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Three Egyptian Bronzes


1. Bronze kneeling king, perhaps Taharqa, king of Kush, 690–664 B.C. *Way Collection*

2. Bronze standing king, probably Taharqa, holding an image of the Goddess of Truth, Maat. *Harvard-Boston Expedition*. 21.3096





3. Bronze open-work plaque. *Gift of Mrs. S. D. Warren.* 94.229

N THE COURSE of forty years of excavation in Egypt and the Sudan the Museum of Fine Arts Egyptian Collection has become one of the richest in this country or abroad, and such objects as the Ankh-haf bust and the Mycerinus sculptures have achieved a proper fame. Many of the smaller objects, however, have suffered an undeserved neglect which the Department has been trying to rectify for some time.¹ During the recent new installation in Gallery E 7, three bronzes from widely separated sources were found to be intimately related not only to each other, but also to several objects in the new amulet cases² of that gallery. The three bronzes³ belong to a class of objects which evidently formed the furnishings of a gilded wooden Sacred Bark. Such a bark once rested on the Atlanersa Altar⁴ now in this Museum (Gallery E 4), as will be shown below. After his conquest of Egypt in 730 B.C. the Kushite king Piankhy built a great temple to Amon-Ra at Gebel Barkal where Tuthmosis III had already constructed a smaller building for that god. A later king of the Kushite Dynasty, Taharqa, added to the Barkal temple, and he too caused to be made a stand like the Atlanersa Altar. The Taharqa stand is still *in situ* in the Barkal temple.⁵

The Sudan, or Kush as the country was called in ancient times, underwent a profound change during the New Kingdom, when Egyptian viceroys and garrisons stimulated a thorough Egyptianization of that once primitive country. There can be no question that by the 8th century when Piankhy built his temple, Gebel Barkal had already become the most sacred place in Kush, and that Amon's worship there was as natural as it was in Egypt itself. It was only natural too that the form of Egyptian ritual should be copied in Kush. The great festival of Amon-Ra in the New Kingdom was the Feast of Opet, at which Pharaoh himself officiated as High Priest. Piankhy's first act after his conquest of Egypt was to celebrate this festival at Karnak. The Feast of Opet was the symbolic journey of the god from his Karnak temple to his temple at Luxor where, so it was said, his harim was situated; the name of the Luxor temple, Opet or *ipt*, means "The House of Mmon in the Southern Harim" During

the festival the image of the god was transported by boat from Karnak to Luxor. The god traveled in a golden bark which was borne to the river on carrying poles by the priests, who then placed it in a shrine on a large ceremonial barge. The reliefs at Karnak show the barge being towed by Pharaoh's own galley.⁶ After the great river procession which was accompanied by the smaller barges of Mut and Khonsu and numbers of other official boats,⁷ the Sacred Bark was removed at the Luxor quay and carried out to the temple. Before reaching its destination, the *sanctum sanctorum* at the rear of the great temple, the god stopped at various "way stations." The temple of Ramesses III at Karnak was evidently such a *temple reposoir*, and the schema of the ceremony is most easily seen in its simpler plan.⁸ There the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary of Amon-Ra, is surrounded by smaller rooms made sacred to the other gods of the Theban Triad: Mut, wife of Amon-Ra, and Khonsu, his son. The bark was laid to rest on a stand in the central sanctuary; in the adjoining rooms Pharaoh was anointed and dressed for his part as High Priest in the ceremony, and probably the more precious objects presented to the god were stored here. A central aspect of the ritual was the presentation of an image of the goddess Maat to Amon. This was no barren formula: the presentation of Maat embodied the whole concept of Egyptian kingship and brought to a focal point Pharaoh's Truth, Justice, Righteousness, the perquisites of the king's place as leader of his people. Thus, Pharaoh is represented accompanying the god on his river journey with Maat held in his arms, later to be

4. "Altar" of Atlanersa, King of Kush, 653-643 B.C. *Harvard-Boston Expedition*. 23.728



presented to Amon in the temple ceremony as a symbol of his possession of these qualities.⁹

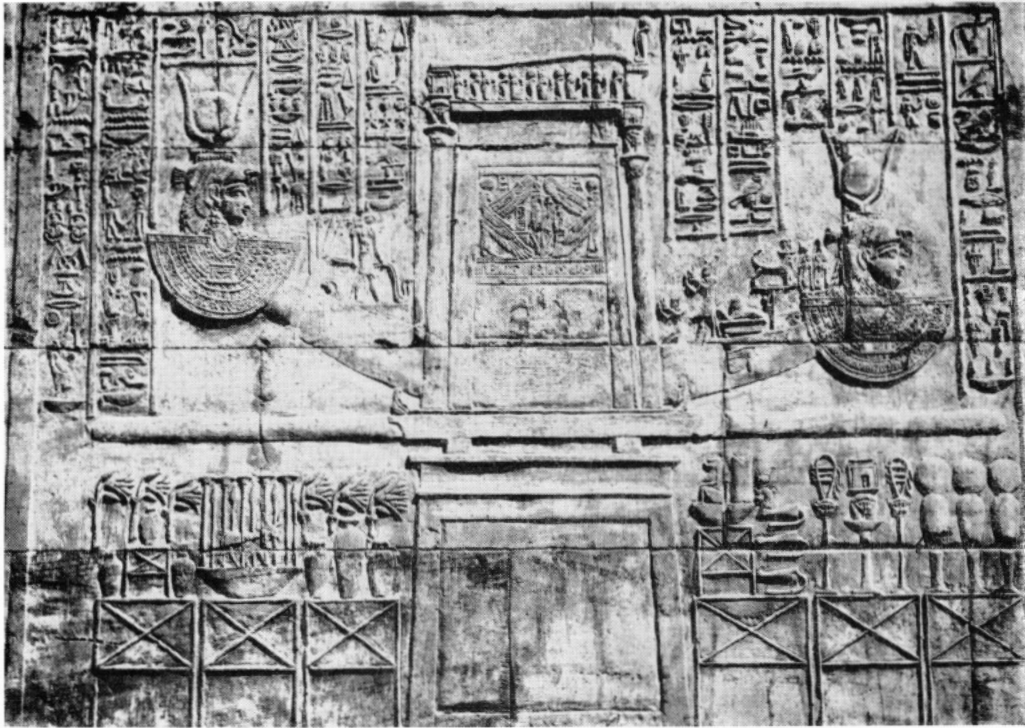
The river procession of the god and the presentation of Maat became a normal and accepted pattern in Kush. The ancient name of Barkal, *dw w^cb*, “The Holy Mountain,” recalls the name of Karnak, *ipt swt*, “Most-Select-of-Places,” and the temple walls were decorated with reliefs in the Egyptian tradition. Thus, a relief of Taharqa represents the king presenting Maat to Amon,¹⁰ just as Ramesses III had done at Karnak and Seti I at Abydos.¹¹ An inscription on a fragmentary relief from Kawa reads: “He (the king presents *truth* to his father Amon so that he may be granted life.”¹² There is no explicit textual evidence for a river procession in Kush, but fragmentary reliefs show that in fact there was such a procession. Attention has already been called to such reliefs at Soleb and Sanam.¹³ At Gebel Barkal itself reliefs were found in the outer court of the Amon temple which indicate that Barkal too took part in the river procession. In fact, Barkal was without doubt the focal point of the procession, for it was the chief temple in Kush, and one would infer that Amon of Barkal took ship and visited the temples at Soleb, Sanam, and Kawa. The reliefs at Barkal are now all but destroyed but a fragmentary portion shows two priests at the end of a carrying-pole.¹⁴

It has been shown recently that the “altar” of Taharqa in the Amon temple at Gebel Barkal was not an altar but a *stand* for the resting of the Sacred Bark after its procession on the river.¹⁵ We are now in possession of evidence to show that the Atlanersa “Altar” too is not an altar, but in actual fact is a *stand*. Vercoutter’s thesis is based on the word *pš*, ‘stand’:

“[He (Taharqa) made] as a monument for his father Amon-Ra the Lord of Ipet-swt, the Great God, who resides in Ta-Seti (Nubia) a *stand* [*pš*] of granite so that he can rest on it in his temple . . .”¹⁶

Now, in the speech of Meryt on the Atlanersa stand the goddess tells of “this thy beautiful *stand* of granite;” another inscription has Amon speaking of Atlanersa who gave him a “monument of granite so that he may rest on it in the great place” (the temple). Continued reference to the object as a place on which Amon may rest suggests the probability that the Atlanersa “Altar” must now be called a stand for a Sacred Bark. The symbolism on the stand is like that of the Taharqa stand: the two Hapys (the Nile god) – one of Upper Egypt, the other of Lower Egypt – tie together the plants of Upper and Lower Egypt. The two plants are joined by the *sm* sign: the ideogram for *uniting* or *joining together*. On both stands the king is represented as holding up the sky. The prominence of Nile symbolism on the stands calls attention to the river as the uniting force of the Two Lands.

Additional confirmation for the use of the Atlanersa and Taharqa stands is found in the recently published reports of the excavations at Kawa in Kush. In both Temples A and T there were found groups of small bronzes, some with tanged bases for insertion into some other structure. In Temple A the excavator, Griffith, discovered the remains of what he took to be a wooden “chest or chests” of long and narrow proportions (1.220 m. x 0.200 m.). MacAdam, editor of the excavation reports,¹⁷ has suggested that these wooden remains were a gilded bark of Amon, and he further suggests¹⁸ that the tanged bronzes which included kneeling and standing royal figures



5. Horus Temple at Edfu. East wall of sanctuary: Bark of Amon-Ra resting on a stand.

and “aegis-heads” (pictured on the reliefs as decorating the prows and sterns of the barks of the river procession; see Fig. 5) were used as models on the bark. The evidence of the reliefs is conclusive: the types of bronzes found at Kawa are duplicated exactly on the reliefs at Karnak and elsewhere.¹⁹

The two royal figures²⁰ in Boston, because of their close resemblances to the Kawa bronzes and the reliefs, must once have been part of the paraphernalia of the Sacred Barks of the Kushite festivals. The standing figure holding a figure of Maat is paralleled by a similar figure from Kawa.²¹ It will be recalled that in the temple ceremony the presentation of Maat to the god (in the case of Barkal, Amon-Ra) was a principal aspect of the ritual, and that in the reliefs of Ptolemy IV at Edfu Pharaoh is represented as carrying Maat while on the Sacred Bark accompanying the god, in readiness for the temple ceremony (Fig. 5). The peculiar position of the hands of the kneeling figure must be due, we think, to the fact that the king is in the position of holding erect the baldachin which protects the cabin of the Sacred Bark.²² This must be the same function of the bronze kneeling figures from Kawa; their hands too are extended with palms inward. The king is represented in several functions on the bark because it is his particular place to enter into personal communion with the god, his father. Thus, he is seen at the corners of the baldachin, protecting the sacred cabin from the elements; he pours oil from a pot to anoint and purify the bark; he is a steersman; he presents pots of oil to the god.

The architectural form of the bronze plaque suggests that it was one side of a sacred cabin which held the image of the god. The usual decoration of such cabins on the reliefs is very like that of the bronze: a lintel frieze of uraei, paired images of a winged Isis or Hathor, which make up the wall itself. A bronze standard in the Gulbenkian Collection is topped by a solar bark whose form is much like that of the barks under discussion and carries a similarly decorated cabin. Here only the upper part of the cabin is open-work but the ornamentation consists of the familiar winged goddess with horned sun-disc crown; the cornice is in the form of a frieze of uraei.²³ The pillar and lintel are a late derivation from much earlier and more complex examples. Ramesside entablatures show an elegant complex of uraeus friezes with rows of geometric designs below, supported by columns made up of an amalgamation of lotus blossoms, *šw* feathers, other plant forms and geometric ornament.²⁴

Stylistic details confirm a Kushite origin for the bronze kneeling royal figure. Typical of Kushite workmanship are the conventionalized wig decorated with small circles representing curls, the "scarf" falling down the back of the neck, the peculiar stylization of the waistband which follows an elliptical curve lower in front than in back. This detail is more easily seen in the standing figure because of its position.²⁵ A typical device of Kushite sculpture is the emphasis laid on the modelling of the thorax which becomes a distinct depression between sternum and naval. Not unusual is the lack of collar or necklace. But most characteristic of the bronze's origin is its total effect; in a framework of generally massive proportions there is an elegance and refinement of details which emphasize Egyptianizing influences on the provincial tradition.²⁶ The Way bronze is a very fine piece; the bronze from Gebel Barkal is in the same tradition but lacks the subtlety of the smaller piece. It recalls the monumental statues of Taharqa and Senkamanisken now in Khartoum, Cairo, and Boston.²⁷ Those great sculptures were conceived in the manner of imperial Kushite art; their massive quality implies the Kushite Dynasty's conviction of its strength in Kush and Egypt.

We would suggest that the standing bronze figure is of Taharqa himself: it is typical of the sculpture of his reign, and he made considerable additions to the Amon temple at Barkal, where the bronze was found. In that case we can surmise that the bronze was one of a number furnishing a bark which carried the cult image of Amon, and which was rested on the very stand of Taharqa which is yet *in situ* at Barkal. Taharqa's son Atlanersa built a similar stand²⁸ and he too must have caused to be made small bronzes for the bark of the river procession. Examination of bronzes in other collections will show, we are confident, parallels for the pieces discussed here.²⁹ Such study will help to clarify one more aspect of ancient Egyptian life.

EDWARD LEE BOCKMAN TERRACE

FOOTNOTES

1. W. Stevenson Smith, *Ancient Egypt as represented in the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston, 1952 (NB) (revised edition now in press); Dows Dunham, *The Egyptian Department and its Excavations*, Boston, 1958.

2. Designed and installed by Suzanne E. Chapman.

3. Acc. no. 72.4433, from the Way Collection. Bronze kneeling royal figure. Traces of ancient gilding on kilt and crown. The king wears a royal diadem, with nape-piece in relief. H. 0.080m. (Figure 1)

Acc. no. 21.3096, from the Harvard-Boston Expedition at Gebel Barkal in Kush. Found in Temple B 501, area IX.6. Bronze standing figure of a king holding an image of the goddess of Truth and Justice, Maat. Regilded in modern times for study purposes. The king wears the usual wig and diadem. Double uraeus. Round his neck is a necklace, the ends of which have been brought round again to fall over the breast. In the centre of the first loop is a large ram's head ornament, and there is another at each end of the necklace. H. 0.199 m. (Figure 2)

Acc. no. 94.229, gift of Mrs. S. D. Warren. Open work bronze plaque: top, a lintel decorated with a continuous frieze of uraei. Bottom: sections to contain paste inlays, some of which remain, original colours red and green. Left: a pillar topped by a uraeus with horned sun disc crown. Wound round the pillar is the body of the sacred serpent, Wadjet. Standing against the pillar is a winged Hathor-Isis figure, with horned sun disc crown. At end of extended wing is a seated Anubis jackal. H. 0.130m., W. 0.065m. (Figure 3)

4. Acc. no. 23.728, Harvard-Boston Expedition: found in Room B700 at Gebel Barkal. (Figure 4)

5. See *infra*, pp. 51 f.

6. The Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak*, Chicago, 1936 (Oriental Institute Publications, vol. 35), vol. II, pl. 84.

7. *Ibid.*, pls. 84ff.

8. *Ibid.*, fig. 1.

9. E.g., a relief of Ptolemy IV on the east wall of the sanctuary in the Horus Temple at Edfu (Figure 5). Such an image of Maat can be seen in Gallery E 7, Case 10: Acc. no. 21.323, Harvard-Boston Expedition, from El Kurru, Tomb 55 (751-716 B.C.). See Dunham, *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush: El Kurru*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1950, pl. lxi, 19-3-1433b.

10. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Aethiopien*, V, pl. 7; pl. 9 (Amon in his ram-headed form: cf. Breasted, Oriental Institute, unpublished photograph no. 3043).

11. Ramesses III: Karnak, *op. cit.* (n. 6 *supra*) pls. 98 and 101; Seti I: The Egypt Exploration Society (A. H. Gardiner, editor), *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*, London, 1938, vol. III, pl. 4 left (Maat presented to Osiris).

12. M. F. Laming MacAdam, *The Temples of Kawa*, vol. II, London, 1955, pl. xix.c.

13. Vercoutter, *Kush*, 5(1957), 87ff., 'Stand for a Sacred Bark or Altar?': pp. 89 and 90 and figs. 3 and 4. See Breasted, Oriental Institute, unpublished photograph no. 3192 of a s and at Soleb with the sacred bark resting on it. See Griffith, 'Oxford Excavations in Nubia,' *Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology*, 9(1922), 96 and pl. xxvii for the Sanam procession.

14. W. Stevenson Smith, *Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*, Baltimore, 1958, pl. 173A; see Breasted, Oriental Institute, unpublished photographs nos. 2990 and 2991 for the bark itself.

15. Vercoutter, *op. cit.* (n. 13 *supra*), *passim*.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 88 and 89.

17. *Op. cit.* (n. 12 *supra*), p. 243 *apud* pp. 41-3.

18. First proposed long ago by Erman, *Aegypten und Aegyptisches Leben im Altertum*, Tübingen, 1923, p. 314.

19. MacAdam, *op. cit.* (n. 12 *supra*), pl. lxxvii.d, centre, standing figure holding *mw* pots: cf. Seti I, *op. cit.* (n. 11 *supra*), vol. II, coloured plate 11 left, Seti on bark of Amon; MacAdam, pl. lxxxii.a and b, gold kneeling