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VON MUSAWWARAT ZU MEROITISCHEN DARSTELLUNGEN  
VOM VIRTUELLEN MEROITISCHEN MUSEUM ZUR  
ENCYCLOPAEDIA

FROM MUSAWWARAT TO MEROITIC IMAGERY  
FROM VIRTUAL MEROITIC MUSEUM TO ENCYCLOPAEDIA

DE MOUSAWWARAT À L'IMAGERIE MÉROÏTIQUE  
DU MUSÉE MÉROÏTIQUE VIRTUEL À L'ENCYCLOPÉDIE<sup>1</sup>

If every scholar invested in the archaeology and ancient history of Sudan has an image of the griffin Apedemak in his mind, it is due to the fact that a graffito from Musawwarat es-Sufra was chosen by Fritz Hintze as the logo for the publication of the *Lion Temple* (Fig. 1-2). The image is “iconic” – as it is now trendy to say – of the religious imagery of the most Meroitic of the gods from the Butana: the Lion God of Meroe. As a matter of fact, it is not only the logo of that publication, it is also the logo of *Antike Sudan* in which this article is published. When it comes time to describe the components of such an image, it is easily understood that many concepts are involved in its composition and that many keywords are necessary to describe the motif. For this single graffito, one could suggest: “*ânkb*-sign (?)”, “Apedemak”, “griffin”, “*hembem*-crown”, “lion”, “lotus flower (?)”, “sceptre”, and “wing”. Each of these words/concepts lead us toward a large corpora of representations of the same or similar objects, motives, animals, gods, etc. and help us to understand, and then to explain in a comprehensive way how the Meroites represented their mental world. This shared reality across all of the research into Kushite studies is at the foundation of the project announced here.

<sup>1</sup> Mes remerciements les plus vifs à Cornelia Kleinitz pour l'invitation, à Nadia Licitra et Julie Anderson pour l'aide apportée à la rédaction et à la révision de l'anglais de ces lignes.



Fig. 1: Musawwarat Es-Sufra. Great Enclosure. Graffito 520/8 representing Apedemak in the form of a griffin. Photo V. Rondot.

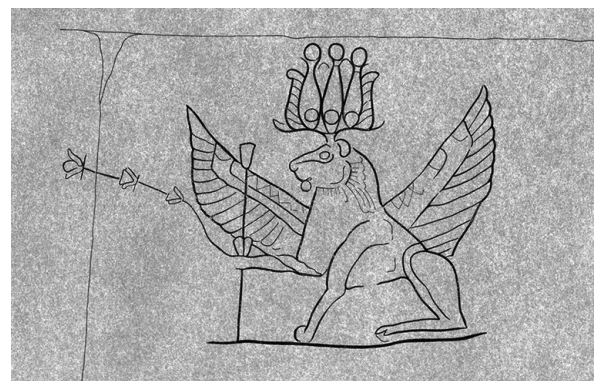


Fig. 2. Facsimile of the same graffito 520/8 by Christa Link, 1974. Sudan Archaeological Collection & Archive at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.



## THE RÉPERTOIRE D'ICONOGRAPHIE MÉROÏTIQUE

In 2016 the launch of the *Répertoire d'Iconographie Méroïtique (RIM)* by the Musée du Louvre was announced at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference for Meroitic Studies in Prague. Then in September 2018, the first workshop focused on the project presented the ambitions and methodological guidelines of the *RIM* to the scientific community during the 14<sup>th</sup> International Conference for Nubian Studies in Paris<sup>2</sup>.

Through a comprehensive study of the Meroitic iconographical production, the project aims to analyse and describe the ways in which the Meroitic kingdom adopted a vocabulary and repertoire of exogenous forms, Pharaonic and Hellenistic, and incorporated them into its own imagery. The Kingdom of Meroe offers an opportunity to observe a rare example of syncretism, as it was the culmination of a long-standing relationship between a culturally African society and the pharaonic realm, the latter itself a conduit for influences from the Mediterranean world.

Even today the question of the nature of this centuries-long influence from the land of the Pharaohs divides scholars into two camps: some see it as an obstacle or filter blocking our direct access to the indigenous characteristics of the Kushite peoples, while others study it as an object of research in its own right. On one hand, research that focuses particularly on demonstrating external influences on Meroitic culture being more frequent, tends to obscure the indigenous character and originality of Meroitic production; on the other hand, iconographic motifs borrowed from or inspired by Greco-Roman and Egyptian repertoires have been erroneously ascribed to the lack of an original, well-structured iconographic language. At the same time,

the relationship of Meroe to sub-Saharan Africa is a subject impervious to analysis since it is more remote from the better-known Mediterranean world and for this reason it is under-represented, or even completely unexplored.

In this context, it is important to stress that until the day when the Meroitic language is deciphered, our knowledge of the history and culture of this African kingdom will still depend largely or exclusively on the information derived from archaeology and material culture. At this stage of research, iconography is the documentary source most capable of exploring Meroitic culture, since it offers a whole range of potentially rich images that have not yet received the systematic examination they deserve.

## SOME HISTORIOGRAPHY

One of the earliest manifestations, as far as it can be established, of the history of interest in Meroitic iconography and the place it has gradually occupied in the imagery of the African continent, is undoubtedly represented by volume I of *L'image du Noir dans l'art occidental (Image du Noir, 1976)*. This pioneering work was the first large-scale dissemination of the state of research on a repertoire of forms largely unknown at the time. The second was the exhibition *Africa in Antiquity*, held at the Brooklyn Museum in 1978 in conjunction with a symposium for scholars of ancient Sudan. The catalogue (Cat. ex. *Africa in Ant.*, 1978) and the proceedings of the symposium (*Africa in Ant. 1978, 1979*) began a process that culminated temporarily with the exhibition *Méroé, un empire sur le Nil* organized by the Musée du Louvre in 2010 (Cat. ex. *Méroé*, 2010). In 1986, 1987, 1988, and then 1991, four supplements to the journal *Beiträge zur Sudanforschung* published in Vienna first by co-authors Inge Hofmann and Herbert Tomandl, and then by Inge Hofmann alone, focused on fully exploiting iconography to learn more about its connection with the Meroitic world. The first, *Unbekanntes Meroe*, supplies the entire available iconography through a selection of photographic details, gleaned from the sites in the Island of Meroe at a time when the asphalt road had not been built and the region was still difficult to access. The second, *Die Bedeutung des Tieres in der meroitischen Kultur*, devoted to the animal world and drawing on zooarchaeology, confirms the attention given by the authors to the matter of ecosystems and their importance for the implications in our understanding of iconographic sources. The chapters are organized like many entries in the

2 The *RIM* Scientific Board is composed by László Török (Hungarian Academy of Sciences – Honorary President), Charles Bonnet (Member of the Institut de France – President), Abdelrahman Ali Mohamed Rahama (General Director of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums), David Edwards (Leicester University), Ghalia Garelnabi Abdelrahman (Director of the museums of Sudan), Sabah Abdel Razek (Director of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo), Pascale Linant de Bellefonds (CNRS – UMR 7041), Claude Rilly (CNRS – LLACAN UMR 8135), Vincent Rondot (Musée du Louvre – CNRS), Neal Spencer (British Museum), Didier Devauchelle (Université Charles-de-Gaulle-Lille III – UMR 8164), Pierre Tallet (Sorbonne Université), Simone Wolf (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin), Janice Yellin (Babson College, Boston), Michael Zach (Universität Wien), Cornelia Kleinitz (Institut für Archäologie der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin).



*RIM* could and should be. The third, *Hase, Perlbuhn und Hyäne – Spuren meroitischer Oralliteratur. Ein Beitrag zur afrikanischen Komponente der meroitischen Kultur*, takes a rigorous approach to the investigation of the sub-Saharan origins of Meroitic civilization. The final piece, *Steine für die Ewigkeit. Meroitische Opfertafeln und Totenstelen*, lays the groundwork for the *Grandes Séries* on which the collection of data for the *RIM* will be organized, here are “Offering tables” and “Funerary stelae”, two of the main corpora of Meroitic funerary artefacts. In 1971, the publication of the reliefs of the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra under the direction of F. Hintze, following the complete reconstruction of the monument which had collapsed *in situ*, literally added a new temple to the short list of those that at the time were known in the Island of Meroe. One could recognize in the 150 pages of the iconographic study of these reliefs, published in 1993 by S. Wenig, and entitled “Die Darstellungen. Untersuchung zu Ikonographie, Inhalt und Komposition der Reliefs”, the methodological matrix of the *RIM*.

The year 2002 marked a milestone in the study of Meroitic iconography with the publication of László Török's *The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art. The Construction of the Kushite Mind (800 BC–300 AD)*. His 218-page-long *Chapter Two* entitled “Iconography and Order in the World” should be seen as a pivotal point for the iconographic research to be carried out here. *The Kingdom of Kush. Handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic Civilization*, published in 1997 followed and heralded a new stage that came in 2011 with *Hellenizing Art in Ancient Nubia 300 BC – AD 250 and its Egyptian Models. A Study in ‘Acculturation’*, where principles of continuity were shown between Napata and Meroe. The iconography of the corpus of Napatan, and then Meroitic temple reliefs, is used to describe, classify, and justify the different phenomena of borrowing, selection, and interpretation, that form three of the fundamental principles to be set forth in the *RIM* for understanding the Meroitic people's way of thinking. Work on the iconographic corpora dates back many years and is constantly progressing. For example, accounts of the decoration of the funerary chapel walls of the Begrawiya necropolises begin with the descriptions and surveys conducted by the early travellers (Cailliaud, *Voyage*, 1826–1827; Linant de Bellefonds, *Journal 1821–1822*, 1958. These remain the primary sources as they document monuments in better states of preservation than at present), then came the first scholarly expeditions (*LD*, 1849–1859), followed by the major systematic undertakings of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (*RCK III*, 1952;

Yellin, Hinkel, *The Necropolises of Kush*, in press). Reference is thus made to the *Temples immergés de la Nubie* as they were documented during the construction and then raising of the first Aswan Dam (Gauthier, *Kalabscha*, 1911; Roeder, *Debod-Bab Kalabsche*, 1911; Blackman, *Dendur*, 1911; Roeder, *Dakke*, 1930). Built in the Dodekaschoinos and then the Triakontaschoinos, they draw particular attention to the phenomenon of a theological coexistence in the Ptolemaic and Meroitic kingdoms. It is worth remembering that the documentation of the northernmost iconographic source, the procession of eighteen figures carved in the “Meroitic Chamber” in the Temple of Isis at Philae (*REM* 0097–0111) is for now only known from Lepsius (*LD IV*, 167–168; *VI*, pl. 2–5) and the surveys by F. Ll. Griffith (Griffith, *Meroitic Inscr. II*, 1912).

#### THE *RIM* PROJECT

The *RIM* project aspires to create a comprehensiveness of the source material that is indispensable in order to avoid the biases that come from partial documentation. Browsing through exhibition catalogues clearly shows that the pieces illustrated are often the same. A good example is the famous treasure of Queen Amanishakheto: the gold and silver jewellery is highly represented in publications, while most of the stone and faience objects only appear in the first study of this assemblage which dates to 1910 (Schäfer, *Goldschmiedearbeiten*). Furthermore, apart from a few dozen objects that include masterpieces of Meroitic art and imported items, most of the artefacts preserved in museums are still unpublished and often inaccessible to the research community.

The real number of Meroitic artefacts in museums around the world is unknown (not more than 20,000 pieces according to a recent and preliminary assessment made by the *RIM* team) and thousands of documents are not taken into account by scholars. Up to now, Meroitic artefacts have been identified in 59 international museums and collections:

##### *Belgium*

Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire

##### *Canada*

Montreal, Redpath Museum of the  
McGill University  
Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum

##### *Czech Republic*

Prague, Náprstek Museum

*Denmark*

Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek

*Egypt*

Aswan, Nubia Museum

Cairo, Egyptian Museum

*France*

Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts

Nantes, Musée Dobrée

Paris, Musée du Louvre

*Germany*

Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung

Berlin, Humbolt-Universität

Hannover, Museum August Kestner

Leipzig, Ägyptisches Museum der Universität

Munich, Staatliche Sammlung Ägyptisches Kunst

Weiden, Internationales Keramikmuseum

*Italy*

Pisa, Musei di Ateneo

Turin, Museo Egizio

*Japan*

Kyoto University

Tokai University

*Netherlands*

Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden

*Poland*

Poznań, Muzeum Archeologiczne w Poznaniu

Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie

*Spain*

Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional

*Sudan*

Ed-Damer Museum

Karima Museum

Kerma Museum

Khartoum, Sudan National Museum

Khartoum University

Merawi Museum

Nyala Museum

Sheikan Museum

*Sweden*

Uppsala University Museum - Gustavianum

*Switzerland*

Geneva, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire

*United Kingdom*

Bolton, Museum and Art Gallery

Brighton Museum

Cambridge, The Fitzwilliam Museum

Carfathfa Castle, Merthir Tydfil (Wales)

Edinburgh, National Museum, Scotland

Liverpool, Garstang Museum

Liverpool, World Museum

London, British Museum

London, Petrie Museum (UCL)

Manchester Museum

Oxford, Ashmolean Museum

Southampton City Council, Archaeological Collection

*USA*

Baltimore, Walters Art Museum

Boston, Museum of Fine Art

Chicago, Oriental Institute Museum

Cambridge, MA, Harvard University,

Peabody Museum

Cambridge, MA, Harvard University,

Semitic Museum

New York, Brooklyn Museum of Art

New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

New York, Museum of Natural History

Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum

of Archaeology and Anthropology

Washington D.C., National Museum of National

History, Smithsonian Institution

Washington, Georges Washington University,

Textile Museum

Worcester, Art Museum

Yale University, Peabody Museum

The *RIM* ambition is to gather all of the Meroitic decorated artefacts in a single database and make them available to the scientific community. It will be therefore possible to carry out transversal analyses of motifs and compositions through the different mediums on which they were depicted. The vast range of the images found, from that on the bezel of a seal ring to a painted temple scene or a sherd of decorated pottery, reveals iconographic variants the analysis of which helps to better understand the meaning of a motif as well as the possible evolution of its allusions or attributes. A good example is the feline head painted on jar 1912.410 in the Ashmolean Museum (Fig. 3, Colour fig. 3) which is also the *RIM* logo (Fig. 4). The composition to which it belongs has been described and explained in several ways, as the quotations below demonstrate:



Fig. 3: Jar Ashmolean Mus. Oxford 1912.410. From Faras cemetery, grave 1090 © Bridgeman Images.



Fig. 4: Logo of the RIM © RIM.

“Fine thin cream, orange wash, jewellery-designs, lion’s mask between two lotus flowers supporting three uraei with disks, fan on either side, purple and red” (Griffith, *AAALiv* 11, 1924, 159).

“Baked clay jar painted with lion-masks and lotus-flowers supporting disked-uraei.” (Cat. mus. Oxford, 1970, p. 75, fig. 39).

“The decoration is bounded by thin black double lines encircling the neck and the lower body. Six lotus flowers rest on the lower lines, each surmounted by three frontal uraei crowned with sun disks and, above them, a lion mask. The lotus and uraei composition is again repeated above the lion mask. Between these motifs are pairs of ankh-signs, one above the other, each formed like a fan with seven upright “ribs”. The sun disks and the fan shapes are painted red. [...] Griffith (1924, 159) thinks “jewellers’ designs” may be represented; he takes the transformed ankh-signs for feather fans. I cannot follow this explanation, since I can find no interpretation for that motif” (Cat. ex. *Africa in Ant.*, 1978, 292, cat. 241).

“Globular jar. Fine, hard, dense pinkish white clay. Thrown. Exterior covered with reddish yellow slip and polished. Painted decoration in a frieze around upper body in black with red filling, consisting of three motifs: a lion’s head mask, an open lotus flower surmounted by three uraeus snakes with sun disks, and a feather fan. The motifs are arranged in a repeated sequence in which the lion’s head lies in the centre with a lotus above and below and two fans on either side. The form of the jar, based on a vegetable gourd or a basket, is distinctively Nubian, and a striking contrast to the complex angular shapes of the fine wares of contemporary Egypt. The style of painting is equally emphatically Meroitic, but the motifs themselves contain elements of Egyptian pharaonic iconography. The clearest is the symbol of the uraeus snakes with sun disks meaning kingship or divinity. Here they are associated with a lion mask – possibly a representation of the Meroitic lion-headed god, Apedemak. Griffith, who excavated grave 1090, described the motifs as ‘jewellery designs’, and the lion motif does occur on jewellery of the period. There is difficulty interpreting the motifs on Meroitic pottery, since different ones, or different combinations of them, occur on almost every vessel. Griffith understood the motif flanking the lion mask as a ‘feather fan’, in which I follow him because of the association with royalty, but Steffen Wenig described it as a ‘transformed ankh sign’ [...]” (Cat. ex. *Umm el-Ga’ab*, 1981, 105-106, cat. 209).

“Vom gleichen Friedhof aus Grab 1090 stammt ein Gefäß mit Löwenköpfen zwischen Lotosblumen und Uräen” (Hofmann, Tomandl, *Bedeutung des Tieres*, 1987, 105, fig. 6).

“[...] the ‘Academic’ group contains an example in which three full face uraei emerge from, or surmount, a lotus with a lion face above them; this combination alternates in checkerboard fashion with the feather fan of Bes on a pole. [...] The uraei were probably intended to be shown surrounding the emergence of the lion from the lotus, encompassed or supported by Bes’ feather fans” (Williams, *Meroitic Remains*, 1991, 42 and n. 103).

“Pottery jar painted in red and black with lion-masks and cobra-goddesses on lotus-flowers” (Cat. mus. Oxford, 2000, p. 60, fig. 38).

“The combination lion-lotus-‘ankh is found in a further incidence in association with other motifs of religious significance. These additional motifs are the uraei crowned with sun disks. The formation is found on a globular jar from Faras Cemetery. It shows a band of lion faces or masks in association with lotus-flowers from which emerge full-face uraei crowned with sun-disks. Between these motifs are pairs of ‘ankh-signs, one above the other, each formed like a fan (of Bes) with seven upright ribs. The precise religious theme behind this combination is not clear. If the lion representation



refers to the Meroitic lion-god Apedemak, the combination may indicate that he is involved with creation, rebirth and life (lotus-‘ankh). The association of the lotus, the ‘ankh and the uraeus crowned with the sun-disk is understandable, owing to their connection with life, creation and resurrection” (Ahmed Abuelgasim Elhassan, *Religious Motifs*, 2004, 48, fig. 3, t-2).

“The wall frieze of a splendid pot from Faras displays triads of sun disk-crowned cobras emerging from lotus flowers and supporting masks of the lion god Apedemak (cf. the iconography of Harpocrates born in the chalice of the primeval lotus as symbol of the renewal of the world by the Nile flood). Pairs of Bes’ feather fan flank these motifs with ânk symbols as their handles. Bruce Williams argues that the design represents the birth of Apedemak in the lotus flower – occurring, as it may be added, in the presence (?) or through the acting (?) of the uraei and with the assistance of Bes, protector of birth. Apedemak and Bes appear in the context of the Myth of the Sun’s Eye in the column reliefs in the Apedemak temple at Musawwarat es Sufra. The symbolic rendering of Apedemak’s birth on the Faras vessel points to other sources: the painting ‘illustrated’ perhaps a now lost birth legend” (Török, *Hellenizing Art*, 2011, 290-291, pl. 138).

The very tempting reading of the composition as an illustration of Apedemak’s birth suffers from a lack of iconographic parallels and must therefore be placed in the broader context of Meroitic imagery. It is this blank that the *RIM* project hopes to fill by setting up an online Open Access scientific platform, the Virtual Meroitic Museum, involving collaboration among numerous museums on many different continents. This major endeavour is a prelude to the long-term goal of the project: the writing of the first multilingual encyclopaedia of Meroitic art.

#### THE VIRTUAL MEROITIC MUSEUM

During the first stage of the project data will be collected on a collaborative platform, a scientific environment for scholars which will become, at the end of the project, an online Virtual Meroitic Museum ensuring in the meantime the sustainability and regular updates of the documentation. Thanks to the new documents made available, it will be possible to recognize new connections between artefacts, motifs and monuments. Fragments originally belonging to a single piece and scattered in different collections across the world will be virtually gathered and visualized together. The Virtual Meroitic Museum will create a digital space where assemblages of artefacts,

as well as architectural elements coming from the same site, the same building or the same tomb can be visualized together. This will greatly facilitate the work of researchers making visible new connections and, at the same time, will offer the opportunity to raise a countless amount of new ideas and interpretations. Documents and data gathered together in the Virtual Meroitic Museum will stay at the disposal of the scientific community, and it will be possible to exploit them in the years to come. The platform will continue to generate new topics, remaining an authoritative resource regularly expanded by new discoveries.

To constitute the corpus and manage research documentation, the artefacts will be grouped in *Grandes Séries* according to their typology or specific history. They will classify iconographic sources by context, type of medium, and occasionally, material. Each series will be placed under the care of a “Head of Series” who will have the task of entering – or supervising the entering of – their documentation in French, English or German.

#### LIST OF GRANDES SÉRIES

1. Amulettes (en faïence, en bronze, en pierre) – Amulets (faience, bronze, stone)
2. Architectural (décor) – Architectural decoration
3. Bagues-sceaux – Seal-rings
4. « Bains royaux » de Méroé (décor mural et statuaire) – “Royal Baths” of Meroe (architectural decoration and statuary)
5. Bijoux/intailles – Jewellery/intaglios
6. Céramique estampée – Stamped pottery
7. Céramique incisée/imprimée – Pottery with incised/impressed decoration
8. Céramique peinte – Painted pottery
9. Cuir – Leatherwork
10. Figurines animales en terre crue – Animal clay figurines
11. Figurines humaines en terre crue – Human clay figurines
12. Fusaïoles – Spindle whorls
13. Graffiti – Graffiti
14. Harnachement et parure animales – Harness and animal ornaments
15. Incrustations en ivoire et en os – Ivory and bone inlays
16. Incrustations murales – Architectural inlays
17. Instruments liturgiques (sistres, supports à encens, etc.) – Ritual implements (sistra, incense burners, etc.)
18. Marques de maçons – Mason’s marks



19. Mobilier en faïence, en bois ou en alliage cuivreux (boîtes, étuis à kohol, etc.) – Faience, wood or bronze implements and furniture (boxes, cosmetic tubes, etc.)
20. Mobilier liturgique (repositoires de barque, autels, naoi, etc.) – Ritual furniture (bark stands, altars, naoi, etc.)
21. Peintures murales sur enduit modelé – Wall painting on shaped plaster
22. Peintures murales sur enduit plat – Wall painting on flat plaster
23. Pyramidions – Pyramidions
24. Rupestres – Rock Art
25. Scellements sur argile – Sealings
26. Scènes de chapelles funéraires et *coffin benches* – Scenes of funerary chapels and coffin benches
27. Scènes des temples immergés de la Nubie – Scenes of temples in Egyptian Nubia
28. Scènes des temples de la Nubie soudanaise – Scenes of temples in Sudanese Nubia
29. Scènes des temples de l'île de Méroé – Scenes of temples in Island of Meroe
30. Statuaire (autre) – Statuary (other)
31. Statuaire animale – Animal statues/statuary
32. Statuaire de genre colossal – Colossal statuary
33. Statuaire funéraire (statues-*ba*) – Funerary statuary (*ba*-statues)
34. Statues-colonnes – Column-statues
35. Stèles funéraires privées – Private funerary stelae (non-royal)
36. Stèles funéraires royales – Royal funerary stelae
37. Stèles royales – Royal stelae
38. Tables à libation (en pierre, en faïence, en céramique) – Libation basins (faience, stone, ceramic)
39. Tables d'offrandes (en pierre, en faïence, en céramique) – Offering tables (stone, faience, ceramic)
40. Textiles – Textile
41. Trésor d'Amanishakheto – Amanishakheto's treasure
42. Trésor de Ballana – Treasure of Ballana
43. Trésor de Qoustoul – Treasure of Qustul
44. Vaisselle en bronze – Bronze vessels
45. Vaisselle en faïence – Faience vessels
46. Verrerie – Glassware

#### THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA

The methodical documentation of the iconographic corpus through the *Grandes Séries* is a groundwork for studies across typologies and analytical descriptions of the various components of Meroitic iconography. The results of this research will flow into a printed encyclopaedia whose entries will be

written in French, English, or German, and arranged in alphabetical order (e.g. “Amesemi,” “Apedemak,” “Aqedise,” “Candace,” “cowherd,” “guinea fowl,” “horse,” “prisoner,” “royal dress,” “soldier,” etc.). Each annotated article in the *RIM* encyclopaedia will provide a synthesis of the origin of the motif, the evolution of its iconography and composition models, along with the meaning(s) accorded to them, and will be considered an independent overview providing first-rate scholarly information for researchers.

This encyclopaedic project continues the learned tradition of Nubian and Meroitic studies as illustrated by the four volumes of the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum. Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region between the eighth century BC and the sixth century AD (FHN)*, published in Bergen in 1994–2000, and the three volumes of the *Répertoire d'épigraphie méroïtique. Corpus des inscriptions publiées (REM)*, published by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres in 2000. Both in its goals and its design, the *RIM* encyclopaedia derives from a model successfully adopted by the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC)*, an encyclopaedia cataloguing the figures of classical mythology, the first volumes of which were published in 1981.

#### PRIMIS

As said above, it was in September 2018 during the 14th International Conference for Nubian Studies in Paris, that the first workshop focusing on the project presented the *RIM*'s ambitions and methodological guidelines to the scientific community. On this occasion, the booklet *PRIMIS* was distributed to the participants and copies of the same volume have been sent to academic libraries in the field. It contains a presentation of the project, editorial guidelines, a selective bibliography, and three model entries showing the type of article that will appear in the future encyclopaedia: one in French (*Pintade/Guinea Fowl/Perlhubn/ (Sudan. arab.)* دجاج حبشي دجاج \ جداد الوادي \ غيني \ خودة); the other in English (*Bouvier/Cowherd/Rinderhirt/ راعي بقر*); and the third one in German (*Aqedise-Khonsou/ Khonsu/Chons*).

The Roman name of Qasr Ibrim has been chosen to be the booklet's acronym and title, a remarkable place where the border between the territories of Meroe and Rome was set in 23 BCE. The site with its Nubian fortress, was a place of military defence, but also of trade and mutual cultural exchange and influence between two worlds.





In conclusion, the ambition of the *RIM* project is to broaden the corpus currently exploited by scholars by making available the entire Meroitic iconographic production that currently is widely dispersed and remains largely unknown.

By providing access to all of the known Meroitic decorated objects, it will be possible to reformulate the transverse questions concerning cultural transfer and to redefine the concepts of adoption, adaptation, and acculturation.

The project wishes to create synergies between disciplines that, so far, have worked too independently from one another. For instance, either Sudanese archaeology is still too often seen as a kind of poor relation of Egyptian archaeology or, conversely – and this is the prevalent epistemological trend today – it claims to be independent from it in both form and content. In this context, this project's intended audience includes all the scholars working on the archaeology of the Nile Valley (both Sudanologists and Egyptologists), because only a fruitful communication between these two specializations that may be judged at present to be too isolated from one another, will allow valuable results. Meroitic culture was the expression of a society that was geographically and culturally African, but the Nile linked it with the Mediterranean world, thus from our perspective positioning it between two worlds. Research on it is split amongst Africanists, Sudanologists, Egyptologists, and specialists in Classical Antiquity, and it demands an interdisciplinary approach that should be of interest to scholars from all four areas of study.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das *Répertoire d'Iconographie Méroïtique* (RIM) analysiert und beschreibt anhand einer umfassenden Untersuchung des meroitischen ikonografischen Schaffens, wie das Königreich von Meroe ein Vokabular und ein Repertoire von Formen, die von außen stammen (pharaonisch, hellenistisch) aneignet und dies in ihre eigene Bilderwelt inkorporiert.

Ziel dieses Projektes ist es, das gesamte meroitische ikonographische Schaffen zu dokumentieren und den Forschern durch die Schaffung einer wissenschaftlichen Online-Plattform, dem Virtuellen Meroitischen Museum, zugänglich zu machen.

Dieses Tool der Verbundforschung ermöglicht typenübergreifende Studien, deren Ergebnisse in einer gedruckten Enzyklopädie mit Einträgen in französischer, englischer oder deutscher Sprache gesammelt und in alphabetischer Reihenfolge angeordnet werden. Jeder kommentierte Artikel in der RIM-Enzyklopädie bietet eine Synthese des Ursprungs des ikonografischen Motivs, seiner Entwicklungs- und Kompositionsmodelle sowie der ihm zugewiesenen Bedeutung(en). Es wird als ein unabhängiger Überblick angesehen, der erstklassige wissenschaftliche Informationen für Forscher liefert. Mit diesem kollaborativen Forschungsinstrument soll ein breiterer Zugang zur meroitischen Kultur auf anderen Gebieten und für nicht-sudanesischen Spezialisten wie Ägyptologen, Afrikanisten und Spezialisten für die mediterrane Antike geschaffen werden, um eine vernetzte Annäherung an die Geschichte des Niltals zu ermöglichen.