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THOUGHTS ON AMESEMI¹

In Memoriam László Török (1941–2020),
an eminent scholar in Kushite Studies

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The goddess Ameseми², the female companion of the native lion god Apedemak, is one of the best documented goddesses of Meroitic culture (c. 300 BC to 350 AD). During the last years several new documents related to her have been unearthed in excavations or discovered in museums. Meanwhile well over 30 attestations are now known for the goddess. She is documented in the decoration of eight sacral buildings and on four stelae as well as on several items of jewellery, on seal impressions and in inscriptions. Except at Qasr Ibrim, Faras and Amara in the north the documents for Ameseми are found in the Meroitic heartland. Most of the evidence comes from Naga and Musawwarat es Sufra, the main cult-places of Apedemak. She either accompanies her consort or is depicted acting alone.

The goddess Ameseми is unknown in Egypt and seems – like Apedemak – to be an indigenous Kushite deity, occurring – at least at present – only in Meroitic times.³ Formerly labelled the ‘goddess with the falcon(s)’, ‘Amentet’, the ‘goddess of the west’ or ‘negro-goddess’ her full name was only recently securely identified.



Fig. 1: Name of Ameseми on stela Khartoum SNM 31338, REM 1294B, © Naga-Project.

Three features identify Ameseми: (a) her name, (b) her role as the companion of Apedemak, and (c) her characteristic costume and accessories. Her name is written in Meroitic hieroglyphs on a stela (Khartoum SNM 31338, REM 1294) found in 1998 under a column in the northern half of the hypostyle of the Amun Temple at Naga (fig. 1).⁴ The inscription

- 1 Special thanks go to Karola Zibelius-Chen and especially Jochen Hallof for their useful suggestions. Hallof has kindly sent me an excerpt from his Meroitic Analytical Dictionary and his article about the stela REM 1251. He also provided the hieroglyphic sections of the inscription from Musawwarat es Sufra presented in notes 6 and 124. For photos of the documents in/from Naga (figs. 1, 5–8, 16) I am indebted to the excavators Dietrich Wildung and Karla Kroeper, for photos of the treasury of Amanishakheto to Silvia Schoske, Staatliche Sammlung Ägyptischer Kunst München (figs. 12, 13) as well as to Olivia Zorn, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin (figs. 14, 17).
- 2 See Török 2002, 181 f. with note 623; Kormysheva 2010, 300–306; Kuckertz, in Kuckertz & Lohwasser 2016, 119 f.; 2019, 119 f.; Phillips 2016, 295, all with older references.
- 3 K. Zibelius (1983, 62 f.) takes into account that Ameseми may be derived from an Egyptian goddess (perhaps Hathor?) having acquired a Kushite name. She refers to depictions of Hathor with a falcon on her head in the Hathor Temple at Dendera. E. Kormysheva (2010, 305 f.) likewise envisages a relationship with Hathor.

- 4 Field number 101/19, REM 1294A–C, mudstone, height 26.1 cm; width at bottom 13.6 cm; thickness 3.4 cm, Carrier 2000, 6, fig. 20–23; Kröper et al. 2011, 34–36, 217, cat. 11, fig. 34; Kuckertz & Lohwasser 2016, 119 f., fig. 63; Kuckertz forthc. b with references (to be added is Rilly 2011b,

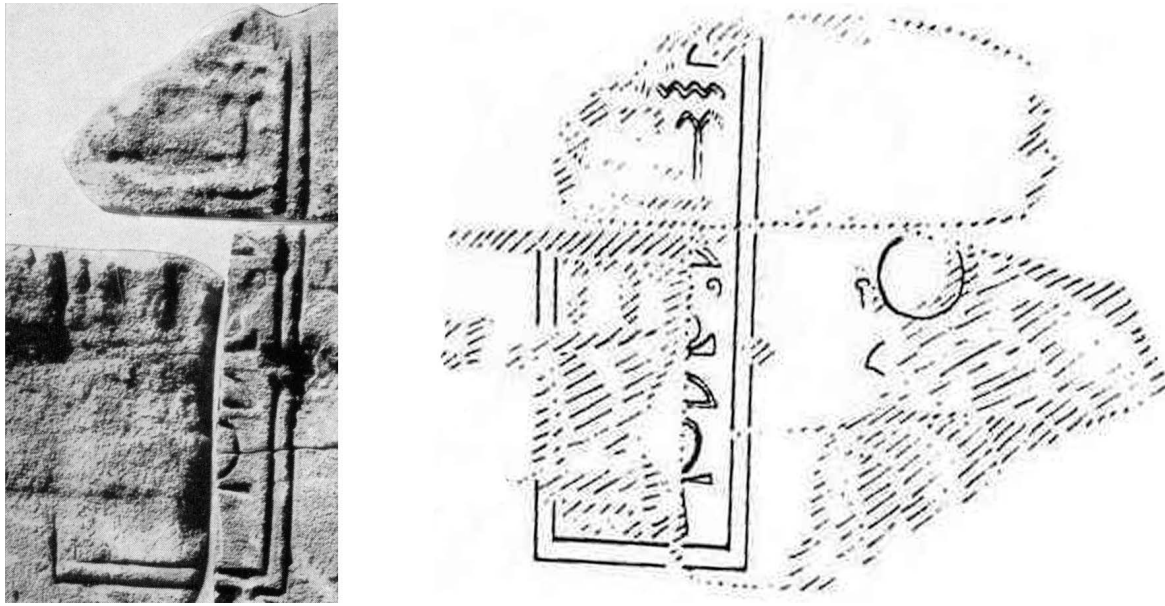


Fig. 2: Name of Amesemi and traces of (a) falcon(s) with sun disk on top of her head, Lion Temple Musawwarat es Sufra IIC, exterior north wall (left: after Hintze et al. 1971, pl. 37; right: after Hallof 2005, 41 fig. 4).

(*Amesemi-ḡo*, “this is Amesemi”), positioned behind the head of the goddess, confirms the carving of her name (*mṣmi*) in the Lion Temple Naga 300 and enables the reading of the caption in the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es Sufra. Some cursive Meroitic inscriptions likewise include her name.

The oldest references to Amesemi come from Musawwarat es Sufra; they date to the last third of the 3rd century BC. In the Lion Temple Musawwarat IIC, she is depicted six times following Apedemak.⁵ Representations of her are not always preserved *in toto*, but a female figure accompanying the lion god should be his companion Amesemi. On the exterior north wall the dress she wears is slightly different from later depictions that show a more canonical type (see below). Obviously the standard appearance of Amesemi was not yet established at the time of King Arnekhamani, the builder of the Lion Temple, who was a contemporary of Ptolemy

III and Ptolemy IV. Her image here is accompanied by an inscription in Egyptian hieroglyphs which is partially damaged, making it difficult to recognise the goddess's name, but thanks to the stela Khartoum SNM 31338 from Naga the reading at Musawwarat Temple IIC (fig. 2) is now possible.⁶ The inscription can be shown to read *ʾJmsm* – Amesemi, followed by an unknown epithet.

In the Great Enclosure IA at Musawwarat es Sufra, Amesemi is once depicted on column 8 at Temple IA 100 where she follows Apedemak and touches his shoulder (fig. 3).⁷ This scene belongs to the cycle presenting the election and investiture of the king depicted on the inner row of columns which stand along the front of the temple.⁸ A recent interpretation of the Great Enclosure proposes that the particular sacred buildings in the complex were dedicated to a divine family. P. Wolf attributes Temple IA 200 to Amesemi, Temple IA 100 to Apedemak and Temple IA 300 to a child of theirs.⁹ His assumptions,

41 f.).

5 These are (1) Exterior north wall with traces of a falcon on the head (Hintze et al. 1971, pl. 16b, 37; Wenig 1993, 87). (2) Apedemak is wearing a pectoral on the exterior north wall in which a goddess with cap and uraeus is sitting behind the small figure of a lion-headed deity; she may be identified with Amesemi too (Hintze et al. 1971, pl. 36d; Wenig 1993, 184 f. fig. 136; Onasch 1993, 252, who names her as Amentet). (3) Interior south wall with hands/gloves (Hintze et al. 1971, pl. 52d, 53). (4) Interior north wall (op. cit., pl. 66, 67). (5) Interior west wall, only feet preserved (op. cit., pl. 71, 73e). (6) On column 2 the goddess on a pedestal behind Apedemak may be Amesemi as well; the pedestal shows a depiction of an elephant in front of a tree (?) (op. cit., pl. 80, 81, 83a, scene 2/2/4).

6 On the inscription at Musawwarat IIC cf. Hintze 1962, 43, inscription 24, pl. XIVd; Wenig 1993, 87; Hofmann 1995: 2826. For the new reading $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑}$ see Hallof 2005, 40 f. fig. 4. The epithet begins with the Egyptian hieroglyphic group $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑}$ (N17) (so Hallof 2005, 40 with n. 27). The traces, however, are difficult to make out (see also below note 124).

7 Wenig 1993, 204 fig. 179; Hofmann 1994, 182 f. fig. 1 (photo); Wenig 2001, 82, fig. 12.

8 Columns no. 7, 8, 9, 10, cf. Wenig 1993, figs. 58, 179, 187, 192; Wenig 2001, 81–84, fig. 11–14. Török 1997, 438–442, figs 18–21; 2002, 180–186, figs 26–29; 2011, 189–238, especially 209–214, pls. 70–73.

9 Wolf 2001, 488–490 with a plan of the Great Enclosure fig. 1; 2006, 249, 256, fig. 15.

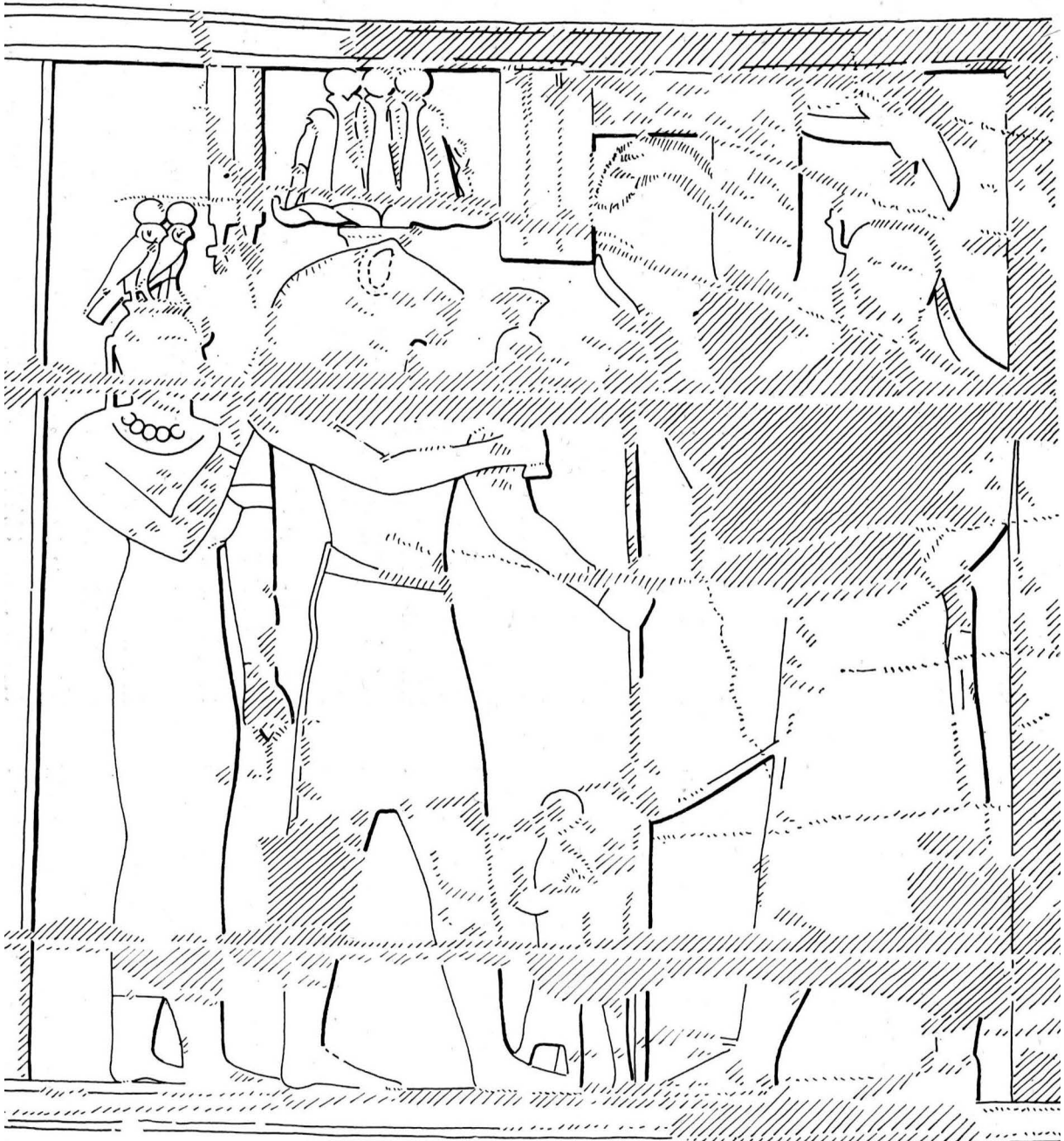


Fig. 3: The king before Apedemak and Amesemi, Musawwarat es Sufra, Great Enclosure IA, Temple 100, column 8 (after Wenig 1993, 204, fig. 179).

however, especially those concerning the owner of IA 300, rest on weak arguments and are disputable.¹⁰

A large number of documents for Amesemi come from Naga, the famous town in the Wadi Awatib lying c. 40 km away from the Nile. Naga must have been a substantial settlement as early as in the 4th century BC, and at least from the 3rd century BC onwards an Apedemak Temple existed there, making Naga one of the most important cult places for the lion god (see below).

10 Cf. Török 2011, 205 f.; Kuckertz forthc. a, chap. IV.1.2.3.

Amesemi is present in Temple F, Lion Temple Naga 300, Amun Temples Naga 100 and Naga 200, and on several stelae found at the site. The earliest documentation occurs in Temple F (Naga 500) from the time of Queen Shanakdakhete¹¹ where at the southern end of the interior south-east wall a goddess

11 The dating of Shanakdakhete is currently under discussion. C. Rilly (2011a, 183–185; 2017, 230, 261–263) places her into the late 1st century BC or early 1st century AD; other positions had put her in the 2nd century BC. Rilly identifies Shanakdakhete with ruling queen Amanishakhete which I do not follow here.



Fig. 4: Amesemi (?) behind Apedemak (?), Temple Naga 500, interior south-east wall (after Hintze 1959, pl. VI fig. 43).

(Amesemi?) stands behind an enthroned deity and touches his head (fig. 4).¹² The identification of the goddess depends on which deity is in front of her: is the enthroned deity Amun¹³ or Apedemak?¹⁴ Some observations made by M. Zach and H. Tomandl speak in Amesemi's favour for they have recognised the legs and tail feathers of a falcon on top of the goddess's head.¹⁵ The two deities directly beside the cult-niche at the interior back wall of the temple who grasp the hand of the queen – a female figure (right) and a male figure (left) – are likewise considered to be Amesemi and Apedemak.¹⁶ This is only a suggestion since no unambiguous signs identifying them are present.¹⁷

Amesemi is depicted at least twice, and perhaps a third time, in Naga 300, the Lion Temple built by King Natakamani and his mother, the *Kandake Amanitore* in the mid-1st century AD.¹⁸ Her figure on the exterior north wall is followed by an inscription (REM 0014) in which K. Zibelius in 1983 could read *m̄smi* as the name of the goddess: “[A]mesemi in ...mmi..., who gives life” with the last word of unknown meaning transcribed *keskeyi* (considered as possible epithet of the goddess).¹⁹ The reading of C. Rilly and C. Carrier (*mesemi* : [*Jmmi* [...] *teli* : *pwrite* : [*l*]*b*]*xte* : *mesemeyi*) confirms the name, here written *Mesemi* without initial *a* (aphaeresis), and repeated at the end of the label.²⁰ The inscription

12 Hintze 1959, 38 f. (Isis?), pl. 6 fig. 43.

13 Hintze 1959, 38; see the discussion in Tomandl 1999, 646 f.

14 Gamer-Wallert 1983, 142; Zach & Tomandl 2000, 142.

15 Zach & Tomandl 2000, 141 f.; the assumption of Kormysheva (2010, 302) that two falcons plus moon-crescent are present is erroneous. As Amesemi also Hofmann 1977, 114 n. 148; Gamer-Wallert 1983, 73 f.; Gamer-Wallert & Zibelius 1983, 43; Török 2002, 210; Rilly 2017, 262.

16 Hintze 1959, 39, pl. VIII, fig. 46–48; see Török 2002: 209 f.; Wolf 2006: 247.

17 The identification rests on the symbol held by the male god (cf. Hintze 1959, pl. VII fig. 46) which is regarded to be similar to that of Apedemak in Mus IIC (Hintze et al. 1971, pl. 17, 21, 89). As the temple seems to be dedicated to both, Amun and Apedemak, the two deities, on the other hand, may be identified as Amun and Mut.

18 Exterior north wall (Gamer-Wallert 1983, pl. 32, sh. 6b), interior south wall, main register and most probably in the frieze above (op. cit., 79, 211, pl. 52, 53b, sh. 10a). On the family relation of Natakamani and Amanitore see Rilly 2017, 273 f.

19 Inscription 14 of the Lion Temple, Zibelius 1983, 26 f., 60–63; REM 0014.

20 Rilly & Carrier (2004), 2116 f. The writing *Mesemi* without the initial *a* (aphaeresis) is not a defective writing, but, according to C. Rilly, a usual feature from the 1st century AD onwards where it also occurs with *Mni* (*Amni*) or *Pedemk* (*Apedemk*), see Rilly 2007, 29 f., 290–292; Rilly, in: Kuckertz forthc. a. According to J. Hallof (personal communication March 2020) both forms – with or without initial *a* – are used simultaneously throughout the whole Meroitic Period.



according to them reads “Oh Amesemi, who is in [.]mami[.], may she give them life, oh Amesemi.”

In the great Amun Temple Naga 100, likewise built by Natakamani and Amanitore, the goddess Amesemi is found on three columns in the hypostyle (columns a, f and g)²¹ where Amanitore adores her (fig. 5). The adjoining scenes above and below the panels with Amesemi are associated with her, showing her companion Apedemak and a deity presumably related to both.²² More figures of Amesemi are not preserved in the Amun Temple, but others may have been painted on plaster of which only few traces with royal figures and Nile gods have remained in some rooms.²³

In the smaller Temple of Amun Naga 200, built by King Amanakhareqerema at the end of the 1st century AD, Amesemi is documented by one clear depiction on the exterior west wall (fig. 6 left) where she is shown together with her companion Apedemak and a third figure, either a deity or, in different interpretation, the deified ruler.²⁴ A further example of the goddess may be the female figure in the second triadic group on the exterior west wall. She follows a ram-headed deity presumably to be identified as Amun-Apedemak (?). The goddess with a headgear other than Mut’s usual crown is interpreted as an amalgamation of Amesemi with Mut and is tentatively called Mut-Amesemi (fig. 6 right).²⁵ The inscriptions of both figures are not preserved.

A further Lion Temple, built upon a podium, has recently been excavated at Naga. The western half of Temple Naga 1200 bears relief decoration. A scene on



Fig. 5: Amesemi adored by Amanitore, Amun Temple Naga 100, column f, 3-D scan Trigon art, © Naga Project.

the interior east wall of room 1202 shows the adoration of Apedemak who sits on a throne composed of a feline animal with wings representing a sphinx or griffin.²⁶ Before him stands a corpulent queen followed by at least two male figures. The headless female figure behind the throne presumably is to be identified as Apedemak’s companion Amesemi. The date of the temple may be earlier than the reign of Natakamani and Amanitore.

Three stelae, found during the excavations of the Naga-Project, depict the goddess Amesemi; two come from Naga 100, the third from Naga 300. The round-topped stela SNM 31338 with the name of Amesemi in Meroitic hieroglyphs was mentioned above (see fig. 1).²⁷ The rather slender Amesemi stands opposite a corpulent figure of Amanishakhetto. With her far (left) hand, the goddess caresses the queen’s head while her near (right) hand grasps Amanishakhetto’s elbow, a gesture symbolic of elec-

21 Column f: Kröper et al. 2011, fig. 203; Kroeper 2011, pl. 24; column g: LD V 67a; Hofmann 1977, 113.

22 In the field above Amesemi the Kandake Amanitore (on column g) or the King Natakamani (on column f) adores Apedemak. The panels below show either Amanitore or the prince in front of a deity with large disk above a close-fitting cap (column g) or a deity with *bembem*-crown above a cap (column f). At least the last figure is interpreted as a deity closely connected with the couple Apedemak – Amesemi, perhaps also the former whose crown may denote solar functions. The triple constellation on column f seems significant concerning a triad made up of Apedemak, Amesemi and perhaps their child; see the discussion in Kuckertz forthc. a, chap. IX.3.

23 Plaster fallen off the walls in rooms 102 and 103, cf. Kroeper 2006.

24 See Kuckertz forthc. a, chap. IV.1.2.4 and the discussion on the third figure in chap. IX.3 and IX.4.

25 See Kuckertz forthc. a, chap. IV.1.2.7 and IX.1.2. See also the discussion on the ram-headed Amun in chap. IV.1.2.5. It is unknown whether Amesemi was depicted in the interior rooms because nearly all information concerning the heads and upper parts of the figures there are lost. Both figures on the exterior west wall of Naga 200 (when complete with crowns) would be about 270–280 cm high.

26 Kroeper 2019, 122–124, pls. 23, 27.

27 See above note 3.

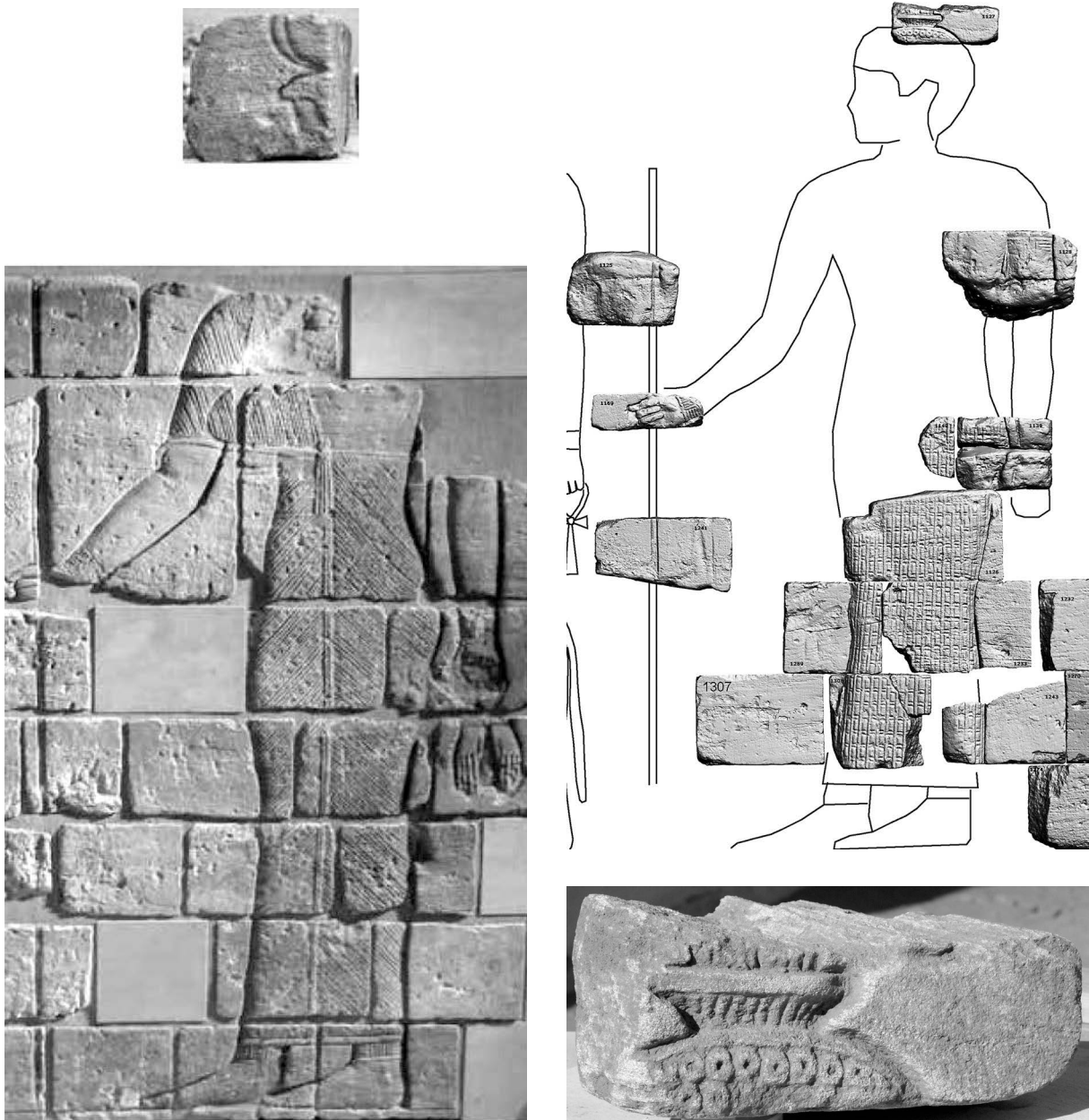


Fig. 6: Temple Naga 200, exterior west wall. Left: Amesemi (after Kuckertz & Lohwasser 2016, fig. 63). Right: Mut-Amesemi (?) with block 1127 of head, © Naga Project.

tion to royal office. Signs of life (*ankhs*) float from nose to nose. The addition of a moon crescent below the two falcons in the headgear of Amesemi is unique; a uraeus is attached to her brow.

The rectangular stela SNM 34661 (REM 1293) was found in the sanctuary of the Amun Temple in

Naga (fig. 7).²⁸ The scene depicted takes place inside a sacred building as indicated by architectural details like columns, cavetto cornice, etc. Amesemi leads Queen Amanishakheto to enthroned Apede-

mak. Both deities touch the queen's elbow and elect her as ruler. Amesemi also touches Amanishakheto's crown with her far hand – a gesture that refers to the act of coronation.²⁹ The headgear combines a *hemhem*-crown with tall falcon feathers and sun disk of Amun. The lower register contains a row

²⁸ Field number 104/4, mudstone, height 39.5 cm; width 24.4 cm; thickness 3.0 cm, Carrier 2000, 5, fig. 17–19, REM 1293; Kröper et al. 2011, 36–38, fig. 37, 213, 218–219, cat. 14; Kuckertz forthc. b, with older references.

²⁹ Kushite references of touching the crown as a symbol of coronation are enumerated in Pompei 2014, 596 f. E. Kormysheva (2010, 302) brings this stela in connection with the divine birth of Amanishakheto and assumes that here Apedemak's fatherhood may be expressed. The queen's divine birth with Amun as her father is exemplified in signet rings of her tomb treasure (on these see the literature cited below note 120).

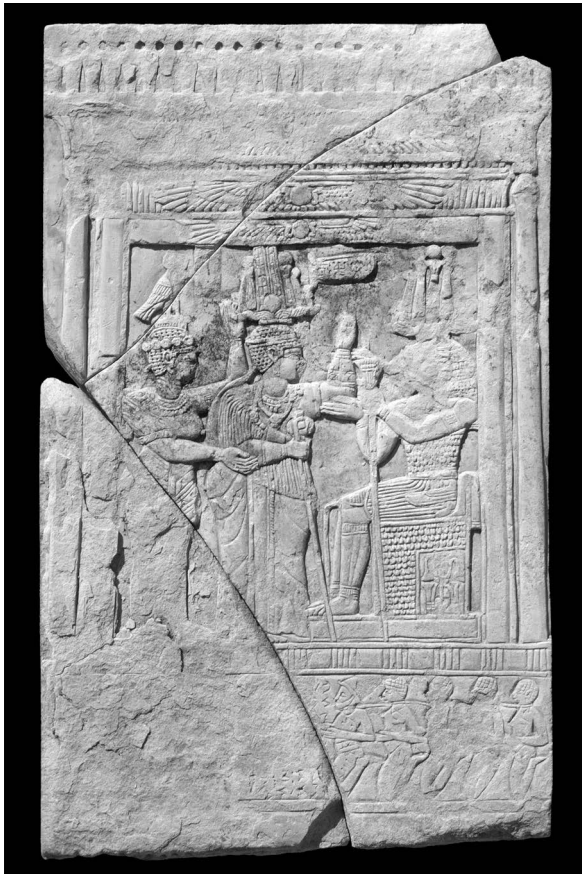


Fig. 7: Stela Khartoum SNM 34661, REM 1293, © Naga Project.

of bound prisoners, reminiscent of the architecture of a temple with a frieze of defeated enemies in the dado. One prisoner is labelled as *tameya* in Meroitic cursive script, a term believed to mean ‘white man/white people’ and to denote a Roman.³⁰ The cursive inscription on the back is a prayer to Apedemak of Daqari – to date, an otherwise unknown locality.

Two fragments of another stela (Khartoum SNM 34633) have been found in the interior of the Lion Temple Naga 300 (fig. 8).³¹ A royal woman with staff and ‘pine cone’ in her hands and a male figure – only a part of his foot is preserved – stand before Amesemi enthroned, her feet upon a footstool. The goddess

30 Rilly, in: Baud et al. 2010, 157; 2011a, 188 f. Roman identity is questioned by Matić 2015. Presumably deriving from the Egyptian term *tmh* (Libyan) *tameya* may simply denote an ethnic group. A *tmeykdi* (Libyan woman) is already documented prior to Roman times (information J. Hallof). Also in later Meroitic texts *tameya* occurs as a tribal name; *tameya* people e.g. are fought by King Kharamadoye in Lower Nubia.

31 Field number 301/7, mudstone, preserved height 9.5 cm; width 5.8 cm; thickness 2.5 cm, Kröper et al. 2011, 36, fig. 36, cat. 13; Kuckertz forthc. b; forthc. c. D. Wildung (in: Kröper et al. 2011, 34, 36) attributes the stela on stylistic arguments to the time of Amanishakheto.



Fig. 8: Stela fragments, Khartoum SNM 34633, © Naga Project.

elects the queen by touching her elbow. Amesemi wears the characteristic striped dress, and upon her head two falcons and a diadem of large beads or disks (?) with a tasselled queue hanging down behind. The figures depicted in front of Amesemi are in all likelihood Amanishakheto and the *pqr* Akinidad, a man of royal descent and governor of Lower Nubia. No inscription is preserved on the remains of the stela.

The fragment of another stela was likewise found in Naga 300 (Khartoum SNM 27499, REM 1238).³² It shows parts two female figures exchanging *ankh*-signs; only a hand is preserved of the figure at the left. Some scholars interpret one of the women as Amesemi.³³ It is not entirely clear, however, whether either of the female figures is to be identified as the goddess. The supposed falcon-claws atop the head of the figure at the right are not discernible; her dress is not like that usually worn by Amesemi. The pointed

32 Field number 301/4, REM 1238; K.-H. Priese, in: Wildung 1996, 251, 263, cat. 285; Wildung 1998, 184, pl. IV; Kröper et al. 2011, 189 f., 192, fig. 220–221, cat. 122; Kuckertz forthc. b.

33 The excavators identify the right figure as Amesemi; Rilly (2011a, 190) considers the left one as „presumably Amesemi“.

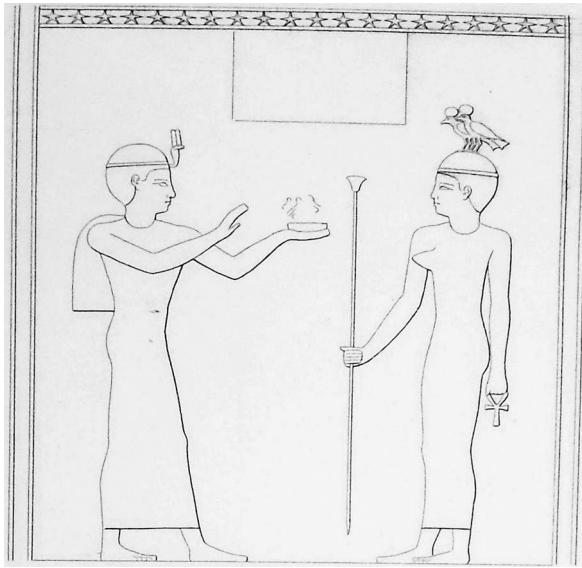


Fig. 9: Column scene in Amara (after Cailliaud 1823, pl. XVII.1).

finger-nails of both women do not speak for identifying either of them as a goddess. Obviously, the fragment depicts two *kandakes*, or royal persons, whose identities currently are not assured.³⁴ Stela fragment Khartoum SNM 27499 thus must be excluded from the Amesemi-dossier.

Amesemi is found in other buildings of Natakamani and Amanitore. In the 3rd register on column 2 of the Amun Temple at Amara Prince Sorakarora offers a bowl (?) to Amesemi who is crowned by a single falcon with sun disk.³⁵ In 1822, F. Cailliaud copied selected scenes of the columns in Amara; in one scene Amesemi has two falcons instead of one (fig. 9) which presumably is the scene on column 2.³⁶ A different goddess on column 7 in Amara is discussed by I. Hofmann³⁷ as another possible representation of Amesemi as well. The figure wears a decorative hair-do with a queue hanging behind her back down to her feet. This coiffure – in Napatan times worn by royal women – became an element of Mut's iconography in Meroitic times.³⁸ According to Hofmann, an

amalgamation of Mut with Amesemi may be feasible in this depiction.

In all probability, Amesemi is also found in the kiosk of Natakamani and Amanitore, erected in the court of the Amun Temple at Tabo.³⁹ One of the goddesses following the lion god on the interior north and south walls should be Amesemi although no definite features are present because only the lowest parts of the figures are preserved.

A hitherto unknown Amesemi document is the heavily damaged and eroded stela of Queen Amanishakheto Khartoum SNM 523 from the Lion Temple M 6 in Meroe (fig. 10).⁴⁰ The cursive Meroitic inscription REM 0406 on the verso is accompanied above by a large winged scarab holding a tiny sun disk between the hind-legs and raising the front-legs in *ka*-gesture.⁴¹ C. Rilly reads this group as the previously unknown throne-name Kheperkare (*Hpr-k3-Rc*) of Amanishakheto in rebus-writing with Egyptian hieroglyphs.⁴² Her personal name is inscribed in the cartouche below the winged sun disk on the front side of the stela (recto). In the area below the cartouche to the right traces can be recognised that belong to a figure oriented leftward. The contour of buttocks and back, perhaps also a bent arm and the outline of the head are discernible. The figure which wears a striped dress of the very same kind as the robe of Amesemi may well depict the goddess, perhaps following Apedemak (not preserved) whom Amanishakheto, standing on the left, was revering. Faint traces of feather decoration are visible, perhaps of a feathered robe worn by the queen.⁴³

Amesemi is also documented on smaller objects in different material. Seal impressions found in Natakamani's palace B 1500 bear her representation (fig. 11).⁴⁴ She stands behind a theriomorphic

34 The stela fragment SNM 27499, with interpretation and identification of the figures, is discussed in Kuckertz forthc. b. The women may represent Amanishakheto and Amanitore.

35 LD V 70a; Wenig 1977, 468, pl. 7 based on a drawing of M. Weidenbach.

36 Cailliaud 1823, Vol. II, pl. XVII no. 3. It is assumed that the Amesemi-scene of column 2 is meant (cf. LD V, 70a) which is consistent with Cailliaud's excerpt; no other depiction of Amesemi at Amara is known.

37 Hofmann 1977, 110 f., 119 f., fig. 32. Cf. Wenig 1977, pl. 9 with the prince offering a plate with bread.

38 As found on the stela of Amanikhabale and on jewellery, see references in: Kuckertz & Lohwasser 2016, 99 note 70.

The goddess of victory Taleya on the stela of Arikankharora wears a resembling coiffure (Wenig 1978, 203 f., cat. 125; to this figure cf. Zach 2017; Rilly & Francigny 2018, 70 f.).

39 Jacquet Gordon 2005. Supposed is a figure of Apedemak on each long wall (figures N11, S5).

40 Sandstone, preserved height 19.3 cm, width 19.6 cm, thickness 2.1 cm, Garstang et al. 1911, 23, 58, 64 f., pl. XXIII, LXIII.6; Kormysheva 2006, 163 f., cat. 144; REM 0406; Leclant et al. 2000, 726 f.; Kuckertz forthc. b.

41 Enough place remains above the front legs of the scarab up to the border of the stela to assume that the legs hold something, perhaps a further sun disk. No definite traces can be made out as the upper edge of the stela is partly broken.

42 Rilly 2002, 142 with n. 60.

43 Not of a winged goddess as Griffith assumes (in: Garstang et al. 1911, 64).

44 Mud, diameter 3 cm, Vincentelli 1993, 120, 122, fig. 2.3; 1994, 147, 152, fig. 2.1, pl. 7; Manzo 2006, 87 f. fig. 13.

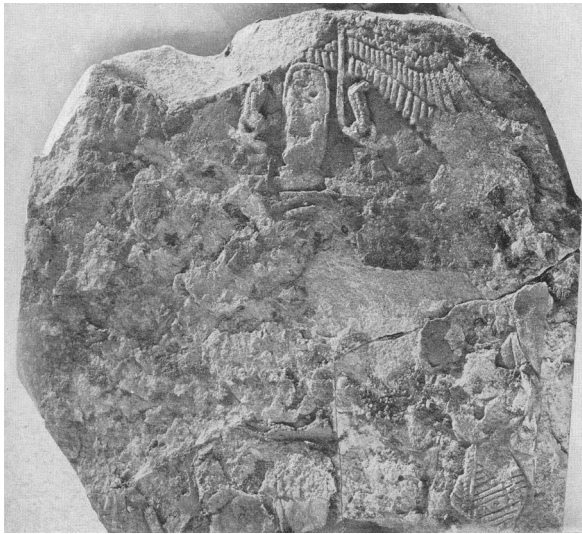


Fig. 10: Stela Khartoum SNM 523, Lion Temple Meroe 6 (after Garstang et al. 1911, pl. XXIII).



Fig. 11: Seal imprint from palace Barkal 1500 (after Manzo 2006, 88, fig. 13).

winged Apedemak and holds a palm branch; an amphora on a stand is depicted in front of the lion and a large *nb-* or *h3b-* sign serves as a base for the scene. The stoppers of at least c. 50 amphorae bear this seal impression, often more than once.⁴⁵

The jewellery treasure which Giuseppe Ferlini found in Amanishakheto's tomb Beg N 6⁴⁶ includes several items with depictions of Amesemi. She is represented on three pairs of armlets, eight beads and two ring plates. The silver ring Berlin ÄM 1671 with Amesemi nourishing a child is discussed below (fig. 17). The goddess on the ring plate Munich Ant. 2496d is possibly likewise to be identified as Amesemi (fig. 12).⁴⁷ Her dress is that typical for Ame-



Fig. 12: Amesemi (?), ring plate Munich Ant. 2496d, photo M. Franke, © Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst München.

semi. A tight fitting cap covers her head, a band with uraeus⁴⁸ is wound around it; tall feathers with horns and sun disk (the Hathor-crown) are mounted above. The goddess holds a cap-crown in her hands at which a head (?) with the same Hathor-crown

45 The total number of this imprint is 430. They belong to the c. 5000 mud-sealings (of boxes, vessels, baskets, leather-bags, doors) that have been found in two rooms in palace B 1500.

46 On the circumstances and the history of the find cf. i.a. Schäfer 1910; Priese 1993; Lacovara & Markowitz 1996; Lohwasser 2001b.

47 Gold, 1.9 x 1.5 cm, height 2.2 cm, Schäfer 1910, 129, no. 171, pl. 24 (goddess); Török 1987, 24 (goddess); Priese 1993, 42 f., fig. 42a (unknown goddess or deified female ruler); Kormysheva 2006, 33 (unknown goddess); Lohwasser 2001b, 289 f. (she takes inter alia into consideration that

a deified person, perhaps the mother of Amanishakheto, might be depicted); Kormysheva 2010, 306 identifies the feather-crown as that of Amun; Pompei 2014, 593, pl. 4, assumes Isis or Mut.

48 The emblem at the queen's headgear is not entirely clear. As she may wear the vulture skin, it is the bird's head projecting at the forehead.



Fig. 13: Pair of bracelets Munich Antiquarium 707/Ant. 2455 (photo M. Franke), © Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst München; and Antiquarium 708 (after Schäfer 1910, pl. 21).

like her own is affixed. The connection of this image with the coronation and investiture is obvious.⁴⁹ The identity of the goddess is uncertain. But the motif seems analogous to the scene on the stela Khartoum SNM 34661 from Naga with its similar subject of donating rulership to Amanishakheto by touching her crown (see above). The presentation of the cap-crown here refers to the coronation and may indeed be performed by Amesemi, who presents it to the (absent) queen, the owner of the jewellery, i.e. to Amanishakheto. Like the deities Apedemak and Amun, the goddess Amesemi is similarly involved in the cycle of investiture and coronation and plays an eminent role in royal iconography during Amanishakheto's time.

Three pairs of golden armlets with glass and enamel inlays are connected with Amesemi. Each is constructed of two halves each joined by hinges. Presumably they were mounted on cuffs of leather or cloth⁵⁰ and worn simultaneously on the left and right arm or wrist.

49 Cf. Pompei 2014.

50 For the construction cf. Schäfer 1910, 101–104. Holes for sewing the metal items on leather or cloth are found on several of Amanishakheto's armlets, inter alia on ÄM 1641 (missing) and Munich Ant. 2495a (see below note 54). Such bracelets are most probably part of the often depicted royal jewellery (cuffs) covering the lower arm

The hinge of one pair (fig. 13) was covered by the figure of a goddess with four wings standing on a lotus flower. The head of the goddess on Antiquarium 708 (now lost) is adorned with a falcon wearing a sun disk that identifies her as Amesemi.⁵¹ The companion piece (Munich Ant. 2455) shows a four-winged Mut upon the hinges.⁵² These goddesses are related to each other: facing in opposite directions they would be looking at each other when the armlets were worn. Each half of the richly decorated bracelets depicts three panels with en-face heads of goddesses upon a collar. The middle field displays Amesemi, here perhaps with two falcons; the two flanking panels show Mut wearing the Double-crown.

A second pair of armlets is similarly decorated, but with four panels on each half and no winged goddesses over the hinges.⁵³ Amesemi with two falcons alternates again with Mut in the panels on the corpus.

Another pair of bracelets may represent Amesemi as well, but this is inconclusive.⁵⁴ Besides a four-winged figure of Mut on a flower pedestal covering the hinges, a row of four-winged goddesses is depicted on the bracelet corpus. Two groups of two goddesses each are oriented to the figure of Mut upon the hinges. Their headgear of full and crescent moon atop a cap⁵⁵ is reminiscent of the additional crescent in the headgear of Amesemi on stela SNM 31338 (see above with fig. 1). In view of the other bracelets mentioned, where Mut and Amesemi are companions, the identification of the four goddesses on this pair as Amesemi cannot be ruled out. Her hatch-patterned dress is slightly different from the goddess's usual garment.

which until more recent times were found in Ethiopia, cf. Wenig 2012.

51 Bracelet with Amesemi Munich Antiquarium 708, today missing, only three wings preserved Schäfer 1910, 109 f. no. 160, fig. 103–106, pl. 21 (160b); Priese 1993, 18. Gold with glass inlays, measurement of each half: length 8.5 cm, height 4.6 cm, entire diameter c. 7 cm.

52 Munich Antiquarium 707=Ant. 2455, Schäfer 1910, 109 f. no. 160, fig. 103–106, pl. 21 (160a); Wenig 1978, 243, cat. 170; Priese 1993, 18, 34, fig. 35; Wildung 1996, 308, cat. 327; Baud et al. 2010, 139, cat. 187.

53 Gold with glass inlays, measurement of each half: length 11.2 cm, height 6.1 cm, entire diameter c. 7.5 cm, Munich Antiquarium 705 und 706, Schäfer 1910, 110 f. no. 161, fig. 108, 109, pl. 22. One bracelet, probably Antiquarium 705, is missing, the other is now Munich Ant. 2453, Priese 1993, 18, fig. 46.

54 Munich Ant. 2495a, Wenig 1978, 241, cat. 169; Priese 1993, 18, 34, fig. 33; Baud et al. 2010, 141 fig. 191) and the now missing Berlin ÄM 1641, both Schäfer 1910, 107 f. no. 159, pl. 1, 21. Gold with glass inlays, measurement of each half: length 8.0–8.5 cm, height 4.9 cm.

55 The goddess is labelled simply as moon-goddess, Priese 1993, 41.



Fig. 14: Golden cowry shell with pictures of Amesemi, ÄM 1758/18, photos Sandra Steiß, © Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin.



Fig. 15: Faience plaque, Faras, Western Palace (left: after Kormysheva 2006, cat. 233; right: after Sackho-Autissier 2018, fig. 4, © photo A. Sackho-Autissier).

The last jewellery items to be mentioned from Amanishaketo's treasure are eight gold beads shaped like stylized cowry-shells. On both sides there is depicted a bust of Amesemi facing right, her head adorned with a falcon (fig. 14).⁵⁶

A blue faience plaque of a casket⁵⁷ found in the 'Western palace' in Faras bears another representa-

tion of Amesemi (fig. 15, colour fig. 5). The goddess Mut suckling a child sits in a small chapel inside a sacral building. Two goddesses flank the chapel, both holding an ankh-sign above an offering stand; a wing is attached to their other arm. A lion-headed goddess crowned with a large sun disk encircled by a snake⁵⁸ stands to the left; Amesemi with falcon on her head is positioned to the right in front the chapel. Again, Amesemi's association with Mut is clear. But here she acts as a goddess protecting the scene in the kiosk or more specifically the nursing child who undoubtedly is to be identified as the king. Faras is the northernmost find spot of an object depicting Amesemi. Possibly, the casket from which

56 One bead Berlin ÄM 1758m (1758/18, length 1.85 cm, width 1.02 cm, depth 0.96 cm, 2.35 g), seven beads Munich Ant. 2449b, Schäfer 1910, 156 f. no. 251, pl. 31; Priese 1993, 24 f., 41, fig. 18. Schäfer (1910, 156) describes the picture as royal head probably because of the band around the chin which he identifies as beard-band.

57 Khartoum SNM 702, height 14 cm, width 17.3 cm, thickness 1.4 cm, Griffith 1926, 22, 31, pl. XIX.6, obj.-no. 648–1023; Kormysheva 2002; 2006, 234, cat. 233; 2010, 118; Sackho-Autissier 2018, 566, fig. 4.

58 Kormysheva 2010, 202 calls her Bastet.



the fragment derives was part of a trade shipment from the south headed farther north, temporarily stored in the ‘Western Palace’. The building probably functioned as a trading-station or ware-house in Meroitic times.⁵⁹

The label Amesemi not only accompanies representations of the goddess (stela REM 1294, REM 0014 in the Lion Temple Naga 300, in Musawwarat es Sufra IIC), but her name is also mentioned in two, and possibly three, cursive Meroitic texts. A fragmentary stela with a text written on four sides (REM 1251) was recently republished by J. Hallof.⁶⁰ The inscription mentions royal offering donations for Amesemi (and other deities?). The stela, broken in several fragments found at different spots in Meroe, is said to have stood in front of Temple Meroe 720.⁶¹ It is attributed to the reign of Natakamani and Amanitore.⁶² An oracular decree on papyrus fragments from Qasr Ibrim (REM 1174) also mentions the goddess [Ame]sem[i]. She would be the only deity invoked in this document. The attestation implies that Amesemi must have been adored at Qasr Ibrim and had a cult there. The goddess perhaps is mentioned for the third time in another text from Qasr Ibrim (REM 2239) where the preserved part of an expression may be reconstructed as [Amese]mi-qo “this is [Amese]mi”.⁶³ Palaeography (*Méroïtische Tardif*) dates both texts from Qasr Ibrim to a late period (c. 230–420 AD).

Other identifications of Amesemi previously made in the literature are speculative.⁶⁴

ICONOGRAPHY

Almost all attestations depict Amesemi wearing a tight-fitting cap adorned with small round or pierced circular ornaments most probably denoting small plaques; the interpretation of them as curly hair is improbable.⁶⁵ The head is encircled by a diadem band which is either plain or decorated with small leaves⁶⁶, large spheres or pierced disks⁶⁷; a uraeus is often present at her forehead⁶⁸. Long streamers are attached at the back; in some cases they resemble an arrangement of tasselled cords with (a) thick knot(s ?).⁶⁹ Whether this tassel arrangement is part of the diadem or rather a supplementary part of the necklace (see below) remains unclear. The most characteristic feature of Amesemi’s headgear is one or two falcons mounted upon a modius.⁷⁰ The meaning of the falcon(s) which are usually adorned with a sun disk⁷¹ is as yet not known. On stela Khartoum SNM 31338 an additional crescent moon is attached to the modius or sits above it. The crescent links the goddess to depictions of Apedemak on a crescent moon that expresses his lunar component.⁷² Kendall identifies Amesemi as “a peculiarly Meroitic female

59 Griffith 1926, 21–23, pl. XIII; for the function of this building (Far 15) see Edwards 1996, 65, 81–84, esp. 81 f. fig. 26; cf. Sievertsen 2013, 269 with further references; Wolf et al. 2019, 717.

60 Hallof 2018.

61 The rather modest size of reconstructed 15.5 cm width, 60 cm height and 8 cm thickness, however, does not suggest a position outside the temple; the stela may have been placed inside, perhaps freestanding in a court.

62 A part of a prince’s name (...ror) is also preserved, either Arikankharora (so Hallof because of the possible title *p[qrtr]*), but Sorakarora or Arakakharora (for the new reading see Francigny 2011) are also possible. An unknown locality called Matabakha and Naga are mentioned, but no further divine name.

63 For the papyri fragments REM 1174 and REM 2239 see Hallof 2015, 18–20 and 86–87.

64 I. Hofmann (1994, 182; 1995, 2826) identifies the goddess behind an enthroned deity in the temple of Duanib (LD V, 68e) as Amesemi. Iconographic indications are lacking and the identity of the male deity as Apedemak is disputed (cf. Zach & Tomandl 2000, 143 f.). A goddess holding a bird in her hand on a bronze bowl found in Beg W 5 (Dunham 1963, 118, 121, fig. 90f) cannot be regarded (with Hofmann 1977, 110 f., fig. 31) as Amesemi.

65 Gamer-Wallert 1983, 48. Such a cap deriving from a royal model (Russmann 1974, 27 ff; 1979, 49–51) is found also as part of the headgear of other male and female deities in the Meroitic pantheon, e.g. with Aqedis and Arensnuphis (Gamer-Wallert 1983, 111 f.) and goddesses at Naga 200.

66 Gamer-Wallert 1983, pl. 32a, sh. 6b.

67 Stelae Khartoum SNM 31338, SNM 34661, SNM 34633; for a possible connection with the short chain of large beads see below.

68 Column 8 in Mus IA 100; columns in Naga 100; Amara column 2; ring ÄM 1671; bracelet Munich Antiquarium 708; stelae Khartoum SNM 31338, 34633. A roughened area in the surface in front of Amesemi’s brow on stela Khartoum SNM 34661 perhaps indicates that a uraeus was likewise once there.

69 This was either attached to the cap (so stela Khartoum SNM 34661; Naga 300, exterior north wall, Gamer-Wallert 1983, pl. 32a, sh. 6b) or to the diadem (stelae Khartoum SNM 31338 and SNM 34633).

70 In eight or nine examples two falcons are depicted: on column 8 in Mus IA 100, on stela SNM 31338, perhaps on stela SNM 34661, on block 1196 of Naga 200, on the pair of bracelets Munich Antiquarium 707/Ant. 2455 and the missing Munich Antiquarium 708 as well as the pair of bracelets Munich Antiquarium 705 and 706 and perhaps also on column 2 of Amara if Cailliaud was right (see above note 36). For I. Gamer-Wallert (1983, 197) the falcon is an allusion to Horus, which she derives from Amesemi’s reference to Isis. But what then do the two falcons mean?

71 The missing sun disk in LD V, 67a is most probably due to incorrect copying. The area on column g is rather worn, but a sun disk presumably is present.

72 E.g. Vercoutter 1962, 276 f. fig. 7; Baud et al. 2010, 243, cat. 324 from Meroe; Wenig 1978, 68, 274, fig. 41; Manzo 2006, col. Pl. XXXIX from B 1500.



personification of the 'Eye of Horus', which is the moon", while he regards Apedemak as the masculine form of the 'Eye of Horus'.⁷³

Amesemi's costume consists of a robe made from a large cloth piece worn over an undergarment. It is draped over her far shoulder and then wrapped around the body, with the corners of the cloth knotted under her breasts. The cloth displays a characteristic pattern of plain and dotted oblique stripes; the vertical hem is fringed. In one of her earliest representations, however, in Musawwarat IIC on the exterior north wall⁷⁴, the textile shows narrow groups of stripes alternating with broad blank bands, some decorated with zigzag or vertical lines. The robe, appearing here more like a cloak, seems to have been fastened at the far shoulder. The undergarment is striped horizontally. Both the design of the dress and the pattern on the cloth differ from later representations. Presumably Amesemi's characteristic outfit had not yet at that time acquired its canonical form.

Another element of her garb is a short chain of large beads lying over the *usekh*-collar. It seems as if it could be also worn as diadem. When the short necklace of large beads is missing from around her neck, a diadem with large spheres or disks, including the tassel arrangement, was tied around her head.⁷⁵

The attribute Amesemi carries in her hand is unique. In temple decoration in Naga (N 200, N 300) and Musawwarat es Sufra she holds a pair of gloves. Or are they two hands? How these attributes are to be understood is unclear since specialists do not agree on what it represented.⁷⁶ Interpretations vary from severed hands⁷⁷ to gloves⁷⁸, amulets⁷⁹ or clappers.⁸⁰ A possible connection to the Egyptian epithet *drt ntr* 'hand of the god' has also been suggested.⁸¹

73 Kendall 2002, unnumbered p. 34 with note 37.

74 Hintze et al. 1971, pls. 16b, 37. The vertical seam bears fringes as does also the coat of Satet (op. cit., pl. 41) which is equally decorated with, here regular, horizontal stripes. Other depictions of Amesemi in Mus IIC are without details.

75 A necklace of large spheres is missing on stelae Khartoum SNM 31338, SNM 34633 and SNM 34661. A crown band with circular decoration (beads, disks) is found on all three stelae. The tassel arrangement attached to it is clearly visible on SNM 34633, perhaps also on SNM 34661. For a discussion see Kuckertz forthc. a, chap. V.3.2.2.

76 Summaries of the discussions by Gamer-Wallert 1983, 144 f., 198 f.; Kormysheva 2010, 303–305.

77 Hofmann 1977, 80, 114.

78 Griffith 1911, 58; Wenig 1993, 205; Onasch 1993, 252.

79 Kormysheva 2010, 305 considers amulets in form of hands.

80 Zibelius 1982, 90; 1983, 63.

81 Gamer-Wallert 1983, 198 f., but with reservations. Attributed to several goddesses and even developed into an

The representation at Naga 200, seeming to show the fabric folded over at the upper rim to resemble a cuff, speaks in favour of a pair of gloves attached to a grip.⁸² In Egypt, gloves are seldom depicted, and finds are even rarer.⁸³ Another interpretation of the 'hands' as clappers in form of human hands, is equally not out of order although in the present case and otherwise, they would be extremely large.

Besides being equipped with an *ankh*-sign like other deities the goddess can possess further emblems: a long staff (Musawwarat IIC), a papyrus sceptre (Naga 200), or a palm frond (Musawwarat IIC, Naga 300, sealing from Jebel Barkal) associating her especially with Isis who is often depicted with a palm branch.

AMESEMI – A DEIFIED QUEEN?

K.-H. Priese expressed the suggestion⁸⁴ that the goddess Amesemi may have been a deified queen. Post-mortem deification is, in general, considered to be only rarely expressed in the Kushite Periods – like the deified status of living rulers.⁸⁵ Some rare examples of the latter are Queens Amanirenase and Amanishakheto as well as, presumably, also King Amanikhareqerema.

Certain arguments speak in favour of Priese's hypothesis. Several features of her representations may indeed indicate that she was a former queen deified after her death and attributed a divine role. If so, the queen in question must have lived before Amesemi's first attestation as companion of Apedemak in Musawwarat IIC around 230–220 BC, i.e. she presumably lived a considerable time before the second half of the 3rd century BC. As is known from inscrip-

autonomous goddess *Drt nTr* became a title of female members of the royal house and of priestesses (Leclant 1977). The title *Drt nTr* is held especially by the God's Wives of Amun of Dynasty 25 who played a decisive religious and political role in Thebes (Leclant 1977; Koch 2012).

82 See the discussion in Kuckertz forthc. a, chap. V.4.2.6.

83 El-Menshawy 2001. Genuine gloves made of tapestry-woven linen were found in the tomb of Tutankhamun (El-Menshawy 2001, 37, fig. 4). Gloves are also interpreted as utensil to manage a chariot (G. Vogelsang-Eastwood, in: Veldmeijer 2010, 168).

84 Mentioned by Wolf 2006, 249. Already Griffith (1911, 60) considered Amesemi as deified person "... this negress may have been a native sorceress deified after death."

85 See the discussion in Kuckertz forthc. a, chap. IX.4. A precursor of a deified and venerated queen may be Katimala at Semna Temple, presumably dating in the 3rd Intermediate Period (cf. Lohwasser 2018).



Fig. 16: Scarification marks on the cheek of Amesemi, stela SNM 31338, REM 1294B, © Naga-Project.

tions in Musawwarat es Sufra⁸⁶, Amesemi's spouse Apedemak enjoyed cultic worship and featured as 'Lord of Tulakate/Tolkte' before Arnekhamani built in Musawwarat es Sufra in the third century BC. At that time, Naga was surely a considerable cult-place with a temple for Apedemak. Whether Amesemi was affiliated with him by this time is not known. Naga must have been a substantial settlement as early as the 4th century BC as shown by its mention on the stela of Nastasen.⁸⁷

One argument in favour of Amesemi originating as a real woman is the scarification – three undulating lines – shown on her depiction on the stela Khartoum SNM 31338 (fig. 16).⁸⁸ Not only the goddess but also the royal donator of the stela, Queen Amanishakheto, is depicted with cheek scars on the pylon of her tomb Beg N 6.⁸⁹ Scars on the cheek, stylized

as uraei, are documented also with Natakamani at Naga 300⁹⁰ and on a block belonging to the kiosk in Tabo⁹¹. The uraei, sometimes interpreted as decorating the crown's fastening device, as well as the undulating signs clearly represent scarification, or a stylized or symbolic version of them.⁹² Facial scars in general are to be regarded as markers indicative of regional or tribal affiliation, but they can have other purposes, too.⁹³ The three, more or less linear facial scars may indicate that Amanishakheto, Natakamani and his mother Amanitore belonged to a particular people or clan from the southern areas of the Meroitic Empire.⁹⁴

The scarification on Amesemi's cheek may indeed strengthen the idea that she was a deified queen.

& Dunham 1952, Pl. 17. The block is now in Berlin, ÄM 2244, Wildung 1996, 304 f., cat. 322. Lohwasser 2015, 11 suspects that the incisions at Beg N 6 may have been executed at a later (posthumous?) date. Kendall 1989, 678, also assumes a later application.

90 Three undulating scarification marks and fastening devices (curved band around the chin plus horizontal fastening line), Gamer-Wallert 1983, 52, pl. 36b, 37a, sh. 7.

91 Jacquet-Gordon 2005, 98, 104 fig. 5–07 (belonging to figure S11 of Natakamani); Bonnet 2011, 288, fig. 6. Three rearing snakes with White crowns are arranged above a curved line running from the chin to the (not preserved) ear (a beard band or fastening band). Perhaps a further scarification mark in shape of an ankh on crescent is found at the man's brow (regarded by Jacquet-Gordon 2005, 98 as an amulet). Cf. Kendall 1989, 679 fig. 8 for crescentic scarification marks at the forehead.

92 Zach 1999, 299, „Backenuräen“ (cheek uraei).

93 Scarification, the creation of permanent signs (keloids) on the skin, mostly practiced by dark-skinned peoples, was and is, although decreasingly, favoured in Africa, Melanesia and Australia. It can be pure decoration, enhance sexual attractiveness, but can also be markings of special social status, of transcending stages of life, for healing purposes and especially denoting ethnic or clan membership. On scarification cf. the essays about African peoples in Rubin 1988. For facial scarification in Nubia/Sudan see Kendall 1989, 672–680, fig. 5–8, pl. IV; 1996 (summary of 1989); Zach 1999, 298–299; Blazynski 2003; Lohwasser 2012, 543–549; Ingram 2017; cf. also Garve et al. 2017, discussing the possible reasons for (recent) scarification, the procedures, also focusing on medicinal aspects. A distinctive metal implement is identified as a tool for cutting scarification marks by a specialised man or woman (Lohwasser 2012, 544 f.; 2015). Most examples have been found in Napatan graves, only one (fig. 1o) comes from Meroe town (context and date unknown). The application of scars is often discussed together with tattooing which is not included here.

94 Zach & Tomandl 2000, 149; Lohwasser 2012, 549; 2015, 11. Similar three incisions are also found with Ba-statues (Wenig 1978, 227, cat. 151) or in vessel paintings (Wenig 1978, 286, 288, cat. 232); further evidence is cited in Zach 1999, 298; Lohwasser 2012, 546 f.; 2015, 10. Three scarification marks of similar shape are found in Sudan even in recent times, cf. Kendall & El-Hassan 2016, fig. 11.

86 Hintze 1962, 20 f., inscriptions 11 and 13.

87 Berlin ÄM 2268, FHN II, no. 84, p. 486 f., lines 40, 43–44. Cf. Zibelius 1972, 176 [trrrqt] and 172 [twrkt(t)] with note 1.

88 So Wolf 2006, 249. The straight and slightly elevated line below the marks that runs from the chin to the cap in the neck serves as a means for holding the crown-structure in place.

89 There is found a similar arrangement with three marks and a straight line as on stela SNM 31338, see Chapman



However, caution is called for, since often representations of human or divine beings are dependent on the appearance of the commissioning ruler or the image he or she wanted to project. An example may be the goddess Mut standing behind Amun enthroned in kiosk B 551 built by Amanishakheto at Jebel Barkal where Mut is likewise represented with three scarification marks on her cheek.⁹⁵ That both goddesses, Amesemi on stela Khartoum SNM 31338 and Mut on a building of Amanishakheto, are represented with scars may be due to the tradition, well-known in Egypt, that even deities are represented in the image of the king or queen who ordered them.⁹⁶

It is nevertheless remarkable that only some, not all figures of Amesemi, Amanishakheto, and Natakamani are depicted with scarification. Why this should be is not known, but in some cases, perhaps the scars were once rendered in paint which has not survived in the archaeological record. The presence or absence of scars, on the other hand, may be related to a specific purpose like emphasising the affiliation to a distinct clan in a particular context that was not so important in other circumstances.⁹⁷

The uraeus, often present at Amesemi's brow, may be another clue indicating her role as ruler, although this is not always a decisive argument in Meroitic relief.

Another indication of Amesemi once being a queen is the decorative cuffs worn on her forearms as shown on the stela Khartoum SNM 31338. The cuff is indicated by several stripes running around her (solely visible) near arm; the stripes presumably denote various registers of decoration. It is unclear whether the goddess is equipped with cuffs also at Naga 300; the relief decoration may instead be intended to represent long sleeves of the undergarment decorated with rows of pearl-like patterns.⁹⁸ More elaborate depictions of such cuffs show several registers with divine figures and decorative motifs.⁹⁹

The 'registers' perhaps reflect decor-panels of precious material mounted on cloth or leather¹⁰⁰ like the pairs of armlets of different size in the treasury of Amanishakheto described above. Elaborately decorated cuffs are usually not worn by divinities, but are found almost exclusively with royal individuals.¹⁰¹

A further argument of Amesemi as deified queen concerns the falcon(s) on her head which may resonate in Amanishakheto and Amanitore who are crowned with birds atop their heads – Amanishakheto on the right pylon of Beg N 6 and Amanitore on the right pylon of Naga 300.¹⁰² In comparison to Amesemi's head-dress, the headgear of the royal women is, however, iconographically transformed and different. A falcon with wings spread clings to the head of the women, the bird's upper body and head held upright and facing forward, the body and wings clasping the head tightly. The cap of Amanitore is the counterpart of the cap of Natakamani on the left pylon which presumably was likewise adorned with a falcon.¹⁰³ I. Gamer-Wallert decidedly connects the tight fitting cap with diadem-band of Amanitore with the goddess Amesemi when the *kandake* together with Natakamani, wearing the *bembem*-crown, are standing before Apedemak.¹⁰⁴ Did the iconography of the goddess Amesemi have a bearing on the appearance of the *kandake* and *qore* Amanishakheto and of the *kandake* Amanitore? Or, alternatively, is it possible that a queen's iconography influenced that of other queens? The similarity of the headgear of Amanishakheto and Amanitore with crouching falcons clinging to the head and the headgear of Amesemi with upright falcons may be fortuitous; but it is nevertheless worth considering a human origin for the goddess. Apart from that, the falcon as royal symbol or as the symbol of a solar deity (Re-Harakhte) is often found in royal regalia and decoration.

In some of her representations Amesemi wears round earrings with a drilling slightly diverging from

95 Kendall & El-Hassan 2016, 81, fig. 10.

96 For Kushite documents already remarked by Pomerantseva 1999, 625. The assumption that the goddess Amesemi might have been adjusted to the look of the local population worshipping her (Ingram 2017, 132) seems unjustified.

97 Noticed also by Lohwasser 2015, 11. Rather strange is a graffito at Beg N 10 depicting a bird with female head that shows three scarification lines on the cheek. The head is adorned by the Isis-Hathor-crown (cow's horns with sun disk). The figure represents either a goddess (Isis?) or a Ba-figure, Hofmann & Tomandl 1986, 68, fig. 80.

98 Cf. Gamer-Wallert 1983, 129, pl. 32a–b, sh. 6b.

99 E.g. in Temple Mus IIC (e.g. Hintze et al. 1971, 21, 22b, 33b–c, 34a, 35, 46; Wenig 1993, 189 f. fig. 143–146), Naga 300 (e.g. Gamer-Wallert 1983, 128 f., 17a, 18a, 21a, sh. 5a, 6a, 7, 10b, 12), in royal tombs (e.g. Chapman & Dunham

1952, pl. 10B, 16A–B). Like on stela Khartoum SNM 31338 sometimes only the borders dividing the individual registers are indicated.

100 Schäfer 1910, 102. Cf. also Wenig 2012.

101 Wenig 2012, 94. Two metal cuffs (plain, without decoration) were found in the non-royal tomb 1516 in Sanam (Griffith 1923, 121–122, pls XXIV, XXV; Wenig 2012, 94–97, figs 17–19; Kuckertz & Lohwasser 2016, 79 f., fig. 37).

102 Chapman & Dunham 1952, pl. 17; Gamer-Wallert 1983, 22, 110, 182, pl. 7–9, sh. 2.

103 Or a ram? LD V, 56; Gamer-Wallert 1983, 18, 110, pl. 1, 2b, sh. 1: In 1983 details were no longer discernible.

104 Exterior south wall of the Lion Temple, Gamer-Wallert 1983, 111, 182; also Török 1987, 26.



the centre, thus resulting in a discrete lunar shape.¹⁰⁵ Actual earrings of this type are found, for example, in Beg W 701, dating into the very early Kushite period (generation 5–9).¹⁰⁶ Is this a hint at the original lifetime of the subsequently deified queen?¹⁰⁷

It is noteworthy that on stela SNM 31338, REM 1294 (fig. 1) Amesemi's royal counterpart Queen Amanishakheto is likewise considered a deified person. Her name without cartouche on the front and the equation of the queen with a goddess in the inscription on the back gives her an exalted position.¹⁰⁸ If Amesemi's suggested former status be confirmed then two deified queens face each other there, (the traditional) one giving favours to the other (new and living) one.

FUNCTION

In most cases, Amesemi is depicted together with Apedemak whom she sometimes touches. The native lion god is pictorially documented for the first time in Musawwarat IIC, but may have been venerated already earlier.¹⁰⁹ Amesemi appears with him in temple reliefs beginning with his first attestation. But she is not confined to the sole role of being his companion. Scenes exist where she is depicted alone, although in some of them she is only superficially separated from her partner. In the panels of the columns in the temples of Amara and Naga she is adored standing alone, but in the adjoining scenes above and below Apedemak and another deity, presumably a member of the lion god's divine entourage¹¹⁰, are venerated. In the columns of the Amun Temple at Naga Amesemi is in focus of the *kandake* only, while Apedemak and another deity in the adjoining panels are adored by king and prince. At Amara it is the prince who offers to Amesemi; the panels above show him in front of Apedemak and Amun. At Naga 300 Amesemi stands amidst the row of goddesses depicted on the exterior north wall. It is assumed that the goddesses and the male deities on the south wall can be combined to form pairs – a suggestion that is debated, however.¹¹¹ Amesemi's partner then

would be ram-headed Amun of Napata wearing the *Atef*-crown.¹¹²

Besides being just the female counterpart to Apedemak and accompanying him, an important function concerns her decidedly active role of electing and promoting a (female) *qore* to kingship. In such contexts she either acts together with Apedemak, or operates alone on her own behalf. Amesemi appears actively involved in performing ritual or legitimising activities on three stelae from Naga. She gives the queen support or protection by encompassing her head (Khartoum SNM 31338), she leads her to Apedemak (Khartoum SNM 34661), she elects or helps to elect her (Khartoum SNM 31338, SNM 34633, SNM 34661) and she is involved in Amanishakheto's coronation (Khartoum SNM 34661).

In Meroitic times, the divine election of the king-to-be is usually undertaken jointly by Amun and indigenous Apedemak. They can be accompanied by their respective female companions Mut and Amesemi who then usually remain rather passive. From the attestations enumerated above it can be concluded that Amesemi had assumed the role of coronation deity – or at least certain aspects of it – when electing a *qore* who in this special case is the female *qore* Amanishakheto. This may have been dictated by the fact that Amanishakheto's dynastic or political stance was not consolidated.¹¹³ Did she feel the necessity to focus on a goddess, perhaps a deified queen, of her own clan?

The concentration on female figures, here queen and goddess in contrast to male king and Amun and/or Apedemak, may also be understood as an expression of the feminine element as one part of the principle of complementarity of male and female components which represent – as Lohwasser has worked out – a decisive element of Kushite kingship ideology.¹¹⁴

It has been observed that connections exist between Amesemi and the presumed royal successor.¹¹⁵ Such links are illustrated by the short chain of extremely large beads with a tassel arrangement

105 Stelae Khartoum SNM 31338 and SNM 34661, Naga 300 (Gamer-Wallert 1983, pl. 52, 53b, sh. 10a).

106 Dunham 1963, 57, fig. 41d, MFA 23.843.

107 The form of earrings in relief, however, is often not precisely indicated so that a comparison with real earrings is not always possible.

108 Cf. Kuckertz forthc. b and c.

109 Kuckertz & Lohwasser 2016, 115–119.

110 See above with notes 21–22.

111 Gamer-Wallert 1983, 191 f., 199. Debated: Zibelius 1982, 86; Török 2002, 234.

112 Gamer-Wallert 1983, pl. 24a, sh. 5b; Zibelius 1983, 20 f., 54 f., inscription 6.

113 Kendall 1989, 666–672; Lohwasser 2001a, 343; Török 1997, 456; Kuckertz forthc. b. Amanishakheto herself possibly needed a male person for legitimising her rule or at least for strengthening her position, cf. Török, in FHN II, 723.

114 Lohwasser 2001a, 335–341.

115 Cf. Gamer-Wallert 1983, 123, 195 f. The bead necklace is already found with Arka in the Lion Temple of Musawwarat es Sufra (Hintze et al. 1971, pls. 21, 35; Wenig 1993, 183).



Fig. 17: Silver ring Berlin ÄM 1671 with Amesemi suckling a child, photos J. Liepe, © Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrusammlung Berlin.

which the goddess wears in several cases.¹¹⁶ This item of jewellery resembles an accessory worn by the (crown-) prince.¹¹⁷ However, his tassel construct ('counterweight') attached at the bead necklace and hanging over the shoulder, is larger and broader.¹¹⁸ Is this tassel arrangement reminiscent of the royal attribute of the tasselled cord or does it even replicates it in different form?¹¹⁹ Two explanations for the appearance of the tassel-element in depictions of Amesemi and the prince come to mind. The first is related to the theory that Amesemi was once a living queen, deified after her death. Does the short necklace of large beads with tassel arrangement represent her perhaps in the state as heiress to the throne? Did this element survive, for whatever reason, in her deified status?

The other explanation refers to Amesemi's role in electing and promoting a ruler which suits the role

of a heir and thus the future king. The underlying theme of the (crown-) princes – the passing on of rulership to the next person or the next generation and thus maintaining dynastic continuity – may have corresponded to Amesemi's tasks and functions in ideologically (also) enabling the election of the *qore*. Her role of nursing the young Horus may add to this. A detail like the short necklace with large spheres plus tassel arrangement appropriate for the king-to-be is perhaps indicative of the continuity of kingship or dynastic succession and thus reflected in both of them, the heir as well as the goddess.

This idea links Amesemi to the next subject which addresses her role as a mother-goddess, which she shares with other female deities. The maternal role she plays in respect to Horus symbolising the king is remarkable. As substitute for – or in amalgamation with – Isis she suckles the Horus child like Isis does in Chemmis, as visualised on the ring plate of Amanishakheto Berlin ÄM 1671 (fig. 17).¹²⁰ In other cases (see e.g. the armllets of Amanishakheto discussed above) she is correlated with Mut in complementary

116 In Naga 200 and Naga 300 (Gamer-Wallert 1983, sh. 6b, 10a) Amesemi's necklace has a tassel arrangement dropping behind the shoulder. In other cases – the three stelae from Naga Khartoum SNM 31338, 34661, 34633 – the necklace seems to be worn as diadem around the head with the tassel arrangement hanging from the head (see above with note 67).

117 This is sensed particularly in the three male figures ('princes') on the monuments of Natakamani and Amanitore. Cf. for example the attestations of the 'prince' in Naga 300 (Gamer-Wallert 1983, 125, pl. 19, 28a, 36b, 38a, 45, sh. 5a, 6a, 7, 9b, 10b, 11b). The genealogical link of Arikankharora, Arakakhatara and Sorakarora to Natakamani and Amanitore is far from clear.

118 Török 1990, 30 f., 33.

119 On the cord cf. Török 1990, 152–170, 180 f. and *passim*; 1997, 440–442.

120 Berlin ÄM 1671, silver, 2.4 x 2.2 cm, height 2.3 cm, Schäfer 1910, 142 f., no. 209, pl. 27; Wenig 1978, 254, cat. 189; Priese 1993, 41, fig. 39c; Kormysheva 2010, 303. The identification of the figure was diverse, as Isis (Schäfer) or as queen (Wenig, Kormysheva). That the depiction on ring Berlin ÄM 1671 is part of the cycle of the divine birth of the king (so Wenig) is unlikely as the ring differs considerably, not least with the material silver, from the rings of Amanishakheto depicting the birth legend. To these rings and the birth legend see Wenig 1978, 249–252, cat. 181–184; Brunner 1986; Hofmann 1995, 2808 f.; Lohwasser 2001b.



position; the functions of both then appear to be similar. Even an amalgamation of Mut and Amesemi is envisaged.¹²¹ Amesemi as custodian of the child, i.e. the king, now suckled by the goddess Mut, is also shown on the faience plaque from Faras. It does no harm to the ideological-theological concept of kingship that with Amanishakheto it is a female *gore* under the particular responsibility of Amesemi, rather than a male Horus king. The protective character is likewise expressed by the winged goddesses who represent Amesemi.

The idea that the goddess has an aggressive character cannot, in my opinion, be maintained. This has been ascribed to her especially in view of her connection with the bellicose lion god Apedemak and the interpretation of her attribute as the severed hands of enemies.¹²² Although their significance (hands or gloves?) remains unsolved, there are no other clear grounds to characterise Amesemi as a militant deity.

The goddess's active role, evident in many of the documents reviewed above, contradicts the assumption that Amesemi is purely a theological construct, seen only in connection with Apedemak.¹²³ The new finds from Naga provide a different perspective on the role of Amesemi.

RESUMEE


The indigenous Meroitic goddess Amesemi is well documented by depictions from eight temples (Naga and Musawwarat es Sufra are particular noteworthy as cult places of Apedemak), on several stelae, on objects of minor art, on sealings, in jewellery and inscriptions. Except for Amara and some fragmentary inscriptions in Qasr Ibrim which are evidence for a cult of Amesemi in the north, the attestations for Amesemi are found primarily in the Meroitic heartland. Representations in official temples suggest cultic veneration, as for all other deities represented. On two occasions she is associated with a place name. One of her cult centres is possibly mentioned in the inscription accompanying her figure in the Lion Temple in Naga. The identification and location of this place, which includes the passage *[..]mami[.].*, is not yet known.¹²⁴ Another un-localiza-

ble place name *mtbh*, *Matabakha*, appears on the stela REM 1251 from Meroe; the name probably specified the destination of the offering donation mentioned in the text.¹²⁵

Amesemi is attested mainly in royal contexts whereas her spouse Apedemak seems also to have had un-standardised and popular cult-places aside from his appearance in official temple decoration.¹²⁶ If the word *bek* at the beginning of the oracular decree REM 1174 from Qasr Ibrim is (part of) a personal name,¹²⁷ then worship of the goddess by non-royal individuals would be documented as well.

The goddess's name Amesemi is found from her first attestation in Musawwarat es Sufra in the time of Arnekhamani, on a stela of Amanishakheto, in the Lion Temple of Natakamani and Amanitore and also in some cursive Meroitic texts.¹²⁸ In historical terms her representations are documented from the last third of the 3rd century BC to at least the end of the 1st century AD with a concentration in the reigns of Amanishakheto and Natakamani with Amanitore around the turn of the millenium and the first half of the 1st century AD (c. 10 BC – 60 AD). If the reconstruction of her name in the papyri fragments from Qasr Ibrim mentioned above (REM 1174 and REM 2239) is correct, their late palaeographic dating in the *Méroïtique Tardif* (230–420 AD) speaks of continuous cult activity in the third and fourth century, at least in Lower Nubia. Even if no pictorial or inscriptional attestations from the periods preceding her documentation at Musawwarat es Sufra are preserved, nevertheless a cult of the goddess may be presumed to have existed earlier. For the most part the goddess is defined precisely by iconography: her headgear (tight-fitting cap decorated with plate-

o Amesemi" (Rilly & Carrier [2004], 2117, REM 0014). The interpretation of the text by Zibelius (1983, 26 f., 60 f., inscription 14) is slightly different.

In combining the word *[.]mami[.]* with the epithet of Amesemi from Mus IIC which begins with the Egyptian hieroglyph *t3/tf[.]* (see above note 6) a place name *Tami[.]* may be envisaged. The Egyptian hieroglyphic writing of the partly destroyed epithet at Mus IIC does not speak against it. Recognizable are there  *t3* (N17) + flat *m* (AA15) + owl *m* (G17) + a broad vertical sign (with two ropes, V36?) + two narrow vertical signs (2 reeds?) + land determinative (N26). These considerations, however, are speculative and must await further documents.

121 Cf. the goddess on the west wall of Naga 200 which is discussed of being an amalgamation of Mut and Amesemi (see above with note 25).

122 Hofmann 1977, 80, 113 f.; refuted by others (i.a. Gamer-Wallert 1983, 198; Kormysheva 2010, 304).

123 Hofmann 1994, 183 f.; 1995, 2825; Zach 1999, 300.

124 The inscription contains an invocation to the goddess: "O Amesemi, who is in *[.]mami[.]* may she give them life,

125 Hallof 2018, 495, 499. J. Hallof suggests that it possibly designates the place where the stela was erected, in his opinion Temple M 720.

126 See the caves in Jebel Naga and the offering place Naga 360 between the Lion Temple and the Hathor chapel (Kuckertz & Lohwasser 2016, 118 f.).

127 Hallof 2015, 18–20.

128 See above with notes 6, 19–20, 60 and 63.



lets, surmounted by one or two falcons, in one case plus a moon-crescent), her robe with a characteristic striped pattern, her jewellery (necklace of large beads and a long cuff at the forearm besides usual jewellery of *usekb*-collar, arm- and anklets, sometimes earrings) and a distinctive attribute of two hands/gloves. The increasing understanding of Meroitic texts will, it is to be hoped, enhance our knowledge of religious matters and deities like Amesemi.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die in Ägypten unbekanntere Göttin Amesemi ist die Partnerin des meroitischen Löwengottes Ape-demak. Obwohl sie in der wissenschaftlichen Literatur schon häufig behandelt wurde, fordern die zahlreichen Neufunde der letzten Jahre eine nochmalige Bearbeitung ihrer zahlreichen Dokumente. Sie ist im Relief etlicher Tempeln, auf einigen Stelen, auf Schmuckstücken und Werken der Kleinkunst sowie in Texten belegt. Einige Überlegungen zu ihrer Funktion sind möglich, die ihre Rolle als Königs-macherin und Muttergottheit betreffen.