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REVISING THE MONUMENTS OF KING ASPELTA'S THIRD REGNAL YEAR¹

I.

One of the most significant events in the studies of ancient Sudanese historical sources of the last several decades is the 2012 publication by Dominique Valbelle of the remains of a deliberately destroyed stela dated to regnal year 3 of king Aspelta, recovered on the site of Doukki Gel in 1999-2007 (Valbelle 2012).

Most intriguingly, the text on the larger of the fragments included the date and a rather long list of participants of some ceremony in the temple of Amun of Pnubs and, on closer study revealed a striking similarity to the introductory part of the Louvre stela C 257 (E 6209) known in the research literature under several different labels but mainly as the "Stela of Madiqen" (cf. Pierret 1876, p. 89; Sayce 1916, p. 76, note †; Török 1995, p. 96) or the "Adoption stela" (Pierce 1994-b, p. 259; Valbelle 2012, p. 5ff.) or, what seems preferable to the present writer, the "Dedication stela" (cf. Macadam 1949-a, p. 50, note 55; Schäfer 1908, S. 101).²

1 I am most indebted to Dr Timothy Kendall (Boston) for reading this text and making some stylistic amendments.

2 In support of this rendering it might be argued that the text of this stela *does not say a word about anyone's adoption of by anyone* – just contrary to the stela of Nitocris, daughter of the pharaoh Psammetichus I (Caminos 1964), which is often referred to by scholars as a (presumed) Egyptian parallel to Aspelta's decree (cf. Török 1995, pp. 97-98; Török 1997, p. 239). Strictly speaking, the Louvre/Sanam/Dedication stela is a legal document dealing with the transfer (perhaps as inheritance) of certain endowments from the "king's sister (and) king's wife" Madiqen to the "king's sister (and) king's daughter" Henuttakhebit, apparently inducted as a temple musician into the Amun-Re temple at Sanam. As for her characterisation *s3.t wr.t* "(the) great/elder daughter" of Madiqen (lines 13-14), which is often thought to have been "a periphrasis for 'adoptive daughter'" (Török 1994, p. 250; Török 1995, p. 98; cf. Török 1997, p. 239: "Kheb was 'eldest daughter of the king' (sic! – A.V.), similarly to the Divine Adoratresses <...>"), it has to be recalled that even in Egypt this term in fact was *ambivalent*. This, incidentally, is clearly seen in the aforementioned stela of Nitocris, who in line 4 is styled "(the) great/elder daughter" of king Taharqa's daughter Amonirdis, which certainly does imply the adoptive relation (cf. lines 3 and 16), and who in lines 6 and 7 is called "(the) great/elder daughter" of the pharaoh Psammetichus I, which evidently *does not*. Thus, only context may prompt the correct rendering of the

Given the textual resemblance, augmented by the closeness of the datings (see below), the author of the study under discussion must have faced the greatest temptation to try, as far as possible, to clarify the record of the damaged monument with the help of the surviving, practically complete one.³ The problem, however, must have been the fact that the text of the Dedication stela is not among the easiest to understand. Besides, although familiar to scholars for almost a century and a half, this monument – preserved in one of the major museums of the world – had not been published in such a way as to meet requirements of today's scholarship. In other words, the very means of verification of the Doukki Gel stela's account in its turn needed a revision and prerequisite "adjusting".⁴

A remarkable synergetic output of Valbelle's work has become a publication in which both of the aforementioned stelae of Aspelta, and not only the newly recovered one, are discussed in parallel with reference to the photographs and facsimiles of the "new generation", analysing the author's reconstruction of the core account standing behind the two records, which seem to be somewhat similar but, evidently, not identical. Interestingly, in the course of this work some variations in the surviving text of

statement, and one may question whether there is anything sufficient in the Sanam stela to preclude the literal rendering of Henuttakhebit's attribute. For a detailed discussion see Vinogradov 2012, S. 105-116.

3 "Certains de se signes ont été reproduite hachurés dans les éditions précédentes comme s'ils étaient en lacune ou effacés. En fait, pratiquement aucun signe n'est dégradé, mais plusieurs ont été gravés de manière indistincte" (Valbelle 2012, p. 10).

4 It will be recalled that the main source for the text of the Dedication stela, until rather recently, was the 1908 handcopy by Heinrich Schäfer (*Urk.* III, 101-107), which represents the original in a somewhat "dressed" outlook, with "alteration" of the sporadic irregular writing = for $\overline{\text{m}}$, recurring throughout this record. The text having been "converted" – by a master's hand, yet subjectively – some losses are not unlikely to have taken place (particularly in spelling of the personal names in Meroitic language) in comparison with Schäfer's 1895 facsimile, which seems to have fallen back after the publication of his autograph, however.

the Doukki Gel fragments, in their turn, have helped to shed more light on several obscure places in the record of the Dedication stela, which was previously accessible to scholars by the 1895 facsimile by Heinrich Schäfer (1895, Taf. IV-V) and the 1905 one by E.A. Wallis Budge,⁵ but principally by Schäfer's 1908 autograph in the epoch-making *Urkunden* (*Urk.* III, 101-108).

The philological amendments⁶ in the new publication have mainly concerned the catalog of the titles and names, Egyptian(ised) and Meroitic, borne by participants of the two ceremonies described (which is almost all that can be derived from the surviving part of the Doukki Gel stela), making a most important source for ancient Sudanese onomastica.

As for history, the collateral study of these two monuments, which commemorate some significant events of king Aspelta's reign, has provided for new possibilities – and, of course, has given an occasion – to revisit the dramatic developments of that watershed period in Kush, which are rather differently interpreted in the research literature.

Comparing the two accounts we notice that the ceremonies took place:

- a) in winter (*pr.t*) of the same year (regnal year 3 of Aspelta's reign), with the span of (79/80) days between them,

- b) in one of the major sanctuaries of the kingdom (the Amun-Re temple in Pnubs and in Sanam respectively),
- d) with a delegation of highest dignitaries⁷ (almost the same in both cases)⁸ as the main actor,
- e) who address the (highest) clergy of the respective temples as the chief executor(s) of the king's will and/or eyewitnesses called to evidence a certain legal act,
- f) the importance of which is further emphasized – the thing unparalleled in Kush – by producing a special document, cut on respective (royal) stelae.

In view of so many coincidences/similarities the question arises, whether these two accounts may not be records of two acts of a single procedure (or campaign, etc).

Because the inscription on the Dedication stela is complete, even though obscure in some places, it naturally must serve as the principal source for a historical reconstruction of the event(s) in question (Fig. 1). According to the dominant view, this text records the ceremony of induction of a certain “king's sister (and) king's daughter” into the office of the sistrum-player (alleged to be about the highest in the hierarchy of the Sanam temple of Amun-Re)⁹ and

5 The statement that the facsimile published by Budge was merely a “copie retouchée” of Schäfer's 1895 reproduction (Valbelle 2012, pp. 9-10) is not quite fair. According to Budge (1912, p. XCVIII), he had at his disposal a tracing of the text, from which his 1907 facsimile was made, re-published in 1912 together with a fragment of the tracing, showing the scene in the lunette (1912, p. XCIX, pl. VIII). The difference between the two scholars' copies is discernible enough at closer study, some signs along the left and right edges being cut or missing in the Budge version. Further, for justice' sake, it might be pointed out that some of the amendments suggested in the recent publication (Valbelle 2012, pp. 18-19: n, t, v, y) *potentially* could have been made already on the basis of the 1895 and 1907 facsimiles but were not duly recognised by the early editors or by the later students of the text.

6 Curiously, the recent conjecture of the enigmatic epithet of Amun “Bull of/in (the) Place” in the lunette, although mentioned by the author at the very beginning of the philological analysis and recognised in the type quote in the description of the relief and in the facsimile of the lunette (Valbelle 2012, pp. 17, note “d”; cf. 12 and 109, pl. 2B), has strangely been omitted (ignored, or overlooked?) from the reproduction of the stela's general view (p. 107, pl. 1B), which is the starting point of the reader's acquaintance with this monument. The epithet was endemic for the Sanam temple (Vinogradov 2010) and is thus important for ascertaining the real provenance of the Dedication stela, which was somehow moved to the sanctuary at Jebel Barkal.

7 Despite the author's remark that “Le premier titre ne pose pas de difficulté d'interprétation” (Valbelle 2012, p. 35), the rendering of the group in line 2 as *srw nw hm=f* “les notables de Sa Majesté” (pp. 14-15, 36; cf. Grimal 1981-b, p. 93 (Index)) is highly disputable (note its reading as *wr.w* in Pierce 1994-b, p. 260). In fact, the word *srw*, to the best of my knowledge, is not used (at least in any probative writing) elsewhere in the written monuments of Kush, the really attested relevant terms – with the same, or similar, determinative – being the words *wr.w* “Great (ones)”, “Chief(tain)s” (Dream stela, line 24) and particularly often *šmr.w* “Friends” (Kawa IV, line 13; Kawa VIII, lines 22-23; Election stela, line 15; Kawa IX, cols. 94, 99, 101; Kawa X, line 6). A tempting comparison with the group “(...) of the king's palace” in the nearly contemporary Election stela (lines 4, 17, cf. 21), which seems to be the only parallel acceptable, leads one to the tentative equation: (Dedication stela, line 2) ~ (Doukki Gel stela, line 3) ~ (Election stela, line 4) ~ (Election stela, line 15). It would follow therefrom that the group in question may be a variant writing, or a semantic equivalent of the term “Friends of the King's Palace” (Vinogradov 1984, pp. 116-129).

8 Eight out of the eleven officials enumerated in the Sanam/ Dedication stela appear to be among the nine persons mentioned in the Doukki Gel stela as well, although the spelling of the proper names is sometimes variable.

9 “the title of the high-priestess of Amun of Napata (sic – A. V.)” (Blackman 1921, pp. 28, 25, 28, 29-30). Cf. George Reisner's characterisation of the Dedication stela: “Record of the adoption of his daughter to be <the> High-priestess of Amon at Barkal (sic – A. V.)” (1921, p. 60, no. 5).



Fig. 1: Scene in the lunette of the Dedication stela (after E.A.W. Budge, *Egyptian Literature*, Vol. II: *Annals of Nubian Kings* (London, 1912), pl. VIII, fragment).

the transfer of the relevant endowments. Opinions considerably differ, however, as to who was taking the office, and, further, who was providing for and who was receiving the allowances mentioned (for a detailed discussion see Vinogradov 2012).

2.

An important point in rendering the evidence of the Dedication stela was reached in the *Fontes*, and some other studies by László Török, in whose opinion this text has to do with the *enthronement procedure*, in the course of which the successor, assuming the royal power, was restoring the order after a period of chaos – real or fictitious – following the decease of his predecessor. Making a ritual coronation journey around the “federal state” he would visit sanctuaries in the main religious/administrative centres of the kingdom assuming the investiture, and royal insignia, from the chief local deity (1995, pp. 65–73) (a hypostasis of Amun in most cases) and making generous donations to temples.

A most significant element of the enthronement ceremony, according to Török, must have been the successor’s marriage with the “king’s sisters” consecrated (by his predecessor, or by himself?) as “sistrum-players” to the major sanctuaries of the kingdom (1994, p. 266; 1997, p. 253) and destined to become – due to the dualism of the supreme power in Kush – the new king’s female counterparts in his “fulfillment of the cosmic and social duties” (1995, p. 60), legitimizing him “as guarantor of order in the cosmos and in the state” (1995, pp. 82, 86).

Török’s rendering of the surviving sources, highly influenced – if not predetermined – by Lana Troy’s

mesmerizing study of the Egyptian queenship (Troy 1986; cf. Török 1995, pp. 99 ff.), looks very impressive in context of his general view of the political organization of Kush. It seems very well coordinated with his other considerations regarding the kingship and its reflection in the mytho-political ideology of the ancient Sudan. The problem is, not all elements of this finely elaborated historical reconstruction prove to be equally well corroborated at closer inspection of the sources.

In the case of the Dedication stela’s testimony it should, for instance, be pointed out that:

- a) the very fact that the ceremony in the Sanam temple of Amun-Re took place in Aspelta’s *regnal* year 3, makes the idea about its connection with the ritual of enthronement (which implies taking over *full* authority, unless we assume existence in Kush of something like a “probation period” of some years) most unlikely because he must have already been an established ruler by this time;
- b) although it is clear from the (con)text of the Dedication stela that the consecration of the “king’s sister (and) king’s daughter” Henuttakhebit in the Sanam temple of Amun was made by order of Aspelta, *there is no indication of his personal attendance* at the ceremony (cf. below), so important for Török’s rendering (1994, p. 255);
- c) *there is not the slightest hint in the record at any marital relations*, efficient or forthcoming, between the young appointee (before or after her induction in the office of “sistrum player” – despite Török 1997, p. 262) and king Aspelta, which, according to Török’s theory, would

have secured the legitimation of his accession to the throne, *i.e.* the very essence of the whole procedure;¹⁰

- d) Henuttakhebit's status of a *princess* at the time of her consecration into the Sanam temple makes it very difficult to prove "the connection of the time of the investiture with the husband's enthronement" (Török 1994, p. 268) and the idea that "the continuity of royal power was paralleled with the continuity of the office of the queen as priestess of Amûn" (p. 267). Even if we suppose that the two careers ran in parallel we have no reason to assume that they started simultaneously.

Some doubts regarding Török's historical reconstruction, his rendering of the Dedication stela's evidence included, have already been expressed in the research literature along with suggestions of some alternative interpretations (Vinogradov 2000, Vinogradov 2009, Vinogradov 2012). One alternative (with no substantial allusions to Török's considerations though)¹¹ may be seen in the recent study of Aspelta's early stela by Valbelle.

Taking for granted the extreme importance of the events recorded, the author rejects, or ignores, the idea, presented by Török in the *Fontes* and elsewhere, about the personal participation of Aspelta in the action described in the Dedication stela, suggesting (or rather returning to the view proposed already in Pierret's *editio princeps*)¹² that the principal actors in the scene were the highest Kushite officials visiting the Sanam temple of Amun and acting *on behalf* of the king, the local priests being their counterparts.¹³ The essence of the ceremony is the induction of the "king's sister (and) king's daughter" Henuttakhebit into the office of the *sistrum*-player and the transfer to her and her posterity of the endowments, inherited from her predecessor – "king's sister (and) king's

daughter" Madiqen, whose adoptive daughter the former is now proclaimed.

In Valbelle's view, the whole (con)text demonstrates the tremendous significance of the "*sistrum* player" position in the cult of Amun-Re at Sanam, an indirect proof of which she sees in the fact that the predecessor of Aspelta on the throne of Kush, his brother Anlamani, had consecrated four of his sisters (apart from his own mother Nasalsa)¹⁴ as "*sistrum* players" into the main temples of the kingdom, one of whom was most likely Madiqen, whose endowments in the Sanam temple were now transferred to Henuttakhebit by order of Aspelta.

A similar situation, Valbelle assumes, might be presented in the Doukki Gel stela, where one other of the four mentioned sisters of Anlamani may have been similarly replaced (by means of adoption) by a relative of Aspelta, in continuation of the same "campaign", a few weeks later. In any case "<...> la coordination programmée des visites de la délégation royale à Sanam et à Doukki Gel ne fait aucun doute <...>" (Valbelle 2012, p. 46) although technically these procedures could differ as seen from some divergence in formulation in the corresponding parts of the two accounts under discussion.

Talking of the role of the king, Valbelle points out referring to the evidence of several Kushite texts that "Ces visites du roi ou de ses représentants étaient destinées à fixer certaines cérémonies, accorder ou rétablir l'offrande divine, ainsi que la dotation en mobilier culturel et, éventuellement, en personnel, en troupeaux et en terres pour assurer l'entretien du temple et, partant, la rémunération des prêtres. C'est donc le souverain qui, comme en Égypte, déterminait les modalités des cultes et le montant des revenus affectés aux temples" (2012, p. 47). Analysing the historical context in order to understand the essence of the accounts of Aspelta's stela, the scholar at a certain point of her study comes to the necessity to explain why one of the two memorial monuments – seemingly close in their contents and intended purpose – has survived virtually intact whereas the other one (the Doukki Gel stela) was deliberately and thoroughly smashed, which has deprived us of the main part of the inscription together with the main part of the relief scene in the lunette, apparently showing the king making offerings to Amun.

10 The statement that "Her first and third titles, *i.e.* king's sister and mistress of the land, appear to qualify her as wife of Aspelta, even though the title king's wife is lacking" (Török 1994, p. 267) in fact rests on pure misinterpretation of the group *Hnwt-t3*, which is by no means a queenly title here (corresponding to the title "Mistress of Kush" of queen Nasalsa) but merely an element of the princess' personal name (to be read "Henuttakhebi(t)" rather than "Kheb" as suggested in the *Fontes* – see Vinogradov 2000).

11 The only relevant remark states that neither of the stela has to do with coronation (Valbelle 2012, . 48).

12 "<...> 11 hommes sont venus au temple d'Ammon-ra <...> dire de la part de son royal fils (sic – A. V.) Pharaon <...>" (Pierret 1873, p. 101; Pierret 1876, p. 90).

13 "Ils déclarent, en vertu de la Majesté de l'Horus Pharaoh, aux prophètes et pères-divins de ce temple: <...>" (Valbelle 2012, p. 15, *cf.* 18, note "p").

14 Valbelle 2012, p. 46 with reference to stela Kawa VII (of year 10 of king Taharqa), which must be a misprint, because Kawa VIII of king Anlamani seems to be implied. A comment, regarding the "installation de sa mère Nasalsa" see below, note 27.



3.

The problem of the traces of *damnatio memoriae* on many artifacts, both Egyptian and Kushite,¹⁵ found within the territory of the ancient Sudan, is a theme which has been discussed in the research literature for over a century and a half but still remains far from being fully understood.

It will be recalled that such traces had long been taken as indicative of either foreign invasions or of internal–political (dynastical?)–clashes.¹⁶ The only exception was seen in the so-called Banishment (*alias* Excommunication) stela, the text on which relates to a conflict of the Kushite king with the clergy of the temple of Amun of Napata, the main sanctuary of the kingdom, while the damage to the king's representation in the lunette and the erasure of his cartouches seem to testify the (posthumous?) revenge of the priesthood, due to which the image of this king and his name have been lost for ever.

Some more logic in the *damnatio memoriae* practice started to reveal itself after the 1916 discovery by George Reisner's expedition of "two dumps of fragments of statues" on the territory of the Amun temple at Jebel Barkal (Reisner 1917, pp. 216-217; Reisner 1918, p. 21). In particular, it was established that the latest of the (royal) statues buried in these two dumps are those of Aspelta,¹⁷ whose reign thus turns out to be a certain historical watershed in the political history of Kush.

The whole situation was drastically reconsidered after the publication in 1949-52 of a series of articles by Serge Sauneron and Jean Yoyotte who came to the conclusion that the destruction of the royal monuments was mainly due to the punitive expedition sent in his 3rd regnal year by Psammetichus II (whose likely contemporary in Kush, according to the independent calculation, was probably Aspelta),¹⁸ and later continued as the anti-Kushite

campaign in Egypt itself, where the memories of "Ethiopian" rule (the XXVth dynasty period) were zealously and rather methodically erased on many monuments for over a century and a half (Sauneron & Yoyotte, (1952), pp. 157-207; Yoyotte & Sauneron, (1949), pp. 45-49; Yoyotte 1951, pp. 215-239).

The well elaborated historical reconstruction set forth by Sauneron and Yoyotte is, doubtless, one of the brightest achievements in ancient Sudanese historiography ever. It should not be overlooked, however, that the tenor of the two scholars' considerations, at least in their principal study, was such as if they conceded that not all Sudanese examples of the *damnatio memoriae* could be best explained by their theory.¹⁹ Indeed, some traces of iconoclastic activities have so far also been attested on the monuments which, on the one hand, are either earlier²⁰ or, still more important, later than the reign of Psammetichus II, and on the other, are found in places which this pharaoh's troops could hardly have reached even by the most daring estimates²¹ (bearing in mind that the Egyptian sources' assertions regarding the depth of the penetration into the Kushite territory are surprisingly uncertain).²²

6); cf. Sauneron & Yoyotte 1952, pp. 202-203, note 1. The prudent caution of the two scholars is noteworthy however: "On ignore malheureusement contre lequel d'entre eux (*sc.* kings of Kush – *A. V.*) s'est battu Psammetique II <...>" (p. 202).

15 Already Reisner pointed out that the practice of intentional destructions in Kush is coming back into the period of Egyptian domination, stating for instance that: "<...> at Gebel Barkal the name of Amun was erased by Akhenaton on all monuments, even private statuettes, existing in his day" (Reisner 1921, p. 91; cf. Reisner 1918-a, pp. 102-103).

16 "<...> the family relations of the kings from Kashta to Tanutamon show abundant possibilities of bitter hatred and jealousy" (Reisner 1931, S. 99).

17 Bringing his 1916-1920 study to a close Reisner observes: "The conclusion to which I have come is that the statues were deliberately broken by a dynastic enemy. <...> I consider it as practically certain that the statues were broken intentionally soon after the reign of Aspalta. I *infer provisionally* that this was done by Amtalqa <...>" (Reisner 1920, pp. 263-264).

18 Reisner 1918, pp. 18 (573-543 BC), 63 (Max., Min., and Mean calculations and (the final) Personal Estimate; no.

19 "<...> il serait *tendant, mais assez incertain* (my italics – *A. V.*), de retrouver au Gébel Barkal, dans le martelage des cartouches sur les stèles dites de "l'excommunication" et de "l'intronisation d'Aspelta" ainsi que dans la destruction des statues de Taharqa, Tanoutamon, Senkamaniskeñ, Anlamani et Aspelta, des témoignages du passage des troupes d'Amasis et de Potasimto" (Sauneron & Yoyotte 1952, pp. 201-203, cf. note 6, end).

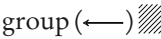
20 Reisner 1918, pp. 102-103; Vercoutter 1956, pp. 71-73 (regarding the usually ignored "cache filled with fragments of broken (Egyptian – *A. V.*) statues" on the Island of Sai); Valbelle 2011, pp. 13-20.

21 Török 1997, pp. 153-154; Gatzsche & Onderka 2013, pp. 121-126. A most problematic case is the Dangeil (quasi-?) cache, where several broken late monuments have been discovered together with the "traditional" set of the Kushite kings' broken statues from Taharqa to, supposedly, Aspelta (Anderson & Salah 2009; Anderson & Salah 2014). Attempts have been made to link this find with the Egyptian invasion (Valbelle 2012, pp. 49, 51), yet the cautious conclusion of the team working on the site is demonstrative: "Thus far there is no direct evidence to indicate that Psamtek II's army advanced as far upstream as Dangeil" (Anderson & Salah 2014, p. 619).

22 For the discussion see Török 1994-b, pp. 284-286; Török 2009, pp. 361-362; Lohwasser 2005, S. 147-148; Vinogradov 2012, S. 114. I am grateful to Angelika Lohwasser for drawing my attention to some very interesting relevant considerations presented in a recent paper by Josefine Kuckertz (2014/2015, S. 278-283).

The general complexity of the situation has been well reflected in Valbelle's interpretation of the two stelae under discussion. Accepting the *hypothesis* suggested by Sauneron and Yoyotte as the unquestionable theory she assumes that the Egyptian punitive²³ campaign took place at the beginning of king Aspelta's reign, considering as important landmarks four deposits of broken royal statues (two at Jebel Barkal, one in Doukki Gel, and one in Dangeil) found in the course of excavations over the last century (Valbelle 2012, p. 49). However, realising that not all of the broken or damaged monuments here are

necessarily to be associated with the Egyptian invasion under Psammetichus II,²⁴ Valbelle tries to ascertain the, so to say, conceptual regularity in the very "technic" of the iconoclasts (effacing one of the two uraei and/or breaking the nose of a statue, erasing cartouches, etc.) thus continuing to some extent the research line once marked by Jean Leclant (Leclant 1950, pp. 187-190, pl. I, III d; Leclant 1953, pp. 120-122, 143). Eventually she takes a new approach to the problem and divides the damaged artifacts – statues and written monuments (mainly stelae) – into two different groups (Valbelle 2012, p. 50), suggesting that the damaged stelae, unlike the broken statues (ritually "buried" in most cases), should be taken as evidence of internal clashes among the Kushites themselves.

Considering from this perspective the Sanam and the Doukki Gel stelae of Aspelta, Valbelle at a certain point in her study turns to another broken monument (*perhaps* stela) of the same king,²⁵ a series of fragments of which were found during the Oxford University excavations of the Gematen (Kawa) temples in early 1930s. The year of Aspelta's reign is not readable in the date but, according to the (conventional) reconstruction, presented in the 1949 publication of the Kawa material by Miles F. Macadam, the group (←)  "Year ////, [month] //// (of) winter, [day] ////" seems discernible at the beginning of the text (Macadam 1949-b, pl. 40), which is the name of the season indicated in the date on the Doukki Gel stela. Pointing out this coincidence, Valbelle suggests that the Gematen monument should be recognised as the evidence of the third act of the same "performance" which, she thinks, has been commemorated by the two aforementioned stelae of Aspelta's year 3 (Valbelle 2012, pp. 6, with note 13; 51).

In Valbelle's logic, the condition of the Doukki Gel and Gematen stelae, broken into small pieces (and not "buried" in the caches along with the fragments of the broken statues when these were removed by the later "cleaners" during the renovation works in these temples), makes one exclude them from among the objects damaged during the Egyptian invasion

23 The idea that the campaign of Psammetichus II was a preventive blow upon the Kushites as they were preparing an invasion of Egypt, occasionally reappearing in the research literature and resumed by Valbelle (2012, p. 50; cf. Schäfer 1908, 86, Anm. 2; Sauneron & Yoyotte 1952, pp. 198-204; Bonnet & Valbelle 2005, p. 164), is in fact very disputable. It seems to rest on two main arguments: (a) the statement in line 6 of the Tanis stela of Psammetichus II that his forces were sent to Kush after he had received a dispatch informing him that the Land of the Nehsiu plotted some "fighting" with him (Sauneron & Yoyotte 1952, pls. III-IV); (b) the statement in line 2 of the Election stela of Aspelta that when his predecessor died his whole "army" was stationed at the Pure/Sacral Mountain, which some scholars tend to identify with Abu Simbel rather than with Jebel Barkal, thinking that these troops were, or could be taken for, a threat at the Egyptian border. Whereas the first point is difficult to verify today, the second one might be assessed with a somewhat greater certainty.

It will be recalled that although the place name Pure/Sacral Mountain seems to have been attested in *Egyptian* texts with reference to several other locations as well (cf. Gauthier 1929, pp. 115-116) the group of the examples coming from the area around Jebel Barkal, and found *in situ*, is doubtless the most numerous one and apart from the Kushite written monuments includes a number of much earlier Egyptian ones as well. It has to be stressed that not a single text here nor anywhere else on the territory of Kush associates the toponym in question with anything but Jebel Barkal and Napata. Thus there is no reason whatsoever to suppose that the point referred to in line 2 as the place of the Kushites' military gathering (*dmj dw w3b* the "town/quarter/quay/vicinity of the Pure Mountain") is much different from – which does not necessarily mean identical with – the place mentioned in lines 1, 11, 15, 17, 23, 25 as the abode of the supreme local god, and simultaneously the chief sanctuary of the kingdom (cf. Grimal 1981-b, p. 108). Thus, the allegation that the Kushites' military presence at Abu Simbel, taken as a sign of aggression, had brought about the Egyptian invasion, is hardly supported by any sufficient proofs (cf. Spalinger 1982, Sp. 1171). It would seem that the Egyptian pharaohs but rarely felt they really needed any "moral" pretext when dealing with their neighbours (cf. Hans Goedicke's conclusion: "It rather seems that it (the Kushite campaign – *A.V.*) was undertaken on the urging of the troops themselves in their quest for booty. In short, there were no events leading to this war <...>" (1981, S. 198).

24 "<...> la mise en pièces d'une cinquième stèle d'Aspelta, dont près de 350 fragments ont été trouvés à Méroé dans le temple dit «du soleil», est vraisemblablement sans rapport avec cette expédition militaire. <...> il est peu probable que ces dernières (sc. troops of Psammetichus – *A.V.*) aient atteint la ville de Méroé où Aspelta s'était réfugié et qui allait devenir la capitale du royaume méroïtique" (Valbelle 2012, p. 51).

25 "<Kawa> XLI. <...> Fragments of grey granite from a stela (?) of King Aspelta <...>" (Macadam 1949-a, p. 89, with note "a").



and look for an alternative explanation of the causes of their – much later? – destruction.

Probably because one of the three (supposedly) interrelated monuments (the Dedication stela from Sanam) did manage to survive intact, Valbelle put forward a guess that the monuments in question may be dedicated to some events which took place *after* the Egyptian invasion of Kush. Believing that the Dedication stela testifies to some radical transformations in the Amun temple at Sanam, she makes a novel, and rather unexpected, assumption that a period of religious renaissance may have begun in Kush some time after the invaders' withdrawal. Accordingly, the three stelae of Aspelta's year 3 would seem to be commemorating his efforts to restore the religious life in three major sanctuaries of Kush, interrupted by the Egyptian invasion: the Amun-Re temples of Pnubs (Doukki Gel), Gematen (Kawa) and Sanam.

Considering from this perspective the Doukki Gel stela (the main focus of her study), Valbelle observes that: «Les neuf premières lignes de la stèle de Doukki Gel décrivent une commission similaire, composée majoritairement des mêmes personnages, qui s'est sans doute rendue dans le temple de l'Amun de Pnubs pour rétablir, comme à Sanam, le bon fonctionnement du culte après l'expédition de Psamétique II» (Valbelle 2012, p. 5).

As for the paradox of two out of the three commemorative monuments having been later thoroughly destroyed, the author tends to assign this – without going into details – to some later political developments in Kush, accompanied by a new wave of iconoclastic actions (Valbelle 2012, pp. 50-51).

4.

The interpretation of the events presented by Valbelle in her study of the most difficult material from the early regnal years of Aspelta is most impressive. Logically, if the resemblance of two testimonies could be considered mere coincidence, the appearance of a third could have pointed to a certain “regularity,” much strengthening the rendering chosen. However, as in the case of Török's bright historical reconstructions, the problem is that a closer study of the newly recovered pieces of evidence and a critical revision of some earlier ones may lead one to conclusions somewhat different from those proposed by Valbelle.

First, it should be pointed out that only two sources (the Sanam/Dedication and the Doukki Gel/Pnubs stelae) out of the three for Aspelta's reign referenced by Valbelle are safely dated. As for the Gematen monument (Kawa XLI), the fragments are interesting but rather unreliable as a source. The dating of this inscribed object to Aspelta's year 3 on the

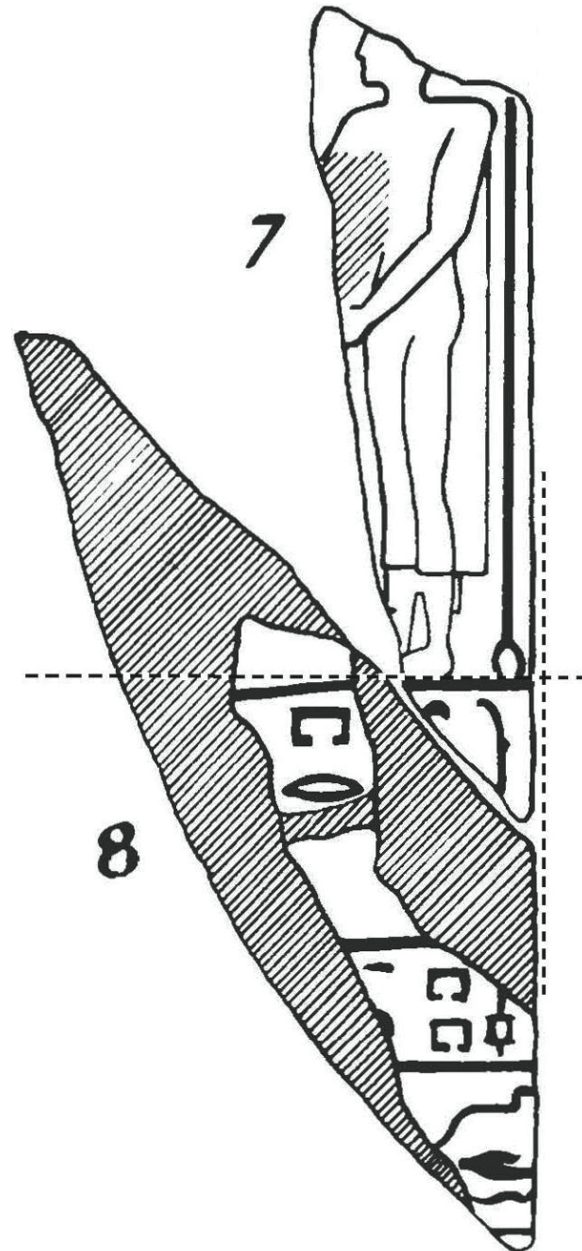


Fig. 2: Fragments 7 and 8 of the “stela” Kawa XLI, as seen in Macadam's reconstruction (after M.F.L. Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa*, Vol. I: Plates (London, 1949), pl. 40, fragment).

basis of its reconstruction in Macadam's publication can only be accepted with reserve, because, judging by the editor's wording, the assemblage of the fragments as shown in his reproduction is subjective, if not random, and, therefore, *conventional*.²⁶

Particularly problematic appears to be the combination of fragments 7 and 8 showing the very beginning of the text (Fig. 2). One can notice that the base

²⁶ “Only the fragments 1-4, 6, and 7 can be certainly assigned to their original position. No. 5 belongs somewhere on the upper edge of the linette, 6 and 9 to the l.[eft] side, 8 (our focus here – AV), 10, and 11 to the r.[ight] side, and 12 and 13 to the bottom” (Macadam 1949-a, p. 89).

line on which the female figure in fragment 7 stands does not match the “corresponding” part (the upper separator of line 1 where the supposed date seems discernible) in fragment 8 neither in thickness, nor even in direction, for they seem to form an obtuse angle, here emphasized by the broken lines. This might indicate that the suggested mating of these two fragments is not correct and consequently make one doubt the restoration of the date suggested by Valbelle.

Secondly, according to one of Macadam’s brief remarks in the *Post Scriptum* in Vol. II of *The Temples of Kawa*, often missed or disregarded by scholars, he expressed doubts about this object’s earlier identification as a stela, opting for its rendering as part of a possible *statue* (Macadam 1955, pp. 242, cf. 18, 134, 217, 221, 224, 233, pl. 21; cf. Macadam 1949-a, p. 89, note “a”). If this latter view could be accepted, one would have to recognise this artifact – following Valbelle’s classification of the damaged objects (see above) – as one of the monuments destroyed by the troops of Psammetichus II rather than by the Kushites in later internal political conflicts. Thus, the reference to this case might be counterproductive for her own historical reconstruction.

As for the other two pieces of evidence, their interpretation in this study is also not without problems. Valbelle’s idea that the events recorded took place *after* Psammetichus’ campaign seems to rest on the assumption that the erecting of the Sanam and the Doukki Gel stelae reflects a (temporarily?) *peaceful* state of affairs in the kingdom, the respective sanctuaries included (Valbelle 2012, p. 50). The essence of the action, accordingly, was an attempt to revitalize temple life which must inevitably have been interrupted by the invasion of the Egyptian pharaoh’s troops.

It is very revealing, however, that the text of the Dedication stela, our main source of relevant information, does not appear to contain the slightest hint of anything remotely resembling a religious revival after a period of political upheaval. As a matter of fact, what we see in the text outwardly seems to be a rather plain description of a quite *habitual* action.

There are, however, some oddities in the record. As noticed in several recent studies by the present writer, a number of points are worth paying attention to here:

a) the text having a legal nature (for the main theme is, doubtless, the transfer of endowments – at the level established by Aspelta’s predecessor, Anlamani – from one of the king’s relatives to another), it remains uncertain whether, alongside

it, the latter person would replace the former (and if so, *when?*) in the hierarchy of the Sanam temple of Amun-Re;

- b) the “king’s sister (and) king’s daughter” Henuttakhebit, who formally appears to be the focus of the record, and is represented in the relief in the lunette of the stela as a member of the “Holy Family” (Fig. 1) – along with three gods (Amun, Mut and Khonsu) and three royalties (king Aspelta, “king’s mother” Nasalsa,²⁷ and “king’s sister (and) king’s wife” Madiqen) – the real “significance” of her status may be assumed from the fact that her figure is the last and smallest in the row, whereas her name is not afforded the simplest of the royal attributes,²⁸ a royal cartouche (Vinogradov 1999, S. 126-27);
- c) the office of a/the “sistrum player” in the temple of Amun-Re at Sanam, into which Henuttakhebit is inducted, might seem rather uncertain in status, for its high position in the priestly hierarchy of the temple appears to be presumed rather than proved in the research literature, whereas some evidence tends to indicate that temple musicians (including those operating with sistrum) in Kush might be recruited even from among the prisoners of war, whose position one would hardly expect to be

27 Noteworthy is the reference to Nasalsa as the “belle-mère” (mother-in-law? stepmother?) of Aspelta in the study under discussion (Valbelle 2012, p. 27; cf. Pierret 1873, p. 99). So far these persons’ relations have usually been reconstructed from the four main facts: a) the predecessor of Aspelta on the throne of Kush was his brother (Election stela, line 23), b) Aspelta’s predecessor was king Anlamani (Dedication stela, lines 9-10), c) *Nasalsa* was the mother of Anlamani (stela Kawa VIII, line 22, and lunette), d) Nasalsa accompanies Aspelta in the relief on the Dedication stela, introduced as “king’s sister (and) king’s mother” in the caption and in the main text (lines 9-10). It would seem natural to deduce therefrom that Nasalsa was the mother of Aspelta (Macadam 1949-a, p. 126; Dunham & Macadam, pp. 145, no. 50; 149; Török 1994-b, pp. 229; Török 1995, p. 63; Lohwasser 2001, p. 64). Any assumption that the kinship terms “mother”, “brother”, “son”, in any of these cases are – or might be – implying affinity, adoption, etc., rather than biological/blood relationships, would need very strong proofs, the importance of which can be seen from some relevant considerations in Angelika Lohwasser’s study on Aspelta’s descent (2005, S. 151-153).

28 The usage of the title “reine” with reference to Henuttakhebit (Valbelle 2012, pp. 5, 17) is most misleading because both in the text and in the relief scene on the Dedication stela she is only referred to as a “king’s sister (and) king’s daughter”, *i.e.* clearly as a “princess”. In fact, the only proof that she did *eventually* become a queen are her royal cartouches and the title “king’s wife” on several *ushabti* figurines from the tomb Nu. 25 (for the discussion see Vinogradov 2012, S. 112, 114-115, with note 92).



particularly privileged (Kawa III, cols. 22-24; VI, cols. 20-21; IX, cols. 62-63; *cf.* Vinogradov 2012, S. 112-113);

- d) the endowments allotted by Aspelta's predecessor Anlamani to his/their sister Madiqen and now transferred to Henuttakhebit,²⁹ as noticed already by Schäfer in his (re)publication of the Dedication stela, looks strikingly moderate, to say the least (Schäfer 1895, S. 108; Тупаев 1912, pp. 232-233; Blackman 1921, pp. 29-30; *cf.* Vinogradov 2012, S. 109-110).

A curious metaphor conveying the contradictions inherent in the Dedication stela's account appears to be the fact that this royal decree (a very rare, almost exceptional – and presumably very important – an occurrence) is incised on the granite slab which is, perhaps, *the smallest* among all Kushite stelae accessible today, the Doukki Gel (supposed) duplicate of it – to judge by the perceptible two out of its three dimensions – being similarly tiny.³⁰

In view of all these and some other oddities it has recently been suggested in the research literature that the text of the Dedication stela, while giving an account of some significant events of king Aspelta's regnal year 3, is actually *ambivalent*, as if recording the confinement of a member of the royal family into a golden cage, perhaps implying some dynastic controversy, rivalry, etc. (Vinogradov 2012, S. 113-115).

²⁹ The remark that the princess Henuttakhebit receives the endowments which once belonged to king Anlamani's mother Nasalsa (Valbelle 2012, p. 48; *cf.* Török 1995, pp. 96-97) is somewhat puzzling for it implies that the latter once was a priestess of Amun of Sanam. In fact, the record of Anlamani's Gematen stela, the only source for his reign, states that he consecrated four of his *sisters* to be sistrum-players in four major temples of Kush (Kawa VIII, lines 24-25), one of whom (perhaps Madiqen as is usually deduced) entered the Amun temple of Sanam. Yet, there is not a word in the record (nor in any other text of Kush) about any priestly office in this sanctuary ever being held by Nasalsa, installed by her son Anlamani (!) as postulated by Valbelle (2012, p. 46). Moreover, the relief in the lunette of Kawa VIII shows her, in two scenes, holding a sistrum (*i.e.*, apparently, performing some rite) in front of the god Amun of Gematen which makes one doubt that she could simultaneously be a "high-priestess" in the Amun temple at Sanam, unless the assumption is made that this sort of representations is (always or sometimes?) merely allegoric. For a detailed discussion see Vinogradov 2012, pp. 111-112.

³⁰ *Cf.* the dimensions of Aspelta's Sanam/Dedication stela – 70 × 45 × 19 cm and the Doukki Gel stela – [...] × 45 × 20 cm, as compared with 131 × 71 × 29 cm of Kawa III, the *smallest* of the Gematen stelae of Taharqa (Valbelle 2012, pp. 10, 21; Macadam 1949-a, p. 4: Kawa III).

5.

The publication of the fragments of the Doukki Gel stela, for all the paucity of its surviving remains, has provided for some new, additional and historically very interesting information, and it seems to provide us a clue to better understanding the otherwise rather obscure records of the events of king Aspelta's regnal year 3.


As stated above, most scholars have long recognised as an important feature of the two ceremonies in question the fact that the delegation(s) of the officials visiting the temples were acting *on behalf* of king Aspelta, translating his orders to the priesthood of the respective temple (Pierret 1873, p. 101; Pierret [1876], p. 90; Schäfer 1895, S. 111; Sottas 1913, p. 133, note 3. See discussion in Vinogradov 2012, S. 107-109), or *vice versa*, according to Budge (1912, p. 107).

Some alternative considerations were expressed by Blackman in 1921 in whose opinion the main actor at the ceremony (as represented in the Dedication Stela) was the king himself who "<...> had all his chief officers <...> and the priests of Amun lined up <...> and informed them that he had appointed his daughter to the office of high-priestess" (Blackman 1921, p. 28). A more sophisticated view was presented in 1994 by Török who assumed that the king – in the course of his enthronement voyage – arrived at the temple to attend the ceremony of induction into priestly office of the "king's daughter," who would later become his spouse and assist him in commencing – by way of a co-regency – a new cosmological cycle in the existence of the Kushite kingdom (Török 1994-b, pp. 267-268; Török 1995, pp. 60, 65, 92-102, 114-133). According to this interpretation, in the scene under discussion "<...> the king is presented by the royal council a proposal concerning the appointment" (Török 1994-b, p. 265; Török 1997, p. 239).

Some time ago, discussing the above interpretations, the present writer had to admit that since the wording of the Dedication stela text at the critical point (lines 8-9) is rather obscure, the alternative renderings by Blackman and Török, stressing the king's personal presence at the ceremony in the Sanam temple of Amun-Re, should be considered as *theoretically* possible, which does not impede the acceptance – by the "principle of Ockham's Razor" – of the traditional reading as preferable (Vinogradov 2012, S. 107-109).

The publication of the Doukki Gel stela fragments, recording, as the editor reasonably assumes, an analogous/parallel ceremony in the Amun-Re temple at Pnubs performed several weeks later, sheds some more light on the matter under discussion.



The very beginning of the main part of the record states:  “Now, (while) His Majesty (stayed) in(side [of]) //” (line 2) the record of the delegation’s visit to the Amun temple following. Regrettably, the actual place where Aspelta stayed remains unknown due to the lacuna in the text, but from what survives it is clear at least that he was *absent from the temple* at the time of the ceremony (the usage of the preposition *m-hnw* hints that he stayed in some palace; for the closest parallels see Kawa VIII, line 17; IX, cols. 5, 7, 27, 45; XIII, col. 3) and, consequently, *did not take part* in it.

This indication in the account of the Doukki Gel stela substantially supports the “traditional” rendering (as against the “alternative” ones) of the parallel, much more complete version in the Sanam/Dedication stela and is of principal importance for the interpretation of the action described.

On the one hand the above reference is fatal for Török’s hypothesis that the account of the Dedication stela has to do with one episode of the strangely prolonged procedure of Aspelta’s enthronement, paradoxically stretching into his 3rd *regnal* year and still unfinished (because his “ritual” marriage with Henuttakhebit – his alleged counterpart on the throne – was still ahead). Indeed, it is hard to imagine that such an important political undertaking as the (supposed) promotion of the future spouse, evidently meant to secure the king’s legalisation, could have been performed *in absentia* of the latter.

Most significantly the same consideration makes an impassable obstacle to the alternative interpretation suggested by Valbelle believing that the Sanam and the Doukki Gel stelae record the induction of two female relatives of king Aspelta into priestly offices (as postulated, very high and influential)³¹ in

31 The idea about the privileged positions of the “sistrum-players” in Kush (sometimes compared to the High Priestess of Amun at Thebes) seems to be usually postulated on the basis of some general *presumptions*, apparently because the discussion is more often focused on the representatives of the royal family (Sander-Hansen 1940, S. 24; Troy 1986, pp. 83-89; Török 1995, pp. 97-98; Lohwasser 1998, pp. 135-137; Lohwasser 2001, p. 61; Valbelle 2012, p. 46). Thus, according to Blackman: “<...> king Aspelta appointed a member of the reigning family to be high-priestess <...> of Amun of Napata, as his predecessor Anlaman had done” (1921, p. 28). The alternative renderings are usually disregarded and some testimonies which contradict the generally accepted view are mostly ignored. It may, however, be pointed out that the aforementioned king Anlamani’s consecration of his sisters as “sistrum-players” into four major temples of Kush (Kawa VIII, lines 24-25) is recorded in his Gematen stela as a *sixth*-important event, whereas his installation of a Third (!) Prophet of Amun in Gematen is mentioned on the *third* place (See discussion in Vinogradov 2012, S. 111).

two major sanctuaries of Kush, in order to secure the revitalising of the religious life in Kush interrupted by the disaster of Psammetichus’ invasion.

The surviving ancient Sudanese written monuments provide for substantial relevant material indicating that the appointment to priestly offices (including the less important and even the lowest in rank) in Kush was a prerogative of the king (*cf.* Valbelle 2012, S. 47), which is logical, bearing in mind that, in principle, the priests must have been considered to be merely *professional deputies of the ruler, replacing him* in the cult of *his* divine parents.³²

It will suffice to recall here the mythologising reminiscences in two stelae of Taharqa about his great uncle Alara (the supposed founder of the royal house of Kush) having committed three of his sisters to the god Amun (Kawa IV, lines 16-19, *cf.* Kawa VI, cols. 22-25) or the brief reference in the Gematen stela of Anlamani to his having “dedicated” his sisters as sistrum-players into four main temples of Kush, apart from his “giving (the office of) the Third Prophet” at Gematen, “which none of his predecessors had done” (Kawa VIII, lines 9, 24-25), in the course of his enthronement/coronation journey. Of particular interest are some statements in several stelae of Taharqa and in the Gematen Great inscription of Irikeamannot showing that it was not only the highest clergy appointments that were (or might be) controlled by the king but also the provision of temples with personnel much lower in rank (including musicians), taken sometimes, occasionally in “families,” even from among the prisoners of war (Kawa III, cols. 22-24; VI, cols. 20-21; IX, cols. 62-63. *Cf.* Vinogradov 2012, S. 112-113).

In light of such testimonies it is clear enough that if the renaissance of the religious life (interrupted by an unparalleled in scale foreign invasion) did take place in Kush in Aspelta’s year 3, as supposed by Valbelle, it would naturally have demanded many revitalising changes in the whole life of the major sanctuaries of the kingdom, the personnel appointments included. But in this case, as is obvious from the evidence at our disposal, the king would hardly have refrained from personally conducting all relevant ceremonies to play his role of the son and supreme minister of Amun and most other gods.

32 As Blackman once put it, “in theory <...> the Pharaoh was *ex officio* high-priest of every Egyptian divinity, the acting high-priest being his delegate” (1921, pp. 10-11).



6.

The fact of Aspelta's *absence* from the scenes described in the accounts of his two stelae of year 3 is probably the clue to their better understanding.

It should be pointed out that the remarks about (or hints at) the king's absence from (or avoidance of taking part in?) certain public events are attested, in some variations, in a number of written monuments in Egyptian.

Such references seem more often to be met with in military reports mentioning that the king had entrusted the command over the troops to one of his "captains", remaining nevertheless the commander-in-chief as it sometimes becomes clear from the subsequent dispatches. The chronist evidently implied that the task assigned to the deputy had been initially expected to be easy enough and not demanding the king's personal involvement, although in certain examples it becomes clear that such an order eventually turned out to be inaccomplishable for the person in charge, and it was but for the king's interference that the campaign was terminated victoriously.

In some cases the ruler's refraining from certain activities is conveyed somewhat obliquely, as in the Triumphal stela of Pi'ankhy, or in the Shellal stela of Psammetichus II, where the king gets involved personally at a rather late stage of military actions.³³ Yet, a special phraseological expression seems to have come into existence by the time of Aspelta, which we see *e.g.* in the Gematen stela of his predecessor Anlamani: "His Majesty did not go against it/them, sitting in his palace (and) sending orders after/when (?) // // // " (lines 16-17). A similar remark in the Great inscription of Irikeamannot who ruled Kush over a century later, says: "Now, a host was sent to fight with them, (as) he was sitting in his palace: he did not go against them" (cols. 26-27), from which we may assume that the king's personal appearance probably was not needed (from the chronist's point of view) in the latter cases.

Such statements in the military reports provide for some very interesting relevant material for consideration, yet they do not themselves allow us to attain enough clarity regarding the two stelae of Aspelta's year 3. The situation described in the latter

accounts must be different, for they seem to record some important actions in which the king's absence can hardly be ascribed simply to his reluctance, laziness, etc., or to the insignificance of the matter, bearing in mind that a number of the highest officials are present.

In these circumstances we seem to get an additional prompt in the text of the Banishment (or Excommunication) stela, dated to regnal year 2 of an unidentifiable Kushite king, which scholars often attribute to Aspelta although the cartouches in the text are effaced and the relief in the lunette is damaged.³⁴

The text records a clash of the king with the clergy of the temple of Amun of Napata at Jebel Barkal, the main sanctuary of Kush, where a group (perhaps, a family) of "heretics", or religious dissidents, was detected, who "did a thing which the god had prohibited (lit. "had not ordered") to do" (Grimal 1981-b, pp. 38-39, pl. IX, lines 6-7), the text referring to some illegal manslaughter somehow associated with this sanctuary. This document, somewhat obscure in places due to the author's oblique narration, is relevant in our case in that it:

- a) proves that *internal political clashes* did take place in Kushite society;
- b) refers to some problems with the activities of the *temple personnel*, whose settling must have been the king's prerogative;
- c) makes it (reasonably) clear that the king, though he, doubtless, controlled the purge, *did not participate personally* in the punitive actions;³⁵
- d) is suggestive of the conclusion that in order to solve the problem (namely, to expel the "heretics" from the temple?) the king *dispatched some surrogate(s)*³⁶ with a (written?) order what to do.

34 However tempting such an identification might be (Grimal 1981-b, p. XV, thrice; Pierce 1994-a, p. 252; Török 1994-a, p. 257; Valbelle 2012, p. 47), it is hardly possible to prove it "in the present state of our ignorance". It will be remembered that, for instance, Reisner was inclined to date this monument to the reign of Amtalqa, Aspelta's successor (1931, p. 99), whereas Karl-Heinz Priese considered the text to predate Aspelta's reign (1996, S. 206; cf. Kuckertz 2014/2015, S. 279, Anm. 50). I owe the latter references to Angelika Lohwasser.

35 The rendering of the phrase "he killed them by making into a burnt-offering" (line 8) as indication that the punishment was exercised *by the king himself* (Török 1994-a, p. 257; cf. Pierce 1994-a, p. 256) is very doubtful. It is clear enough in the context, that the subject in this sentence is the same as in the foregoing one, where reference is made to the god Amun-Re: "The god made them say with their (own) mouth(s): «// // // them!»" (line 8). Cf. note 36 below.

36 The assumption that the king in person arrived at the

33 Triumphal stela of Pi'ankhy (Grimal 1981-a, pls. V-XII), lines 29-33; 76-81; 81-83; 83-84; 85-96, as compared with earlier operations headed by the king's "generals": 8; 10; 14; 16-17; 20-21; 23; 27-29, cf. 121-125. See also the Shellal stela of Psammetichus II: cols. 5-6; cf. 8 (Bakri 1967, p. 227), and the stela of Harsiotef (Grimal 1981-b, pls. X-XXV): "impersonal" references about military actions in lines 80, 92, 97, 114, as different in style from the statements in lines 77, 78, 85, 86, 102, 106-107, 108, stressing or hinting at the king's personal participating.



The statements of the Banishment stela, it seems, might give us some clue to the accounts of the two stelae of Aspelta discussed in this study. The absence (or *avoidance*?) of the king from an important public action – eventually commemorated by a special stela – may well indicate that such an undertaking was twofold in nature, being a restrictive, if not quite punitive, measure applied to a person of royal blood with all proprieties, including the decorum, observed. Such an action, as recently suggested, might be likened to the well known historical practice of “tonsuring” (forcing men to take monastic tonsure, and women to take the veil), implying celibacy, in order to remove certain potential claimants to the throne from the political arena in the course of the (inter-/intra-)dynastic clashes (Vinogradov 2012, S. 113-115).³⁷

Such a move could be a means of “shortening the list” of the potential candidates to the throne in order to secure the shift of power predetermined (somewhat illegally?) by the will of the present ruler or of the elite behind him.

A return motion of the Kushite political pendulum rather than vandalism of the Egyptian pharaoh’s troops, or a paradoxical Kushite protest against the religious renaissance attempted by Aspelta after the Egyptian invasion (as supposed by Valbelle), may

have been the cause of the damage to his monuments by some of his adversaries.

In favour of such a conclusion testify some peculiarities of the Election stela (the image of Aspelta in the relief on which has been spared while *that of his mother is damaged* (Vinogradov 1996, pp. 152-153) whose matrilineal filiation makes the backbone of the – also erased at some time – list of the king’s ancestors in the main text) and a number of the above quoted oddities of the Dedication stela, a parallel to which, according to Valbelle, is expectable in the Doukki Gel stela and probably in the Gematen “monument” (see above) as well.

The strange fact that one of the two (or three?) latter objects was left intact while the other was/were smashed into small pieces, seemingly indicative of the randomness in the Aspelta’s adversaries’ activities, in fact might have a most simple explanation. The text on the Dedication stela terminates in something like a brief “user instruction” closing with a threat addressed to the possible violator in case he dares to “remove the stela from the temple”³⁸ (which may have been a metaphor for desecration of the monument).

This latter warning, well known by numerous variations in Egyptian monuments since very early times,³⁹ must have been intended to serve as a magical spell against vandals and/or thieves. If such a formula was missed in the texts on the Doukki Gel stela and on the Gematen “monument” respectively (which, judging by the surviving fragments, certainly were not absolutely identical with the Sanam/Dedication stela inscription) this may have been the explanation of their having had a different fate in one of the most disturbed periods of Kushite history.

It might be of interest, further, that the latter two damaged monuments, having been broken into small fragments (one of which in both cases had a more or less readable cartouche of Aspelta, with no traces of erasing), were scattered over the site where they were afterwards discovered by archeologists. This is exactly the same condition in which still another

Amun temple to punish the priestly perpetrators (Maspero 1875, p. 95; Pierce 1994-a, p. 255; Török 1994-a, p. 257), though looking theoretically permissible, is, however, hardly acceptable practically because of the spelling of the key word $\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{d}}\{.t\}$ in line 4 (cf. 7, twice). If the verb $\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{d}}(j)$ “go, set out, proceed” were used, the presence of the determinative Δ (D 54: “Legs walking”) would have been expected, whereas no use without it seems to have been attested by *Wb.* I. 397-398. On the contrary, the very *lack of a determinative* in our case indicates that some derivative of the stem $\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{d}}$ “(make a) command” is to be read (*Wb.* I. 394(-397), with a remark: “auch ohne Det[erminativ]”), which speaks in favour of the translation: “His Majesty (made a) command to the temple of his father Amun of Napata <...> to expell that clan/family”. Similar view is deducible, e.g., from the brief retellings of this stela by August Mariette (1865, p. 174) and Isidor Katznel’son (1970, pp. 361(-362)); cf. rendering “ordonner” in the last publication’s glossary with reference to the phrase in question (Grimal 1981-b, p. 73). For numerous parallels see e.g. the Mendesstela (*Urk.* II. 38, 9; 41, 11; 43, 1, 16; 46, 6, 8-9; 49, 11, 12; 50, 6).

37 The possibility that the Doukki Gel stela might have referred not to Henuttakhebit, mentioned in the Dedication stela, but to some other person “taking the veil” (unless we deal with the *duplicate of the same decree*) does not matter much, for it is known from the Kushite chronicles that some rulers (e.g. Alara and Anlamani) “dedicated” to Amun several of their “sisters” (Kawa IV, lines 16-17; Kawa VI, cols. 22-23; Kawa VIII, lines 24-25).

38 Ironically, this stela – almost certainly coming from the Amun-Re temple at Sanam (as indicated by the epithets “Bull of the Land of the Three-Curved Bow” and “Bull of/in (the) Place”, endemic for the main god of this sanctuary – see Vinogradov 2010) – is reported to have been found somewhere in the sanctuary at Jebel Barkal, *i.e.* in a place on the other bank of the Nile (Schäfer 1895, S. 102; cf. Pierret [1876], p. 87; Budge 1912, p. XCVIII; Grimal 1981-b, p. VII).

39 Sottas 1913, pp. 132 (Inscription d’Osorkon), 150 (Stèle de Sheshonq III), 153 (Stèle de Tefnakht), 155 (Stèle de Psammetique I), 157 (Stèle de Nechao), 158 (Stèle d’Amasis, an 8), 162 (Stèle de l’Apanage).



(undatable) broken stela of Aspelta was found in the Royal Quarter at Meroe City,⁴⁰ which shows that the same “techniques” were used by the iconoclasts in both South and North of the kingdom, perhaps suggesting the traces of one and the same campaign of the *damnatio memoriae*. This, incidentally, could have been another hint as to who was – and who was not – responsible for damaging the monuments of Aspelta and his predecessors, for it can hardly have been possible for the troops of Psammetichus II to have reached Meroe City (see above).

Today it is very difficult to ascertain when such an iconoclastic campaign could have taken place. Logically, the (genealogical?) adversaries’ revenge would seem more likely to have reached Aspelta after the termination of his rather long (at least of 24 years) reign, *i.e.* posthumously, because no traces of restoration have so far been attested on his monuments, unlike those of some other kings of Kush.

It is most regrettable that so many important details of Aspelta’s reign, undoubtedly one of the most bright and dramatic periods of ancient Sudanese history, still remain unknown to us. Yet, some new evidence may, rather unexpectedly, come to light one day, just as it recently happened during the excavations at Doukki Gel and Wad Ben Naga, which will hopefully bring about the appearance of some new studies comparable to the most stimulating and thought-provoking publication of Dominique Valbelle the discussion of which was the starting point of the present article.

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⁴⁰ Hinkel 1986, S. 58; Hinkel 2001, S. 191-200, 207-208; Taf. D.1-D.10, D. 13. I am thankful to Dr. Jochen Hallof for helping me to acquaint myself with the relevant parts of this – rather difficult of access – a publication.



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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Eine der bedeutendsten Ereignisse der letzten Jahre in der Forschung zu historischen Quellen des antiken Sudan ist die 2012 erschienene Publikation von Dominique Valbelle über die Fragmente einer willkürlich zerstörten Stele, die unlängst in Doukki Gel entdeckt wurde. Sie ist in das 3. Regierungsjahr des Königs Aspelta datiert und zeigt auffällige Ähnlichkeiten zum einleitenden Teil der „Adoptionsstele“, in der die Einführung einer „königlichen Schwester und königlichen Tochter“ als Sistrum-Spielerin in den Tempel des Amun-Re in Sanam protokolliert ist. Die Stele aus Doukki Gel muss eine sehr ähnlichen Zeremonie beschrieben haben, die – mit nahezu denselben Teilnehmern der höchsten Beamten und Priesterschaft – im Tempel des Amun von Pnubs etwa 80 Tage nach dem Geschehen in Sanam stattgefunden hat. Es ist sehr verlockend anzunehmen, dass diese

Berichte zwei Abschnitte einer einzigen Maßnahme oder Aktion waren.

Nach László Török beschreibt der Text der Adoptionsstele eine wichtige Stufe der Inthronisation. Dabei weiht König Aspelta, als er die bedeutendsten Tempel von Kusch besucht, seine königlichen Verwandten („Königsschwester“) als Sistrum-Spielerinnen. Diese sollten seine Gemahlinnen werden und – aufgrund des Dualismus der höchsten Macht in Kusch – seine femininen Gegenstücke bei der Erfüllung der kosmischen und sozialen Pflichten, indem sie ihn als Garant von Ordnung im Kosmos und im Staat legitimieren.

Nach der Ansicht von Valbelle gehören diese beiden Stelen nicht zum Inthronisationsgeschehen, sondern erinnern an die Bemühungen von Aspelta, das religiöse Leben in den großen Heiligtümern von Kusch wiederherzustellen, das durch die zerstörerische Invasion von Psammetich II. um 593 v.u.Z. unterbrochen wurde.

Das Problem beider Interpretationen ist, dass der Text der Adoptionsstele, unsere Hauptquelle der Informationen, nicht den kleinsten Hinweis auf etwas, das einer Inthronisation gleicht, oder einer religiösen Wiederbelebung nach einer Periode politischer Widrigkeiten, die der Invasion durch die ägyptische Armee folgt, enthält.

Der Schlüssel zum besseren Verständnis dieses Befundes könnte darin liegen, dass – obwohl der Text zerstört ist – wir aus der Variante aus Doukki Gel deutlich herauslesen können, dass König Aspelta an der beschriebenen Zeremonie nicht persönlich teilgenommen hatte. Die Abwesenheit (oder das Fernbleiben?) des Königs von einer wichtigen öffentlichen Aktion, möglicherweise durch eine spezielle Stele erinnert, könnte darauf hinweisen, dass solch ein Vorhaben von zweierlei Natur war: eine restriktive, wenn nicht sogar strafende Maßnahme gegenüber einer Person königlichen Blutes, doch mit all dem angemessenen Decorum. Solch ein Schachzug könnte der Verkürzung der Liste von möglichen Thronkandidaten dienen, um die Übergabe der Macht, die vorherbestimmt ist durch den Willen des jetzigen Königs oder der Elite hinter ihm, zu sichern.