Yellin 2014.



some depictions when Osiris is in profile, he is also shown with a cloak, and with his feet visible from the side. In one case, Osiris is depicted striding,¹⁷ but otherwise he is usually shown enthroned.¹⁸ One unusual scene shows the enthroned deceased opposite the enthroned Osiris, as a mirror image with both of their legs and visible feet crossed (Fig. 2b).¹⁹ The metamorphosis of the deceased to “Osiris NN”, i.e. to the Osirian form of the person, is distinguished from the god Osiris by his visible feet.²⁰

The “fringed cloak”, with fringes marked by fine lines on the front vertical hem and at the bottom, is well documented in Meroitic depictions. This is an element of the Meroitic state vestment with which the king or kandake is depicted in temple reliefs. Other elements include tasselled cords hanging from the shoulders to the lower body and down the legs, and a pleated sash draped diagonally over one shoulder.²¹ None of this is present for our Osiris, who wears only the fringed cloak. Since the fringed cloak is also part of the clothing of the Ptolemaic ruler, the indigenous nature of this element in particular has been much discussed in the literature.

Török suggests that the Meroitic fringed cloak is not derived from the traditional Nubian cloak, as seen for example in the tomb of Tanwetamani, but was borrowed from Ptolemaic Egypt. However, it is not a direct copy of the Ptolemaic costume. The diagonal sash, for example, has a long Kushite tradition.²² Hallmann analyses the clothing of the Egyptian Late Period and concludes that both the outer

garment with fringes on the longitudinal hems and the inner garment with fringes on the lower hem are of Nubian origin.²³ However, the depictions of the Kushites wearing this garment date from the early Late Period in Egypt, which is considerably earlier than the Meroitic state regalia. A further difference can be seen in the group of people who wear this garment: in the Egyptian Late Period it is worn exclusively by non-royal persons, whereas in the Meroitic version it is worn exclusively by the king and queen.

Depictions in the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es Sufra are the earliest of a king in Meroitic state regalia and can be dated to around 220 BC (Fig. 3a). In the Lion Temple at Naqa, which dates from around the turn of the millennium, the fringed cloak is modified in that not only is a fringed border shown on the vertical edge of the drapery, but fringes also hang down from the lower hem (Fig. 3b).²⁴ In the early form, the lower fringes are not depicted on the cloak, but on the garment underneath,²⁵ which is missing in Naqa. The Kandake is shown in the same costume in Naqa, and although the prince does not wear a full state robe, he does wear the fringed cloak.²⁶

The fringed cloak was also once documented as a god’s garment: in the Lion Temple of Naqa, Aqedis wears a diagonally patterned cloth wrapped tightly around his body and limbs, leaving only his hands and feet free.²⁷ The visible long hem is decorated with a fringed border; as the foot area is destroyed, a possible border on the lower hem remains uncertain. Aqedis carries a Was-sceptre, a flagellum, and the variant of the Heka that can also be seen on our figure, with the lunar disc on his head. His appearance corresponds to that of the Egyptian Chons.

In his study of the Napatan statue of King Aramatelqo, Karl-Heinz Priese proposed that his long cloak should be classified as a Sed-festival cloak. This specific garment is usually a short cloak and ends above the knees. However, there are some statues of Egyptian kings that show an ankle-length cloak, which in other details corresponds to the short cloak of the Sed festival.²⁸ From the New Kingdom onward, the king is occasionally depicted in mummy form, akin to Osiris. The iconographic similarities between the Sed-festival king and Osiris are so great that it seems reasonable to assume a mutual influence – and in some cases they are interchangeable. This is true in the pyramid chapels of Meroe, which depict

17 Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 10.C (Beg. N12).

18 Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 23.C (Beg. N32), pl. 8.A (Beg. N11), pl. 30.C (Bar. 5); LD V, 51b (Beg. N 17); LD V, 25a (Beg. N 28), and Beg. N 22. I would like to thank Janice Yellin for the information and photos.

19 Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 21.E (Beg. W14). Nasapanasap is probably not a king, as he is buried in the Western Cemetery and does not wear any royal costume elements.

20 In Roman Egypt, burial shrouds also show the deceased fused with Osiris, with a cloak leaving the feet visible. (For example in Riggs 2006. The shroud shows Osiris-Nespatytau depicted frontally, wrapped in a cloak decorated with diamonds and embroidered with pearls. The hands hold flagellum and Heka, the feet are also shown frontally and are wearing sandals. The Atef crown represents the bundle of plants and thus resembles the crown of our Osiris.) Even if no direct influence or even adaptation can be assumed, the iconographic element “visible feet” seems to indicate that it is not the god Osiris who is depicted here, but a person (in the case of the pyramid chapels and burial shrouds: the deceased) who has become Osiris.

21 All these elements are discussed in detail in Török 1990. On the Lion Temple in Musawwarat es Sufra see Wenig 1993, 155–156.

22 Török 1990, 174–175.

23 Hallmann 2023, 241–244, and 428–431.

24 Gamer-Wallert 1983, 101.

25 Wenig 1993, 155.

26 Gamer-Wallert 1983, 104–105.

27 Gamer-Wallert 1983, 39–40, 106.

28 Priese 1974, 213–214.

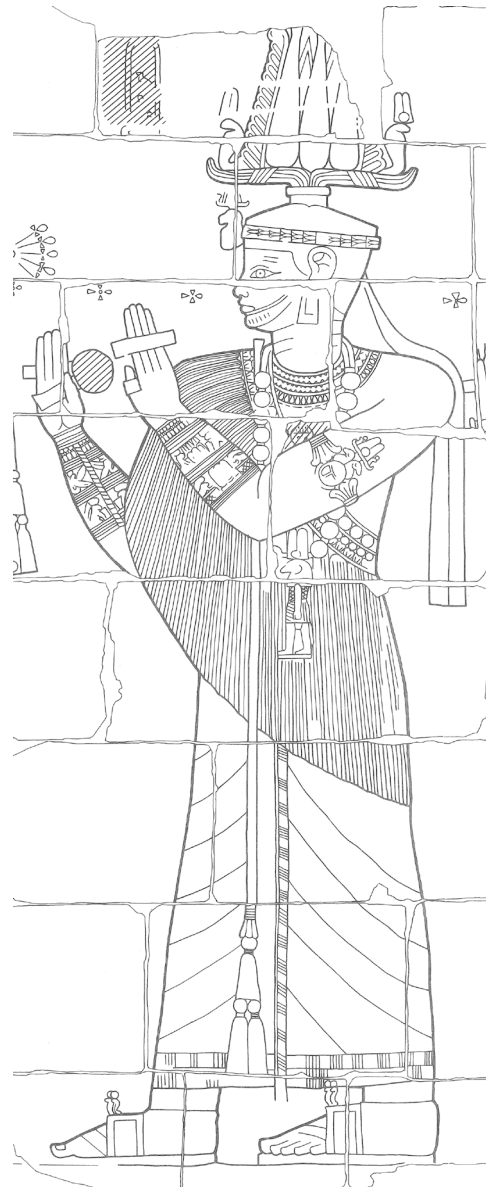
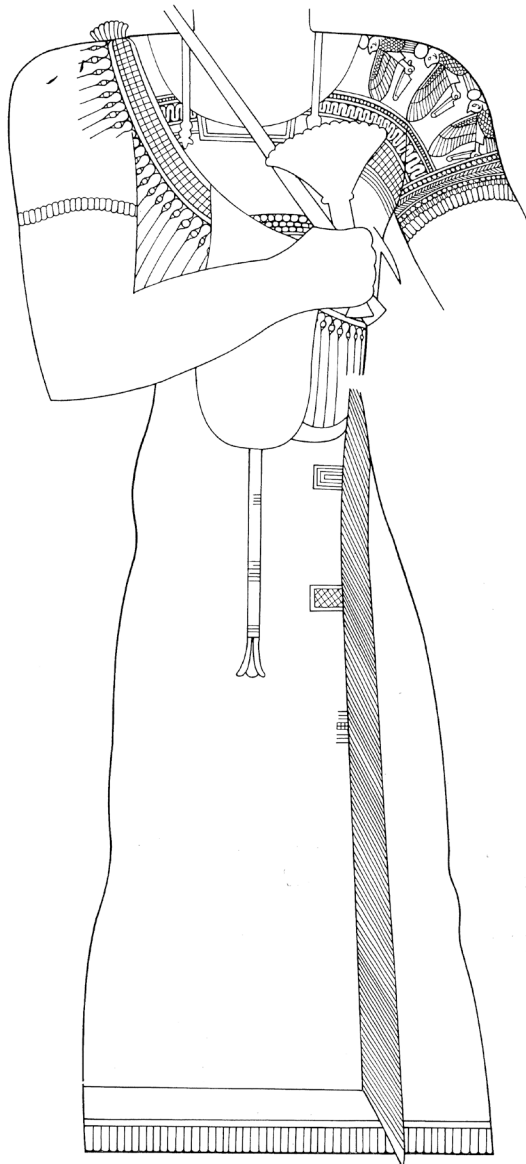


Fig. 3: The king in Meroitic state regalia: Lion temple of Musawwarat es Sufra (Wenig 1993, 155, fig. 97) and Lion temple of Naqa (Gamer-Wallert 1983, sheet 5a).

Osiris in both mummy form and the Sed-festival cloak.²⁹ It is evident that fringes are present on our statue of Osiris, which is not a typical attribute of the Sed-festival mantle. However, ornaments are sometimes visible at the hem.³⁰ It appears that the mummy wrapping, the Sed-festival cloak, and the cloak of the state ornate seem to merge in our statuette.

The style in which the face is worked, the slightly protruding eyes, the triangular nose with wide nostrils and the fleshy cheeks suggest a Meroitic date. Comparisons with other three dimensional sculptures suggest a date in the 2nd or 1st millennium BC. The fringed cloak, known from many representa-

tions of Meroitic state regalia, wrapping our Osiris is also undeniably Meroitic. So here we have a figure that cannot be dated by archaeological context, but can be dated by style and iconography.

OSIRIS BRONZES FROM KUSH (SEE TABLE)

A number of bronze Osiris figures have been found in the Middle Nile Valley. These can be divided into two groups according to their style: Those that are rather small and very flat, and those, like the one under discussion, that have a rounded sculptural appearance – these are larger, have a full body, and are usually finely worked. In the case of the flat figures, the wax model was made in a simple mould. Only the

29 Priese 1974, 222.

30 Priese 1974, 214.



Fig. 4: Bronze statuettes of Osiris from Kawa (Macadam 1955, pl. LXXXIc), Sanam (Kormysheva 2006, 101) and Wad Ban Naga (Onderka 2022, Fig. 3.41).

front is modelled and the back is simply smooth.³¹ The wax models of more rounded figures, whose backs were also modelled, were made in two parts that were moulded together. Our Osiris belongs to this type, which is of higher quality.

Most of the known Osiris statuettes are usually dated to the Napatan period; only few (from El Hassa and Wad Ben Naga) belong for sure to the Meroitic period, and for others the dating is uncertain. As almost all the bronze statuettes found in temples were discovered in a deposit or scattered, it is difficult to date them accurately. Finally, some of the temples

31 For the lost wax technique see Fitzenreiter 2014a. For a model of a simple Osiris figure with an un-sculpted back, see Auenmüller 2014, 218–219; wax models of Osiris in Auenmüller 2014, 221–222.

(Tabo, Kawa, Soniyat, Jebel Barkal, Meroe) were used in both the Napatan and the Meroitic periods, which makes it difficult, or in the case of the simple and poorly preserved examples, impossible to assign the figurines to one of these periods.

As far as is known, the Napatan and Meroitic bronze figures of Osiris in Kush nearly all originate from the temple context. Only very few Osiris bronzes were found in tombs: In Bar. 8, a complete statuette was discovered in the burial chamber, in Beg. N 4 the head and in Beg. N 11 the lower part of Osiris was found in the debris.³² Apart from the royal cemeteries, two specimen were found in the

32 Dunham 1957, Bar. 8: 62, fig. 32, pl. LVII.E. Beg. N 11: 72, pl. LVII.F. Beg. N 4: 53, pl. LVII.B.



debris of tombs of Begrawiya West.³³ The majority, however, were found in the temple context. This is the focus of the following part. The evidence is presented in chronological order as far as possible.

Kawa: 40 bronze statuettes of gods, mainly Osiris, and a further fifty bronze objects (e.g. uraeus) were found in the hypostyle of Temple T at Kawa.³⁴ The bronzes were damaged, some of melted, by a fire dating to the late Meroitic period. One heap was found south of the shrine of Taharqo, a second on the western wall near the entrance to the 1st courtyard.³⁵ In addition to the many industrially produced³⁶ flat examples, there are at least two larger and higher quality examples from Kawa (Fig. 4).

Dongola: The exact location of a fragment of an Osiris statuette allegedly from Dongola is unknown.³⁷ Due to its geographical proximity, it could belong to the Kawa assemblage.

Sanam: 21 small Osiris figurines were discovered in Sanam; they are located in the hypostyle hall under a later brick chamber.³⁸ The four objects in the National Museum in Khartoum are the simple and flat version of this statuette of the god.³⁹

Unknown: Two figurines of unknown origin are in the Khartoum National Museum. One of them wears an unusually large Atef crown. As the specimens from Sanam also have particularly large Atef crowns, it is assumed that they may have come from this temple.⁴⁰

Jebel Barkal: In the courtyard of the great temple of Amun B 500 (B 501) and in the re-modelled Meroitic sanctuary of temple B 700 (704), one and seven figurines respectively, also of the flat type, were found.⁴¹

Soniyat: At the doorpost between the pronaos and hypostyle, the excavators discovered a deposit with

140 oddly shaped stones and two bronze figures of Osiris.⁴² As at Kawa, this was a mixed deposit.

Sedeinga: The exact location of the figure from Sedeinga⁴³ is not specified, but as several blocks from the temple of Taharqo were used in the cemetery,⁴⁴ if the bronze was found in a grave, it can be assumed that it was originally located in this temple.

Doukki Gel: 21 statuettes and fragments of Osiris have been uncovered in the vicinity of the temples, several in the foundation of the Eastern temple.⁴⁵ As the temple was rebuilt in the 25th dynasty, used during the Napatan period and completely redesigned in the Meroitic period, it is difficult to date the bronzes.

Tabo: In this Meroitic temple, four figures were discovered on the floor of the sanctuary and another in the adjoining room. They belong to the simple variant and are heavily corroded. As the temple was probably used in the Napatan and Meroitic periods, it is difficult to date the bronzes.

Meroe: Some (fragmentary) Osiris statuettes are also known from the Royal City of Meroe. Of particular interest is the figure discovered in spot M 944 (in the northern part of the Royal enclosure). It is an annex to building M 296, which may have been a cult building.⁴⁶ The dating is completely unclear – while Garstang initially calls it a “Taharqa building”, he later favours “Middle Meroitic I”.⁴⁷ The site card notes the following about this find: “Osiris figure [of] bronze (vestiges of linen [or] cotton wrapping).”⁴⁸ The reference to the figure being wrapped in textile may indicate that it was “mummified” when it was removed from the ritual context.⁴⁹ Fragments of other figurines, albeit heavily corroded, were discovered scattered around the city.⁵⁰ These too may have originally been placed in one of the temples.

Wad Ben Naga: In the northern porch of the Isis-temple in Wad Ben Naga (WBN 308) several remains of cultic equipment were found around the original location of Altar C. Today 18 complete or fragmentary figures of Osiris are discovered.⁵¹ It seems that they derive from different moulds, however, the Atef-crown is particularly protruding.

33 Dunham 1963, W 253: 248, fig. 164.7; W 353: 265.

34 Macadam 1955, 92.

35 In contrast to the usual meticulousness in recording finds at Kawa, this mass of objects was described under the collective term “Bronze Find”, but some special pieces were described individually. This makes the allocation of figures to the two collections and their exact composition uncertain, Macadam 1955, 92.

36 An example of a mass production mould can be found in the Ägyptisches Museum, Bonn where 34 statuettes of Osiris were cast using one mould (Auenmüller 2014, 244–245).

37 Kormysheva 2006, 269.

38 Griffith (1922, 85, 89) interpreted the hoard as a “store for sale”, but this should be rejected.

39 Kormysheva 2006, 100–102.

40 Kormysheva 2006, 274–275.

41 Dunham 1970, 43, fig. 34; 69, fig. 47.

42 Zurawski 2007, 297, fig. 14 a, b.

43 Francigny 2016, fig. 69.

44 Francigny 2018, 340–341.

45 Bonnet, Valbelle & Marchi 2021, 154. 248.

46 Török 1997, 166.

47 Török 1990, 165–166.

48 Török 1997, 207.

49 Charloix & Thiers 2019, 47–48.

50 Shinnie & Bradley 1980, 186–7, pl. XLIV.

51 Onderka 2022, 49 and Fig. 3.41.



El Hassa: A single bronze Osiris in the temple of El Hassa is from a secure Meroitic context.⁵² It is roughly the same size as our Osiris (14 cm), but less finely worked. The Atef crown is combined with the White Crown with a uraeus on the forehead. The flagellum and Heka are recognisable; the cloak is undecorated. The foot part with a possible tenon is not present. The appearance corresponds to the Napatan Osiris figures.

Small bronzes can have various functions in Kushite cultic contexts. One possibility is that it is a cult image from a temple. It is expected that this was made of metal – either precious metal or bronze.⁵³ Our bronze Osiris was covered with gold leaf so that it appeared to be a golden statuette. So far, however, no cult image has been found in situ to serve as a parallel for such a determination.

There are also small bronzes of the gods with a loop on the neck. These could be worn as amulets or symbols on a chain or cord around the body. Another possibility is that statues with loops functioned as the crew of a barque of the gods⁵⁴ or were on any other ritual installation which is moved. To stabilize the figures while conducting the rituals, a support pole to avoid tilting or falling is needed. In Egypt, there exist several specimens with loops near the feet, which hint to this function. However, our figure does not have a loop, so a different function must be assumed. Nevertheless, a substantial tenon can also provide this stability.

A large number of such statues were found in Sanam, Kawa, Doukki Gel and Wad Ben Naga. In comparable situations in Egypt, these are interpreted as votives, i.e. a manifest personal connection to a deity. In contrast to ephemeral prayers, with votives this relationship is permanently anchored.⁵⁵ In the Kingdom of Kush, very different categories of objects are interpreted as votives. Very common, for example, are oddly shaped stones and other special naturalia, which are interpreted as votives used both in the cult of the gods and in the funerary realm.⁵⁶ For example in Soniyat the Osiris bronzes were found together with oddly shaped stones. The whole group could therefore have served as votive offerings. However, this may not have been the sole function of these bronzes.

52 Baud 2010, fig. 309.

53 See also Weiß 2013, 467.

54 Wolf 2003; Fitzenreiter 2014b, 175–176.

55 See on votive and votive practice in Egypt, Weiß 2013, 463–468.

56 Francigny & de Voogt 2014.

In addition to Osiris, other figures of deities and kings as well as parts of small bronzes (e.g. various crowns) were found in one locale at Kawa.⁵⁷ It is possible that this was a storage place for cult artefacts that were originally scattered but were later concentrated in one room as a result of secondary events (fire, relocation). However, it can also be – as in the Ptah temple in Karnak and other places in Egypt⁵⁸ – a targeted depot for discarded temple utensils.

Another possibility for the use of Osiris bronzes could be in a particular ritual performed in Nubian Amun temples. During religious festivals, the king made the god ‘appear’ – although we do not know what form this took. A list of local forms of Osiris is preserved on the stela at Harsiotef (Z. 146–161).⁵⁹ So far, only some of the places mentioned in the list have been identified. They are Sedeinga, Meroe, Defeia, Napata, Kawa and Pnubs. In all these places there are temples of Amun in which it can be assumed that Osiris had a guest cult. The other place names cannot yet be assigned to specific places or temples. With the exception of Defeia, bronze statues of Osiris have been found at all these sites,⁶⁰ so that it can be assumed that the bronze statues may have had a ritual function.

Ultimately, the original context of our Osiris figure is unknown. Since origin cannot be determined, we can only conclude from these similar finds that it was also originally used in a temple, however, the function there remains unknown.

OSIRIS AND KING

Osiris is the dead king: in the royal funeral rituals he becomes Osiris. However, the funerary metamorphosis also has an impact on the real political situation when the new ruler, responsible for this ritual transition, presents himself as a worthy successor.⁶¹ Osiris is thus the deified ruler when he is depicted as such on the chapel walls. It is always the specific king buried in this very tomb who becomes the god Osiris.

On a higher level, not related to a specific king, but to the sum of all kings, i.e. the kingship itself,

57 Macadam 1955, 92.

58 See the compilation in Charlot & Thiers 2019, 50–53.

59 FHN II, 456–457; 463; Horus, Re and Onuris are also mentioned once.

60 Sanam is not mentioned in the list of Harsiotef, but this temple was no longer in use at the time.

61 Francigny 2016. A particularly vivid depiction can be found on the Khaliut stele from the early 6th century BC. Here, the deceased Osiris-Khaliut claims kingship for Aspetla because he had erected a tomb for him and established a funerary cult (FHN I; 268–279).



the cult of Osiris became very important in Egypt in the 1st millennium BC.⁶² As a dead god, ancestor of the living kings, and guarantor of the renewal of kingship and nature, Osiris was a key figure in many festivals and rituals. Rites for the renewal of kingship flourished in the 25th dynasty in particular, and the close link between Osiris and the king is also clearly evident in the kingdom of Kush.⁶³ Again, it is the divine king, not the god of the dead, who is worshipped in the country's temples. We do not know of any temples specifically dedicated to Osiris in Kush, but he may have been present in the form of a guest cult in the temples of Amun, as can be seen from the list in the Harsiotef inscription. With the hymn to Osiris in the small temple of Amun, B 700, at Jebel Barkal, in which he is described as ruler ("King of both lands, head of both shores, perfect ruler... King who took the White crown for himself, who came forth from the body, the two uraeus on his forehead..."⁶⁴), we thus have written evidence of the cultic presence of Osiris in the temple of Amun, but especially of his nature as a royal god.⁶⁵

A passage from Agatharchides of Cnidus, quoted in the work of Diodorus, speaks of Osiris as the ruler of the "Ethiopians": "They [i.e. the Ethiopians] say that the Egyptians are settlers from among themselves and that Osiris was the leader of the settlement."⁶⁶ Now, this is certainly not to be taken literally; many statements in the description of Nubia (Ethiopia) are fanciful elaborations. In particular, the postulate that Egyptian culture descended from Ethiopian culture has long been refuted. However, the association of Osiris with the leader from the south raises questions – the descriptions are based on the testimony of informants, which may have been embellished or misrepresented, but there is always a basis for it. The model of a connection between Osiris and the king of Kush, as a guarantor of the continuity of kingship, may have been incorporated into the description.

So how should we interpret our gold-covered bronze Osiris? We can assume that it was originally placed in a temple, probably a temple of Amun. Whether the ritual use(s) of bronze statues of Osiris continued into the Meroitic period cannot be determined from the very limited evidence available so far. Our Osiris also differs from the other known mummified Osiris figures in that he is shown wear-

ing a fringed cloak and with uncovered feet. This may be a chronological indication, but it may also indicate a different function from the many purely mummiform figures of the Napatan period.

In the Meroitic pyramid chapels⁶⁷ an Osiris with visible feet is interpreted as a person fused with the god. However, all this evidence comes from the funerary realm; it is the dead man who has become Osiris, who appears in this way. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that our Osiris also represents a human fused with the god – since the fringed cloak is part of the royal costume, this would be a king. Although the cloak is always draped or knotted over one shoulder as part of the Meroitic state dress, Osiris is completely wrapped, which can be interpreted as the Osirian version of the royal cloak. If we now consider the proximity and interchangeability with the Sed-festival cloak, we can also consider this possible aspect of this garment. Priese postulates that this specific cloak identifies the living king as the 'divine-king'.⁶⁸ As we can see from the pyramid chapels of Meroe, the king retains this specific cloak even after death, when he transforms into Osiris and the authority of the earthly rule passes to a successor. Osiris is thus the aspect for the continuum of the divine king.⁶⁹

As a deceased king, Osiris is the ancestor of every living king. His representation in the fringed cloak makes the royal aspect of Osiris particularly tangible, including the use of the Sed-festival cloak. The specific function of the bronze statue is not known, but we can think of a role in ancestor worship. In Kushite culture, ancestors appear at various levels, with the continuum of kingship occupying a special position due to the place of the individual king in the succession of rulers.⁷⁰ In the Napatan period, references in the royal texts show that both the real ancestors and Osiris as the mythical ancestor were of particular importance for the assumption and functioning of the office of king. In the Meroitic period the texts are still incomprehensible to us, so we have to concentrate on the interpretation of the images. In the Lion Temple of Musawwarat es Sufra we find scenes associated with the enthronement of the new ruler in its innermost zone. The designated king is 'chosen' by the main deities.⁷¹ In another scene, two kings stand opposite each other with their cloaks open – predecessor and successor. This

62 Overview at Coulon 2005.

63 Lohwasser 2020, 152–159.

64 Translation according to Priese 2005, 143.

65 Priese 2005.

66 Diodorus Siculus 3.3.1. translation according to FHN II, 645. Agatharchides, the author of the original text, dates to the 2nd century BC.

67 And on burial shrouds in Roman Egypt, see above.

68 Priese 1974, 219–220.

69 Priese 1974, 220.

70 See for the Napatan period Lohwasser 2020, 150–159.

71 Wenig 1993, 211–212.



motif is interpreted as a transfer of office.⁷² Beyond that, however, we lack specific references to the role of ancestors in the Meroitic kingship.⁷³ But Osiris is not only the ancestor of each king, but also the representative of the continuum of kingship. It is therefore also conceivable that there was a ritual performed in connection with the continuity of kingship. However, the available evidence is insufficient to confirm this hypothesis, as there is a dearth of knowledge regarding the practices of Kushite royal ideology and its material relics.

We cannot concretely determine the function of the figure of Osiris in the fringed cloak; we do not know the context in which it was placed, and we have no parallels to help us interpret it. The details suggest a royal connection, the fact that it is made of gold-covered bronze suggests a temple context. Only a future discovery of a similar statuette with a confirmed find context can help here. However, there is no doubt that the figure is a local production, depicting an Egyptian god, but with Meroitic style and iconography.

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⁷² Wenig 1993, 212.

⁷³ This can perhaps be seen in royal pyramid chapels of Meroe such as BEG N 11, BEG N 12 (Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 7 and 10) among others in which rows of members of the royal court are shown at the funeral to witness the proper burial of the rulers and the inauguration of their ancestor cults which validates the legitimacy of the new ruler. I owe this observation Janice Yellin.



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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Artikel wird eine ungewöhnliche Statuette eines Osiris aus Bronze vorgestellt: Er ist in einen Fransenmantel gehüllt und die Füße sind nicht darin verborgen, er ist also nicht wie sonst in Mumienform gezeigt. Der Stil des Gesichts sowie der Fransenmantel, Teil des meroitischen Staatsornates, weisen auf die meroitische Kultur. Da die Statuette in sekundärem Kontext in einem Abfallareal im Sudan gefunden wurde, ist keine genauere Datierung über den Kontext möglich. Vergleiche mit anderen Objekten der meroitischen Rundplastik weisen auf das 2./1. Jh. v. Chr.

Osiris-Bronzen sind in Kusch in mehreren Amuntempeln gefunden worden, fast alle stammen vermutlich aus der napatanschen Periode. Sie sind entweder verstreut oder in einem Depot entdeckt worden. Da auf der Stele des Harsiotef eine Aufzählung von lokalen Osiris-Festen erhalten ist, die bekannten Ortsnamen alle mit einem Amuntempel verbunden werden können, ist ein Zusammenhang der Bronzen mit einem Osiris-Kult in Amuntempeln naheliegend. Da alle bisher bekannten Bronzefiguren des Osiris aus Tempeln stammen, könnte auch die hier besprochene Statuette ursprünglich zu einem Tempel gehört haben.

Nicht zuletzt spielt Osiris als toter König, und damit als jeweiliger Vorgänger eines regierenden Herrschers, eine ideologische Rolle. Die Umhüllung in einen Fransenmantel, ein meroitisches königliches Attribut, lässt vermuten, dass dieser Osiris (auch) einen verstorbenen Herrscher dargestellt hat.



LIST OF BRONZE OSIRIS STATUETTES IN KUSH (ORDERED NORTH–SOUTH)

Origin	Quantity	Remark	Location	Bibliography
Sedeinga	1	Location not specified		Francigny 2016, fig. 69
Temple of Doukki Gel	21	In foundation of Eastern temple and scattered in the area		Bonnet, Valbelle & Marchi 2021, 154, fig. 158; 248, fig. 197.
Temple of Tabo	5		SNM Khartoum Inv 18894	Jacquet-Gordon, et al., 1969, 111 ; Kormysheva 2006, 140–141
Temple of Kawa, Hypostyle	>40	Many figures or fragments scattered throughout the temple	SNM Khartoum Inv. 2696 and 2722; Ny Carlsberg AEIN 1699; further location unknown	Macadam 1955, 145–148, pl. LXXXIc; Kormysheva 2006, 118–119; Bagh 2015, fig. 2.55
Dongola	1	Fragm. Upper half	SNM Khartoum Inv 15c	Kormysheva 2006, 269
Temple of Soniyat	2	1 complete, 1 upper half to knee		Zurawski 2007, 297, fig. 14 a, b
Temple of Sanam	21		SNM Khartoum Inv. 5917; Ashmolean Museum Oxford; Manchester Museum	Griffith 1922, 89; Kormysheva 2006, 100–102
Jebel Barkal, Temple B 500, courtyard 501	1		MFA Boston	Dunham 1970, 43, fig. 34
Jebel Barkal, Temple B 700, sanctuary 704	7		“not in Boston”	Dunham 1970, 69, fig. 47
Barkal Pyramids	1	Burial chamber of Bar. 8		Dunham 1957, 62, fig. 32, pl. LVII.E.
Meroe townsite	4	Fragment of statuette and three fragments of Atef crown	SNM Khartoum Inv 22972	Shinnie & Bradley, 1980, 186–7, pl. XLIV; Kormysheva 2006, 170
Meroe, Spot 944	1	Statuette, “wrapped in textile shroud”		Török 1997, 206–207, find 944a
Begrawiya North cemetery	2	In debris of royal tombs N 4 and N 11		Dunham 1957, 72, pl. LVII.F. 53, pl. LVII.B.
Begrawiya West cemetery	2	W 253, W 353		Dunham 1963, 248, fig. 164.7; 265
Temple of El Hassa	1		SNM 31687	Baud 2010, fig. 309
Wad Ben Naga, Temple WBN 300 (“Isis-Temple”)	18	Northern Proch (WBN 308), around original location of Altar C		Onderka 2022, 49, Fig. 3.41
Location unknown	1		SNM Khartoum Inv 2169?	Kormysheva 2006, 274–275

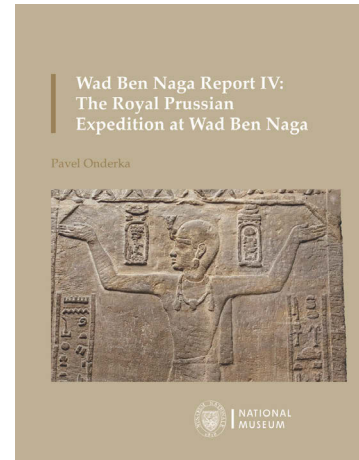


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Pavel Onderka

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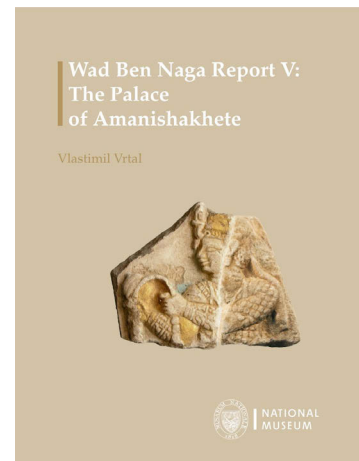


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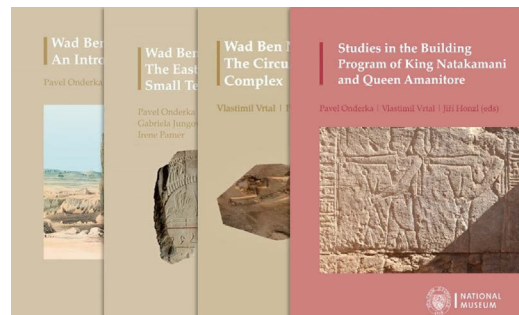
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