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THE GOLDEN CAGE: WHAT IS THE «DEDICATION STELE» DEDICATED TO?¹

καὶ φρουρὰν πλουτοῦντες
ἐντιμότεροι δεσμῶται γεγόναμεν.
(Helioid., *Aeth.* 9. 2)

One of the most obscure written monuments of the Ancient Sudan is Louvre stele C257, dated to year 3 of Aspelta, king of Kush (6th century B.C.E.).

The relief in the lunette (Fig. 1) depicts three royal ladies, facing left - («king's mother» Nasalsa, «king's sister (and) king's wife» Madiqen, and «king's sister (and) king's daughter» Henuttakhebit) – all standing behind the king, who offers a figurine of Maat to the god Amun-Re, human-headed, accompanied by the goddess Mut, his divine wife, and Khonsu, their son, all of whom face right.

The hieroglyphic inscription of 23 lines below the relief reports a visit of eleven of the highest royal officials to the temple of Amun, «Bull of the Land of the Three-Curved Bow»² (one of the two hypostases of Amun venerated in the temple of Sanam),³ in the course of which it was declared that the allowance established for Madiqen, at her dedication as sistrum-player to Amun by Aspelta's predecessor king Anlamani, should thenceforth be transferred to Henuttakhebit and her descendants. The text specifies the details of the weekly, monthly and yearly ration to be provided to (or by ?)⁴ the temple, pro-

vides the names and positions of fifteen priests of the temple who witnessed the «deal», and announces the particular divine retribution to be meted out to «anyone who removes the stele (lit. 'ordinance', 'decree') from the temple».

The text of the stele is somewhat uncertain, since it has many irregularities in grammar, wording and writing. Because many of its statements have been interpreted differently in the research literature, there has been no unanimity among scholars in labelling or naming this monument. Thus far it has been called: «Stela of Matsenen»⁵ (*sc.* Madiqen - A.V.), «Stele der Priesterinneweihe unter König Esperet»,⁶ «Denkstein des Esperet über die Einsetzung einer Priesterin»,⁷ «priestess stela»,⁸ «Adoption Stela»,⁹ «Dedication Stela»,¹⁰ «Adoption Stela of Aspelta».¹¹

This diversity of titles reflects the differences in scholars' understanding of the significance of this monument. Paul Pierret, the author of the 1873 *editio princeps*, took this text as a story how «Onze hauts fonctionnaires d'Aspurta viennent au temple d'Ammon présenter de sa part son épouse Maisren comme prêtresse du dieu <...> et la fille du rois Kheb-ha (*sc.* Henuttakhebit - A.V.) fait à cette occasion une fondation d'offrandes <...> qui devra être perpétuée par ses descendants.»¹² Views were set

1 I am very indebted to Dr. Timothy Kendall for reading this paper and making stylistic alterations.

2 The traditional rendering of this place-name as *Ta-Seti* is compact, but flat, though anyway preferable to the toponym "Nubia", which, from my point of view, is absolutely unacceptable for the period in question. The alternative «Bow-land», suggested long time ago and recently revived in the epoch-making *Fontes*, is in fact somewhat misleading. The Egyptian language did not have any abstraction for «bow» but used *several* words for different kinds of this weapon, only one of which, referring to the so-called «triple-curved» bow (*st*), came to be associated with the Ancient Sudan. The problem is discussed in A.K. Vinogradov, 'On the Rendering of the Toponym *T3 Stj*', *Chronique d'Égypte*, T. LXXV (2000), pp. 223-234; see also *id.*, 'A Rare Epithet of Amun in the Temple of Sanam: A Comment on the Dedication Stela', *MittSAG*, Heft 21 (2010), SS. 97-105.

3 *Urk.* III, 101-08.

4 *Cf.* H. Schäfer, 'Die aethiopische Königsinschrift des Louvre', *ZÄS*, Bd. 33 (1895), S. 108.

5 A. Wiedemann, *Ägyptische Geschichte*, 2. Teil (*Handbücher der Alten Geschichte*, I, 1; Gotha, 1884), S. 577, Anm. 2.

6 *Urk.* III, 101.

7 H. Schäfer, 'Die sogenannte "Stele de l'excommunication" aus Napata', *Klio*, Bd. 6 (1906), SS. 288-89, Anm. 1.

8 G. A. Reisner, 'Inscribed Monuments from Gebel Barkal', *ZÄS*, Bd. 66 (1931), S. 83, № 51.

9 *PM* VII, 218.

10 M.F.L. Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, Vol. I: *The Inscriptions. Text* (London, 1949), p. 126.

11 *FHN* I, p. 259; *cf.* C. Peust, *Das Napatanische. Ein ägyptischer Dialekt aus dem Nubien des späten ersten vorchristlichen Jahrtausends* (Göttingen, 1999), S. 72.

12 P. Pierret, *Études égyptologiques comprenant le texte et la traduction d'une stèle éthiopienne inédite <...>* (Paris, 1873), p. 97. The name «Maisren» most likely is a mistake of the calligrapher of Pierret's book (published in facsimi-



Fig. 1. Lunette of the Dedication Stele (after E. A. W. Budge, *Annals of Nubian Kings* (*Egyptian Literature*, Vol. II; London, 1912), pl. VIII).

forth later that the stele had been set up in order to commemorate «les dons faits au temple d'Ammon de Napata (*sic!* - A. V.)¹³ par la mère d'Aspalout»,¹⁴ «an endowment made by his queen»,¹⁵ «le transfert fait par lui, à sa fille et à la postérité de celle-ci, d'une fondation qu'il avait d'abord constituée, dans le temple d'Amun à Napata (*sic!* - A. V.), en faveur de sa femme, lorsque celle-ci était devenue prêtresse de ce dieu.»¹⁶

One of the most recent renderings, published in 1994 in the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*, stated that the stele is «recording the investiture of Queen Kheb

(*sc.* princess Henuttakhebit - A. V.)¹⁷ into a priestly office at Sanam»,¹⁸ which, due to the authority of this edition, might give the impression that a certain consensus has been achieved among scholars. Yet, even in 2000 the view that the Dedication Stele «gives an account of Madiqen's induction into the office (of priestess - A. V.)» was still maintained.¹⁹ Thus it is to be admitted that 140 years after the first publication of the monument a student of the Louvre stele still has to face three principal questions:

- a) who was the *subject* of the action,
- b) who or what was the *object* of the action,
- c) what was the *aim* of the action under discussion.

As for the *subject* (performer) of the action, there are at least four different views, depending on the rendering of the key phrase in lines 8-9, which follow the enumeration of titles and proper names of the eleven officials who came to the temple of Amun and precede the statement of the ordinance. According to the generally used (Schäfer's) copy of the text,²⁰

le) for the name of the «king's sister» which is elsewhere rendered by the author as «Matsenen». Since Schäfer's republication of the stele (see note 22 below) this name is usually interpreted as «Madiqen», or similar.

13 The earliest students of the stele believed that one of the temples of the Jebel Barkal sanctuary, usually identified with Napata, is mentioned in the text. It was not before F.L. Griffith's excavations on the site of Sanam, situated on the other bank of the Nile and afterwards for some time referred to as «Contra-Napata» ('Oxford Excavations in Nubia', *LAAA*, Vol. IX (1922), p. 77), that the real localisation of the temple of «Amun-Re, Bull of the Land of the Three-Curved Bow» was established. Worth noting is Griffith's observation that in Aspelta's time «the hierarchy of Napata and the court in Contra-Napata were not on speaking terms» (*ibid.*, p. 79).

14 H. Gauthier, *Le Livre des Rois d'Égypte*, T. IV (*MMFAO* 20; Cairo, 1915), p. 56.

15 E. A. W. Budge, *The Egyptian Sūdân*, Vol. II (London, 1907), p. 66; cf. id., *Annals of Nubian Kings* (*Egyptian Literature*, Vol. II; London 1912), p. xcvi.

16 C. Boreux, Département des antiquités égyptiennes (Musée National du Louvre. Guide-catalogue sommaire, I; Paris, 1932), p. 84.

17 The problems of reading of this princess' name and titulary are discussed in some detail in A.K. Vinogradov, 'The Dedication Stela: The Name of the Kushite Princess', *BzS*, Bd. 7 (Wien, 1999), SS. 119-127.




18 L. Török, 'Adoption Stela of Aspelta. Comments', in Eide T., Hägg T., Pierce R.H., Török L. (eds.), *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*, Vol. 1 (Bergen, 1994), p. 231.

19 Ye. Ye. Kormysheva, *Mir bogov Meroe* (St-Petersburg and Moscow, 2000), pp. 60-61; cf. D.A. Welsby *The Kingdom of Kush. The Napatan and Meroitic Empires* (London, 2002=1998), p. 31.

20 *Urk.* III, 104.



the passage in question, opening the main text of the stele, reads:

(8) <...> 

 <...> (text of the ordinance following).

The earliest students of the stele assumed that the «decree» was announced, *on behalf of the king*, by the grandees who came to the temple and addressed its priests. Thus Paul Pierret, in 1873, translated the statement as «<...> ensemble 11 hommes sont venus au temple d'Ammon-ra, Taureau de la Nubie dire de la part de son royal fils Pharaon aux prophètes et aux divines pères de ce temple (savoir): <...>»²¹

A similar rendering was set forth in Heinrich Schäfer's (re)publication of the text in 1895. In commenting on the passage, however, he pointed out the grammatical vagueness of the phrase on the break of lines 8 and 9: «Den Schluss der Periode muss ich unübersetzt lassen, da ich die Schwierigkeiten, die er bietet, nicht lösen kann. Der gleich folgende Befehl wäre mir als eine Rede der Priester des Tempels schwer verständlich. Er ist ein königlicher Befehl, den die elf Beamten den Priestern überbringen; und das muss in dem Schluss dieses Satzes stehen. Dieselbe Auffassung zeigt auch Pierret's Übersetzung: 'dire de la part du roi (*sic!* - *A. V.*) aux proph. etc.' Wie das aber grammatisch herauszubringen ist, verstehe ich nicht.»²²

When presenting his own line-by-line analysis of the text in the first part of his article, Schäfer opted for leaving out the closing part of the phrase and marked it only by a dotted line.²³ Yet in giving a connected translation at the end of the paper he found a technical means to express his intuitive understanding of the passage and conveyed the part in question by a smaller size of type (here highlighted by underlining - *A. V.*): «Zusammen elf Personen kamen zum Tempel des Amon-Re, des Stieres von Nubien, und sprachen im Auftrag des Königs zu den Propheten und Gottesvätern dieses Tempels: <...>»²⁴



In 1912 a different interpretation was put forward by E.A. Wallis Budge who thought that the ordinance was announced - also *on behalf of the king* - not by the royal officials to the priests (as Pierret and Schäfer thought) but *vice versa*: «<...> In all, eleven men came to the temple of Åmen-Rā, the Bull of Ta-Sti. The servants of the god (*i.e.*, priests) and the divine Fathers of this temple space on behalf of the Majesty Horus Pharaoh [saying]: <...>»²⁵ Explaining this reading, Budge set forth a suggestion that the officials may have come to the temple «to take part in the ceremony connected with the presentation of an endowment of the temple which the Queen Matisen <...> purposed to offer to the god.»²⁶

Still another point of view was expressed in 1994 by Richard H. Pierce in the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*: «<...> a total of eleven men, who came to the temple-compound of Amen-Rê, the Bull of Bowland (Nubia) saying to the majesty of Horus Pharaoh to the prophets and god's-fathers of this temple-compound, <...>»²⁷

On the basis of this rendering László Török, the author of the interpretative commentary to the whole publication, reconstructed a picture of a «royal council» considering «the investiture of Kheb (*i.e.* Henuttakhebit - *A. V.*) into a priestly office held formerly by Madiken.» According to this reconstruction, «<...> the King is presented by the royal council a proposal concerning the appointment. The scene is the Amûn Temple at Sanam, where the King appears personally <...>, and where the council (?) and the investiture are attended by the assembled prophets and god's fathers of the temple.»²⁸

If the text is understood in this way, the *ruling king* turns out to be merely a speechless actor, to whom less than a dozen of *royal* officials dictate what to do with *his* two kinswomen and their *very modest* (see below) property, after which this decision - with no sign of this king's approval - gets the power of a *royal* decree and is commemorated on a *royal* stele. This picture looks very odd indeed.

A complete alternative to the latter view is found in Aylward M. Blackman's 1921 paper 'On the Position of Women in the Ancient Egyptian Hierarchy'. Recounting the text of the stele, the author states that «The Nubian king Aspelta had all his chief officers of State and the priests of Amun lined up in the temple and informed them that he had appointed his daugh-

21 Pierret, *Études égyptologiques*, p. 101, cf. 97. He read the group on the turn of lines as  «son royal fils» which was later corrected by Schäfer into much more logical  «Majesty (of) Horus of <...>». This could simply stand for «Majesty of <...>» (see note 39 below).

22 'Die aethiopische Königsinschrift', S. 107. Schäfer quotes Pierret's translation not quite correctly, perhaps from memory. This does not affect his rendering however.

23 Schäfer, 'Die aethiopische Königsinschrift', S. 107.

24 Schäfer, 'Die aethiopische Königsinschrift', S. 111.

25 Budge, *Annals of Nubian Kings*, p. 107.

26 Budge, *Annals of Nubian Kings*, p. c.

27 R.H. Pierce, 'Adoption Stela of Aspelta. Text and translation', *FHN* I, p. 261.

28 Török, 'Adoption Stela', p. 265.



ter to the office of high-priestess.»²⁹ In this scenario the king himself is not only the director but also the main performer of the action.

Contrasting the interpretation of Blackman with that of Pierce and Török, one should keep in mind that the chronicler, describing the arrival at the Sanam temple of the Kushite king's officials (given with their names and titles), and minutely registering, also with their names and titles, fifteen local priests in their capacity of witnesses, does not say a word about the presence there of king Aspelta or any of the three royal ladies. It might even be assumed from this that the whole action took place *in absentio* of the royal persons.

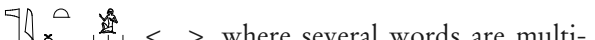



It could be argued that the relief in the lunette shows Aspelta, accompanied by his three kinswomen, making offering to Amun-Re in the latter's Sanam hypostasis (Bull of the Land of the Three-Curved Bow), which could be taken as implying the king's attendance at the temple on the day in question. However, the scene hardly proves the presence of the royals. As a matter of fact, such representations on the official monuments in Kush (and in Egypt, wherefrom this tradition was once borrowed) quite often, if not always, are to be taken as metaphoric, or even allegoric, rather than realistic illustrations to the text which they accompany.³⁰

The answer to the question of who was the subject of the scene under discussion should most likely be looked for in the main text of the stele rather than in the pictorial supplement in the lunette. Yet the passage in question is very difficult to interpret for it seems to have a number of philological «irregularities»,³¹

and it is regrettable that none of the aforementioned scholars explained his rendering, except Schäfer, who expressed his perplexity.

The main difficulty lies in the interpretation of

lines 8 and 9:  (9) 

 <...>, where several words are multi-valued and where the problem hinges on «coordinating» their renderings. Most confusing is the fact that there are two words -  *hr* and  *jn* - that theoretically could be used «to introduce the agent», *i.e.* indicate the person(s) who performed the action in question.³² Their presence could mean that here we have a passive construction *sdm=f*³³ after the introductory word *juw*.³⁴ By curious coincidence the same two words (taking  as an irregular, yet identifiable writing - in the context of the Dedication Stele³⁵ - of the preposition *n*) could be used to express dative. Thus the following readings are theoretically possible:

- 1) «said BY (*hr*) the Majesty of the Pharaoh TO (*jn*) the God's servants and God's fathers», which looks similar to the rendering suggested by Blackman.
- 2) «said TO (*hr*) the Majesty of the Pharaoh BY (*jn*) the God's servants and God's fathers», which is probably what Budge meant.


As we see, only two parties - king and priests - are taking part in the «council» in both cases. The third party, the grantees, seem to be ignored, although they are thoroughly enumerated at the beginning of the text and it is by *their* (rather than the king's) visit to the Amun temple of Sanam that the day of the «council» is dated. This oddity makes both translations rather suspect. Moreover, they can at best be considered *hypothetical*, because the phrase in question just cannot be taken as passive construction since it

neither in the article of K.-H. Priesse («Zur Sprache der ägyptischen Inschriften der Könige von Kusch», *ZÄS*, Bd. 98 (1972), SS. 99-124) nor in the monograph of C. Peust (*Das Napatanische*), two principal generalising studies of the language of the Kushite monuments in Egyptian, in which the roots of the native «Meroitic» language seem gradually to appear.

32 *Wb.* I, 89,1-4; III, 315, 13.

33 A.H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (3rd ed.; London, 1957), § 39; J.P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge, 2000), §§ 14.4.1, 18.6, 21.9.

34 Allen, *Middle Egyptian*, § 21.11.

35 Note the same «pleonastic» writing of the preposition *n* in line 6 and the writing  (*Tks*) for the place name *K3* in line 10.

29 A. M. Blackman, 'On the Position of Women in the Ancient Egyptian Hierarchy', *JEA*, Vol. VII (1921), p. 28.

30 The closest analogy (both as regards chronology and subject) could be the rock relief in Wadi Gasus (V. Vikentiev, 'Les Divines Adoratrices de Wadi Gasus', *ASAE*, T. LII (1954), pp. 150-59, pl. II; cf. G. Schweinfurth, *Alte Baureste und hieroglyphische Inschriften im Uadi Gas s <...>* (Berlin, 1885), Taf. II) showing Psammetichus I in the company of his daughter Neitiqert (Nitocris) and Shepenupet II, «God's Wife» of Amun at Thebes, making oblations to Amun-Re and Min. The scene evidently refers to the induction of Neitiqert into the priesthood by way of her adoption by Shepenupet, arranged by Psammetichus as a diplomatic move in order to gain control of Upper Egypt. According to the Nitocris Stele (R.A. Caminos, 'The Nitocris Adoption Stela', *JEA*, Vol. 50 (1964), pp. 71-100), the princess was *sent* to Thebes by river and departed «from the king's private apartments» (line 7), which means that *the king did not take part* in the ceremony. Thus the scene in Wadi Gasus, representing the three persons together, most likely should be treated as merely symbolic.

31 Quite remarkably, the text of the Dedication Stele for some reason (perhaps as not representative?) was included



begins with *jw=w dd* «They said <...>» and not with *jw dd* «(It was) said <...>». Thus, both conventional readings (together with renderings of both Blackman and Budge) should probably be rejected.

Refusing to consider the words *hr* and *(j)n* as means to introduce the agent in a passive construction we get back to the fact that both could be used as *nota dativi*.³⁶ This usage is implied by Pierce's translation «<...> saying TO (*hr*) the majesty of Horus Pharaoh<, and> TO (*(j)n*) the prophets and god's-fathers of this temple-compound <...>», which looks more acceptable than those of Budge and Blackman. What is very strange, however, is that both words turn out to be used simultaneously in adjacent phrases of the same sentence, whereas one would expect to see only one of them, and besides in the first instance (after «saying»). This stylistic mismatch raises more doubts about this rendering. In view of the context (lack of explicit reference to Aspelta's personal presence in the temple - see above) and the fact that the word *(j)n* is by far more often than *hr* used as *nota dativi* it seems logical to conclude that dative is used only in the second part of this sentence («saying <...> to the prophets and god's fathers»), whereas the word *hr* before «majesty» is to be understood otherwise.

As a consequence, the earliest interpretation of the key phrase, with rendering *hr* as «on behalf»,³⁷ «for»,³⁸ etc., looks preferable due to its «flexibility». The passage could be read as: «A total (of) 11 men came to the temple of Amun-Re, the Bull of the Land of the Three-Curved Bow, and they said, on behalf of the majesty (9) of³⁹ the PHARAOH, to the god's-servants and god's-fathers of this temple, <...>». Thus we are brought to the conclusion that the group of the grandees acting on behalf of the king, but not the king himself, are to be considered as the subject of the action commemorated by the Dedication Stele.

2. Who or what is to be treated as the *object* of the recorded procedure is not quite clear either. The main part of the inscription (*i.e.* the text less the two lists of the participants - officials and priests - which make up more than half of it) is focused on «the king's sister (and) king's wife» Madiqen, or, more precisely, on the allowance assigned to her by

king Anlamani, Aspelta's predecessor, when she was, at sometime in the past, consecrated (lit., «given», «placed») to Amun of Sanam as a temple musician. This allowance, Aspelta's ordinance states, should be conveyed to «the king's daughter (and) king's sister» Henuttakhebit and, eventually, to her successors. Strangely, the text is silent on whether the transfer of Madiqen's maintenance to Henuttakhebit implied that the latter was to replace the former in her office of sistrum-player. Such a conclusion seems probable, yet, strictly speaking, remains but a *conjecture* based on the fact that in line 13 Henuttakhebit is called Madiqen's «great/eldest daughter», which is well attested in Egyptian texts as indication of adoptive relationships between priestesses.⁴⁰



3. The principal riddle of the Dedication Stele is the question of what the aim of the recorded action was. The situation presented in the text is somewhat strange. On the one hand, it is obvious that the ceremony was of major social importance because, as mentioned above, more than half of the text (13 lines out of 23)⁴¹ is made up of a detailed enumeration of the participants in the «council», among whom were 11 of the highest officials of Kush and 15 priests, including the highest ones, of the Sanam temple of Amun. Of much significance is also the fact that the issue of the «council» as a legal document was eventually commemorated by a special stele, which is unparalleled in Kush. On the other hand, the striking paradox of the situation is the «modesty» of the legacy of Madiqen which was to be transferred to Henuttakhebit - a fact already noted by Schäfer, who observed: «Das Gehalt selbst ist nicht übermäßig hoch, es wird wenig mehr als das zum Leben Nothwendige gegeben haben».⁴²

Few scholars have paid attention to Schäfer's remark. Among the earliest were Boris Turayev and Aylword Blackman who, by coincidence, approached the problem from opposite perspectives. Turayev, in 1909, commenting on the Dedication Stele, pointed out that the allowance of Madiqen in the Sanam temple was a far cry⁴³ from that which at about the

36 *Wb.* I, 193; III, 315, 15-17.

37 *Wb.* III, 315, 9-12.

38 K. Jansen-Winkeln, *Spätmittelägyptische Grammatik der Texte der 3. Zwischenzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1996), § 278, b.

39 Taking  in  as determinative to *hm* (cf. *Wb.* III, 91; E.A.W. Budge, *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary* (New York, s.a.), p. 483) rather than ideogram «Horus».

40 Blackman, 'On the Position of Women', p. 18; M.F.L. Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa, Vol. I. The Inscriptions. Text* (London, 1949), pp. 119-20; Caminos, 'The Nitocris Adoption Stela', p. 78.

41 Lines 2-8 (list of officials), 18-23 (list of priests).

42 Schäfer, 'Die aethiopische Königsinschrift', S. 108.

43 In fact the allowances of Madiqen and that of Neitiqert (Nitocris, daughter of Psammetichus I), are just *incommensurate* both literally and figuratively as can be seen from the comparison of their daily rations. However much could make Madiqen's 10 *bia*-bread loaves plus 5 *tebedj* (white bread) loaves, their weight could hardly have

same time was allotted to a «God's Wife» of Amun in Thebes.⁴⁴ Blackman, in 1921, went still further and also compared the ration of the Sanam temple sistrum player with that of a *prisoner* as described in the Egyptian tale, «the Eloquent Peasant». As he stated: «One must certainly agree with Schäfer in regarding this stipend as very modest. The bread would have supplied the needs of only a very small household, while the beer would seem to have been barely enough for the princess alone <...>».⁴⁵

These observations made by the earliest students of the Dedication Stele seem to have been missed, or merely ignored, by most later scholars.⁴⁶ They do, however, deserve much more attention as they may lead us to another paradoxical question: whether the named royal ladies' position in the Amun temple at Sanam was as honorable as scholars usually think. To understand this we should try to ascertain the category of Sanam temple personnel entitled to the allowance referred to in the stele.

All we know in this regard is that the «king's sister (and) king's wife» Madiqen was «given/placed <by> the PHARAOH [A>N]LAMANI before his father Amun, Bull of the Land of the Three-Curved Bow to be sistrum-player, as he (11) gave a (libation) bucket of silver in her right hand, as he gave a sistrum of silver in her left hand, to appease the heart of this

god, as he gave (12) her allowances in(side of) this temple <...> (list of provisions following)».

The descriptive *rjhjt* «to (be) sistrum-player»⁴⁷ is not very informative. Long ago Blackman observed: «The word *ihyt*, <...> is determined with a woman rattling a sistrum, thus indicating what was considered to be a characteristic duty of this officiant.»⁴⁸ Pointing out that in Egypt there were *various* categories of sistrum-players (*hnjt*, *dhn*, etc. with the determinative)⁴⁹ with different status in the priestly hierarchy,⁵⁰ he somehow assumed that the term used in the Dedication Stele was «the title of the high-priestess of Amun of Napata (more correctly would be 'of Sanam' - A. V.)»⁵¹ No proofs were produced apart from a rather confusing⁵² allusion to the relief in the lunette of the stele where three royal ladies «are depicted not merely rattling sistra before the god but also pouring out libations - a very important priestly function».⁵³ Blackman seems to have assumed that the royal persons could only be at the head of the priestly corporation, just as «in theory <...> the Pharaoh was *ex officio* high-priest of every Egyptian divinity, the acting high-priest being his delegate».⁵⁴ The question of how it could happen that *three* high priestesses were functioning in the same temple at the same time (which we seem to see in the relief of the Dedication Stele if we render it «literally»), was never raised in Blackman's study.

Much more recently Török, without going into details of the temple musicians' ranks, seems also to have taken for granted that the office of *jhjt* mentioned in the stele was the highest in the priestesses' hierarchy. He stated that the text refers to «three queens» who, in accordance with the «'adoptive' suc-

been comparable with 2,100 *deben* (191.10 *kg*, according to Ricardo Caminos' calculation) of bread allotted to Neitiqert at her accession as «God's Wife» of Amun at Karnak (Caminos, 'The Nitocris Adoption Stela', p. 96, note to line 30). This difference in the endowments of Neitiqert and Madiqen can hardly be ascribed to the difference in «living standard» in Egypt and in Ancient Sudan only, for the Kushite kings' donations to temples (not to mention their lists of war spoils) look quite impressive. For lists of donations see: Kawa III, cols. 1-21; Kawa VI, cols. 1-14; Dream Stele, line 9; Kawa IX, cols. 59, 66-69, 124; Kawa X, cols. 6-7; Kawa XII, col. 5; Harsiotef Stele, lines 30, 33-55, 66-69, 139; war spoils: Harsiotef Stele, lines 86-88; Nastasen Stele, lines 47-48, 51, 53-54, 56, 58-59.

44 B.A. Turayev, *Istoriya Drevnyago Vostoka: Lektsii, tchitaniya v 1906-1909*, T. II (litograph; [St. Petersburg], s.a.), p. 318; *id.*, *Istoriya Drevnyago Vostoka*, [Part] II: *Kurs, tchitaniya v S[ankt]P[eter]B.[urgskom] Universitete v 1910-1911 g.[odu]* (St. Petersburg, 1912), p. 232-33; *id.*, *Istoriya Drevnyago Vostoka*, Vol. 2 (ed. by V.V. Struve and I.L. Snegiryov; Leningrad, 1935), p. 179.

45 Blackman, 'On the Position of Women', pp. 29-30.

46 It seems that only Török noticed this oddity, stating that: «The presence of the highest economic officials of the land <...> may also suggest that Kheb's revenues were not exhausted by the modest amounts of bread, beer, and oxen <...> but also further, more substantial, incomes might have been secured from domains that were outside the domain in which the Sanam temple was situated» (*FHN* I, p. 126). This of course is a pure guess.

47 In both published facsimiles the second determinative looks more like (C10 «goddess with feather on head») than (B7C) presented in the «standard» copy (Urk. III, 105).

48 Blackman, 'On the Position of Women', p. 20.

49 Blackman, 'On the Position of Women', pp. 9-10. This enumeration could be continued by some other terms like *shmj.t* (*Wb.* IV. 252. 9), *sm'(j).t* (*Wb.* IV. 479. 9, 14), etc.

50 Cf. Blackman, 'On the Position of Women', p. 22: «In the New Kingdom women of all classes, from the highest to the lowest, were attached as musician-priestesses to some temple or other.»

51 Blackman, 'On the Position of Women', pp. 25, 28, 29-30.

52 The word *jhjt* in the Dedication Stele refers neither to the queen-mother *Nnsrws* nor to the princess *Hb* (*i.e.* Nasalsa and Henuttakhebit) but, strictly speaking, only to Madiqen, whom Blackman ('On the Position of Women', p. 25), strangely enough, does not mention at all.

53 Blackman, 'On the Position of Women', p. 25.

54 Blackman, 'On the Position of Women', pp. 10-11.



cession system»,⁵⁵ replaced each other in the office of sistrum player (in their capacity of Amun's priestess, the most important function of a king's wife) having «their priestly role in the renewal of the royal power of their husbands».⁵⁶

The priesthood of each of the «queens», Török maintains, corresponded to the period of kingship of her wife, the procedure of induction into the priestess' office, like the one described in the Dedication Stele, corresponding to the procedure of enthronement of the king. He concludes with the statement that «in Kush the office of the king's wife as sistrum-player of Amûn was modeled on the institution of the Theban God's Wife of Amûn», although in some aspects «the priesthood of the royal wife functioned <...> similarly to the priesthood of New Kingdom queens».⁵⁷ In general Török's considerations appear to be strongly influenced by the elaborate study *Patterns of Queenship* by Lana Troy,⁵⁸ yet the attempts to fit the Kushite material into the Egyptian models (sometimes rather debatable themselves), upon closer investigation, do not seem altogether successful.

First, it must be stressed that it is only Madiqen, one of the three royal ladies referred to in the Dedication Stele, who may be *supposed* (but not asserted) to have been admitted into the office of sistrum-player of Amun of Sanam at *about* the time of an enthronement of a king of Kush (Anlamani, Aspelta's predecessor). The time and circumstances of this event are known only very roughly, the only source being one passage in the text of the Gematen stele of Anlamani stating that: «His Majesty gave/placed his 4 sisters as sistrum-players - one to Amun of Napata, one to Amun-Re of Finding the Aton, one to Amun of Pnubs, one to Amun-Re, Bull of the Land of the Three-Curved Bow - (in order) to rattle the sistrum before them, to pray for life, soundness, health (and) a long life for the king, every day» (Kawa VIII, lines 24-25).⁵⁹ Because this statement has something in common with those of the Dedication Stele (reference to King Anlamani, to (the temple of) Amun of Sanam and to the dedication of a «king's sister» as sistrum-player) scholars usually identify Madiqen with the last of the four sisters «given» to the gods.⁶⁰

55 Török, 'Adoption Stela', p. 268.

56 Török, 'Adoption Stela', p. 267.

57 Török, 'Adoption Stela', p. 268.

58 Cf. L. Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in ancient Egyptian myth and history* (Uppsala, 1986), p. 132 (II.7).

59 Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, pls. 15-16.

60 It is noteworthy that although the text refers to four hypostases of Amun, these are verbally treated as *different* gods, since both the word *ntr* «god» in line 24 and the relevant pronoun of 3rd pers., replacing it in line 25, are used in plural.

The problem with Török's hypothesis, however, is the fact that it is impossible to ascertain the time when the described dedication took place. The reference to the king's sisters' consecration is in the closing part of the text of Anlamani and is preceded not only by a) an account of his council with «friends», in which some probable hints at (but not explicit references to) his enthronement may be found (lines 2-7), but also by: b) an account of the king's journey through his kingdom (lines 7-9); c) an account of his visit to Gematen (lines 9-10), establishing a new priestly office of the «Third god's servant» in the Amun temple there (lines 9-10), and celebrating the «First Festival» of Amun (lines 11-16); d) an account of the military expedition to the land *Bulahau*, and its returning with rich spoils and captives (lines 16-21); and e) an account of the queen-mother's arrival to the royal court, escorted by the king's «friends» sent to fetch her (lines 22-24).

From this list it is clear, first, that in the eyes of the chronicler, the four king's sisters' consecration to the gods was by no means the most important event in the life of the kingdom (as it is mentioned even after the reference to the introducing of a new position of the «Third god's servant» in Gematen), and, second, that it is practically impossible to date this event, because the beginning of the text is destroyed. Thus, any link between this consecration of sisters (which, according to Török's logic, implied their marriage with the king, which would also have taken some time) and the enthronement procedure of Anlamani needs to be verified. In fact, these events could be separated not only by months, but even by years, as some analogies (*e.g.*, the visit of the queen-mother - which is often considered as an element of the enthronement procedure - in the 6th (!) regnal year of king Taharqa) in the royal annals of Kush.

As for the other two royal ladies referred to in the Dedication Stele, the information about their consecration to gods in their capacity of temple musicians is scanty. Unfortunately, no relevant information is available about queen Nasalsa, but it is interesting to note that in the relief on the Anlamani Stele she is depicted, with a sistrum in her hand, standing, together with the king, before Amun-Re of Gematen.⁶¹ On the Election Stele of her son Aspelta she rattles the sistrum before Amun-Re of Napata,⁶² and on the Dedication Stele, of the same period, she plays to Amun-Re of Sanam. Because the Kushites seem

61 Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, pls. 15-16.

62 N.-C. Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes au Musée du Caire. JE 48863-48866. Textes et Indices (Études sur la propagande royale égyptienne, II; le Caire, 1981), pls. V-Va.*



to have considered these three hypostases of Amun to be *three different* deities,⁶³ in accordance with Blackman's and Török's views one would have to conclude that Nasalsa was - simultaneously or successively - the high priestess of three gods in three different temples of Kush. Whether this was possible remains a question.

It is of some importance that the accompanying inscription of Nasalsa in the lunette of the Anlamani Stela, the earliest of the relevant pieces of evidence, states that she is «rattling the sistrum to HER father, that he give HER life».⁶⁴ It follows, therefore, that acting in her capacity of sistrum-player she petitioned for *her own* prosperity, instead of playing her «priestly role in the renewal of the royal power» of her son,⁶⁵ which seems to complicate the theories of Török (or rather, of Troy) still more.

As for Henuttakhebit, it is clear from the Dedication Stele record that she becomes a sistrum-player not at Aspelta's enthronement but in his 3rd regnal year. Török tries to explain this by the hypothesis that Aspelta, after his accession, first married Madiqen, the (supposed) widow of his predecessor Anlamani, who - due to this marriage, remained in the office of high priestess of Amun at Sanam for another three years, after which was replaced by Henuttakhebit, a new wife of the king.

The greatest problem about this interpretation is the fact that Henuttakhebit is referred to in the text not as a new «king's wife», but obviously as a *princess*. As it was recently shown by the present writer, the attribute *hnwt-t3*, alleged in the *Fontes* to be a queenly title «the mistress of the land»,⁶⁶ is merely an element of her personal name (which consequently should be read «Henuttakhebit» and not «Kheb».⁶⁷ This also gives the clue to the otherwise inexplicable fact, often missed by students of the stela, that neither in the text (line 13) nor in the caption to her representation in the lunette is her name written in a royal cartouche. In other words, both in the text and in the relief she is presented as the junior (both literally and metaphorically) of the personages.

The conclusion that *three years after* Aspelta's accession Henuttakhebit became a sistrum-player in the temple of Amun of Sanam, while still remaining a

princess, is fatal for the aforementioned idea that the office of (*jhjt*-)sistrum-player was connected with *queen*-ship, and that «the continuity of royal power was paralleled with the continuity of the office of the queen as priestess of Amûn».⁶⁸

It is further important to notice that many scholars, including Blackman and Török, when speaking about the priesthood mainly focus on the privileged strata of this corporation only,⁶⁹ whereas it is obvious that, both in Egypt⁷⁰ and Kush, the status of different members of temple personnel, including temple musicians - and more narrowly, sistrum-players - could be quite different.

By coincidence in the very temple of Amun-Re in Gematen (Kawa), along with the Anlamani stela, where it was reported that the king dedicated his four sisters to the four hypostases of Amun in order that they «rattle the sistrum before them» (see above), some other sort of evidence was also discovered. The text on the stela Kawa III of king Taharqa (*ca* 690-664), recording some reconstruction works in this temple (in fact much more prestigious than the Amun temple in Sanam) in his regnal years 2-8, informs us that the king «<...> provided his (Amun's - *A. V.*) magazine with servants (and) maid(servant)s, (being) children of captives (or: «chieftains» ? - *A. V.*) from Tjehenu (Libya - *A. V.*) <...> and he filled it (the temple - *A. V.*) with numerous musicians, their sistra in their hands, to rattle the sistrum before his (Amun's - *A. V.*) beautiful face (in order) that he made the requital for this giving him (Taharqa - *A. V.*) all life from himself, all soundness from himself <...>» (cols. 22-24).⁷¹

Another inscription of Taharqa, giving the account of years 8-10, reports that the same temple was again provided with musicians or chantresses (cols 20-21) «to rattle the sistrum before his beautiful face». Neither their names nor their number is again indicated,⁷² but, like their colleagues mentioned in the previous inscription, they almost certainly were captives since they are enumerated among the «numerous maid(servant)s (being) wives of chiefs of North-land (Lower Egypt)» (col. 20), «good gar-

63 See above, note 60.

64 Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, pls. 15-16.

65 That there are no «scribal» errors here may be seen from the fact that an identical caption accompanies a similar representation of the queen-mother Abar rattling sistrum before Amun-Re in two symmetrical scenes in the lunette of king Taharqa's stela Kawa V (Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, pls. 9-10)

66 Török, 'Adoption Stela', p. 260, 266-67.

67 See above, note 17.

68 Török, 'Adoption Stela', p. 267.

69 Cf. A. Lohwasser, 'Die Handlungen der Kuschitischen Königin im Götterkult', *VIIIe Conférence internationale des études nubiennes. Actes. III. Etudes* (Lille, 1998), p. 136.

70 See Blackman's own considerations, quoted above, in note 50.

71 Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, pls. 5-6.

72 Kawa VI, cols. 20-21 (Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, pls. 11-12), cf. *FHN* I, pp. 172-73. Judging by the determinative of plural, these «musicians» were not less than three in number.



deners of the *Mentiu-Sechet*» (cols 20-21) and «men who know their spells (being) children of the chiefs of every land» (col. 21).

Similar practice most likely survived until much later times, for, according to the Great Inscription of king Irikeamannot (5th century B.C.E.) in Gematen, during his visit to Pnubs he presented, among other gifts, to the temple of Amun-Re a certain community of captives («families of the *Murs*»), to serve as «sistrum-carriers»⁷³ (cols 62-63).⁷⁴

As all these examples suggest, the office of sistrum-player did not necessarily imply a privileged position in the temple hierarchy, since it could be «filled» with a captive foreigner. Moreover, it has to be stressed that the term *jhjj.t*, which is of particular interest for us here as the attribute of Madiqen (and may be, of Henuttakhebit), in fact did not even mean «sistrum-player» but seems to have had a *most general meaning* «musician», being cognate with *jhj* (or *jr jhj*) «make music».⁷⁵ Consequently, in order to ascertain the true status of a temple musician it is necessary to clarify the real conditions in which she functioned.

Listing all the relevant data from the Dedication Stele, we get the following facts:

- a) a *representative of the royal family*, perhaps a sister of the *ruling king*,
- b) is «given» into the office of sistrum-player (evidently not the *most prestigious* in the temple hierarchy, since it could be «filled» with an unnamed Kushite or even a captive woman)
- c) in the temple, which, despite its proximity to the temple of Amun of Napata, the main sanctuary of Kush, was not even the second- but the *fourth-best* in prestige,⁷⁶
- d) receiving a *strikingly modest* allowance,
- e) the fact of which being announced *under unprecedentedly pompous conditions* (in presence of the

highest ranking officials and a great number of priests, including the highest in hierarchy),
f) by *order of the king*,

g) but *without the king's personal attendance*, which may point to the *secondary importance* of this office.⁷⁷

Summarising these observations, one may be driven to a paradoxical conclusion: that in the action described in the Dedication Stele we see a sort of political sacrifice by means of which the king perhaps intended to propitiate the god Amun-Re (like king Cepheus in the Greek myth about Andromeda) in view of some political, ecological etc. emergency. On the other hand, because an office with a remarkably modest income (almost «miserable» for a representative of the royal clan) is the focus of the record, an alternative interpretation is also possible: the «dedication» in the case of Madiqen and Henuttakhebit may have meant a deliberate *incapacitating* of the person(s) involved, if not a kind of punishment.

Many examples are known from world history⁷⁸ when «dedication» to a god, or involuntary ritual «cutting» or «tonsuring» (particularly, when this was bound up with priestly celibacy) etc., were used for political purposes. In Kush, where no distinct rule of royal accession seems ever to have existed and where genealogical rights to the throne, as it seems, were often claimed with reference to the female line,⁷⁹ the practice of some kings' marriage with certain of their sisters and dedicating some other sisters to gods (as in the case of the celibate «God's Wives» of Amun in Thebes in the 25th Dynasty period)⁸⁰ could be an

73 For this office see e.g. C.E. Sander-Hansen, *Das Gottesweib des Amun* (København, 1940), S. 37.

74 Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, pl. 24. The phrase may be understood so as if such was also the destiny of three other peoples, *Gr-Imn-št*, *Skšt*, and *Trht*, mentioned before the *Mwʒrś*.

75 *Wb*. I. 122. 1-6 «musizieren».

76 Note the order in which temples are enumerated in the Anlamani Stele (Kawa VIII, line 24). The same temples in exactly the same order are enumerated in the annals of three later Kushite kings as sanctuaries visited by each of them in the course of enthronement procedure, except that instead of the Sanam temple, omitted from these three lists, the temple of the goddess Bast in Taret is referred to in the last two (Great Inscription of Irikeamannot, cols 37, 49, 56; Harsiotef Stele, lines 10-11, 19-20, 20-21, 21-22; Nastasen Stele, lines 12, 22, 25, 32).

77 Blackman, p. 28; f. S.R.K. Glanville, 'The Admission of a Priest of Soknebtynis in the Second Century B.C.', *JEA*, Vol. XIX (1933), p. 40 (a much more late but still relevant an example).

78 Cf. the most popular in the classical world story about the forcible dedication of Silvia Rhea, future mother of Romulus and Remus, to the goddess Vesta (Liv. I. 3). Note also the Middle Age chroniclers' relations about compulsory «tonsuring» of certain kings of the Franks after their dethronement by their political rivals (Crégoire de Tours, *Histoire de Franks*, 2 (Chararic and his son); Éginhard, *Vie de Charlemagne*, 1 (Childeric), etc.).

79 A.K. Vinogradov, 'O mekhanizme prestolonasledovaniya v Kushe', *Meroe*, Vol. 2 (Moscow, 1981), pp. 73-81; K.-H. Priese, 'Matrilinere Erbfolge im Reich von Kusch', *ZÄS*, Bd. 108 (1981), SS. 49-53; A. Lohwasser, 'Queenship in Kush: Status, Role and Ideology of Royal Women', *JARCE*, Vol. XXXVIII (2001), pp. 64-66.

80 Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, pp. 120, 126; F.K. Kienitz, *Die politische Geschichte Ägyptens von 7. bis zum 4. Jahrhundert vor der Zeitwende* (Berlin, 1953), S. 14; E. Drioton, J. Vandier, *l'Égypte* (Paris, 1962), p. 563; J. Leclant, *Recherches sur les monuments thébains de la XXVe dynastie dite éthiopienne*, Texte (Le Caire, 1965), p. 367.



effective means to limit the number of potential rivals in the political struggle for the throne.⁸¹

Aspelta's reign was obviously a period of political struggle, judging by the large number of his and his predecessors' monuments, which exhibit traces of intentional damage.⁸² The explanation suggested by Serge Sauneron and Jean Yoyotte, arguing that these destructions were due to the invasion of the troops of Psammetichus II some time during the reign of Aspelta,⁸³ is compelling, but it does not explain all of the examples of *damnatio memoriae* within the territory of Kush.

Some hints in the text and some peculiar damages in the lunette of the Election Stele of Aspelta,⁸⁴ the discovery of his destroyed stele in the Meroe City⁸⁵ (which the troops of Psammetichus could hardly have reached) and the existence of such a monument as the Stele of Excommunication,⁸⁶ often attributed to his reign as well, tend to show that this was certainly a period of internal political - perhaps, dynastic - conflict. It is not at all unthinkable that Aspelta's kinswomen, Madiqen and Henuttakhebit (because of the vagueness and reticence of Egyptian kinship terms used in Kushite texts, the real relationships between them are still rather uncertain) may somehow have been involved in these events to the displeasure of the king.

It is no surprise that, because of the two royal ladies' descent, the transfer of Madiqen's moderate allowance, and *probably* her duties as sistrum-player in the Sanam temple, to Henuttakhebit is described rather pompously, with due observance of legal norms. The formality and dignity of the stele, however, may conceal an actual situation in which the women are consigned to a golden cage or placed

in golden fetters, in which, as some classical writers allege, the prisoners in Aithiopia were kept.⁸⁷

Yet, just like in European societies where the «taking of monastic vows» and «taking the veil» sometimes was followed by voluntary «unfrocking» of the person involved,⁸⁸ the dedication to god in Kush probably did not imply a *life* service. From the Dedication Stele itself it seems to follow that Madiqen, after her allowance was transferred to Henuttakhebit, would no longer retain her office of *jhj.t*-sistrum-player (if only she was still alive at that time).⁸⁹

The same probably happened with Henuttakhebit herself, as some finds in the royal necropolis at Nuri suggest. Among a few artefacts found in tomb Nu. 28 (attributed to Henuttakhebit by George A. Reisner), plundered already in antiquity, were eleven fragments of «thin sheet electrum with traces of an incised hieroglyphic inscription, of which only the group 'King's Mother' can be read».⁹⁰ On the basis of this find, the assumption was made that eventually Henuttakhebit married a king and even became a queen-mother. However tempting it is, this view must be taken with caution, since there is no personal name in the aforementioned inscription. As a matter of fact, this object could have belonged to someone else, like queen Nasalsa, who is often considered Henuttakhebit's «physical» mother. Or it may have been introduced into the tomb by plunderers from some other tomb of this necropolis.⁹¹

Much more reliable pieces of evidence were obtained in tomb Nu. 25, built for a certain Maletaral II. Among the things introduced by plunderers from adjacent tombs and eventually lost or abandoned, were found several *ushabti* figurines (four intact and three in fragments) made for Henuttakhebit.⁹²

81 Vinogradov, 'O mekhanizme prestolonasledovaniya', pp. 77-78.

82 J. Yoyotte, S. Sauneron, 'Le martelage des noms royaux éthiopiens et la campagne nubienne de Psametik II', *BSFE*, 2 (1949), pp. 45-49; J. Yoyotte, 'Le martelage des noms royaux éthiopiens par Psammétique II', *RdÉ*, T. 8 (1951), pp. 215-239.

83 S. Sauneron, J. Yoyotte, 'La campagne nubienne de Psammétique II et sa signification historique', *BIFAO*, T. L (1952), pp. 157-207.

84 A.K. Vinogradov, 'The Erasures on the Election Stela: A Consideration on the Causes', *8th International Conference for Meroitic Studies. Pre-prints of the main papers and abstracts* (London, 1996), pp. 152-153.

85 F.W. Hinkel, 'Temple Complex Meroe 245-253', in R. Dehlin, T. Hägg (eds.), *Sixth International Congress for Nubian Studies. Abstracts and Communications* (Bergen, 1986), p. 58.

86 Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls. VIII-IX, pp. 36-39.

87 Herod. III, 22-23; Heliod. *Aeth.* IX, 2.

88 Cf. the unambiguous hint in the story about the («ton-sured») king Chararic and his son in Grégoire de Tours, *Histoire de Francs*, 2. Of some relevance may also be a much later precedent of Grigoriy Otrepyev (*Pseudo-Dmitriy I*), an «unfrocked» monk, who ruled Russia in 1604-1605 (cf. R.G. Skrynnikov, *Boris Godunov* (Moscow, 1983), pp. 155-182).

89 Noteworthy are some details of Madiqen's designation, discussed in A.K. Vinogradov, 'On the Titulary of the "King's Sister" Madiqen', *MittSAG*, Heft 20 (2009), SS. 167-68.

90 D. Dunham, *Nuri (The Royal Cemeteries of Kush)*, Vol. II; Boston, 1955), pp. 127-128, 17-3-448.

91 Dunham, *Nuri*, p. 159, note under 17-2-1887; cf. G.A. Reisner, 'Preliminary Report on the Harvard-Boston Excavations at Nuri: The Kings of Ethiopia After Taharqa', *Harvard African Studies II (Varia Africana II)*; Cambridge/Massachusetts, 1918), p. 14.

92 Dunham, *Nuri*, p. 159, 17-2-1882, with a note.



In the inscriptions on these figurines she is referred to as «king's wife», her *complete* name (and not the final element «Kheb» only - see above) being quite logically written in a royal cartouche,⁹³ which incidentally occurs on some other objects of hers too.⁹⁴ Thus, it is clear that the lady, mentioned in the text on the Dedication Stele as princess, eventually became a queen. Who her spouse was and whether she had any descendants remain unknown.

The fact that the stele, mentioning Henuttakhebit's «taking the veil» in her capacity of (*jhjj.t-*) sistrum-player, survived quite safe, unlike many monuments of king Aspelta, at whose order the consecration took place, probably means that she and her advocate(s) eventually found themselves among the victors.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Eines der undurchsichtigsten Schriftdokumente des antiken Sudan ist die Stele Louvre C257, die in das 3. Regierungsjahr des kuschitischen Königs Aspelta datiert und unter verschiedenen Namen bekannt ist. Unter anderem wird es die „Weihestele“ genannt. Der Text der Stele ist unklar und hat viele philologische Unregelmäßigkeiten, daher sind viele ihrer Aussagen in der Forschung unterschiedlich interpretiert worden.

Das hauptsächliche Rätsel der Stele ist die Frage nach dem Ziel der darauf geschilderten Handlung. Die Situation, die im Text geschildert wird, ist seltsam:

- a) ein Repräsentant der königlichen Familie, vielleicht die Schwester eines herrschenden Königs, namens Henuttakhebit, wurde so wie ihre „Adoptivmutter“ Madiqen vor ihr
- b) in das Amt der Sistrumspielerin „gegeben“ (anscheinend nicht das prestigeträchtigste Amt in der Tempelhierarchie, da es auch mit gefangenen ausländischen Frauen besetzt werden kann, wie es Texte des Taharqa zeigen)
- c) in den Amun-Tempel von Sanam, der im Ansehen der Tempel von Kusch nur an vierter Stelle steht
- d) und bekommt einen nahezu elenden Unterhalt (insbesondere für ein Mitglied der königlichen Familie)
- e) was andererseits unter unvergleichlich pompösen Konditionen verkündet wird (in Gegenwart

der höchsten Funktionäre und einer großen Zahl an auch höchstrangigen Priestern)

f) auf Anordnung des Königs Aspelta
g) aber ohne seine persönliche Anwesenheit (obwohl die gegenteilige Meinung unlängst in der Literatur geäußert wurde), was auf die Zweitrangigkeit dieses Amtes deutet.

Wenn man diese Beobachtungen zusammenfassend betrachtet, kann man daraus schließen, dass wir mit den in der Weihestele geschilderten Handlungen entweder mit einer Art eines politischen Opfers zu tun haben, mit dem Aspelta den Gott Amun-Re in einem politischen oder ökologischen Notfall beruhigen wollte, oder mit einer bewussten Entmündigung, wenn nicht Bestrafung der Henuttakhebit.

Die Weltgeschichte kennt viele Beispiele, dass die Zueignung an einen Gott (besonders, wenn es mit priesterlichem Zölibat verbunden ist) für politische Zwecke genutzt wurden. In Kusch, wo es keine eindeutige Thronfolgeregelung gab und wo genealogische Thronrechte anscheinend oft über die weibliche Linie beansprucht wurden, war die Praxis der Ehe des Königs mit bestimmten Schwestern und die Überantwortung anderer Schwestern an einen Gott eine effektive Möglichkeit, die Zahl der potentiellen Rivalen im politischen Streit um den Thron einzudämmen.

Einige Hinweise im Text und bestimmte Aushakungen im Giebelfeld der Wahlstele des Aspelta, der Fund seiner zerstörten Stele in Meroe-City und die Existenz einer Stele wie die Exkommunikationsstele, die ebenfalls oft in seine Regierungszeit datiert wird, zeigen, dass die Regierungszeit des Aspelta eine Periode der internen politischen, möglicherweise dynastischen, Zusammenstöße war. Es kann nicht ausgeschlossen werden, dass Aspeltas Verwandte Henuttakhebit und Madiqen in diese Zusammenstöße involviert waren.

Es ist nicht überraschend, dass wegen der königlichen Abstammung der beiden königlichen Frauen der Transfer von Madiqens sehr bescheidenem Unterhalt im Sanam-Tempel und ihrer Aufgaben als Sistrumspielerin an Henuttakhebit so hochtrabend geschildert ist, wobei die Rechtsnorm gebührend beachtet wurde. Die Zweideutigkeit der Situation kann aber auch die Assoziation mit dem Geleit in einem goldenen Käfig oder in goldene Fesseln erwecken.

Doch wie in europäischen Gesellschaften das Gelübde oder der Schleier manchmal mit einer freiwilligen „Degradierung“ der involvierten Person einhergegangen ist, implizierte die Weihung an einen

93 Dunham, *Nuri*, pp. 128, Fig. 95; 262, Fig. 206; cf. Reisner, 'Preliminary Report', p. 12, XXVIII-b, pl. X, 1.

94 Reisner, 'Preliminary Report', p. 12, XXVIII-a, pl. X, 1.



Gott in Kusch nicht ein Lebensamt. Aus der Weihestele folgt, dass Madiqen, nachdem ihr Unterhalt an Henuttachebit übertragen wurde, nicht länger ihr Amt als Sistrumspielerin ausübte. Dasselbe geschah vielleicht mit Henuttachebit. In den Inschriften auf ihren in der königlichen Nekropole von Nuri gefundenen Uschebtis ist sie als „Königsgemahlin“ bezeichnet. Das heißt, dass die königliche Person, die in der Weihestele als Prinzessin bezeichnet wird,

möglicherweise Königin wurde. Wer ihr Gemahl war und ob sie Nachkommen hatte, bleibt unbekannt.

Das Faktum, dass die Stele mit der Schilderung, dass Henuttachebits als Sistrumspielerin „den Schleier nimmt“, im Gegensatz zu anderen Denkmälern des Aspelta so sicher erhalten blieb, auf dessen Order hin die Weihung stattgefunden hat, bedeutet vielleicht, dass sie und ihre Befürworter sich unter den Siegern befunden haben.

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