

Foreword

'The Napatan Cylindrical Sheaths: A catalogue and analysis of precious objects from the royal cemetery of Nuri' presents for the first time a complete analysis of these precious finds found at the cemetery of Nuri (Sudan), each accompanied by an iconographic and epigraphic commentary.

The subject of this book originated from a study which I produced for the 13th International Conference for Nubian Studies at the University of Neuchâtel, (1st - 6th September 2014). On that occasion, I presented a paper entitled "*Function and Significance of the Napatan Cylindrical Sheaths*", which showed the early results of this research. Over time, this study became so extensive that it was necessary to produce a complete volume.

The focus of this investigation is the iconographical and epigraphic analysis of each cylindrical sheath found in royal burials of the cemetery of Nuri. A complete and detailed study of these cylinders had never been undertaken. For the first time, translations of the inscriptions and identification of the divinities occurring on the cylinder sheaths, accompanied by critical comments, are presented in this volume. These material attestations have proved to be important elements for Kushite history between the VII and IV centuries BC.

This work is composed of four parts: the preliminary part is concerned with some considerations on the royal cemetery of Nuri, where the cylindrical sheaths were found (chapter **I**)¹; the second part considers the complete catalogue of the cylinders with their iconographical and epigraphic descriptions, together with a tabulary summary of information relating to each cylinder and detailed comments which point out the iconographical and epigraphic features of all cylinders compared with each other. Since this part has to be considered as a real catalogue and so read separately for consulting a single cylinder, I have repeated the explanatory footnotes in the *Comments* of each cylinder (chapter **II**); the third part of the work relates the specific considerations on the cylinders through observations about the inscriptions, the features of the bases and the main decorations, the crowns worn by the main goddesses, the relation of these goddesses and crowns, the attributes held by goddesses and the small motifs occurring on the cylinders (chapter **III**). All these new data collected together helped me to postulate the final part of the volume (chapter **IV**), relating to the

hypothetical identification of the cylinders, their practical function and their ideological significance.

As I have pointed out some discordances between the current museum accession numbers and the original excavation 'field numbers', the monograph includes a final appendix that presents the correct concordances for each of the cylindrical sheaths for facilitating researchers' consultation.

The achievement of '*The Napatan cylindrical Sheaths. A Catalogue and Analysis of precious Objects from the royal Cemetery of Nuri*' has been made possible by extensive use of *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush, vol. II: Nuri*² written in 1955 by Dows Dunham, in which all archaeological finds discovered in the royal cemetery of Nuri (Sudan) are collected/listed.

To illustrate the cylinders, this work includes the indispensable drawings reproduced by Miss Suzanne Chapman and W.G. Kemp in 1955, contained in Dunham's publication of the *Royal Cemeteries of Kush, vol. II: Nuri* and the photographs sent to me by the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston.

This study is based on the methodical observation and comparison of photographs and drawings, and not on my direct inspection. The systematic comparison of drawings and of both old and modern photographs has permitted the comprehension and so the realization of this work. Only a few drawings have been here 'modified' to provide a better interpretation of reading. The drawing shown in fig. 18 is reproduced with the permission of Susanne Gänsicke, as well as all the photographs and drawings with the permission of the MFA of Boston.

I have omitted inserting transliterations of the hieroglyphic inscriptions, because the epithets and the *formulae* occurred on the cylinders are very common in the Egyptian and Nubian literature. Besides, the inscriptions of the late cylinders are so difficult and uncorrected that it is impossible to transliterate and sometimes translate them.

I should like to add that I believe that this work is really necessary in order to emphasize the importance of Nubian archaeology as a subject and so, even if identification of the function of the cylindrical sheaths remains a hypothetical question, this study will provide a useful contribution

¹ All pertinent references to these chapters will be identified using the following numbering: I, II, III and IV.

² In the present monograph, *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush, vol. II: Nuri* is quoted as RCK II.

The Napatan Cylindrical Sheaths

to stimulating and developing further discussion on the subject among scholars.

Finally, I am grateful to Prof. Luisa Bongrani Fanfoni for her constant encouragement over the years. Our long conversations have always been a source of knowledge and inspiration for me.

Abstract

'The Napatan Cylindrical Sheaths: A catalogue and analysis of precious objects from the royal cemetery of Nuri' presents for the first time a complete analysis of these precious finds found at the cemetery of Nuri (Sudan).

The focus of this investigation is the iconographical and epigraphic analysis of each cylindrical sheath found in royal burials of the cemetery of Nuri. A complete and detailed study of these cylinders had never been undertaken. For the first time, translations of the inscriptions and identification of the divinities occurring on the cylinder sheaths, accompanied by critical comments, are presented in this volume. These material attestations have proved to be important elements for Kushite history between the VII and IV centuries BC.

This work is composed of four parts: the preliminary part is concerned with some considerations on the royal cemetery of Nuri, where the cylindrical sheaths were found (chapter **I**); the second part considers the complete catalogue of the cylinders with their iconographical and epigraphic descriptions, together with a tabulary summary of information relating to each cylinder and detailed comments which point out the iconographical and epigraphic features of all cylinders compared with each other (chapter **II**); the third part of the work relates the specific considerations on the cylinders through observations about the inscriptions, the features of the bases and the main decorations, the crowns worn by the main goddesses, the relation of these goddesses and crowns, the attributes held by goddesses and the small motifs occurring on the cylinders (chapter **III**). All these new data collected together helped the Author to postulate the final part of the volume (chapter **IV**), relating to the hypothetical identification of the cylinders, their practical function and their ideological significance. The Author believes, in fact, that these precious cylinders were handles of sistra used during specific royal rituals, acted by royal women identified with mother-goddesses. This research thus additionally proves that the above-mentioned attestations point out the importance of the royal women, as fundamental custodians of the ideology of the Napatan kingship. This is generally well-known because of the role of the royal women in playing sistra in order to pacify deities, but in this research there has been evidence to suggest that in the Napatan period the sistra seem also to have been the symbol evoking the covenant between Alara and Amun and so guaranteeing the continuity of the Napatan kingship. The sistra, therefore, symbolized the royal legitimation of the Napatan king. At the death of the royal owners (king or queen), the handles of sistra were laid in their tombs, to guarantee the continuity of life for the dead in the Underworld. Therefore, the symbolic sistrum was removed from its handle; subsequently, this 'personal' handle (= Napatan cylinder) was placed in the royal tomb, while the sistrum it once held (i.e. the symbolic object) was possibly preserved in the Amun temple, where other royal Napatan insignia were conserved. It seems, in fact, that the Amun temples were the depositories of the sistra. The sistra were removed from their cylindrical handles probably for a magical exorcism, which allowed not only 'continuity of life' to the dead, but also to the living (and successor) king. Perhaps, in turn, the successor king would have received the symbolic sistrum inserted in his personal handle.

The Cemetery of Nuri and the Cylindrical Sheaths

The royal cemetery of Nuri is located at the Fourth Cataract of the Nile, about 6 miles to the north of Kareima (pl. I). It is approximately 10 km upstream from Gebel Barkal on the opposite bank of the Nile and 26 km upstream from the old royal cemetery at el-Kurru.

The Egyptologist George A. Reisner described the topography of the pyramid field of Nuri as follows: “At Nuri, the flat alluvial land is bordered by low ridges and knolls of sandstone founded on a deep bed of micaceous schist. These ridges and knolls, rising gently to a range of low hills lying a mile or so out in the desert, are separated by dry wadys cut by rain torrents. Most of the ridges therefore run towards the river. At one place, however, owing perhaps to some difference in the rock, two adjacent wadys have diverged, one to the “north” and one to the “south”¹, leaving a sort of large island of rock whose main ridges run nearly parallel to the river. On this island of rock stand the pyramids of Nuri, close to the alluvial plain, and less than a mile from the river” (REISNER 1918b, 3).

Chronologically, the cemetery of Nuri followed that of el-Kurru, the earliest royal necropolis of Napata. The cemetery of Nuri was inaugurated by king Taharqo of the XXV dynasty, whose pyramid was designated ‘Nu.1’ by George A. Reisner, but his successor Tanutamani was buried at el-Kurru cemetery in the tomb named ‘Ku.16’. The second successor of Taharqo, Atlanersa, was buried at Nuri and so all subsequent kings for the next 360 years. The Nuri cemetery was in use from the end of the VII century BC up to the middle of the IV century BC, when the most important site became Meroe. The last king buried at Nuri was Nastasen in the tomb named ‘Nu.15’.

George Reisner supposed that Taharqo chose Nuri, rejecting el-Kurru, because the king was not of the direct royal line, while Dows Dunham thought that for Taharqo el-Kurru was overcrowded for his project, i.e. building the largest royal pyramid. According to Timothy Kendall, Taharqo chose Nuri for astronomical and mythological reasons: “Taharqo’s pyramid was placed on the horizon with respect to the pinnacle [of Gebel Barkal] so that the sun rose over it forty days after the summer solstice. [...] When the rising sun cast a shadow from the pyramid to the pinnacle, the “god” on the opposite bank would have seemed to “wake up” on his day of rebirth. Three and a half months later, when the sun set behind the pinnacle, the “god”, by casting his shadow to his tomb, would have seemed to “die” (KENDALL 2008, 140). Therefore,

“Taharqo could have imagined himself fully united with the Great God in all his aspects on both banks” (KENDALL 2008, 140).

According to Michela Schiff Giorgini, “the tomb [of Taharqo] at Nuri, reminiscent of the Osireyon at Abydos in plan, must have been merely a memorial to Taharqo and not his place of burial” (SCHIFF GIORGINI 1965, 130). In fact, Michela Schiff Giorgini believed that the real tomb of Taharqo was the pyramid called WT1 at Sedeinga, but Ali Hakem wrote “I find it difficult to see in the very poor pyramid of Sedeinga W.T.I. a tomb of the greatest king of the Meroites. His works had set the tradition followed for generations after him and it will be difficult to think that his successors would not – if not all, at least some of them – follow his example or develop Sedeinga cemetery into an alternative cemetery as Barkal or Begrawiya South and West cemeteries. Hence, I would suggest that Sedeinga W.T.I. was, perhaps, a tomb of one of his queens or minor sons who was buried at Sedeinga near an important religious centre, for which the blocks were taken from a destroyed building of Taharqo nearby, and were reused” (HAKEM 1988, 283).

The logistical organisation of the tombs at Nuri followed a precise pattern. Reisner recorded “The curious fact thus appears that Tirhaqa², the first and greatest of the Nuri kings, and the queens of all the periods there represented, were buried on the “eastern” part of the knoll, while all the kings after Tirhaqa were buried on the “western” part. The chapels and the entrances of all these tombs are turned to the “west,” the land of Amenti, the land of Osiris, god of the dead” (REISNER 1918a, 73), and Dunham wrote: “The western ridge, and its outlying western projection behind Nu. 1, was reserved for the tombs of women. The pyramids of the later kings, starting on a projection southeast of Nu. 1, gradually occupied the eastern ridge from south to north, and then the slightly less desirable area between the two ridges” (RCK II, 1). The Nuri cemetery, therefore, accommodated together the tombs of Napatan kings and queens, so the royal women were not separated from their rulers. According to Angelika Lohwasser, “The tombs of royal women are located on the west plateau. They form three groups: the southern group inscribes an arch to the south and west of Nu. 1; the second group consists of two parallel rows north of Nu. 1; while a cluster of very small tombs to the far north form a third group. [...] kings’ mothers were buried in the southern group, in the largest tombs of the cemetery. Some women buried in the same

¹ Reisner used a specific nomenclature for naming the cardinal points relating to Nuri (REISNER 1918b, 2).

² Tirhaqa was the name of Taharqo in earlier literature.

sector of the cemetery, however, do not bear the title *mwt njswt*. Perhaps they fulfilled other functions which were the prerogative of women in an especially high position entitling them to burial alongside kings' mothers. Kings' wives were laid to rest primarily in the two rows of tombs north of Nu.1. These women seem to have enjoyed a median status. The tombs forming the group to the north are smaller, and they preserve little textual information with hardly any titles, arousing the suspicion that this part of the cemetery was reserved for royal women of comparatively low status. The form of these smaller tombs can be cited in support of this interpretation. While the tombs of the southern group and those of the two parallel rows possess relatively well-preserved pyramidal superstructures, the small tombs to the north give no indication of ever having superstructures of any kind. The substructures, too, are modest affairs with a single chamber, by contrast to the more complex subterranean arrangements in the other tombs of royal women at the site" (LOHWASSER 2001b, 66). This distribution, therefore, suggests that "royal women were allotted burial in a particular part of the cemetery according to their status" (LOHWASSER 2001b, 66) and so, this aspect shows the importance of the role of the 'king's mother', which is one of the most significant elements for this research.

Generally, the pyramids of Nuri were greater in size than those of el-Kurru. The Nuri tombs were cut into the bedrock beneath the pyramids and are composed of a superstructure and a substructure. The superstructure consisted of a sandstone masonry pyramid, an enclosure wall of sandstone masonry, a foundation deposit with animal bones, pottery, faïence, etc., and a mortuary cult chapel of sandstone masonry with a pylon. The substructure below the level of the ground constituted of a stair of various steps leading to the interconnecting chambers. Commonly, the number of the subterranean chambers was two or three for the kings, and one or two for the queens. According to Kendall, "When well-finished, these rooms were completely painted and carved with Egyptian texts from the "Book of the Dead." Each was entered by a long flight of stairs cut in a descending trench in the rock ledge, far out in front of the chapel entrance. After the burials, the stairway was filled in, camouflaged from the ground, and the chapels were built over their shafts in order to seal the tomb entrances³".

At Nuri, the tombs showed different dimensions⁴. Taharqo's pyramid was the largest ever built in the cemetery and in all Nubia. It appears that his pyramid was enlarged during its construction, because the outer pyramid was a posthumous addition that encased the original pyramid (whose base was 28,5 m square), its chapel and foundation deposits. The new plan enlarged its dimensions, reaching

51,75 m square at the base and a height of about twice that of its first phase.

Later, the only enlarging of pyramid size, from 26,45 m to 32,2 m, was made by Irike-Amannotte ('Nu.12') in the second half of the V century BC. On the contrary, in the same period, the king Talakhamani ('Nu.16') had a disproportionately small pyramid (LOHWASSER 2001a, 67-77), perhaps due to his unexpected death.

In Nubia, pyramids were built at the royal cemeteries of el-Kurru, Nuri, Gebel Barkal and Meroe. These pyramids are very different from the best known Egyptian pyramids of the Old and Middle Kingdoms, which are of enormous size and have the burial chamber within or entered by a passage through the same pyramid. The Nubian examples imitated the New Kingdom Egyptian and Nubian élites and not the Old Kingdom pyramids. For this type of stylistic imitation, scholars frequently use the term of 'cultural entanglement' between Egypt and Kush (SMITH 1998; 2016), in which the cultural material and funerary and customary practices tend to be combined and re-mixed in a particular cultural fusion. As demonstrated by Susan K. Doll, these combined features can also be seen in the "series of stelae [from Nuri, which] contains the liturgy for the mortuary rites performed in the chapels and that the utterances on them accompany a Napatan royal ancestor ritual. On the stelae are intentionally sought-out quotations and extracts from Egyptian sources, which have been reorganized, sectioned-off, and reframed so as to create a new Napatan rite, specific to Napatan beliefs and imperatives" (DOLL 2014, 191).

The Nubian tomb chambers lay beneath the pyramid and were structurally independent of it. Reisner recorded that "All the pyramids at Nuri were of the slender type, with steep sides inclined at an angle of about 68° to the horizontal, quite different in aspect from the massive squat pyramids of Giza" (REISNER 1918a, 73).

Normally, Napatan kings and queens were mummified according to Egyptian practice. Their bodies, bearing gold crooks and flails, were wrapped in bandages; their fingers and toes were protected with gold; their faces were covered with gold or electrum masks; and large heart scarabs and gold pectorals were located over their chests. During mummification, their viscera were removed and put in canopic jars. The royal mummies were successively enclosed inside wooden anthropoid coffins covered with gold foil. The coffins were then located inside one or two larger gilded anthropoid coffins (LEHNER 1997, 196-197). Unfortunately, the mummies and other friable objects have not been preserved, perhaps decaying over time or destroyed by termites (DERRY 1911). Some mummies had also been torn to pieces by thieves looking for gold and precious objects.

Commonly, the royal chapels preserved funerary stelae placed in their west wall niches, containing "the liturgy for the mortuary rites performed in the chapels" (DOLL

³ http://www.jebelbarkal.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=65&Itemid=75.

⁴ For a summary on the classification of types of pyramids, s. HAKEM 1988, 256ff.

2014, 191). The tombs also contained numerous *shawabti* statuettes (lit. “*answerer*”) which were often ranged in rows.

The archaeological excavations at the cemetery of Nuri were conducted by George A. Reisner (1916-1918), who used scientific methodologies for survey with plans and stratigraphic descriptions. Reisner published only a little information about his excavations in ‘*Preliminary Report on the Harvard-Boston excavations at Nuri*’ of the Harvard African Studies (REISNER 1918b)⁵. Part of his work was also edited in The Boston Museum Bulletin (REISNER 1918a).

In 1951, Bertha Porter and Rosalind Moss published the inventory of the tombs of Nuri in the VII volume of ‘*Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings. Nubia, the Deserts, and Outside Egypt*’⁶, where most of the objects found there were listed.

In 1955, Dows Dunham, Reisner’s assistant, edited the entire excavation records in ‘*The Royal Cemeteries of Kush II: Nuri*’, describing all the royal tombs and their finds, in detail. Dunham’s important contribution was that of assembling and collecting the complete excavation records, but unfortunately his work was limited, however, to the minimum of information.

Dunham noted that the pyramids had already been ‘visited’ by plunderers in antiquity, who caused disorder within the tombs, and serious confusion among the discovered finds. The “*method of penetration [of the plunderers] into the subterranean chambers was by digging a hole through the original filling of the stairway at its western end, adjacent to the doorway which gave access to these chambers. On reaching the upper part of the blocked doorway sufficient of the blocking was removed to allow entry into the chambers which, at the time of penetration by the thieves, were unencumbered by debris, except in so far as rock falls from the roof may have occurred*” (RCK II, 4). So, “*One must imagine that the thieves, whose small penetration afforded them but scanty light for their work, took everything which could be easily carried to the surface for examination, and then threw back into the hole they had made such objects as did not interest them. Subsequently much of this discarded material would be washed back into the tomb by the summer rains*” (RCK II, 4).

During the archaeological excavations of the cemetery of Nuri, in some burials George A. Reisner discovered about thirty cylindrical objects made of gold, electrum and silver (REISNER 1918a, b), which are the focus of this research. Such cylinders represent an archaeological *unicum*, because they have not been found elsewhere.

The precious cylinders were found in the tombs of both kings and queens, dating from the reign of Senkamanisken (second half of the VII century BC) to that of Nastasen (second half of the IV century BC). Almost all were discovered on the floor of the burial antechamber, often in material disturbed by ancient plundering.

Dunham described the cylinders as follows: “*The objects referred to as cylinder-sheaths, found in a number of the Nuri tombs, are of unknown purpose, and have not been recorded elsewhere. They consist of two parts; (a) a cylindrical tube, closed at the base by a circular disc, and (b) a shorter cylindrical tube open at both ends, fitted with an internal sleeve which projects beyond its lower end and slides inside (a). The decoration of (a) usually features a winged female figure as its main motif, with decorative borders above and below. The decoration of (b) consists of friezes of uraei, ram’s heads, or sometimes hieroglyphs, cartouches, flowers and the like. The upper end of (b) is open. Although the suggestion has been made that these objects may have been cases to contain papyrus rolls, no trace of any contents was found in any example, and the fact that they appear to have remained open at the top renders the suggestion improbable*” (DUNHAM 1955, 43).

The drawing shown in fig. 1 (from RCK II) represents examples of elevation and section of cylinder sheaths of Aspelta and Amani-natake-lebte. As Dunham noted, the cylindrical objects seemed to be open at the top without a top cover, but with a bottom. It is, therefore, supposed that they were the end of cylindrical handles.

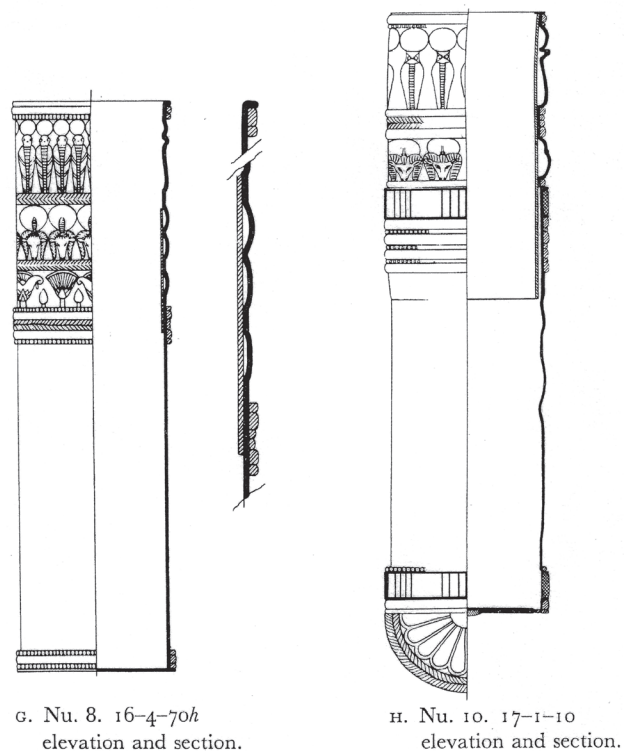


Fig. 1. Elevation and section of two cylinders (RCK II, pl. XCIV).

⁵ H.A.S. II, 1-64.

⁶ PM VII, 223-233.

The Napatan Cylindrical Sheaths

In general, one or two cylinders were discovered in each one of these tombs, except in that of Aspelta, where surprisingly fifteen cylinders were found. According to Dunham, “*Of the fifteen found in that [Aspelta’s] tomb only three were of true gold; the rest were described as being of base gold, possibly containing copper or silver. These were easy to distinguish from the gold ones because they were considerably oxidized*” (RCK II, 5).

These precious objects did not undergo formal changes during all this period (VII-IV centuries BC), and their measurements and dimensions remained almost the same during all three centuries⁷.

Almost all of the Napatan cylinders found were consigned to the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston (MFA), the remaining four ones were transferred to the Sudan National Museum of Khartoum (SNM).

During the 1930-40s, the cylinders of the MFA were restored, but unfortunately, after their restoration, no notes were recorded regarding any original material impressions inside the cylinders. In the catalogue ‘*Sudan. Ancient Treasure*’, Julia Anderson and Philippa Pearce observed the presence of “*wood impressions*” in Aspelta’s cylinder conserved in SNM, which was ‘*fortunately*’ not restored (*Sudan* 2004, 129).

Fabrication of these cylinders consisted of a “*multistep process involving soldering, gilding, chasing, and the addition of appliqués, decorative wires, and enamel*” (LACOVARA-MARKOWITZ 2019, 43, nr. 22).

It is generally known that the royal tombs where the cylinders were found belonged to:

- King Senkamanisken (three cylinders);
- King Aspelta (fifteen cylinders);
- King Aramatelqo (two? cylinders);
- Queen Madiqen (two cylinders);
- Queen Amanitakaye (one cylinder).
- King Amani-natake-lebte (one cylinder);
- King Amaniastabarqo (one cylinder);
- King Siaspiqo (one cylinder);
- King Talakhamani (one cylinder);
- King Nastasen (one cylinder);

But, I believe that it is necessary to add to this list a further three cylinders belonging to:

- an *unknown* owner,
- Queen ‘Mernua’ (?)
- Queen Saka’aye.

⁷ S. III.1.