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TOMB BUILDING TRADITION IN LOWER NUBIA FROM THE MEROITIC AGE TO AFTER CHRISTIANIZATION¹

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Abstract: The article considers types of graves found to be typical of the Meroitic, post-Meroitic and Christian Nubian kingdom periods and recapitulates the different typologies published by various excavators over the last century. Research has produced differentiated data sets for given areas, thus confirming the multi-ethnic character of lower Nubia. Nonetheless, the author opts for a continuity of sepulchral traditions.

Keywords: Lower Nubia, tomb building, Meroitic, post-Meroitic, Christianity, grave typology

The story of archaeology in Nubia began with the onset of the 20th century, although the Nile valley south of Aswan had been the object of interest of many scholars before that; suffice it to mention in this regard Carl Lepsius, Frédéric Cailliaud and Johann Burkhardt. The first regular survey of Lower Nubia was commissioned by Gaston Maspero and conducted in 1906 by Arthur Weigall. A year later George Reisner's expedition was established; in 1907–1908 Reisner explored territories lying directly south of Aswan in connection with the planned raising of a dam built in 1902 and published a cultural and chronological sequence for Nubia, which was to remain in force for many years. A hundred years later, it has partly stood up to the findings of successive generations of archaeologists, but other parts have come

into question. Cecil Firth took over the Archeological Survey in Nubia in 1908. This, in the briefest words, is the story of the birth of Nubiology.

All important phases of research in Lower Nubia have always been linked inseparably with modifications of the Aswan Dam, ever the catalyst for archaeological research. The dam was raised again in the 1930s and the second archaeological survey of the region was mounted then by Walter B. Emery assisted by Lawrence Kirwan. The most spectacular discoveries of this period were the post-Meroitic cemeteries of Qustul and Ballaṇa.

In the 1960s Nubiology and Egyptology separated ways. The scale of research mounted at the time exceeded anything conducted before and has not been repeated for any territory or culture since.

¹ The article sums up the author's studies completed while on scholarship from the Polish Ministry of National Education.

Spectacular discoveries were made in effect and conservation projects implemented, e.g. the wall paintings from the Faras cathedral and the transfer of Pharaonic temples, like the sanctuary of Ramesses II in Abu Simbel, to higher ground.

The present article sets itself the objective of reviewing in brief the story of the development of the subterranean parts of tombs in the region between the First and Third Nile Cataract in a period covering the passage from the Meroitic age

to the establishment of new state structures in the territory of modern Sudan and their conversion to Christianity. The focus on the subterranean part of tombs draws from the fact that some cemeteries were actually devoid of superstructures that could be seen on the ground (Trigger 1969: 120). Royal or princely tombs have been omitted on the assumption that their form is normally governed by slightly different rules. Neither will the grave inventory be discussed in detail here for lack of space.

STATE OF RESEARCH

Research in Lower Nubia has been burdened by an imbalance in archaeological excavations. Most of the digging has been carried out on cemetery sites with much less attention being paid to settlement sites; in effect, 80% of the explored sites are connected with interment of the dead. William Y. Adams pointed this out in his recapitulation of research in the decade 1959–1969, read during the Conference of Nubian Studies in 1990 (Adams 1992). That which was a curse proved — for the purposes of the present article — to be a blessing for Lower Nubia. About 350 cemetery sites from the territorial and chronological

range under discussion have been recorded to date. The sites vary from a few dozen graves to huge burial grounds with a few thousand graves. Several tens of thousands of graves have been explored, but still there is no publication discussing sepulchral tradition for the entire region in given chronological periods. Neither has there been a synthetic anthropological analysis of the material.

Another reservation to be made is that sites south of Wadi Halfa have been investigated to a much lesser degree: field surveys have been carried out, but much less regular excavations.

GRAVE TYPOLOGY

In the course of the present study the following types of graves have been found to be typical respectively of successive periods: Meroitic, post-Meroitic and three Nubian kingdoms:

1. Meroitic Period. The part of the structure seen aboveground approximated a square in shape. It was a brick-lined mastaba with a core of rubble. Some

scholars believe these features to be the remains of small pyramids, largely destroyed in the upper parts. The classic underground grave substructure from this period was an angled ramp leading down into a burial chamber, which was oriented east–west and extended on axis, in line with the access way. The entrance to the chamber was bricked up or else blocked with stone slabs.

The body was laid to rest supine, extended, the head directed either to the east or to the west.

2. The classic post-Meroitic tomb is an earth tumulus with or without a stone coat and a rectangular shaft sunk vertically in the center. The burial chamber oriented north–south was aligned with the long side of the rectangle. The entrance was sealed with either bricks or stone slabs. The body lay in contracted position, head directed either to the north or to the south. Francis Griffith (1925: 147) proposed to identify this kind of burial with the Blemmyes, while Cecil Firth (1915: 6 and 23–37) had suggested earlier the Nobades. At the present stage of research, it seems more likely to connect this type of burial with the arrival and presence of the Noba.²

3. A new type of burial structure seen on the ground appeared with the onset of Christianity. It is a rectangular mastaba built of stone or bricks, the latter both baked and dried, in forms from a simple quadratic prism through a prism with rounded top to a cross (for a classification by tomb superstructure in the period following conversion to Christianity, see Monneret de Villard 1957: III, 63–78). The body was placed at the bottom of a rectangular trench, stretched out with the head to the west.

Many subtypes have been distinguished within the “classic” grave classification presented above. The fact that so much research was being carried out simultaneously in the 1960s resulted in separate publications presenting independent grave typologies and not necessarily permitting comparison with other sites. In the end effect, it is extremely difficult sometimes to compare particular

cemeteries. At least 20 such typologies exist, including double classifications in a few cases. Separate classifications were prepared for the following sites: Nag Gamus, Gammai, Arminna, Karanog, Abri-Missiminia, Nelluah, Kosha and Firka, Wadi el-Arab, Soleb, Toshka, Walter Emery’s and Lawrence Kirwan’s surveys between Wadi es-Sebua and Adindan, surveys by Cecil Firth and George Reisner, Francis Griffith’s investigations, survey on the west bank of the Nile during the Nubian campaign, survey between Faras and Gezira Dabarosa and finally, the work of the Scandinavian Joint Expedition (see list of selected bibliographic references). Since no uniform principles of grave classification could be established, various details like geographic orientation of the chamber and body, chronology and characteristics linked to grave morphology were considered as distinctive for successive types. Taking into consideration all the known examples of graves, I believe that it is possible, based on substructures alone, to distinguish three basic types with two subtypes for the latter two [*Fig. 1*]:

- A. Rectangular pit with many variants, without niche for the body and with an additional niche (or niches) in a number of variants;
- B. End chamber graves described above as a typical Meroitic tomb with platform leading to the grave;
- C. Lateral chamber graves;

Two basic subtypes can be distinguished in types B and C: B1 and C1 with ramp leading to the burial chamber and B2 and C2 without such a ramp.

All other substructures, and there is a multitude, can be assigned to these types,

² Adams (1977: 347) believes this to be in imitation of royal tombs.

their combinations and modifications. The issue of grave classification was so important that it was treated in a separate study (Oldenburg, Möllerop 1969).

At first glance the present proposition may seem to correspond with the previously accepted classic chronological division. It is true to some extent, but even

so, all three types occur in the basic and modified forms in both Meroitic and post-Meroitic times, and in modified form in times after the conversion to Christianity, which means that the role of chronology as a distinctive trait should be reduced. A juxtaposition of grave types and main explored sites is presented in *Table 1*.

DISCUSSION

At least two issues can be raised with regard to material from Lower Nubia: the brick tomb structures and the graves with steps instead of dromoi. With regard to the classification of brick structures, the present author is inclined to follow Francis Griffith's suggestion that in many places the physical composition of the soil made it difficult to tunnel a chamber that could support the load of earth above it (Griffith 1925: 145–146; repeated in Adams 1977: 375). Aesthetic considerations must have also played a role in view of the fact

that brick structures were found also in rock-cut tombs (e.g. Reisner 1910: 96–97, grave 1249 cemetery 2). After all, it was much easier to dig or cut a rectangular shaft and build a vault resting on walls of brick or ledges left in the rock than to excavate under difficult conditions a chamber which could collapse at any time. Ergo, brick chambers were nothing but substitutes for chambers excavated in the earth and hence it is not necessary to classify them as yet another principal type of sepulchral structure. Let the cemeteries at Qasr Ibrim serve as an

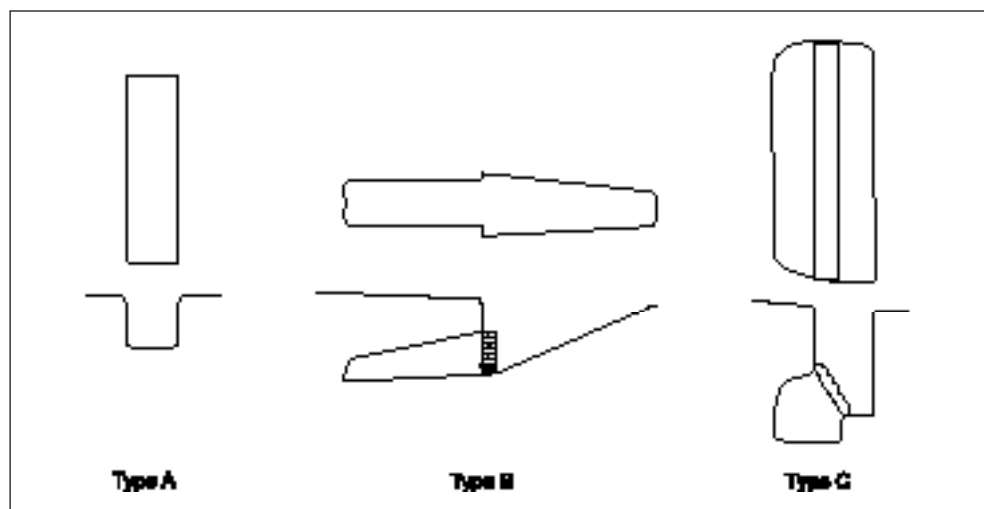


Fig. 1. Proposed typology of graves from Nubia

example where most of the tombs have sub-structures in the form of rectangular pits or rectangular pits with inbuilt brick chambers (Mills 1982: 6, type I and type IV).

As for the second issue, that is, inclined platforms in shaft walls, it should be pointed out that they are always on the opposite side of the tomb. It is possible that the whole idea was to facilitate access to the burial chamber, most likely during the funeral ceremony. Therefore, it can be concluded that changes in tomb structure, that is, reduction of the dromos, were connected with changes in burial tradition. Such a change, barring tombs of tribal or proto-state elites, can be observed in Nubia between the Late Meroitic period and the advent of Christianity. Christian tombs no longer have a dromos, even in modified form. This is presumably because of an entirely different funerary rite: after conversion to Christianity there was no longer any procession (even in modified form) bringing gifts for the dead. For the same reason — absence of grave goods — the size of the burial chamber was reduced and was replaced with a niche.

The following observations can be made based on a comparison of material from cemeteries from the Meroitic age through the times of the Christian kingdoms of Nobadia. Graves of type A were present in Lower Nubia continuously from the Meroitic period. Graves of type C, commonly attributed to the post-Meroitic period, are documented starting from the

Late Meroitic period (for examples, see, Griffith 1925: 145; Vila 4: 109 [Ayun]; Emery, Kirwan 1935: 417ff. [cemetery 214]; Vila 10: 48 [Irki Samb]). This can be a reflection of the gradual appearance of the Noba in the valley and argues against the theory of a sudden cultural breakthrough. The view has gained advocates among Nubiologists and the present argument is put forward as yet one more in its favor.³ Processes of Noba migration must have gone through different phases of intensity and the fall of Meroe could have played a role (Geus, Lenoble 1985: 89–90; Adams 1977: 392; Vila 14, 1982: 186).

In the post-Meroitic period there seems to have been a considerable diversity in grave structure. Graves of all types and subtypes, and in a great number of variants were in use and it is hardly surprising taking into consideration the ethnic and cultural situation of Lower Nubia in this period. Beside Egyptian settlers present in the region already from the Ptolemaic period, the population we are dealing with continued Meroitic traditions. Moreover, exceptional activity of the Blemmyes on the margins of the river valley started to be noted from the middle of the 3rd century AD, along with their settling, at least of some of them, on the Nile, and finally successive waves of the Noba tribes, who later dominated politically the other peoples.

Type B was also in permanent use alongside both subtypes of type C and



Table 1. Juxtaposition of grave types and main explored sites

³ See, e.g., Geus, Lenoble 1985: 90–91. Like Williams 1991: 33, among others, the authors suggested a migration of the Noba northward in the Nile Valley. So far, however, the archaeological record, especially from Lower Nubia, has not borne out this idea, because the material from excavations in the vicinity of the Third Cataract is dated currently later than that from the region of the Second Cataract. This issue is discussed herein.

Site	Nag Gamus	Nag Shayeg	Karanog	Area between Shablul and Kalabsha	Area between Pachoras and Gezira Dabarosa	Pachoras (1)	Pachoras (2)	Nag el Arab	Gammai	Nelluah
Publication Type	Almagro 1965	Pellicer 1963	Woolley, Randal - McIver 1910	Reisner 1910	Verwers 1962	Griffith 1924	Griffith 1928	Pellicer 1965	Bates, Dunham 1927	Guinea, Teixidor 1965
Type A	A		C						A	
	1	A-1		Chr.VI, Chr.VII	18			1-A; 1-E; 5	A I	
	2	A-2	C1.2	Byz.VI; Chr.VIII	17		rectangular bricked grave	2-B	A II	
	3	A-3	A1-4	Byz.IIIc; Chr.I; Chr.IV	10,11	6	rectangular bricked grave and corbel vault	1-D; 1-C		
Type B	B		D	Byz.IV		3	lateral niche grave		pit and side chamber	
	1	B-1		Byz.VIII	16			3-B; 3-C	B II, BIII	A II, D III
	2	B-2					double lateral niche	3-G		C
	3	B-3 (corner niche)					lateral foot niche	3-A	B I	A I, D I,II
									E I	
									E II	
									EIII	
									EIV	
Type C	C		B			1	cave grave			
	1	C-1	B							B I,II
	2	C-2	B	Byz.IIIb	13			4-A, 4-B	D II (vault)	
	3	C-3	B1			7				
	D						cave grave			
	1	D-1		Pt.-R.II; Byz. IIIa	15			4-D	C I	
	2	D-2						4-E	C-1	
	3	D-3		Pt.-R.IV a				3-E	D I (vault)	B-III
	E						cave grave			
	1	E-1								
	2	E-2						3-F		
	3	E-3		Pt.-R.III; Pt.-R.IV b				3-D	C III, C IV, C III	

Site	Area between Wadi es Sebu'a and Adindan	Area between Kalabsha and Aman Daud	Area between Kubban and Wadi es Sebu'a	Ermenne	Kubanieh	Area between Dal and Nilwatti	Firka	Soleb	Toshka	Qasr Ibrim
Publication Type	Emery, Kirwan 1935	Firth 1912	Firth 1927	Junker 1925	Junker 1918	Vila 1975–1984	Kirwan 1939	Giorgini-Schiff, Robichon, Ledant 1972	Simpson 1964	Mills 1982
Type A	W.14, W.15					M I, C I, B I				
				I (X24); Ch.1	Ch.1	C II, B I A				I
	W.3; W.12,	cemetery, 72.162, extended position		Ch.2,3	Type II	C III, B I-A I				I, II
	W.4	cemetery. 72.93, 72.166								II
Type B					Type III	M II, C IV, B II, B III	B		B	VI
	W.13			Ch.5		B II variante 2		2, 3, 4		
	W.11			II b (X49, X9)						
				II a (X53); Ch.4		B II variante 1		5		VI
	W.9									
Type C	W.6, W.7, W.8	rectangular pit with end chamber				M III, C V, C VI, B IV	A		A	
		cemetery 72.64, contracted		III b				1		
				III a (X46)						
			ccm. 112.9	V (X29) vault						
	W.5, W.10			IV a (X19)						III, IV
	W.1			V (X27) vault						
				III a (X20)						
	W.2	cemetery, 72.90 contracted		V (X29) vault						

their many variants (e.g. Type B1 Eri/Mindiq, Vila 4: 74). New types emerged simultaneously, combining traditions of Meroe and of the Noba, type C with east–west orientation, the same tombs with dromos (subtype C1 at Dawki, Vila 3: 63). There is also evidence of graves representing type B with archaeological material, especially pottery, associated unquestionably with post-Meroitic culture (Firth 1912: I, 35). Suffice it to mention cemetery no. 72 (grave no. 64), where a typical Meroitic substructure, but oriented north–south, contained a body in contracted position with accompanying post-Meroitic ceramics. Interesting to note that another grave explored in the same cemetery (no. 91) differed from the one above only in the orientation, which was in keeping with the Meroe tradition (Firth 1912: I, 91–92, it could also be a reused Meroitic tomb). Moreover, throughout the post-Meroitic period, the characteristic contracted position of the body of the deceased was doubled quite regularly by an extended position. The number of tombs with the typical dromos fell and in cases where the dromos still occurred, it was in greatly reduced form.

A local differentiation is observable with regard to orientation. In the region of the Dal Cataract, the predominant orientation is north–south in post-Meroe times, although the data originates from survey work and not regular excavations and hence may not be entirely reliable. In territory explored by the Scandinavian Joint Expedition, proportions between the traditional Meroitic orientation and that associated with the Noba were in favor of the former (Säve-Söderbergh 1981: 15). In the so-called private cemeteries of Qustul and Ballaña there is an absolute superiority

of the north–south orientation starting from the last quarter of the 4th century, replaced in the second decade of the 5th century with an E–W orientation; this phenomenon was continued through the end of the post-Meroitic period (Williams 1991: 16). David Edwards has suggested that the differentiated orientation, N–S and E–W, could have reflected social status (1989: 164). However, to verify this idea one needs to answer a few questions, such as was the superiority of the E–W orientation in certain regions a mark of relatively greater affluence? And did graves of such orientation from the period in question contain a richer grave inventory?

It is possible that Edwards' idea and the idea that grave orientation reflects certain cultural differences are not mutually exclusive and can be considered as complementary. The Noba in transition from a nomadic to sedentary life may have had lesser resources.

Williams has also pointed out that bodies in the earliest post-Meroitic tombs were laid out on animal skins, which were later replaced with wooden beds (Williams 1991: 13). In my opinion, it could indicate a change of lifestyle of the Noba tribes from nomadic to more of a sedentary kind. Similarly as the fact that most artifacts from the post-Meroitic period originate from graves, not from settlement sites. Even considering that investigations in the area of Lower Nubia in the first half of the 20th century had concentrated mainly on sepulchral sites, the disparity in the origins of archaeological material is still significant.

The picture of sepulchral traditions of Lower Nubia would not be complete without including the cemeteries from the area of the ancient Talmis, also known

under the Arabic name of Kalabsha (Ricke 1967; Strouhal 1984; for Sayala, see Bedawi 1976). Local variants of burial traditions have been noted there, different from both the Meroitic tradition and that associated with the Noba tribes. Tombs were constructed of stones without any bonding, on ground surface or taking advantage of natural rock crevices. The burial chamber was marked with stone mounds or veritable domes of stone slabs. Most of the graves from the Kalabsha area were enclosed by low stone walls with one or two entrances (Török 1988: 179).

Two separate ideas as to their cultural attribution have been put forward. According to László Török, they should be linked to the Noba who inhabited the region of the Gezira and were at one point resettled in the *Dodekaschoinos* (Török 1988: 180; see also Trigger 1989: 543 for a critique of Török's views). A perusal of the written sources (Olympi-

odoros), however, makes Bruce Williams' suggestion associating the archaeological material with the Blemmyes more credible (Williams 1991: 5, 19, also note 66; Mayer Thurman, Williams 1979: 26). Williams notes also that archaeological research in this area has not demonstrated the same line of development in the 4th and 5th centuries as in other regions. Considerably less sites with material commonly encountered on sites further to the south and usually associated with the Noba have been documented in the *Dodekaschoinos* in post-Meroitic times.⁴ Two conclusions are thus justified: the post-Meroitic period in its material version present in the south lasted shorter in this region for the simple reason that the area was more or less in the hands of the Blemmyes. Moreover, sedentarization trends and state-building ambitions among the Blemmyes inhabiting the Nile Valley were not as strong and widespread as among the Noba.

RECAPITULATION

It seems in recapitulation that we are dealing with a long-lasting Meroitic tradition confirmed by finds not only from the sepulchral domain (for instance, the crowns from Qustul and Ballaña), but also from outside of it, i.e., operation of temples (Temple 6) in Qasr Ibrim (see, among others, Horton 1991: 272). New elements, such as pottery, appeared as well.

In terms of the substructure, the tombs from the period after conversion to Christianity modified the tradition instead

of breaking it, a specificity noted already virtually at the beginning of research in Nubia (Junker 1925: 89ff.; Griffith 1927: 63; Reisner 1910: 308). Although one should keep in mind distinctive traits like the common application of white-wash in Christian tombs, a characteristic seen sporadically in Meroitic burials and practically absent from post-Meroitic ones. The continuation of sepulchral traditions can be traced best on the example of the so-called mixed cemeteries, which

⁴ Török (1988: 177) writes of a lesser number of sites connected with the so-called Ballaña period in the *Dodekaschoinos*. He gives as an example the results of one survey between Shellal and Wadi es-Sebua, which identified 418 sites, less than for any other period.

reveal either continuation or coexistence of rites identified with different time periods. George Reisner referred to this in cemeteries nos 59, 63, 72 and 74, where Christian graves were positioned either between tombs of post-Meroitic age or directly adjacent to them. Moreover, they are extremely alike with pottery being the only distinctive element (Reisner 1910: 345; other examples, see cemeteries at Meeme n'tahu, Vila 3: 29, and Saheyirki, Vila 10, 101). David Edwards also drew attention to the close relation between post-Meroitic and Christian tombs at the cemetery in Abri Missiminia and to the presence of a large number of transitional forms (tumuli constructed over Christian graves) in the Dal region (Edwards 1994: 176–177; see also similar burial at Abu Sir (5-T-27), Adams, Nordström 1963: 32). Other examples of mixed cemeteries were pointed out by László Török after William Adams, albeit in a different context, in the immediate neighborhood of the Second Nile Cataract. Thirteen out of the total number of known post-Meroitic cemeteries contained graves also from Meroitic times and 25 from the period after conversion to Christianity, and only 17 were strictly post-Meroitic to the exclusion of all others (Török 1988: 176; Adams 1977: 393). According to Török, this determined the fairly short duration of the post-Meroitic in this region. To my mind, however, it could be construed as proof of settlement and cultural continuity, as well as evolutionary change in the area. Additional information is provided by a comparison of geographical distribution of post-Meroitic tradition and tombs following the period of conver-

sion to Christianity. Here, too, it is possible to trace continuity. Graves of type B were encountered all over Lower Nubia, but they were the most frequent in its southern part. Following Christianization, a modified form of this grave type became the most popular form also to the south of Debeira (Adams 1998: 27, on geographical distribution of grave types after Christianization).

Anthropological evidence also attests to evolutionary change instead of an invasion of new peoples wiping from existence the previous population of the Nile Valley. It is true that the earlier part of the 20th century, virtually through the 1960s, was dominated by the views of George Reisner and Grafton Smith. Ahmed Batrawi was the first to shy away from these opinions, although he was unable to shake them off completely (Batrawi 1945: 173ff.).⁵ The results of the Nubian Campaign of the 1960s finally revised these views and the evolutionary character of the transformation is now generally accepted to the exclusion of any drastic changes which could have been the effect of mass migration. Even so, the research has produced differentiated data sets for given areas, thus confirming the multi-ethnic character of Lower Nubia. For the region of the Scandinavian Joint Expedition concession, Ole Nielsen observed a small change in transition from the Meroitic to post-Meroitic (Nielsen 1970: 80ff.). Studying the material collected by the Finnish Nubia Expedition (the southernmost end of the SJE concession in the vicinity of Gemai East, Eugen Strouhal noted a change between the post-Meroitic and Christian periods (Strouhal 1997: 233).

⁵ Batrawi cautiously signaled certain issues, like the non-Negroid character of the male part of the population (1945: 175), but he failed to stand contrary to G. Smith's views.

For the Wadi Halfa region David Greene saw no statistically significant changes from the Mesolithic on (Greene 1966: 288). According to Greene, the people of Kulubnarti had less traits in common with Africans than their immediate neighbor to the north, the population inhabiting the region around Wadi Halfa, while the closest similarity occurred in the period after conversion to Christianity (Greene 1999: 79).⁶ It could point to a stable population in Lower Nubia in this period.

The development of the situation after the fall of Meroe was not uniform throughout the territory of the kingdom. Certainly there was some cultural regression symptomatic of such periods, which is reflected for instance in cutting back on grave goods and reduced decoration on ceramics (Adams 1977: 396).⁷ At the same time, there is continuity in some aspects of material culture, like the production of iron, for instance (Lenoble 1997: 138). The absence of monumental architecture is unequivocal proof of a formative stage in the development of still weak statehood. The biggest concentration of post-Meroitic sites is found around the Second Cataract and directly to the north of it, the other concentration being around Qasr Ibrim. Assuming unbiased data,⁸ these areas could be recognized as the core of newly developing statehood, possibly even during the waning of

an already territorially diminished Meroe, a state combining strong Meroitic tradition (which were stronger in the neighborhood of Qasr Ibrim) with the ambitious plans of Noba tribes (Qustul and Ballaña).

Once we take into consideration David Edwards' findings that the archaeological material from the vicinity of the Third Cataract was mostly from the late post-Meroitic period (Edwards 2001: 90)⁹ and historical sources on the struggle between the Noba and the Blemmyes for the *Dodekaschoinos*, we get a probable scenario for the territorial development of Nobadia. The heartland of the state was in the Nile Valley between Qasr Ibrim and the Second Cataract and it expanded from here to the north, as attested by the struggle with the Blemmyes, as well as to the south. The disputed territory around the Third Cataract could have been the source of conflicts echoed in sources reporting on Nubia's conversion to Christianity and Silko's inscription from the temple in Kalabsha.

Nobadia was a conglomerate of several superimposed and permanent traditions, dominated by the new Christian tradition added in the 6th century, but not at once and never completely. We may presume a similar process to that described by David Frankfurter for late antique Egypt, namely, a lasting old religion even as a new one took root (see Frankfurter 1998) and

⁶ According to Greene (1999: 88), the island itself was inhabited by a population manifesting a mixture of local traits and traits present further to the north, while the population inhabiting the riverbank was virtually identical with the population to the north. It should be noted that the youngest samples of the island inhabitants referred to the early Christian period.

⁷ In my opinion, the growing share of vessel forms used with liquids in the grave inventory is significant, for it may reflect changes in religious beliefs and a shift toward libation offerings being made during the funeral ceremony.

⁸ The data could be distorted especially by the fragmentary nature of research south of Wadi Halfa.

⁹ Edwards points out simultaneously the absence of material from the late phase in the north, a finding not borne out, for example, by the cemeteries in Qasr Ibrim. Similarly Török (1988: 188) for the Abri-Delgo region, suggesting a late 5th and early 6th century date, contemporary with the fourth and fifth generation of graves in Ballaña.

the assimilation of certain ancient traditions into the new rite. A good example is provided by the burial of the bodily remains of a church hierarch on a wooden *angareeb* bed (Adams 1977: 480). The

present author is hardly alone in propagating views of this kind today, but the real harbinger was Hermann Junker (Junker 1925: 89ff.), whose ideas were ignored for too long.

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