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## A CASE OF DIALING THE WRONG NUMBER - THE FAILED HUMAN APPEAL TO RA IN ASPELTA'S ELECTION STELA (CAIRO JE 48866)<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

The Election Stela dated to year 1 of the Napatan king Aspelta, a ruler who reigned during the early part of the 6th century B.C. over the independent kingdom of Kush,<sup>2</sup> should doubtless be considered one of the most important royal Kushite inscriptions of the Second Dynasty of Napata (7th-4th Centuries BC).<sup>3</sup> On the political and religious plane, no other Nubian primary source of the first millennium BC supplies so much information on the various procedures for the ceremony of royal investiture and on the distinctive divine mode of election of a Napatan king.

The facsimile drawing and photographic reproduction of the Election Stela of king Aspelta, registered in the Cairo Museum as No. JE 48866 but exhibited today in the Nubian Museum in Aswan, were published more than 30 years ago by Nicolas Grimal.<sup>4</sup> Testimony to the text's significance is its inclusion in a number of anthologies over the last fifty years. A complete translation of the inscription

was thus given by G. Roeder (1961),<sup>5</sup> F. Kammerzell (1986),<sup>6</sup> R.H. Pierce (1994),<sup>7</sup> L. Török (2002),<sup>8</sup> S. Burstein (2009)<sup>9</sup> and R. Ritner (2009).<sup>10</sup> Specific aspects of the text, revolving around the key question of the extent of the Egyptian influence on Nubian practices, were treated in various studies. They dealt mostly with iconographic features of Napatan royal and divine rites, the importance of the role of the king's brothers as potential heirs to the throne, the emphasis on the king's mother and maternal ascendancy in the genealogy of the king, as well as the crucial role played both by the human sphere and the god Amen-Ra of Napata in choosing the future ruler.<sup>11</sup> Comparatively little has been written,

1 The present article is an updated and expanded version of papers given at the *Scholars' Colloquium of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* held in Toronto in 2007, the 59th annual *American Research Center in Egypt* meeting in Seattle (2008) and the Master2/Doctorate seminar of Prof. Valbelle at the Sorbonne in Paris in 2011. We wish to acknowledge the financial support provided for this research by the Fonds Québécois de la Recherche sur la Société et la Culture (FQRSC). We are also indebted to some scholars for their valuable comments on the draft of this paper, either in its form (P. Brand) or its content (P. Vernus, N. Grimal and J. Pope).

2 For an overall view of his reign, C. Bonnet, D. Valbelle, *The Nubian Pharaohs: Black Kings on the Nile* (Cairo, 2007), p. 155-171.

3 Within this period spanning over four centuries, Aspelta's reign is certainly the best documented one. See *FHN I*, p. 229-279, to which must also be added the newly discovered stela of Year 3 from Doukki Gel. D. Valbelle, *Les stèles de l'an 3 d'Aspelta*. *BdE* 154 (Le Caire, 2012).

4 N.-C. Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes au Musée du Caire*. *JE* 48863-48866. *Textes et indices*. *MIFAO* 106 (Le Caire, 1981), p. 21-35, pl. Va-pl. VII.

5 G. Roeder, *Der Ausklang der ägyptischen Religion mit Reformation, Zauberei und Jenseitsglauben* (Zürich-Stuttgart, 1961), p. 380-391.

6 F. Kammerzell, 'Die Wahl des Meroitischen Königs Aspelta', in F. Kammerzell, H. Sternberg (eds.), *Ägyptische Prophetien und Orakel. Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments, II/1: Religiöse Texte. Deutungen der Zukunft in Briefen, Orakeln und Omina* (Gütersloh, 1986), p. 117-122.

7 *FHN I* (Bergen, 1994), p. 232-244.

8 L. Török, *The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art. The construction of the Kushite mind (800 BC-300 AD)* *ProbÄg* 18 (Leiden/Boston/Köln, 2002), p. 422-439 (the entire text is not systematically translated, but most parts are; the translation is actually Pierce's from *FHN*).

9 S. Burstein (ed.), *Ancient African Civilizations. Kush and Axum* (Princeton, 2009), p. 27-32. The translation is also Pierce's. Earlier editions of this book, originally published in 1997 under the same title, did not contain the translation of the Aspelta Election Stela.

10 R. K. Ritner, *The Libyan Anarchy. Inscriptions from Egypt's Third Intermediate Period* (Atlanta, 2009), p. 449-455.

11 To cite some of the most recent publications in relation to these matters (in chronological order): S. Allam, 'Observations sur les oracles', in *Hommages à Jean Leclant, vol. 4. Varia. BdÉ* 106/4 (Le Caire, 1993), p. 1-8; E. Kormysheva, 'Das Inthronisationsritual des Königs von Meroe', in R. Gundlach, M. Rochholz (eds.), *Ägyptische Tempel - Struktur, Funktion und Programm (Akten der Ägyptologischen Tempeltagungen in Gosen 1990 und in Mainz 1992)*, *HÄB* 37 (Hildesheim, 1994), p. 187-210,



however, about the role played by the god Ra at the beginning of the text; it is with the intent of bridging this gap that the present article has been written.

### 1. GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE MONUMENT AND A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF ITS CONTENT

The granite stela discovered in 1862 in the Gebel Barkal,<sup>12</sup> on which this inscription is engraved, measures 160 cm in height and 70 cm in width; it contains 30 lines of inscription. In the scene carved at the top of the monument<sup>13</sup> (fig. 1), king Aspelta kneels before the ram-headed god Amen of Napata (*Imn Np.t*) who is sitting on a throne behind him, holds out his hand above the head of the ruler, in a gesture of protection. Mut, Amen's spouse, stands behind the god, while the king's mother, presumably Nasalsa,<sup>14</sup> shakes a pair of sistras in front of her son.

The text opens with a gathering of army officers and high-ranking civil officials who announce that the moment had come to choose a new sovereign

from among themselves, following the death of the previous king Anlamani whose name has been erased on the stela (lines 1-7). Incapable of recognizing whom, among the persons present in the assembly, should become the new ruler, four individuals suggest one after the other to turn to the god Ra for advice (lines 7-10). Regrettably for the people present at the gathering, Ra remains obstinately silent. The assembly is at a loss to explain the absence of any reaction from the part of the god. People simply repeat in unison: « our ruler is here with us, but we do not know him! » (line 11).

Suddenly, as if struck by a sudden intuition that allows it to find the appropriate solution, the assembly decides to seek help from the Nubian dynastic god, Amen-Ra of Napata. There follows four eulogies recited in honour of the god Amen-Ra of Napata (lines 11-14) who, moved by all the praise addressed to him, reaches out to his people by electing the future king among the *sn.w nsw*, « royal brothers », though not before rejecting a first round of unsuccessful candidates (lines 14-22). Amen-Ra then proceeds to crown Aspelta (lines 22-27) who later appears in front of his subjects who acclaim him (lines 28-30).

### 2. RA OR AMEN-RA OF NAPATA AS THE DIVINE ELECTOR OF THE NUBIAN KING ASPELTA

Let us turn our attention back to the passage at the beginning of the inscription, in which the assembly seeks divine advice for the succession of the deceased king Anlamani:

« (7) Then one said to his companion among them (*ḥ<sup>c</sup>.n dd.in w<sup>c</sup> n snnw=f n-im=sn*): 'No one knows him (i.e. the future king) (*nn rh sw bw nb*), **since it is the decision of Ra himself** (*wp(w.t) R<sup>c</sup> pw ds=f*). He drives away all evil from him in every place in which he is'. Then (8) one said to his companion among them: 'Ra rests in (the Place of) Life, after he has crowned (iw stn=f sw) him from amongst us'.<sup>15</sup> Then said one to his companion among them: 'That is right. It has been the decision of Ra (*wp(w.t) pw n.t R<sup>c</sup>*) **since (9) heaven came into being** (*dr hpr p.t*) **and since crowning the king came into being** (*dr hpr stnw nsw*). He has (always) given it to his son whom he loves (*s3=f mr=f*) because the king among the living is the image of Ra (*hr-nty twt pw n R<sup>c</sup> nsw imy ḥnhw*). Ra is the one who places him in this land in the desire that his land be set in order'. Then (10) one said to his

*passim*; L. Török, *FHN I* (Bergen, 1994), p. 244-251; U. Verhoeven, 'Amun zwischen 25. Männern und zwei Frauen. Bemerkungen zur Inthronisationsstele des Aspelta' in A. Schoors, W. Clarysse, C. Vanderleyen (eds.), *Egyptian Religion. The last thousand years. In Memoriam Jan Quaegebeur. OLA 85/2* (Leuven, 1998), p. 1487-1501; J. Revez, 'L'élection du roi napatéen Aspelta d'après la Stèle de l'Intronisation. Continuité et rupture avec la tradition pharaonique', *Revue d'Études des Civilisations Anciennes du Proche-Orient* 9 (2000), p. 5-21; A. Lohwasser, 'Die Auswahl des Königs in Kusch', *BzS* 7 (2000), p. 85-102; L. Török, *The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art. The construction of the Kushite mind (800 BC-300 AD)*. *ProbÄg* 18 (Leiden/Boston/Köln, 2002), p. 422-439; A. Lohwasser, 'Die Ahnenreihe des Aspelta', *IBAES V* (2005), p. 147-154; A. Lohwasser, 'Fremde Heimat. Selektive Akkulturation in Kusch', in E. Czerny & al. (eds.), *Timelines. Studies in Honour of Manfred Bietak, vol. III*. *OLA* 149 (Leuven, 2006), p. 133-138; E. Kormysheva, *Gott in seinem Tempel. Lokale Züge und ägyptische Entlehnungen in der geistigen Kultur des Alten Sudan* (Moskau, 2010), p. 33-36 and *passim*; J. Hallof, 'Die nubischen Königsmacher', in H. Beinlich (ed.), "Die Männer hinter dem König". 6. *Symposium zur ägyptischen Königsideologie* (Wiesbaden, 2012), p. 47-52; J. Osing, 'L'élection divine du roi', in C. Zivie-Coche, I. Guermeur (eds.), « *Parcourir l'éternité* ». *Hommages à Jean Yoyotte. Tome II* (Turnhout, 2012), p. 878-879; J. Pope, 'The Problem of Meritefnut: A "God's Wife" During the 25th-26th Dynasties', *JEGH* 6 (2013), p. 197-201; J. Pope, *The Double Kingdom under Taharqa. Studies in the History of Kush and Egypt, c.690-664 BC* (Leiden/Boston, 2014), p. 219-223.

12 On the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the stela, G. Maspéro in A. Mariette-Pacha, *Monuments divers recueillis en Égypte et en Nubie* (Paris, 1889), p. 1.

13 Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls. V-Va.

14 Contra, Lohwasser, *Die Ahnenreihe des Aspelta*, p. 152.

15 Use of *iw* as a circumstantial converter followed by the *sdm=f* „perfective » form.



Fig. 1: lunette of Aspalta Election Stela Cairo JE 48866 (Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pl. I)

**companion among them:** ‘Ra will not enter heaven, while his throne is bereft of a ruler, for his excellent office is (still) here in his hands. He has given it to his son whom he loves (*s3=f mr=f*) because Ra knows that he will make good laws on his throne’. (11) Then this entire assembly was worried (*wn.in mšc pn r 3w=f hr mh.t*), saying: Our lord is here with us, but we do not know him ».

« Then His Majesty’s entire assembly said with one voice (*wn.in mšc n.w hm=f <hr> dd r 3w=sn m r3 w<sup>c</sup>*): ‘But there is (still) this god **Amen-Ra, Lord of the Thrones of Two-Lands, who resides in the Pure Mountain** (*dw w<sup>c</sup>b*) (i.e Gebel Barkal) - He is the god of **Kush** (*ntr pw n Kš*). (12) Come, let us go to him. We cannot accomplish anything without him, (for) an affair carried out without him cannot be good, while an event in the hand of the god is successful. He has been the god of the kings of **Kush** (*ntr pw n nsy.w n Kš*) **since the time of Ra** (*dr rk R<sup>c</sup>*). It is he that guides us. (13) The kings of **Kush** (*nsy.w n.w Kš*) have (always) been in his hands. He has (always) given (it) to (his) son whom he loves (*s3=f mr=f*). Let us give praise to him!’ »<sup>16</sup>

This excerpt has been interpreted by historians in various ways. L. Török notes simply that the legitimization of the new king is expressed in terms reminiscent of New Kingdom royal ideology, which emphasizes the divine solar sonship of the sovereign.<sup>17</sup> E. Kormysheva considers that ritualistic features of the enthronement of king Aspelta mix both Nubian and Egyptian practices.<sup>18</sup> U. Verhoeven, who has dealt in depth with this excerpt, sees in Ra an Egyptian god whose cosmic importance is still recognised by the locals, but whose efficacy on the practical level is limited by the abstract nature of his personality.<sup>19</sup>

As we shall see below, while agreeing for the most part with U. Verhoeven, we are inclined to push farther still her argumentation and to propose a line of reasoning that deviates somewhat from her own understanding of the text. Her point of view implies that the respective roles of Ra and Amen-Ra of Napata described in the text quoted above are in some measure complementary and mutually beneficial;

16 With a few exceptions, our translation is based on FHN I, 235-237; IV, 1231.

17 Török, FHN I, p. 246-248, 252.

18 Kormysheva, ‘Das Inthronisationsritual des Königs von Meroe’, p. 188-192.

19 Verhoeven, ‘Amun zwischen 25. Männern und zwei Frauen’, p. 1491-1494.



we are rather inclined to believe that the aim of this whole section of the text is to portray the Egyptian god Ra as an inept kingmaker, in sharp contrast to the Nubian supreme being Amen-Ra of Napata whose timely and successful intervention is further in the text, by contrast, presented as providential.

A clear-cut distinction is indeed made along this line of reasoning inside the text quoted above. In the first paragraph that exposes the committee's anguish due to the absence of divine help, Ra is quoted no fewer than seven times, while no allusion is made here to Amen-Ra of Napata at all. The model described in the first section of the excerpt is essentially Egyptian, where Ra traditionally holds a predominant position and plays an active role in choosing a new king. Formulations such as „He has (always) given it (i.e. the office of kingship) to his son whom he loves because the king among the living is the image of Ra (line 9 of the text)“ refer without ambiguity to the divine election of the king by his father Ra according to traditional Egyptian solar theology, but not necessarily as we shall argue, from the perspective of Kushite royal ideology. Most significantly, as if to stress this last point, the word „Kush“ appears on four occasions in the second paragraph (but not at all in the first one) that deals exclusively with the Nubian version of Amen-Ra who, as the genuine designator of the new ruler, becomes henceforth the central and domineering figure. Thus, in our view, the text seeks to illustrate a paradigm shift along ethnic lines as to the way a Napatan king is divinely elected.

On the other hand, one could argue that the predominant position of Amen-Ra of Napata at the top of the divine hierarchy is not new, since in line 12 quote above, the text states that „he [Amen-Ra of Napata] has been the god of the kings of Kush since the time of Ra“. The expression „dr rk R“ „since the time of Ra“ does imply that electing the Nubian king through Amen-Ra of Napata is a practice dating back to primeval times, when Ra ruled over the universe before the advent of pharaonic kingship.<sup>20</sup> Even though this expression must be understood as a figure of speech, the fact that

Amen-Ra of Napata did play a major role in Kushite ideology before Aspelta is undeniable, as strong epigraphic and iconographic evidence for this god during the 25th Dynasty and its immediate aftermath in Nubia clearly shows.<sup>21</sup> Still, in our view, no royal narrative other than Aspelta's Election Stela wishes to emphasize Amen-Ra's of Napata key role as the divine elector of the new Nubian king to such a great extent, while using another god (Ra in our case) as a foil to enhance the qualities of the other deity.

### 3. LONE VOICES NO LONGER IN TUNE WITH THE TIMES

U. Verhoeven emphasizes various features, both in form and content, that mark the action described above. First of all, she considers the fact that four anonymous members of the commission speak alternately in the first paragraph as a clear sign of a chaotic situation in which the absence of a clearly defined hierarchy makes it impossible for a true leader to stand out and make a decision, a clear illustration of the « herd without its herdsman » *topos* stated in line 5.<sup>22</sup> She also interprets the four discourses as being part of a true debate (« Debatte ») or discussion of the situation (« Lagebesprechung ») over the role of the Egyptian god Ra as kingmaker.<sup>23</sup> In her view, the justification for the assembly to turn away from Ra in order to seek counsel elsewhere, is the realization that the solar god's essentially cosmological nature hinders his efficiency on a more pragmatic level, such as that of choosing a future earthly leader.<sup>24</sup>

A. Lohwasser, who has studied this text on numerous occasions, comes to a similar conclusion: the assembled « people discussed the succession to the throne, without previously consulting the god », a cultural trait that she sees as typically Kushite, since in Ancient Egypt proper one would have gone directly to the god to seek its oracle, without having deliberated beforehand as to who the next king might be.<sup>25</sup> L. Török rejects the idea of an « anachronistically democratic practice »,<sup>26</sup> but sees

20 On the origin and significance of the expression *dr rk R'*, U. Luft, „Seit der Zeit Gottes“, *StuAeg* 2 (1976), p. 47-78, esp. 66-73; P. Vernus, *Essai sur la conscience de l'Histoire dans l'Égypte pharaonique* (Paris, 1995), *passim*; J. Tait, 'Introduction - '...since the time of the gods'', in J. Tait (ed.), *Never Had the Like Occurred: Egypt's view of its past* (London, 2003), p. 1-13; E. P. Uphill, 'The ancient Egyptian view of world history', in *ibid*, p. 15-29. Whether accidental or intentional is the specific choice of Ra as the god whose ancient time is here mentioned is open to question, since there were numerous similar ways of formulating this expression (cf. references above).

21 References to that question are too numerous to cite. Cf. I. Guerneur, *Les cultes d'Amon hors de Thèbes. Recherches de géographie religieuse* (Paris, 2005), p. 525-539; Kormysheva, Gott in seinem Tempel, esp. p. 21-42, and its bibliography on the subject.

22 Verhoeven, 'Amun zwischen 25. Männern und zwei Frauen', p. 1491.

23 *Ibid*, p. 1494.

24 *Ibid*, p. 1493-1494.

25 Lohwasser, 'Die Auswahl des Königs in Kusch', p. 86-87.

26 L. Török, *The Birth of an Ancient African Kingdom*.



instead a « liturgical drama »<sup>27</sup> being played out, where the « council scene contains several speeches which present a summary of the principal concepts of Kushite kingship ideology ».<sup>28</sup>

Although we believe that the principles of Egyptian (rather than Kushite) royal ideology are here expounded, we share L. Török's view that no real deliberation is actually taking place here, for two additional reasons.

First, by definition, a serious debate over a public question in an assembly involves people expressing opposing viewpoints. Arguments and counter-arguments in such cases should normally be put forward in order to determine all possible options. On the contrary, in the Election Stela, no such disputation takes place; all four proposals formulated by the members of the assembly arrive at one and the same conclusion (albeit for slightly different reasons): it is to Ra that they must turn in order to seek out the new king.

Secondly, there is also the obvious inconsistency and discrepancy between the apparent decision reached by the speakers (to contact Ra) and the action they take immediately thereafter by seeking, instead, the advice of Amen-Ra of Napata. Neither a formal explanation, nor the slightest explicit indication is given by the people gathered to justify such a spectacular change of heart, which is all the more surprising if the main purpose of the assembly had genuinely been deliberative.<sup>29</sup>

Seen in this light, it seems to us more likely that the repetitive use of the formula (*ḥ<sup>c</sup>.n dd.in w<sup>c</sup> n snnw=f n-im=sn*) « Then said one to his companion among them » illustrates the involvement in the give-and-take of only a few people scattered in the crowd; combined with the unanswered calls to the Egyptian deity Ra, this situation would in fact indicate the confusion of some individuals that are no longer in tune with their times and who desperately seem to hang on to an obsolete model for the transmission of power. In sharp contrast to this is the consensus that prevails afterwards within the assembly, when it finally turns to Amen-Ra of Napata in order to elect the future sovereign. This newly found unity, as illustrated by the phrase « Then His Majesty's

entire assembly said with one voice » (*wn.in m<sup>sc</sup> n.w ḥm=f <hr> dd r 3w=sn m r3 w<sup>c</sup>*), is the spontaneous manifestation of the collective consciousness of a new political and religious Kushite reality, where Amen-Ra of Napata comes to the forefront.

#### 4. A CALL FOR HELP THAT FALLS ON DEAF EARS

If the motive for this sudden turn of events is nowhere plainly stated in the text, it is most probably due to factors that are totally independent of the assembly's intentions or discourse, and have little to do with the committee *per se*. In our opinion, the fundamental reason for the reversal of the commission's stance lies squarely with the attitude of the god Ra, or to be more accurate, with the total lack of response on his part.

The situation is indeed quite intriguing, not to say outright paradoxical. By uttering the four short eulogies in honor of Ra, the public speakers hope to reach the solar deity and coax him into intervening in favor of one candidate or another. For all the good will directed toward him, Ra remains disquietingly silent. The assembly reacts with great anxiety to the god's unresponsiveness, as the sentence in line 11 clearly shows: « Then this entire assembly was worried (*wn.in m<sup>sc</sup> pn r 3w=f hr mh.t*), saying: 'Our lord is here with us, but we do not know him' ».<sup>30</sup>

What kind of reaction should the crowd have expected from the god in the first place? One could conjecture that the human community was waiting for an *omen* or prophetic sign (*bi3y.t*<sup>31</sup>) that could

30 We prefer to go along with the translation of the verb *mhi* as given by Roeder (Der Ausklang der ägyptischen Religion, p. 385), K.-H. Priese ('Zur Sprache der ägyptischen Inschriften der Könige von Kusch', ZÄS 98 (1972), p.115) « sich Sorgen machen », Grimal (Quatre stèles napatéennes, p. 79) « se faire du souci », Kammerzell ('Die Wahl des Meroitischen Königs Aspelta', p. 119) « zutiefst bekümmert », Pierce (FHN I, p. 236 and Burstein (ed.), Ancient African Civilizations, p. 29) « was concerned », than by Ritner's (Libyan Anarchy, p. 453) « This entire army then considered it, saying ».

This is actually the second time around that the committee shows deep concern over the absence of any divine reaction to its plea, since the same sentence (with the addition of *sp.sn* after the verb *mhi* « very worried ») comes up in line 5 of the text. In the first instance however, the supplication was not directed to any deity in particular, as opposed to the second one, where Ra is undoubtedly the intended recipient.

31 On this Egyptian term, see especially, M. Römer, *Gottes- und Priester-Herrschaft in Ägypten am Ende des Neuen Reiches. Ein Religionsgeschichtliches Phänomen und seine sozialen Grundlagen*. ÄAT 21 (Wiesbaden, 1994), p. 142-153.

*Kush and Her Myth of the State in the First Millennium BC. CRIPEL Suppl. No. 4*, (Lille, 1995), p. 74; quoted by Lohwasser, 'Die Auswahl des Königs in Kusch', p. 86.

27 FHN I, 247.

28 Török, The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art, p. 425 and note 259.


29 This observation goes against the observation made by S. Allam ('Observations sur les oracles', p. 2) that the decision is made by the council to turn to Ra after thoughtful deliberation («après mûre délibération »).

have been interpreted as a manifestation of the deity's preference for any one candidate. Evidence for divine wonders as a way to single out the future king is quite commonplace in Ancient Egypt proper. One has only to think of the growing intensity of the sun's rays or the impromptu movement of the sacred bark of Amen across the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak as various supranatural means of signifying the god's will to choose the prince Thutmose (future Thutmose III) as the successor of pharaoh Thutmose II.<sup>32</sup> If the assembly's goal in the stela of Aspelta was to provoke divine intervention by lauding Ra, no overt and explicitly formulated demand for help is made directly to the god, as will later be the case with Amen-Ra of Napata.<sup>33</sup>

In a seminal article dealing with Amarnian religion, C. Cannuyer insisted that a very singular and unpleasant trait of Aten's personality as perceived by the Egyptians was his incapacity to communicate, as texts from Akhenaten's time never show the god expressing himself directly to people, whether king or subjects.<sup>34</sup> While it would be complete nonsense to compare Ra with Aten, the inability or unwillingness of the solar god in our text to manifest himself would certainly have framed him as either arrogant or lacking empathy towards his human creatures. At a time when ready access to gods was a necessary condition in order to seek divine approval for settling important earthly affairs, such a show of indifference by Ra must have been greeted with disbelief.

While Ra is totally deaf to the human plight, Amen-Ra of Napata is, by contrast, « all ears » to the committee's predicament: when the group of officials enter the temple of Amen-Ra of Napata, the god is the one who answers the call for help and finally puts an end to the distressing situation by choosing the new ruler : « Then this god, (19), Amen-Ra, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, resident in Gebel Barkal, said: „He [Aspelta] is the king, your lord. It is he who will vivify you. It is he who will build all

the temples of Upper and Lower Egypt. It is he who will endow their divine offerings. »

Further down in the text, in line 25 of the Election Stela, the deity is even called « Amen-Ra, Lord of the Thrones of the Two-Lands, resident in Gebel Barkal, great god, sweetly beloved, who hears the one who petitions him at once  », *sdm(w) sprw n=f m t3 3.t* ». One could not find another epithet that encapsulates so unequivocally the Nubian god's immense capacity for understanding of and compassion for his people's needs. It is one among many epithets traditionally held by the Theban god Amen-Ra to denote the deity's deep emotional understanding of humans' feelings or problems. Thus, on the head of a statue of the deity dated to the reign of Seti I, Amen is « the one who-hears-the-cry-of-woe » (*Imn sdm w3[w]*),<sup>35</sup> while on a graffito in the temple of Luxor, he is « Amen-of-Opet-who-answers-the-poor » (*Imn-ipt-p3-w3b-i3d*).<sup>36</sup> In Karnak, a temple devoted to « Amen-Ra-who-hears-prayers » (*Imn-R<sup>c</sup>-sdm-nh.wt*) was built during the New Kingdom;<sup>37</sup> evidence for numerous « ear stelae » and votive ears<sup>38</sup> of the same period are also testimony to this foremost of divine qualities, the ability to hear, listen and be attentive to the devoted. Thus, this trait of personality was taken over by Amen-Ra of Napata from Amen-Ra of Karnak and other Egyptian gods, such as Ptah; in the Election Stela, Ra is deprived of this quality.

32 Urk. IV 157, 10-159, 9. P. Vernus, 'La grande mutation idéologique du Nouvel Empire: Une nouvelle théorie du pouvoir politique. Du démiurge face à sa création', *BSÉG* 19 (1995), p. 73-74.

33 On the distinction between the unplanned and fortuitous nature of omen, on the one hand, and oracles that are clearly the response to overt consultation, on the other hand: Vernus, 'Grande mutation idéologique du Nouvel Empire', p. 83-84; Revez, 'L'élection divine du roi napatéen Aspelta', p. 10-13; Osing, 'L'élection divine du roi', p. 872-873.

34 C. Cannuyer, 'Questions sur la religion d'Akhénaton et son prétendu "monothéisme"', *Mélanges de science religieuse* 59/2 (avril-juin 2002), p. 62-63.

35 Port Said Museum P. 4035 (formerly Cairo temp. no. 23.8.22.4). P. J. Brand, *The Monuments of Seti I. Epigraphic, Historical & Art Historical Analysis. ProbAg* 16 (Leiden/Boston/Köln, 2000), p. 255.

36 P. J. Brand, 'A graffito of Amen-Re in Luxor Temple restored by the High Priest Menkheperre', in G. N. Knoppers, A. Hirsch (eds.), *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World. Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford. ProbAg* 20 (Leiden/Boston, 2004), p. 261 and fig. 3 at the end of the volume. See also idem, 'Veils, Votives, and Marginalia: The use of sacred space at Karnak and Luxor', in P. F. Dorman, B. M. Bryan (eds.), *Sacred Space and Sacred Function in Ancient Thebes. SAOC* 61 (Chicago: 2007), p. 60.

37 P. Barguet, *Le temple d'Amon-Rê à Karnak. Essai d'exégèse. RAPH* 21 (Le Caire: 1962), p. 223-242; J.-F. Carlotti, L. Gallet, 'Le temple d'Amon-qui-écoute-les-prières à Karnak, oeuvre de Ramsès II ou d'un prédécesseur?', in J.-C. Goyon, C. Cardin (eds.), *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Egyptologists. Grenoble 6-12 septembre 2004. Vol. 1. OLA* 150 (Leuven, 2007), p. 271-282; Brand, 'Veils, Votives, and Marginalia', p. 60.

38 A. I. Sadek, *Popular Religion in Egypt during the New Kingdom. HÄB* 27 (Hildesheim, 1987), p. 245-267; E. Elvira Morgan, *Untersuchungen zu den Obrenstelen aus Deir el Medine. ÄAT* 61 (Wiesbaden, 2004).



### 5. A CROWN UNFIT FOR A NUBIAN ENTHRONEMENT RITUAL

Another clue favors the interpretation that Ra is simply no longer the deity suited to elect the new Napatan king.

While it is clear that the responsibility for crowning the new king should normally fall on the god Ra, if we are to believe the statements in line 6 (« (after) he [Ra] has crowned him [the king] (*stn=fsw*) among us », and just further down, in line 7, « it has been the decision of Ra (*wp(w.t) pw n.t R<sup>c</sup>*) since (9) heaven came into being and since crowning the king came into being (*dr hpr stnw nsw*) », noteworthy of mention is the fact that in both instances, the verb used for « crowning » is written *stn* (line 6) and (line 7), determined with the White Crown.<sup>39</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that this *stnw* crown is interchangeable with the *sdn* skullcap,<sup>40</sup> since inside the lunette of the sandstone Khartoum stela 1851, the Red Crown is combined with the skullcap, where one would in the latter case have normally expected the White Crown.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Wb. IV, 359, 5 does mention that is an « Ethiopian » spelling of <sup>42</sup> and Wb. IV, 370 suggests that both terms are equivalent.

In our opinion, based on evidence from the Election Stela, these two crowns are undeniably to be distinguished. Indeed, whereas the two mentions of *stnw* were exclusively associated in lines 6 and 7 with the Egyptian god Ra, the three mentions of *sdn* in lines 22-24 are firmly linked with the Nubian deity Amen-Ra of Napata, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

39 P. Vernus mentioned to us that the basic and most widespread meaning of is « to choose » (in this case, a king among a group of people) and that the sign should be better understood as the phonogram *tn* rather than a determinative. He nevertheless believes the use of this particular biliteral sign by the scribe to be intentional in order to express the notion of crowning (« Bien entendu, la notion de couronnement n'est pas exclue, mais elle joue à titre de connotation, le signe étant un phonogramme pour *tn* quand bien même ce phonogramme est élu pour ladite connotation », email of July 22nd 2014). Whether understood as a determinative or a phonogram, the association of the White Crown with the word *stnw* is manifest.

40 E. R. Russmann, *The Representation of the King in the XXVth Dynasty*. MRE 3 (Bruxelles/Brooklyn, 1974), p. 29.

41 P. Derchain, 'La visite de Vespasien au Sérapéum d'Alexandrie', *CdE* XXVIII (1953), p. 267, note 3. For the Khartoum stela 1851, G. A. Reisner, 'Inscribed Monuments from Gebel Barkal', *ZÄS* 66 (1931), pls. V-VI.

42 See also, Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, p. 94, under *stnw*.

« (22) His Majesty then entered in order to appear in glory in the presence of his father Amen-Ra, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, and he found every *sdnw-crown* of the kings of Kush (*gm.n=f sdn.(w) nb n.w nsy.w n.(w) Kš*) together with their scepters placed before this god. In the presence of this god his Majesty said: "(23) Come to me, O Amen-Ra, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, resident in Gebel Barkal ! May you give to me the excellent office here, although it was not my intent, through the greatness of your love. May you give me the *sdn-crown* in accordance with your desire, together with the scepter." Then this god said: "Yours is the *sdn-crown* of your brother, the king of Upper and Lower Egypt [Anlamani], the justified. (24) May it remain upon your head as the *shn.ty* double crown remains on your head. His scepter is in your hand. May it overthrow all your enemies. " »<sup>43</sup>

The different textual contexts in which the *stnw* crown and the *sdn* skullcap respectively appear could not be more markedly contrasted. As A. Pompei wrote in her article dealing with Nubian crowns, the *sdn* skullcap was most likely kept in the Amen temple at Napata, together with the royal scepters.<sup>44</sup> As the excerpt above shows, this crown belonged to the kings of Kush (*sdn.(w) nb n.w nsy.w n.(w) Kš*) and was apparently passed on from one Nubian ruler to the next, since Aspelta inherited the *sdn* skullcap from his brother who ruled over the Napatan kingdom before him. According to T. Kendall, the shape of the tight-fitting *sdn* skullcap reproduces the overall silhouette of the Sacred Mountain of the Djebel Barkal, seat of the Nubian god Amen-Ra of Napata (« who resides in the sacred mountain » *Imn-R<sup>c</sup> hry-ib dw-w'b*);<sup>45</sup> as such it can be truly considered as a distinctive and quintessential Nubian regalian feature, as opposed to the White Crown which is closely connected with Egypt.<sup>46</sup>

43 Translation by Ritner, *The Libyan Anarchy*, p. 452.

44 A. Pompei, 'Names of Royal Kushite Crowns: Some Notes' in *Between the Cataracts. Proceedings of the 11th Conference of Nubian Studies. Warsaw University, 27 August-2 September 2006. PAM Supplement Series 2.2/1.2* (Warsaw, 2010), p. 495-497. For different reasons than those put forward in the present article, she also believes (p. 499) the *stnw* and *sdn* crowns to be distinct.

45 T. Kendall, 'Kings of the Sacred Mountain: Napata and the Kushite Twenty-Fifth Dynasty of Egypt' in D. Wildung (ed.), *Sudan. Ancient Kingdoms of the Nile* (Paris/New York, 1997), p. 167-170 and especially, p. 170, fig. 35.

46 Ch. Strauß, 'Kronen', *LÄ* III (Wiesbaden, 1979), 812. According to E. Russmann, *The Representation of the King in the XXVth Dynasty* (p. 29-32), the skullcap may be of Egyptian origin; even then, she acknowledges that examples of this type of crown in Egypt are few and far between (with the notable exception of the Ramesside



One could put forward two arguments against this clear-cut distinction between the Egyptian *stnw*-crown on the one hand, and the Kushite *sdn*-crown on the other. In lines 23-24 cited above, one reads that « "Yours is the crown (*sdn*) of your brother, the king of Upper and Lower Egypt [Anlamani], the justified. (24) May it remain upon your head as the double crown remains on your head (*mn=f m tp=k mi shm.ty hr tp=k*)" ». If the reading  $\text{𐀪} \text{𐀨} \text{𐀭} \text{𐀴} \text{𐀭}$  *shm.ty* is indeed correct (which is quite far from being certain),<sup>47</sup> one would be inclined to agree with L. Török's comment about the persistent use of the White and Red Crowns and other royal titles referring to territories now lost by the Nubian rulers until late Meroitic times, as indication « that symbols and titles of sovereignty over Egypt became, after the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, general symbols and titles of kingship, and had lost their original significance ». <sup>48</sup> It does seem very likely that giving too much weight to the unique instance in which the  $\text{𐀪} \text{𐀨} \text{𐀭} \text{𐀴} \text{𐀭}$  *sdn* and  $\text{𐀪} \text{𐀨} \text{𐀭} \text{𐀴} \text{𐀭}$  *shm.ty* are equated may be misleading, in light of the distribution of the more numerous occurrences of  $\text{𐀪} \text{𐀨} \text{𐀭} \text{𐀴} \text{𐀭}$  *stnw* and  $\text{𐀪} \text{𐀨} \text{𐀭} \text{𐀴} \text{𐀭}$  *sdn* elsewhere in the text, as expounded above.

Nevertheless, more acute a problem to be resolved is the apparent use of the determinative of the White Crown at the end of the word « kings » in such expressions as  $\text{𐀪} \text{𐀨} \text{𐀭} \text{𐀴} \text{𐀭}$  *nsy.w nw Kš* « the kings of Kush » (line 13)<sup>49</sup> and especially  $\text{𐀪} \text{𐀨} \text{𐀭} \text{𐀴} \text{𐀭}$  *sdn.(w) nb{t} n.w nsy.w n.(w) Kš* « all the *sdn*-crowns of the kings of Kush » (line 22).<sup>50</sup> If our hypothesis is to be substantiated, how can one explain the use of an Egyptian crown to define Nubian kings?

Our position is not to claim that the use of a typical Egyptian White Crown is incompatible with Nubian royal ideology *per se*. Evidence for this type of crown being worn by Kushite rulers exists, though such instances are admittedly scarcer than for the Nubian skullcap and its variants.<sup>51</sup> We suggest rather

period), especially in comparison with countless Kushite representations where the skullcap is shown. On the skullcap as the most distinctive royal Kushite emblem, see L. Török, *The Royal Crowns of Kush. A study in Middle Nile Valley regalia and iconography in the 1st millenia B.C. and A.D. BAR International Series 338* (Oxford, 1987), p. 4-9; Pompei, 'Names of Royal Kushite Crowns', p. 495.

<sup>47</sup> In his facsimile of the stela, N.-C. Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pl. VII, puts a question mark over the Red Crown. See also his comments at the bottom of p. 32; H. Schäfer (*Urk.* III, 97) leaves a blank where N. Grimal transcribes *shm.ty*.

<sup>48</sup> Török, *The Royal Crowns of Kush*, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls. VI-VIA.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. VII-VIIa.

<sup>51</sup> A good idea of the relatively small number of occurrences

that the White Crown was inappropriate and malapropos in the most fundamental and important act of transmission of royal power there is: the enthronement ritual.<sup>52</sup> Cogent evidence of this is the fact that the scene inside the lunette of the Election Stela shows Aspelta wearing a Nubian skullcap *alone* (without the White Crown),<sup>53</sup> which to all appearances seems to be the *sdn*-crown.<sup>54</sup>

#### 6. RA'S EXCLUSION AS THE ALL-POWERFUL JUDGE WHO CHOOSES THE FUTURE KING-TO-BE

In the paragraph depicting Ra's inaction, the phrase, « it has been the decision of Ra (*wp(w.t) pw n.t Rc*) [i.e. to crown the king] since heaven came into being (*dr hpr p.t*) and since crowning the king came into being (*dr hpr stnw nsw*) » used in lines 8 and 9 of the Stela, has largely escaped attention. In our opinion, the expression  $\text{𐀪} \text{𐀨} \text{𐀭} \text{𐀴} \text{𐀭}$  *wp(w.t) pw n.t Rc* « it has been the decision of Ra » makes implicit reference to the role of the god Ra as the judge who presides over the Heliopolitan Ennead when the time comes to settle the dispute between Horus and Seth (*wpw.t Hr hn<sup>c</sup> Stš*)<sup>55</sup> for the kingship over Egypt, previously at the hands of Osiris.

Interestingly enough, another sentence in line 7 of the stela,  $\text{𐀪} \text{𐀨} \text{𐀭} \text{𐀴} \text{𐀭}$  also seems to allude to the judgement of Ra, although this idea has not been conveyed in previous transliterations of this passage that has uniformly been rendered as *nn rh sw b(w) nb wp(w)-<hr> Rc pw ds=f*. The *FHN* translates this phrase as « there is no one that

of the White Crown in Ancient Kush can be gleaned by looking at Chart I shown at the end of Török's *The Royal Crowns of Kush*. A very rare representation of a king wearing a White Crown inside the lunette of a stela can be seen in Taharqa's Kawa IV (M. F. Laming Macadam, *Temples of Kawa I. The inscriptions* (London, 1949), pl. 7-8).

<sup>52</sup> See *infra* in section 7 of the present article for the highly significant distinction between the initial religious rite of « becoming king » in contrast to the repetitive rituals of « being/remaining king ».



<sup>53</sup> Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls. V-Va.

<sup>54</sup> A. Pompei ('Names of Royal Kushite Crowns', p. 495) also believes that the cap-crown worn by Aspelta in the lunette of the stela is the *sdn* skullcap. One should not pay too much heed to the fact that the cap worn by Aspelta in the lunette has a double uraeus, as opposed to the skullcap determinatives of the words *sdn(w)* in the text, that only have one. Cf. L. Török's comments (The Royal Crowns of Kush, p. 11) on the difficulty of carving minute details on the very hard stone surface of the Election Stela.

<sup>55</sup> On this expression, see J. Revez, 'The Metaphorical Use of the Kinship Term *sn* "Brother"', *JARCE* 40 (2003), p. 127-130.





knows him, excepting it is Rê himself ».<sup>56</sup> Frank Kammerzell gives a similar translation,<sup>57</sup> as well as G. Roeder,<sup>58</sup> N.-C. Grimal,<sup>59</sup> S. Burstein,<sup>60</sup> E. Kormysheva<sup>61</sup> and R. K. Ritner.<sup>62</sup> Rendering *wp(w-hr)* as the preposition « except » is not problematic as such, although the use of a nominal construction with *pw* after such a construction does look rather odd. We prefer to translate this sentence by *nn rh sw b(w) nb wp(w.t) R<sup>c</sup> pw ds=f*, « no one knows him, since it is the decision of Ra himself », with *wp(w.t)* meaning « decision », as in line 8. The omission of the feminine ending *-t* at the end of the noun *wp(w.t)* « decision » in  of line 7 does not raise any particular difficulty, since in the similar expression *wp(w.t) pw n.t R<sup>c</sup>*,  « it is the decision of Ra » of line 8, the written feminine form of the indirect genitive *n.t* clearly demonstrates that the gender of the noun which precedes it is also feminine, although it is spelled out without the distinctive feminine ending *-t*, exactly as in the example given earlier.

The role of Ra as the ultimate legal judge, « the one who distinguishes between Horus and Seth », is a leitmotiv that goes back to the Pyramid Texts and comes forth especially in the Ramesside Papyrus Chester Beatty.<sup>63</sup> Incidentally, as further illustrated by Papyrus d'Orbiney (« the Tale of the Two Brothers »),<sup>64</sup> the recurrent literary *topos* of Ra having to judge between two rival factions during Ramesside times may be partly inspired by real internal struggle amid the royal family for the claim to power during turbulent times, after the reign of Merenptah<sup>65</sup> and at the end

of the 20th Dynasty respectively.<sup>66</sup> Going back to our stela, it is thus tempting to perceive the failed call to Ra for help and the ensuing unwillingness of this god to act in his traditional role as settler of disputes for the royal succession, as yet another subtle way for the scribes of king Aspelta to highlight the disparity between traditional Egyptian ideology and current local Nubian customs. In other words, Amen-Ra of Napata is now the god in charge of electing the new king, not Ra. The text thus translates, in a subtle and implicit way, the renunciation of a mode of royal succession based on the mythological conflict between two „brothers“ (*sn.wy*) (i.e. Horus and Seth), in favor of a new paradigm, based on the political competition between several „king's brothers“ (*sn.w nsw*) whose role are defined in this text as in no other document, whether Egyptian or Nubian.<sup>67</sup>

On the contrary, one could argue that the « judgement by Ra of Horus and Seth » paradigm is not in fact obsolete by Aspelta's time, since reference to it is given precisely on the sarcophagus (Boston MFA 23.729) of that king, found in tomb Nuri 8 : « I am Thoth who justifies (*sm<sup>3c</sup>-hrw*) Horus against his enemies on that day of litigation (*hrw pfy n wd<sup>c</sup>-md.t*) in the Great Mansion which is in Heliopolis ». <sup>68</sup> The verb *wd<sup>c</sup>* is a close synonym of *wpi* and is also used in reference to the judgement between Horus and Seth.<sup>69</sup>

M. Collier, S. Snape (eds.), *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K. A. Kitchen* (Bolton, 2011), p. 445-451.

56 FHN I, p. 235; FHN IV, p. 1231; Török, *The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art*, p. 429.

57 Kammerzell, 'Die Wahl des Meroitischen Königs Aspelta', p. 119 (« Nicht irgendwer wird ihn erkennen, sondern es muß schon Re sein »).

58 Roeder, *Der Ausklang der ägyptischen Religion*, p. 385 (« Keine Menschen kennen ihn außer Rê selbst »)

59 Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, p. 72.

60 Burstein (ed.), *Ancient African Civilizations*, p. 28.

61 Kormysheva, *Gott in seinem Tempel*, p. 211 (« Niemand kennt ihn außer Re selbst »).

62 Ritner, *The Libyan Anarchy*, p. 452 (« There is none who knows him unless it be Re himself »).

63 A. H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories*, *BiblAeg* I (Bruxelles, 1932), p. 37-60. A particular interesting reading on this question can be seen in S. Bickel, 'Héliopolis et le tribunal des dieux', in C. Berger, B. Mathieu (éds.), *Études sur l'Ancien Empire et la nécropole de Saqqâra dédiées à Jean-Philippe Lauer*. *OrienMonsp* IX (Montpellier, 1997), p. 113-122, and esp. p. 114-116.

64 A. H. Gardiner, *op. cit.*, p. 9-30, esp. lines 6,3-6,7, p. 15-15a.

65 A. Spalinger, 'Transformations in Egyptian Folktales: the Royal Influence', *RdE* 58 (2007), p. 145-147; T. Schneider, 'Innovation in Literature on behalf of Politics: the tale of the Two Brothers, Ugarit, and the 19th Dynasty History', *ÄgLev* 18 (2008), p. 315-326; Idem, 'Conjectures about Amenmesse: Historical, Biographical, Chronological', in

66 Cf. U. Verhoeven, 'Ein historischer "Sitz im Leben" für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I', in M. Schade-Busch (ed.), *Wege öffnen. Festschrift für Rolf Gundlach zum 65. Geburtstag*. *ÄAT* 35 (Wiesbaden, 1996), p. 347-363. Although one should perhaps be cautious at giving too much of a political spin to this satirical story, there is good ground to believe that rivalries within the royal family may have served as inspiration for the plot.

67 On the king's brothers, Lohwasser, 'Die Auswahl des Königs in Kusch'; J. Revez, 'The Role of the Kings' Brothers in the Transmission of Royal Power in Ancient Egypt and Kush: a cross-cultural study', dans J. R. Anderson, D. A. Welsby (eds.), *The Fourth Cataract and Beyond. Proceedings of the 12th International Conference for Nubian Studies* (Leuven, 2014), p. 537-544.

68 Horizontal lines 2-3 in the front interior of the sarcophagus. Cf S. K. Doll, *Texts and Decoration on the Napatan Sarcophagi of Anlamani and Aspelta*, *UMI Dissertation Services* (Ann Arbor, 1978), p. 342, 354. For general comments on the overall composition of these funerary texts, Ead, 'The day hour texts on the sarcophagi of Anlamani and Aspelta', in W. K. Simpson, W. M. Davis (eds.), *Studies in Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and the Sudan: essays in honor of Dows Dunham on the occasion of his 90th birthday, June 1, 1980* (Boston, 1981), p. 43-54.

69 For a comparative study of both terms, see A. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis. Zum Ausländer in der ägyptischen*



Two observations should be made at this point. First of all, it is not in our intention to postulate that ancient models in either Ancient Egypt or Kush totally gave way when new ones appeared. As with everything else in connection with those ancient societies, paradigms tend to have precedence over previous ones, without totally replacing them.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the intimate and secretive dimensions of the funerary framework in which the notion of judgement appears on the Aspelta sarcophagus is a far cry from the public and celebrative context associated with coronation rites. In the Aspelta stela (that was originally erected inside the temple of Amen-Ra of Napata, the main cult center of that god in Nubia, lest we forget), the point had to be made that Amen-Ra of Napata had superseded Ra as the god that elects the king, in which case a literary stratagem was used in order to convey this message.

An excerpt from the speech given by the king's mother to Amen-Ra of Napata inside the lunette of the Election Stela exemplifies the new separation of duties between Amen-Ra of Napata and Ra: « May you establish your son whom you love (*smn=k s3=k mry*<sup>71=k</sup>) [Aspelta], (may he live forever!) in this high office of Ra (*β.twt p(y).tn.tR<sup>c</sup>*), that he may be greater in it than all gods ! ». <sup>72</sup> On the one hand, as suggested by U. Verhoeven, Ra's kingship is definitely acknowledged on the cosmic plane by Aspelta; on the other hand, the authority to implement this sovereignty over Nubia is entrusted to Amen-Ra of Napata.<sup>73</sup> This division of tasks between the two gods is stated in similar words by Amen-Ra of Napata himself in columns 2-3 : « <My> beloved son [Aspelta], I give you the appearance in glory of Ra (*h'w*<sup>74</sup> n R<sup>c</sup>), his

kingship on his throne ». <sup>75</sup> Here, the existence of the reign of Ra is duly recognized, but the duty of transmitting it to the Kushite king belong to Amen-Ra of Napata.

7. THE INITIAL RELIGIOUS RITE OF „BECOMING KING“ IN CONTRAST TO THE REPETITIVE RITUALS OF „BEING/REMAINING KING“

As a natural and logical consequence of what precedes, it would be useful at this stage to make the distinction between the rites of transmission of royal power (« Übertragungsriten ») and those relating to the exercise of power (« Ausübungsriten ») *per se*, as expounded by W. Barta<sup>76</sup> and A. Lohwasser:

« The god's investiture of the king is a singular act - "initial". This unique and creative activity conditioned the continuous activity of the king as ruler. The coronation established the king once and for all as ruler. But in order to fulfill his obligations as king vis-à-vis the gods and humankind, he must be active, he must accomplish deeds. These included building temples, endowing them with offerings and personnel, repelling enemies, guaranteeing order in the kingdom. I propose to confront the unique occurrence of "becoming king" with the continuum of "being/remaining king." »<sup>77</sup>

Thus, the divine election process of a newly crowned king constitutes a unique act that belongs to the initial rites of transmission of royal power; its objective is to establish Ma'at and to set up kingship. The annihilation of enemies and the construction of temples are repetitive actions that aim at preserving Ma'at and maintaining kingship. Through the analysis of verbal forms generally used in phraseology and especially the use of the perfective/imperfective constructions, J. Assmann opposed the punctual action of the gods who only intervene once when the time comes to put into place kingship (« Initialhandlung » (initial act)), on the one hand, and the durative or iterative action of the king in retaining his power (« Inganghaltung » (ongoing conduct)),<sup>78</sup> on the other. In the Election Stela of Aspelta, the initial rites of « becoming a king » are performed according

*Literatur.* *ÄgAbb* 48 (Wiesbaden, 1988), p. 73-83; S. Jin, "Schlichten" und "Richten". Über die altägyptischen Termini *wpi* und *wd<sup>c</sup>*, *SAK* 31 (2003), p. 225-233.

70 Funerary corpuses are the best illustrations of this trend. Parts of the *Pyramid Texts* survive into the *Coffin Texts* which in turn subsist in the *Book of the Dead*, etc. Cf. E. Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife* (Ithaca/London, 1999), *passim*.

71 On the use of this word in Late Period royal ideology, N.-C. Grimal, *Les termes de la propagande royale égyptienne de la XIXe dynastie à la conquête d'Alexandre* (Paris, 1986), p. 199-201; A. I. Blöbaum, "Denn ich bin ein König, der die Maat liebt". *Herrscherlegitimation im spätzeitlichen Ägypten. Eine vergleichende Untersuchung der Phraseologie in den offiziellen Königsinschriften vom Beginn der 25. Dynastie bis zum Ende der makedonischen Herrschaft.* *AegMon* 4 (Aachen, 2006), p. 227-238.

72 Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls V-Va, cols. 2-4 on the right side of the lunette; *FHN* I, p. 233.

73 Verhoeven, 'Amun zwischen 25 Männern und zwei Frauen', p. 1493-1494.

74 For the use of this term as referring to the accession of a king to the throne, D. B.Redford, *History and Chrono-*

*logy of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt. Seven Studies* (Toronto, 1967), p. 3-27.

75 Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls V-Va, cols. 2-in the center of the lunette; *FHN* I, p. 233.

76 W. Barta, *Untersuchungen zur Göttlichkeit des regierenden Königs*, *MÄS* 32 (München/Berlin, 1975), p. 16-17.

77 A. Lohwasser, 'Queenship in Kush: Status, Role and Ideology of Royal Women', *JARCE* 38 (2001), p. 72-73.

78 J. Assmann, *Ma'at. Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten* (München, 1990), p. 208-210.

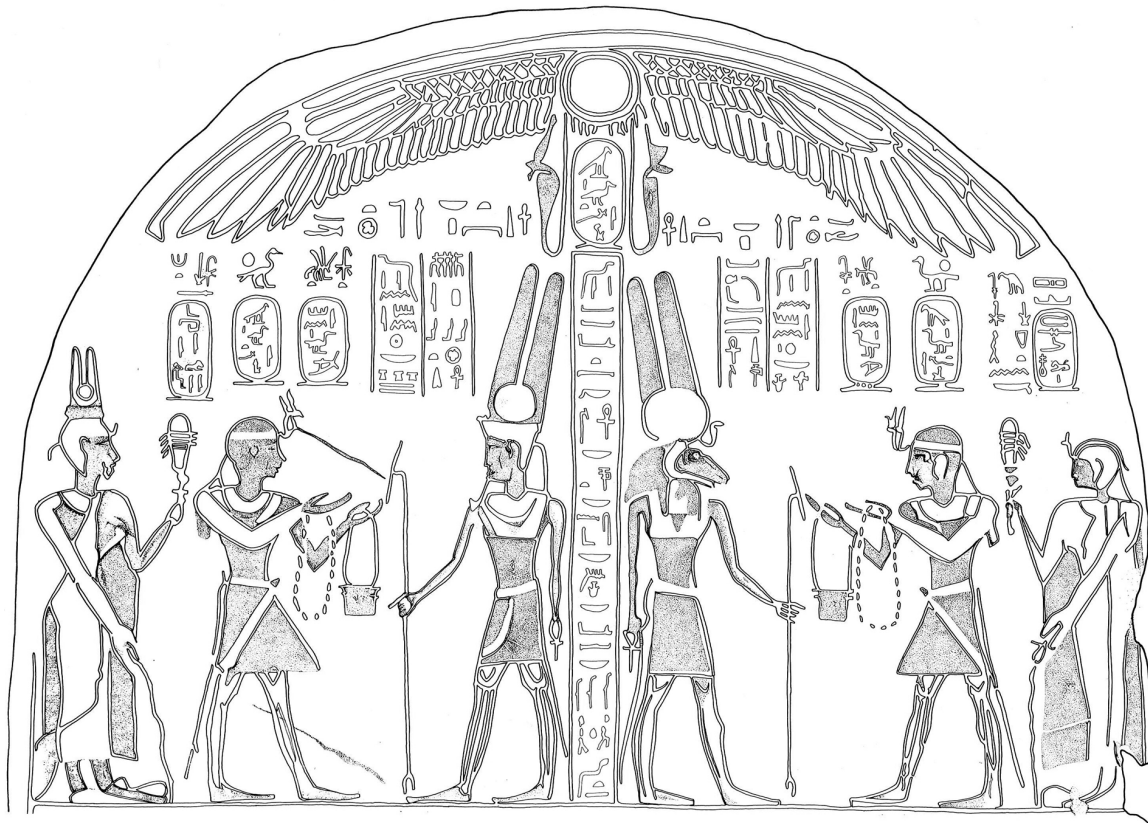


Fig. 2: lunette of Harsiotef Stela Cairo JE 48864 (Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pl. X)

to Nubian customs, with Amen-Ra of Napata acting as the central divine figure; the ongoing rites of «being/remaining a king» remain Egyptian in essence, and can involve Ra, alongside Amen-Ra of Napata.

#### 8. THE ASCENDANCY OF AMEN-RA OF NAPATA OVER AMEN-RA OF KARNAK

Finally, there is a noteworthy iconographic feature of the stela that, although it might appear unexceptional, may have a deeper ideological significance. In the Election Stela of Aspelta, there is only one scene in the lunette, with Amen-Ra of Napata represented as the sole god behind the king (fig. 1).<sup>79</sup> This is also true of another royal stela carved by Aspelta on which the Kushite deity Amen-Ra appears.<sup>80</sup> This is not a unique occurrence, since under other rulers, such as king Pi(ankh)y, reference is also made solely to a Nubian manifestation of Amen-Ra.<sup>81</sup>

79 This observation was also made by E. Kormysheva, *Gott in seinem Tempel*. p. 33.

80 Excommunication Stela (Cairo JE 48865). Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls. VIIIa-VIII.

81 Khartoum Museum 1851. Reisner, 'Inscribed Monuments from Gebel Barkal', pls. V-VI (between p. 80-81); Great Triumphal Stela (Cairo JE 48862, 47086-47089). N.-C.

However, in most other royal Kushite stelae, where the local variant of Amen-Ra is depicted, there is not only one, but actually two symmetrical scenes, showing the Egyptian form of the god Amen-Ra of Karnak, beside the Nubian one.<sup>82</sup> Thus, in stelae carved under pharaohs Taharqa<sup>83</sup> and Tanutamani<sup>84</sup>

Grimal, *La stèle triomphale de Pi('ankh)y au musée du Caire*. JE48862 et 47086-47089. MIFAO 105 (Le Caire, 1981), pls. I, V. Although only Amen of Napata is represented in the lunette of the Khartoum stela (together with Mut and Khonsu), the text makes explicit reference to a dual approach of the divine election of the Nubian ruler, judging from the speech given by Pi(ankh)y: Amen of Napata gives this king the power to govern over 'all the foreign lands' (which include Kush) while Amen of Karnak grants Pi(ankh)y the power to rule over Egypt. Cf. FHN I, 57; Grimal, *Termes de la propagande royale égyptienne*, p. 217-219. In any case, the complex connection between Amen-Ra of Napata and Amen-Ra of Karnak would require a more thorough treatment than is given here.

82 On this particular aspect of lunette relief composition of royal stelae, L. Török, *The Kingdom of Kush. Handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic Civilization* (Leiden/New York/Köln, 1997), p. 307-309.

83 From Kawa: Inundation Stela from year 6 (Kawa V). Macadam, *Temples of Kawa. I. The inscriptions*, pls. 9-10; stela from year 10 (Kawa VII), *ibid*, pls. 13-14.

84 Dream Stela (Cairo JE 48863); Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls. Ia-I.



of the First Napatan dynasty (=25th Egyptian dynasty), or Harsiotef (fig. 2)<sup>85</sup> and Nastasen<sup>86</sup> of the Second Napatan dynasty, the Egyptian and Kushite Amen-Ra appear back to back. In Aspelta's case, one has the feeling that he wished to give prominence to Amen-Ra of Napata alone, by excluding Amen-Ra of Karnak from the lunette.

### CONCLUSION

From the theological point of view, Aspelta's Election Stela is probably the most explicit written source to record in any coherent and detailed manner the rise at the head of the Kushite pantheon of the Nubian deity, Amen-Ra of Napata as the divine elector of the king, in place of two Egyptian dynastic gods, Ra, and to a lesser extent, Amen-Ra of Karnak who is not represented inside the lunette of the stela (as is often the case otherwise). Indeed, the very revealing passage in lines 7-13 of the stela, quoted at the beginning of the article, clearly opposes Ra's passivity to Amen-Ra of Napata's active participation in the designation of the successor, as illustrated in the rest of the inscription. The purpose of the first paragraph (lines 7-11), by stressing the inefficiency of the Egyptian god Ra in choosing a new ruler, is to enhance *a contrario* Amen-Ra of Napata's proficiency as the Nubian kingmaker *par excellence* (lines 11-13 and later).

Various literary motifs are used to illuminate the two deities in contrasting light :

- Each god is the central figure of separate sections of the inscription, to the exclusion of the other;
- While only a handful of council members await some sort of manifestation from the part of Ra, the assembly speaks as unified group when the decision is made to consult Amen-Ra of Napata outright;
- Ra is willfully deaf to human's predicament, while Amen-Ra of Napata is shown to be caring and attentive;
- Ra is associated with the Egyptian *stnw*-White Crown, Amen-Ra of Napata with the Nubian *sdn*-skullcap, the crown that ends up adorning Aspelta's head inside the lunette of the stela;
- The traditional decision-making process used by Ra as the ultimate judge of the Heliopolitan Ennead to select the new king from among two

mythical « brothers » (Horus and Seth) is superseded by the mode of electing the ruler by Amen-Ra of Napata, among a plurality of king's brothers (*sn.w nsw*), inside the temple of the Nubian deity.

In an almost incongruous way, Ra seems to be associated with Egyptian traditional pharaonic customs that look now out of step with practices of the late 7th-early 6th Century BC kingdom of Kush. One can only marvel at the crafty and audacious intellectual devices used to depict Ra's abasement. This original treatment of the coronation rite illustrates the fact that, far from being a pale reproduction of earlier Egyptian textual sources, Aspelta's Election Stela exemplifies Kushite literary creativeness some two or three generations after the independence of the Napatan state from Pharaonic Egypt.

A. Loprieno categorized Aspelta's Election Stela as a *Königsnovelle* (« king's novel »),<sup>87</sup> « a narrative which claims to report a concrete episode from the king's life [and thus] provide an ideal setting for a politically motivated use of history ».<sup>88</sup> While this is true of the second half of the stela's inscription that stresses the actual enthronement of the king, one would be more inclined to define the first part of the text we have analyzed as a *Götternovelle*, a literary genre that uses the *Königsnovelle* to develop a mythological discourse.<sup>89</sup> Thus, not unlike some Babylonian texts that use historical narrative to substantiate the rise of the *Akkadian* God Marduk at the top of the Mesopotamian pantheon traditionally dominated by deities of *Sumerian* origin<sup>90</sup>, the Election Stela of King Aspelta stresses the predominance of a local *Nubian* god over an *Egyptian* one. Interestingly enough, the immense popularity of Amen-Ra of Napata at that time transcended other literary genres, since he became the focal point of the Book of the Dead (at the expense of Amen-Ra of Karnak)

87 A. Loprieno, 'The "King's novel"', in A. Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature. History & Forms. ProbÄg 10* (Leiden/New York/Köln, 1996), p. 289.

88 *Ibid*, p. 287. For a more recent study on the question, B. Hofmann, *Die Königsnovelle. "Strukturanalyse am Einzelwerk"*. *ÄAT 62* (Wiesbaden, 2004).

89 Loprieno, *loc. cit.*, p. 290-294.

90 A good, though very succinct example of this can be seen at the beginning of the prologue in the so-called « Hammurabi Code », where the description of the moral fortitude and deeds of king Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC) serves as a platform to boost Marduk's position as the real divine kingmaker, a role assigned traditionally to Enlil and An(u) who explicitly transfer their supreme power to the god of Babylon (lines 1-26). B. Foster, *Before the Muses. An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, 2005), p. 128; D. Charpin, *Hammurabi of Babylon* (London/New York, 2012), p. 78.

85 Cairo JE 48864; Grimal, *Quatre stèles napatéennes*, pls. Xa-X.

86 Berlin Stela 2268. Wildung, *Sudan. Ancient Kingdoms of the Nile*, p. 237.



as well, as illustrated in the supplementary chapters 162-165 dated to the 25th Dynasty and later.<sup>91</sup> That king Aspelta wanted to exploit his filial piety to Amen-Ra of Napata fully is all the more understandable, since his accession to the throne seems to have been marred by political opposition.<sup>92</sup>

As previously observed in an earlier article that we wrote dealing with the relationship linking Osiris, Isis, Seth and Horus,<sup>93</sup> the emphasis in royal texts on any given divine protagonist may fluctuate in time according to political and religious circumstances, without yet any one character disappearing totally from the stage. In the context of Aspelta's investiture, the Nubian god Amen-Ra of Napata is in the spotlight while the Egyptian deity Ra (and to some extent, Amen-Ra of Karnak as well) is pushed into the background. This however does not imply that Ra ceases to shine in contexts other than the initial act of the coronation, since Aspelta's theophoric prenominal *mry-k3-R* includes Ra's name and this god, associated with Harakhte, plays a significant role in the stela of Aspelta on the mortuary cult foundation of Prince Khaliut.<sup>94</sup>

#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Obwohl einige Aspekte der Wahlstela des Aspelta schon in früheren Untersuchungen behandelt wurden, ist der unklaren Rolle des Re am Beginn der Inschrift (Z. 7-13) bisher wenig Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt worden. M.E. ist der Zweck dieses ganzen Abschnittes, aus verschiedenen Gründen zu verdeutlichen, dass der ägyptische Gott Re nicht geeignet ist, einen neuen Herrscher auszuwählen. So soll im Gegenzug die Fähigkeit von Amun-Re von Napata als der nubische göttliche Königsmacher par excellence unterstützt werden, was im Verlauf der Inschrift deutlich gemacht wird.

91 A. Wüthrich, *Éléments de théologie thébaine: les chapitres supplémentaires du Livre des Morts*. SAT 16 (Wiesbaden, 2010), p. 118, where mention is made of the « (mountainous) peak of Napata in Nubia » (*dhn.t np.t m t3-st3*); for comments on the importance of Amen-Ra of Napata in those chapters, p. 130-149; Ead, 'Abracadabras méroïtiques dans le Livre des Morts ?' in B. Backes, M. Müller-Roth, S. Stöhr (eds.), *Ausgestattet mit den Schriften des Thot. Festschrift für Irmtraut Munro zu ihrem 65. Geburtstag*. SAT 14 (Wiesbaden, 2009), p. 267-282 on the vocabulary in these chapters that are of Nubian origin.

92 As witnessed by traces of hacking on Aspelta's Election Stela and other monuments. On this matter, Lohwasser, 'Die Ahnenreihe des Aspelta'.

93 J. Revez, 'Looking at History through the Prism of Mythology: Can the Osirian Myth shed any Light on Ancient Egyptian Royal Succession Patterns', *JEGH* 3 (2010), p. 47-71, esp. 66-67.

94 M. B. Reisner, 'Inscribed monuments from Gebel Barkal. Part 4. The Stela of Prince Khaliut', *ZÄS* 70 (1934), p. 35-46; FHN I, 268-279; Verhoeven, 'Amun zwischen 25 Männern und zwei Frauen', p. 1492-1493; on the possible use of this stela for legitimation purposes, Lohwasser, 'Die Ahnenreihe des Aspelta'. More research has to be carried out on this text in order to grab its content fully.