

UCLA

UCLA Previously Published Works

Title

The “Feast of Entry”: Gold in Nubian Practice and Power at Philae

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4k66v9q6>

Journal

Journal of Egyptian History, 18(1-2)

ISSN

1874-1657

Author

Ashby, Solange

Publication Date

2025

DOI

10.1163/18741665-bja10039

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

The “Feast of Entry”: Gold in Nubian Practice and Power at Philae

Solange Ashby

Assistant Professor, UCLA

ORCID: 0009-0003-7782-9263

Abstract:

This paper will explore the ritual power and significance of gold for Nubian cultic practitioners at the ancient Egyptian temple of Philae, located at the traditional border between Egypt and Nubia. Philae was a place of cultural, religious, economic, and military interaction between Egyptian and Nubian populations, both of whom engaged in religious practices at the temple, often jointly. Though co-religionists, Nubian practice diverged in specific ways from that of Egyptian priests and practitioners.

Long associated with gold, Nubia served as the primary source of this precious metal for ancient Egypt. This paper will explore the presentation of gold by Nubians at the temple of Philae as recorded in hieroglyphic texts that decorate the temple walls and in the words of Nubian visitors who inscribed their prayer texts on the temple walls primarily in the Egyptian language (Demotic), but also in the Meroitic language and in Greek. Additionally, I will describe the unique symbolism and ritual power of gold in the Nubian religious practices at Philae.

Keywords:

Gold–Nubia–Ritual practice–Temple–Priests

The “Feast of Entry”: Gold in Nubian Practice and Power at Philae

Abstract:

This paper will explore the ritual power and significance of gold for Nubian cultic practitioners at the ancient Egyptian temple of Philae, located at the traditional border between Egypt and Nubia. Philae was a place of cultural, religious, economic, and military interaction between Egyptian and Nubian populations, both of whom engaged in religious practices at the temple, often jointly. Though co-religionists, Nubian practice diverged in specific ways from that of Egyptian priests and practitioners.

Long associated with gold, Nubia served as the primary source of this precious metal for ancient Egypt. This paper will explore the presentation of gold by Nubians at the temple of Philae as recorded in hieroglyphic texts that decorate the temple walls and in the words of Nubian visitors who inscribed their prayer texts on the temple walls primarily in the Egyptian language (Demotic), but also in the Meroitic language and in Greek. Additionally, I will describe the unique symbolism and ritual power of gold in the Nubian religious practices at Philae.

Keywords:

Gold–Nubia–Ritual practice–Temple–Priests

Introduction

The Symbolism of Gold in Ancient Egypt

The offering and fashioning of gold at Egyptian temples associated the precious metal to purity, the skin of the gods, and the glittering rays of the sun, personified as the supreme god Re. Gold was thus an essential ingredient in temple decoration and the performance of funerary rites. While gold could be obtained in the eastern deserts of Egypt, the bulk of this precious metal was obtained from Nubia and its vast gold fields.¹ Since the earliest periods of pharaonic Egyptian history trade missions were sent south to obtain temple ritual items, chiefly incense to burn in temple rituals and gold with which to gild sacred temple statues of the gods, but also panther skins worn by funerary priests, sacred oils, and baboons who were sacred manifestations of the god Thoth. Throughout the ancient world gold was associated with the divine realm; we have only to think of the royal funerary treasures discovered in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur. On the African continent, the golden stool and royal regalia of gold in the Akan culture connects this precious mineral with those given the divine right to rule. Family lineages and gilds dedicated to the crafts of iron and gold working are traditional in many cultures of West Africa

¹ Fisher et al. *Ancient Nubia*, 187, 198-199.

where a concept of “ritual geography” demarcates those equipped to work with the spiritual power and danger inherent in these precious metals retrieved from the bowels of the earth.² With the prominence of iron production at Meroe, we might expect to see something similar. In fact, a Nubian prayer inscription engraved in the Pronaos of the temple of Isis at Philae hints at such a lineage when a writer with a Meroitic name (Abaryte), states in a colophon to the main inscription: “Abaryte, goldsmith of Isis, son of a goldsmith for 303 generations.”³ While translators quibble with the reading of the number of generations, the purpose of the writer was to claim a family lineage in the craft that was long-lived.⁴

Fig. 1: The Gold Fields of Nubia. Courtesy of American University in Cairo. Image: Fisher et al., 187, Fig. 115

The hieroglyphic symbol for the Egyptian word gold *nwb* – the depiction of a pectoral necklace (Gardiner’s Sign list S12) - appears as early as Egypt’s First Dynasty⁵ (3000-2890 BCE).⁶ Sixth Dynasty king Pepi I sought, in the Pyramid Texts that decorate his funerary chamber, to associate himself with the tripartite symbols that would remain potent throughout Egyptian history. These symbols would find similarities with Nubian ritual practice: divinity in the form of the sun (Re), gold as a manifestation of the sun, and the potency of the sky goddess, the Hesat-cow:

Pepi comes to thee, O father of his!
Pepi comes to thee, O Re!
A calf of gold, born of heaven,
The soft one, formed by the Hesat-cow [Pyr. 1028-30].⁷

² d’Avignon, *Ritual Geography*, 58-85.

³ Griffith *Catalogue*, 83 (Ph. 253).

⁴ FHN III, 1041. Richard Pierce Holton translates the relevant portion of the prayer inscription as “son of a goldsmith for many generations (‘šy dm’).”

⁵ Spencer, *Early Egypt*, 87 fig. 66 (fragment of ivory from the tomb of Den at Abydos).

⁶ All dates follow Shaw, *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*.

⁷ Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, 133.

The king is portrayed as the child of the gods, calf of a sky goddess called the Hesat-cow.⁸ Pepi I, bull-calf of his mother, is said to be formed of gold, taking on the skin of the gods after his successful transition to the Afterworld. Each of these three ritual factors is present in the relief and textual decoration at the temple complex of Philae, demonstrating an astounding longevity of religious symbolism over the course of two and a half thousand years that separate these monuments.

Gold was a prime motivating factor in the multiple periods of Egyptian conquest and domination of Nubia (Middle Kingdom 2055-1650 BCE; New Kingdom 1550-1069 BCE). This hunger for the mineral wealth of Nubia continued under the colonial rule in Egypt of the Macedonian Greek Ptolemies (332-30 BCE) and the Romans (30 BCE – 395 CE). It is the period of Greco-Roman rule in Egypt that is the focus of this paper.

The Importance of Purity

The centrality of gold to the Nubian worship experience at Philae stems not only from the earlier demand of Ptolemaic and Roman rulers in Egypt for Nubian tribute in this form to be delivered to Egyptian temples, but also speaks to the vital importance of purity to the rites performed before the gods. The Meroitic Chamber at Philae is located between the laboratory and the library behind the Second Eastern Colonnade.⁹ The Meroitic Chamber's door is decorated with images of the gods Thoth and Horus pouring out ankh ("life") hieroglyphic signs in a rite of purification.

⁸ A primary focus of Nubian prayer inscriptions from Phase II of the corpus (175-273 CE) is centered on a large depiction of Ptolemy VIII pouring milk over an offering table. Behind the king, hieroglyphic texts say that "I give you milk that comes from the udders (using a nice Old Egyptian dual mnd.ty) of (the sky-cow goddess) Sekhat-Hor." For milk from the Hesat-cow as an offering in the Nubian nome lists, see Rickert "Ein Blick nach Suden," 210: Ptolemy II, Room 1 and a milk hymn inscribed on the southern jamb of the western door leading to the Gate of Hadrian and Ibid., 208 n. 372: Ptolemy VI. Each time the milk is offered by Snmt/Bigat Island.

⁹ PM VI, 221, plan 202, 212.

Purification is an indispensable prelude to any ritual... Water from the cataract is under the guardianship of the gods of Aswan and the Nile itself ... The water is brought to the temple in vases of gold and silver.¹⁰

Nubian worshippers record the working of their gold donations into cultic vessels upon reaching the temple for the performance of purification rites and the pouring of libations at the grave of Osiris located on the nearby island of Biga.¹¹

Itny: A Nubian Concept of the Spiritual Power of Gold

Among the hundreds of prayer inscriptions engraved into the stone walls of Egyptian temples along the Nile River in Lower Nubia, one word is found only in Nubian prayer inscriptions. In prayers to the goddess Isis, Nubian worshippers use the Egyptian word *itny* to refer to the sacred, shining, correct and pious way of being in the world as ruled by the goddess Isis. The word *itny* is specifically associated with the presentation of Meroitic royal donations of gold at the temple of Philae. In the Nubian prayer inscriptions Meroitic royal donations of gold were presented at Philae upon the successful return from Meroe, formed into cultic implements by specialized Nubian craftsmen, and used to enact the rites of the enigmatic “Feast of Entry.” The term *itny* has been translated as “resplendent” or “bright” by Erichsen¹² and Burkhardt.¹³ This paper will elucidate the cultural context in which this unusual Egyptian-language term was used: specifically, and uniquely, in the presentation of Meroitic gold donations at the temples in Lower Nubia during the third century CE. I will return to a deeper exploration of this term and the unique Nubian rites with which it is related later.

Nubian Worship at Philae

¹⁰ Cauville, *Offerings to the Gods*, 21.

¹¹ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 116 (Ph. 416).

¹² Erichsen, *Glossar*, 47 “Glanz, Freude.”

¹³ Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 117, line 19: “[G]ib uns den Weg, welcher glänzend ist.”

In a 2020 monograph,¹⁴ I identified three discrete phases of Nubian involvement in the Egyptian temples of Lower Nubia as evidenced by inscriptions engraved on the temple walls of Philae, Dakka, and lesser temples along the Nile in Lower Nubia (located today in southern Egypt, stretching 120 kilometers south of the city of Aswan at First Cataract of the Nile).¹⁵ Nubians of Phase I (10 BCE - 57 CE) came as required by Ptolemaic and Roman rulers to deliver tribute to the temples at Philae; they are obliquely referenced in the Nubian nome inscriptions of Ptolemy II and Ptolemy VI. Phase II Nubians (175 – 273 CE) served rulers of the Kingdom of Meroe, who sent gold to Philae and employed Lower Nubian priests to conduct rites honoring Isis and Osiris. This was a dramatic shift in agency for Nubians arriving at Philae, from conquered bearers of tribute to ritual specialists who arrived with financial support to sustain traditional temple practices. Phase III priests (408- 452 CE), the last in which traditional rites were conducted at Philae, were in the employ of Blemmye kings. Those priests were tasked with carrying the sacred statue of Isis throughout Lower Nubia to visit various temples and shrines (Kalabsha, Tafa, Qasr Ibrim) in a sacred procession. The Nubians discussed in this chapter lived during Phase II and served Meroitic rulers.

While Nubians came to Philae to donate tithes and perform sacred rites in each of these phases, their actions also occurred within a political context. Nubian worshippers came as conquered people delivering tithes during Phase I. Phase II presented a very different context when members of the Wayekiye family¹⁶ served as emissaries of a potent military power (Meroe) and journeyed to Philae to conduct political negotiations on behalf of the Meroitic ruler, made vital financial donations to support the continuation of temple cultic practice, and performed important funerary rites for Meroitic royal ancestors as depicted in the funerary chapels at

¹⁴ Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, 2, 8-9.

¹⁵ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 1.

¹⁶ Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, 120-121; Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 89-96; Millett, “Meroitic Nubia,” 77-97.

Meroe. Meroitic rulers showed a heightened interest in the ritual practices carried out at Philae as the funerary rites of Khoiak, performed for the deceased god Osiris, took a central role among the elite in Meroe. During the first and second centuries CE depictions of the rites of Khoiak became prominent on the inner walls of the royal funerary chapels in Begarawiyah North¹⁷ as did the associated “milk libation” scenes in which Anubis and Nephthys poured milk over an offering table laden with goods.¹⁸ These adopted Egyptian funerary rites required specialist knowledge for which the Meroitic rulers employed Lower Nubian elites trained in Egyptian temple practice and sacred scripts (hieroglyphs and Demotic). Such ritual knowledge was the purview of the Wayekiye family which served as temple priests, military men, and political administrators for Meroitic royalty in their northernmost province called *Akin*, which was roughly equivalent to the Triacontaschoenos, reaching south of the Dodecaschoenos to the Second Cataract. The Wayekiye family, attested at Philae over many generations, will be discussed below.

Treasuries at Philae: the mechanism of colonialism

After the Upper Egyptian Revolt (206-186 BCE), Ptolemaic kings sought to fortify and protect the Egyptian temple of Philae that was vulnerable due to its location at the southern border of Egypt. It had been taken and held by Meroitic kings (Arqamani II and Adikhalamani) during the revolt. Ptolemy VI took measures to ensure that would not happen again. Erected as part of the fortifications around Philae temple during the latter part of the reign of Ptolemy V, the First Pylon connected to temple enclosure walls, built to a height of at least eight meters.¹⁹ These walls fortified the Main Temple and separated it from the temple forecourt where Nubian crowds

¹⁷ RCK III, pls. 21-23; Wenig, *Darstellungen der meroitischen Königsfamilie*, 28-31: Wenig’s „Typ C“ which includes increased Egyptian elements such as Egyptian texts and depictions of the rites of Khoiak, which include the “milk libation” scene.

¹⁸ Yellin, “Abaton-Style Milk Libations at Meroe,” 151-152; Ashby, “Milk Libations for Osiris,” 207 with additional bibliography.

¹⁹ Haeny, “Short History,” 213. “Today only its stone-built foundations remain.” Ibid.

arrived to worship at minor temples dedicated to Nubian gods (Arensnuphis and Mandulis).

Masonry work and the decorative scenes for the First Pylon were undertaken during the reign of Ptolemy VI²⁰ who also ordered construction of the Second Pylon and the Pronaos of the Main Temple.²¹

[Fig. 2: Plan of Philae Temple. Karl Baedeker, *Egypt and Sudan Handbook*. (1914)]

The First Pylon, with hollow interior and internal staircases, came to be used as a treasury to store temple cultic items. Laetitia Martzolff has convincingly shown that the pylons at Philae served as “secondary treasuries” in addition to the primary temple treasury located in the Main Temple.²² Sixteen rooms within the First Pylon served as a secure space where raw materials such as foodstuff and precious minerals, as well as cultic implements, were stored. The use of the First Pylon as a treasury is quite fitting given that the decoration of the rear walls of the monumental gate emphasizes the requirement of subjugated Nubians to bring a portion of their regional produce to the temple of Philae as tribute. The decorative program of Ptolemy IX (116-107 BCE and 88-81 BCE) on the east side of the pylon records the punitive payments demanded of Nubians in the form of a tax of one-tenth of all the produce of the land.²³ In hieroglyphic texts engraved around the door leading from room one within the First Pylon (eastern wing) to the stairs ascending into the pylon, the king states,

they leave the towns with their tribute in [...], (...) those who come loaded with their products equaling one tenth of their production which they carry toward the temple in²⁴

This text corresponds to a relief in the same room in which Ptolemy IX offers the produce of the Dodecaschoenos to the goddess Isis by presenting her with an image of the fields

²⁰ Haeny, “Short History,” 212.

²¹ Haeny, “Short History,” 208; Ashby 2020, 48-49.

²² Martzolff, *Les «trésors»*, 268 ff.

²³ Junker, *Der grosse Pylon*, fig. 97, 165-168; Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, 103 n. 174.

²⁴ Martzolff, *Les «trésors»*, 273. Original text: « ils sortent de la ville avec leurs tributs dans [...], (...) ceux qui viennent chargé de leurs productions correspondant au dixième de leurs productions qu'ils portent vers le temple dans ... ». Junker 1958, fig. 97, 165-168.

(Gardiner's sign list M20 - Egyptian: *šḥt*),²⁵ which reiterates the donation of the Dodecaschoenos to Isis by Ptolemy II, Arqamani II, and Ptolemy VI, discussed below.

[Fig. 3: Plan of Temple of Isis (PM VI, 225)]

Nubian Nome Temple Offering

The temple complex of Philae, built under Ptolemy II (284-246 BCE) and decorated primarily under the Macedonian Greek Ptolemies, contains multiple references to mandated Nubian offerings to be delivered to the temple in the form of temple relief scenes and royal decrees mandating Nubian tribute delivery to specific temples within Philae's temple complex. This was the continuation of a New Kingdom practice in which subject peoples of Nubia and the Levant presented tribute to the pharaoh.

[Fig. 4: TT 63 Nubian tribute Hyspaosines, CC BY-SA 2.0

<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons]

The Nubian nome lists at Philae are quite explicit in that they connect specific types of offerings to individual Nubian regions, as did Ptolemaic royal decrees engraved on stelae. Generally, the offering was an in-kind donation of the product that was typical of that area. Two Nubian nome lists decorate the temples at Philae. That of Ptolemy II decorated Room 1 of the Main Temple with an abbreviated Nubian nome list along the lower course of the room's interior walls.²⁶ Ptolemy II's Nubian nomes begin with Biga (*Snmt*) and Philae itself (*ḥw.t ḥn.t*) in the north and consist of eleven nomes (several nomes depicted by Ptolemy VI are missing), including Kerma (*Pnbs*), Napata (*Nipt*), and Meroe (*Mirw³*) in the south.

The Nubian nome list of Ptolemy VI (180-164, 163-145 BCE) at Philae was created under circumstances very different from those of Ptolemy II. Shortly after the Upper Egyptian

²⁵ Martzolf, "Les «trésors» des temples," 273-274; H. Junker, *Der grosse Pylon*, fig. 100-101; Sylvie Cauville, *Offerings to the Gods*, 91-93.

²⁶ FHN II, 564-566; Rickert, „Ein Blick nach Süden“, 287-292. See Rickert's Table 7 on p. 162 for a comparison of the scenes of Ptolemy II and those of Ptolemy VI.

Revolt (206-186 BCE) was quashed, Ptolemy VI came to power. As noted above, many of his changes to the temple complex at Philae were aimed at securing the temple and re-establishing Ptolemaic control over Lower Nubia. These changes included colonialist imagery in the form of vanquished Nubian nomes as conquered tribute bearers.

Late in his reign upon having fully imposed Egyptian control on Nubia (157 BCE), Ptolemy VI reiterated the donation of the Dodekaschoenos as the temple estate of the goddess Isis²⁷ as previously confirmed by Ptolemy II at Philae and the Meroitic king Arqamani II at Dakka.²⁸ This was recorded on the Dodekaschoenos Stela, which still stands before the Second Pylon at Philae. Of primary interest in re-establishing Ptolemaic rule over Lower Nubia was the extraction of mineral wealth from the conquered territories, especially gold.

In describing gold, the ancient Egyptians often referred to its geographic source...northern or Lower Nubia supplied the 'Gold of Wawat'. The region was particularly rich in the ore, as the area includes the mines of the Wadi al-Allaqi, Wadi Gabgaba, and Wadi al-Hudi. Finally, the 'Gold of Kush' derived from the gold-belt region south of the Second Cataract in the area of Napata and Abu Hamed.²⁹ (See Fig. 1)

[Fig. 5: Nome of Napata bringing Gold to Philae. After Hermann Junker, *Der grosse Pylon*, fig. 160]

[Fig. 6: Map of Lower Nubia. American University Cairo Press]

The Nubian nome list of Ptolemy VI decorates the passageway through the western side of the First Pylon.³⁰ Listed from north to south, the images depict each Nubian nome as a fecundity figure in the form of the god Hapi bearing tribute on its head. Both processions of nomes are led by Ptolemy VI and his queen Cleopatra II. The decorated third panel on the east wall contains a figure labeled Mhyt (Abu Simbel).³¹ Hieroglyphic text around the figure states:

²⁷ Dietze, „Philae und die Dodekaschoinos im ptolemäischer Zeit,“ 93.

²⁸ Roeder, *Kalabsche*, vol. 1 250-251.

²⁹ Lacovara and Markowitz, *Nubian Gold*, 28.

³⁰ FHN II, 614-630; Rickert „Ein Blick nach Süden,“ 148, 177-256.

³¹ FHN II, 627; Rickert „Ein Blick nach Süden,“ 191-196.

Here comes the son of Re, Ptolemy, may he live forever, beloved of Ptah (Ptolemy VI), unto you Isis, Lady of Final-Island (Philae), Lady of the southern countries, that he may bring to you the countries of the Nubians, bearing everything that comes forth from Wawat-land: gold, silver, copper, real lapis-lazuli, real turquoise.³²

While the figure is depicted offering ebony, the text adds that precious stones, copper, silver, and the “gold of Wawat” are also offered by this Nubian nome near the Second Cataract of the Nile. The fifth panel on the west wall depicts a figure labeled “Napata,” capital of the Kushite state that ruled Egypt as the 25th Dynasty. Hieroglyphic texts also list gold as tribute brought from the region of the Fourth Cataract.³³

I have highlighted these two nomes – Mhyt/Abu Simbel and Napata – because they make offerings of gold. *Wawat* which roughly corresponds to Lower Nubia, between the First and Second Cataracts of the Nile, is the focus of this paper. It is within this region, and specifically the towns (Sayala), temples (Dakka, Kubban), and hamlets (Mediq, Qurta) around the mouth of the Wadi Allaqi which comprised the home territory of the well-attested Wayekiye family of Nubian priests, administrators, and warriors. Their involvement with gold, gold working, and ritual at the temples of Philae and Dakka during the third century CE will be discussed below.

From Taxation to Piety, From Political Domination to Self-Determination

Lower Nubian Priests Serving Meroitic Royalty

While a strong Meroitic presence in the Egyptian temples of Lower Nubia was probably limited to a ten-year period in the mid-third century CE (ca. 250-260), the fact that high-ranking Meroitic emissaries spoke of crowning prophets, collecting taxes, and leading official Meroitic royal delegations to Philae to negotiate political settlements speaks to the power of Meroe vis-à-vis Rome during this period, known as the Roman “crisis of the third century”. The power

³² FHN II, 627. Junker, *Der grosse Pylon*, 275-277, Fig. 160.

³³ Junker, *Der grosse Pylon*, 621; Rickert, „Ein Blick nach Süden,“ 241-245.

dynamic of Nubians arriving at Philae had shifted dramatically from the tribute bearers of the Ptolemaic period to royal emissaries who were now funding and defending the temple of Philae.

Often mistakenly referred to as “Meroites,”³⁴ the priests, administrators, and pilgrims from Nubia who recorded their inscriptions at Philae in the third century CE were not from Meroe as they make clear in the texts of their *proskynemata*. A majority of Phase II inscriptions were authored by members of a family called Wayekiye. This elite family was resident in Lower Nubia, with their home being just south of the Dodecaschoenos in the area around the mouth of the Wadi Allaqi and the temples of Dakka and Kubban. Meroitic rulers sought the ritual and linguistic knowledge held by members of elite Lower Nubian families in both political and ritual interactions with Roman-controlled Egypt. Fluent in three languages (Egyptian, Meroitic, and Greek), as well as their own Nubian language, northern Nubian elites were positioned to administer Meroe’s northernmost province of *Akin*, conduct political negotiations with Roman Egyptian authorities (often in Greek, as attested by the inscriptions of Abaratoye IGP 180³⁵ and Tami IGP 181,³⁶ at the temple of Philae), and perform the complicated rituals involved in the Osirian rites of Khoiak. Members of the Wayekiye family are attested at Philae and Dakka over six generations during which they accrued increasingly exalted titles – religious and political – which demonstrate their growing importance as intermediaries for Meroitic royalty seeking to engage with Roman Egypt and the temples of Lower Nubia.³⁷

Priests from Lower Nubia served Meroitic rulers as chief ritualists and royal scribes who were adept at performing Egyptian rites for Osiris. Those rites were integral to the royal funerary practices at Meroe. Meroitic royal patronage of the Nubian priests who served at Philae and Dakka changed the focus of the Nubian prayer inscriptions. The inscription content became more

³⁴ Burkhardt, *Ägypten*.

³⁵ FHN III #265, pp. 1020-1023; Bernand, *Inscriptions grecque du Philae*, 192-197.

³⁶ FHN III #266, pp. 1023-1024; Bernand, *Inscriptions grecque du Philae*, 197-201.

³⁷ Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, 144-166.

complex, exhibiting a stronger focus on performing rituals and attending to the cultic requirements of Meroitic royalty. While personal piety was evident in the prayer inscriptions, much of the text was dedicated to a “report” of the official activities undertaken on behalf of the Meroitic monarch whom they served.³⁸ The object of adoration in the *proskynemata* was almost exclusively the goddess Isis to whom Philae’s Main Temple was dedicated. The form of worship seems also to have changed, from individual piety to acts of communal worship. Several Nubian prayer inscriptions note that the author had traveled to Philae as part of a larger group making the visits to Philae, and presumably the worship undertaken there, communal. Graffito writers note that they were accompanied by “my brethren”³⁹ and “my brethren and my people”⁴⁰ or “with my brethren and my clan” (mhw.t), and with “my wife and my children.”⁴¹ Particularly striking in a corpus of prayer inscriptions profoundly devoid of female participants is the Nubian inclination to mention those women who traveled with them, before whom they performed rites, or for whom they extended prayers. Mothers and daughters are explicitly mentioned, but especially mothers who held an exalted place in Nubian kinship lineages. In contemporary Meroitic funerary stelae, the mother’s name frequently takes precedence over the father’s, often being mentioned before that of the father.⁴² The ultimate status for women in Meroe came, of course, in the fact that eight women assumed sole rule during the course of 600 years of the Kingdom of Meroe (300 BCE – 300 CE) with an apogee reached in the period immediately preceding the Phase II of Nubian inscriptions at Philae, discussed here. In the late first century BCE and the early first century CE, a series of five sole-ruling queens ruled Meroe virtually back-to-back.⁴³

The Longest Demotic Inscription is Nubian

³⁸ Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 51-53.

³⁹ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 85. Ph. 257, line 8.

⁴⁰ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 113-114. Ph. 411, line 4 (ḥn‘ n’y=y sn.w n’y=y rmt.w)

⁴¹ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 84 (Ph. 255, lines 7-9); Dak. 33, line 6 “his wife and his children.”

⁴² Griffith, *Karanog and Shablul*, 32; Trigger 1970, 22 and 49, Table 6.

⁴³ I am currently writing a book on these queens of Meroe, tentatively titled *Daughters of Hathor*. See also Haynes and Santini-Ritt 2012, 170-185; Ashby 2021, 28-32.

In his Demotic prayer inscription of twenty-six long lines (Ph. 416), Sasan, the Meroitic royal ambassador to Roman Egypt who served Meroitic King Teqorideamani (253 CE), boasted, “He (the Meroitic king) had ordered me to make the whole [district] enjoy itself and we did it in his good name. It was a beautiful p[arty] he made for the nome.”⁴⁴ Sasan continues:

We made a festival in the temple complex of Isis with our brethren, the *qerens* of Isis, the prophets and the serving (i.e., on duty) priests among the *wab*-priests of Isis. We spent eight days dining on the dromos of Isis on wine, beer, and meat, while the populace of the whole town was celebrating and making obeisance to the King, their overlord and our own banquets too, which we had humbly held in the name of the King, our lord, as well.⁴⁵

Detailing many pounds of gold transported to Philae, both as royal offering and individual pious donations of gold (including by high-ranking members of the Wayekiye family), inscription Ph. 416 records the presentation of 16 pounds of gold to the temple. The text also documents how the gold was fashioned at Philae, presumably by Nubian goldsmiths traveling with Sasan, into several cultic items, including *hs*-vessels used to pour libations at the nearby grave of Osiris, a golden sistrum to be used in the weekly processions to Biga, and a libation saucer (*phiale*) decorated with an image (*protome*) of Isis.⁴⁶

Where was all this Meroitic gold obtained during the third century CE? Interestingly, Klemm and Klemm note that no signs of gold mining can be securely dated to the Ptolemaic period for the region of Wadi Allaqi and that after the reign of Ramses III gold mining appears to have dramatically declined in the region.⁴⁷ Rickert notes Napata as a source of gold for transport to Egypt along the Korosko Road.⁴⁸ She identifies gold production in the area east of the Abu Hamed near the Fifth Cataract. Julien Cooper notes the presence of Blemmye communities in the Eastern Desert areas of northern Nubia and evidence of their Eastern Desert Ware at sites

⁴⁴ FHN III, 1002; Ph. 416, line 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1004, lines 12-13.

⁴⁶ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 114-119.

⁴⁷ Klemm and Klemm, *Gold and Goldmining*, 15, 295.

⁴⁸ Rickert, „Ein Blick nach Süden,“ 244-245.

between the Abu Hamad area (5th Cataract) and the Red Sea.⁴⁹ While he confirms that it is difficult to date gold mining sites based on the surviving lithics and nomadic settlement sites generally, Cooper extends the dates for the “enigmatic” sites of Upper Egypt’s Eastern Desert with those studied in the Sudanese Eastern Desert to as early as 200 CE.⁵⁰ Suggesting that Alitiatib may have served as a “supply hub” for surrounding goldmining communities, Cooper suggests possible Blemmyean involvement in the goldmining activities of this region:

As the major cultural affiliation of the site seems to be connected to Eastern Desert Ware and thus likely the indigenous nomads, the site raises many questions about the nature of indigenous Blemmyean-Beja involvement in the goldmining industry.⁵¹

Clearly, additional archaeological work is needed to ascertain whence came the gold transported to Philae and Dakka as recorded by the Wayekiye family in their prayer inscriptions.

The Wayekiye Family

The Wayekiye family of priests and civil administrators worked with Egyptian priests in the administrative structures of the major Egyptian temples of Lower Nubia, Dakka and Philae, while simultaneously serving as political representatives of the Meroitic rulers in Lower Nubia. The combination of religious and civil titles held by the Wayekiye family in both the Egyptian and Meroitic controlled areas of Lower Nubia stemmed from their ability to function in the Egyptian temples as priests trained in the ancient Egyptian scripts while controlling the northernmost Meroitic province as civil administrators and warriors for the Meroitic ruler. Evidence of the Wayekiye family found south of the Dodekaschoenos in Mediq and Gebel Adda (fig. 4), as well as at Dakka and Philae, indicates that their sphere of influence extended from a base of power in Meroitic Nubia north into the Dodekaschoenos.

⁴⁹ Cooper, “Goldmines, Nomad Camps, and Cemeteries,” 127.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 125. With dates from 200-1000 CE with reference to Sidebotham et al. 2002.

⁵¹ Ibid., 127.

Over the course of six generations the Wayekiye family steadily accumulated titles, both priestly and political. We see Wayekiye family members claiming the title *lesonis* in early inscriptions at Philae and Dakka in Generation 2 and 3 (see Table 1). In Generation 3 Wayekiye A attained the title of ḥm nṯr priest (“prophet”), providing a clear indication that he had received training in the sacred Egyptian scripts.⁵² In the Meroitic Chamber, several members of the Wayekiye family of Nubian priests are shown arriving at the temple complex of Philae surrounded by Meroitic language texts that provide their names, priestly and Meroitic administrative titles, and reference to the offerings being donated to the temple.

Wayekiye family inscriptions listed by Generations
Inscription numbers per Griffith 1937 (Ph. = Philae)

Generation	Name and prayer inscription(s)
1	Paese - Ph. 251
2	Hornakhtyotef I - Ph. 227 Bek – Dakka 33
3	Sosen – Ph. 223 Wayekiye A – Ph. 421 Manitawawi – Ph. 410
4	Hornakhtyotef II – Ph. 410, Ph. 427, Dakka 30 Qeren – Dakka 31 Shetelten – Dakka 32 Senpate – mentioned in Dakka 33 Wayekiye B. – Ph. 120
5	Ta-senet-Aat (daughter of Hornakhtyotef II)
6	Wayegate – Ph. 111, Ph. 254, Ph. 403

Table 1: Wayekiye Family Inscriptions at Philae and Dakka

Festivals Performed by Nubians at Philae

The Feast of Entry as Presentation of Meroitic Gold

The enigmatic “Feast of Entry” was briefly described by Griffith who came across the Demotic word ‘yq/‘q,⁵³ which appeared in the Demotic prayer inscriptions of Egyptians and

⁵² Ibid., 154-155.

⁵³ The word ‘q (Griffith glossary entry no. 7 “festival” “inauguration” and no. 35 “dedication festival” “feast of entry”) is listed in Erichsen’s *Glossar*, 56 with the meaning, “Fest, Einweihung” and Ibid., 72 “eintreten” with the example ‘q r pr(j)-nfr “eintreten in das ‘gute

Nubians at Dakka⁵⁴ and Philae.⁵⁵ In the Nubian inscriptions of the third century CE, the word ‘q referred to the cultic practice of carrying a newly gilded shrine in procession. A weekly journey of the statue of Isis from her temple at Philae by boat across the Nile to the neighboring island of Biga (called the Abaton in Greek)⁵⁶, the ‘q-procession consisted of a funerary rite performed for the god Osiris. These rites were performed in accord with texts known as the Abaton decrees,⁵⁷ carved in hieroglyphic texts on the north wall of the Gate of Hadrian (an important locus of Phase II Nubian prayer inscriptions in Demotic and Meroitic). The Abaton texts stipulated that the goddess Isis (in the form of her divine statue) must be present on Biga Island each week to pour milk libations at the grave of her deceased husband, Osiris. The rite of pouring a libation at Osiris’ grave site emphasized the funerary aspect of the procession, while the application of gold to divine statues and the offering of milk announced the intention to reanimate the soul of Osiris to facilitate his transformation into Osiris Wennefer, a manifestation of Osiris “beautiful of being” who had been revived through the weekly ritual actions of the goddess Isis. However, there was an additional connotation associated with the procession as celebrated by Nubians at Philae. The fact that Nubians priests came to Philae on behalf of the ruler in Meroe to perform this rite yearly, while beseeching Isis to give the “breath of life” to their ruler, emphasized another definition of the Egyptian word ‘q, “the solemn entry of the king.”⁵⁸ As representatives of the Meroitic king or ruling queen, Nubian priests performed funerary rites annually for Osiris as the divine “father” of the Meroitic ruler.

Haus” as a euphemism for burial taken from the first tale of Setne Khaemwas, page 4, line 25 where the phrase t^3I ‘q refers to the funerary procession for Setne.

⁵⁴ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 26-32 (Dak. 30 and Dak. 33).

⁵⁵ Ph. 28, 29, 207, 363, 411, 421, and 436.

⁵⁶ The gold sistrum mentioned in the Demotic prayer inscription of Sasan (Ph. 416) above was stated to have been made “to carry before Isis on the three decads” meaning every 10-day week (“decad”). Griffith, *Catalogue*, 116.

⁵⁷ See Junker, *Der grosse Pylon*, passim, esp. 55.

⁵⁸ WB I, 232/10. „der feierliche Einzug des Königs“

on 500 places”.⁶³ Wayekiye family members Bek, Wayekiye A, Hornakhtyotef II, and Wayegate (Table 2) inscribed prayers that mention gilding, a goldsmith title, or the donation of golden cult items. The focus on gold as a central cultic item in the rites performed by members of this elite Lower Nubian family spans multiple generations, being attested in generation two, three, four, and six (there are no inscriptions for generation 5). This demonstrates a remarkable consistency in the ritual focus of this Nubian family of priests. Hornakhtyotef II (Dakka 30) and his brothers, Qeren (Dakka 31), Shetelten (Dakka 32), and Senapte (mentioned in Dakka 30, inscription of Hornakhtyotef II), dedicated three Demotic prayer inscriptions at the temple of Dakka. Qeren and Shetelten each mention travel to Meroe. Qeren prays to the gods at Dakka: “Send us safe to Meroe, give favor before the king that we may have our 1/10th brought yearly.”⁶⁴ Shetelten asks the divinity to, “Take me with my mother and brothers to Meroe so that I can furnish your glorious (itny) temple.”⁶⁵ Note Shetelten’s explicit mention of his mother (the formidable matriarch Taese) traveling with the brothers to Meroe.

Wayekiye family inscriptions:

Names with asterisk refer to gold in their inscriptions.⁶⁶

Gener- -ation	Author	Location	Festival	Date
1	Paese	SW Pronaos ⁶⁷		Mid-late 2 nd century CE
2	Bek*	Dakka	Feast of Entry	

⁶³ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 26-31 (Dak. 30, line 6); FHN II, 982-988. See Ashby *Calling Out to Isis*, 130-131.

⁶⁴ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 31 (Dak. 31); FHN II, 992-993.

⁶⁵ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 31 (Dakka 32); FHN II, 993-994.

⁶⁶ After Ashby *Calling Out to Isis*, 134.

⁶⁷ PM VI, 278-79.

3	Wayekiye A*	Gate of Hadrian	Feast of Entry	227 CE
4	Wayekiye B	Birth House, Ph. 120		Dated to Khoiak c. 253 CE ⁶⁸
	Wayekiye B	Temple of Imhotep, Ph. 403		Dated to Khoiak c. 253 CE ⁶⁹
4	Hornakhtyotef II*	Dakka	Feast of Entry	
6	Wayegate*	SW Pronaos	Feast of Entry	

Table 2: Gold in Wayekiye Family Prayer Inscriptions

Nubians not in the Wayekiye family.⁷⁰

Names with asterisk refer to gold in their inscriptions.

Graffito	Author	Location	Festival	Date
Ph. 411	Atenkitnri ⁷¹	Gate of Hadrian	Feast of Entry	
Ph. 416*	Sasan	Gate of Hadrian	Khoiak festival	253 CE
Ph. 252*	Dd Hr, Abaryte	SW Pronaos	Khoiak festival	273 CE
Ph. 68*	P ³ -ti-p ³ -ḥwt	First Pylon	Khoiak festival	Father dated to 265 CE
Ph. 449	Pakhom		Khoiak festival	

Table 3: Gold in Other Nubian Prayer Inscriptions at Philae

In a process that mirrors that of their entry into the Egyptian priesthood, Wayekiye family members' performance of the Feast of Entry is first attested at the temple of Dakka before being performed at Philae. In Generation 4 we see Hornakhtyotef II commemorating his performance of the Feast of Entry at Dakka once again at Dakka (Dakka 30).⁷² Yet this powerful priest and Meroitic administrator was not limited to performing priestly functions at Dakka. Hornakhtyotef II is also attested at Philae, performing rites together with his maternal uncle Manitawawi (Ph.

⁶⁸ Mentioned in Ph. 416 by Sasan.

⁶⁹ Mentioned in Ph. 416 by Sasan.

⁷⁰ After Ashby *Calling Out to Isis*, 135. While textual sources fail to definitively connect the first three individuals in this table (Atenkitnri, Sasan, and Abaryte) with the Wayekiye family, Sasan and Abaryte each appear in prayer inscriptions at Philae as part of an entourage that arrived at the temple in service of the Meroitic ruler. Unfortunately, Sasan's mother's name is lost in his inscription Ph. 416, which might have allowed us to connect him to the Wayekiye family. Ph. 68 belongs to Phase I and Ph. 449 belongs to Phase III and thus would not include Wayekiye family members who are attested only in Phase II. See, n. 71 for Atenkitnri's possible membership in the Wayekiye family.

⁷¹ Atenkitnri may also have been a Wayekiye family member. Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, 135 n. 58.

⁷² Ashby *Calling Out to Isis*, 135-136.

410). The tradition is recorded two generations later with Wayegate who is the last member of the Wayekiye family to document his performance of the Feast of Entry.⁷³

Wayegate made reference to the gilding of a statue of Osiris in his Demotic graffito (Ph. 254) on the southwest wall of the Pronaos,⁷⁴ (northwest face of the Second Pylon) (see Fig. 6). It is certainly not coincidental that his inscription is located immediately east of a set of stairs leading up into the Second Pylon, site of most of prayer inscriptions by goldsmiths at Philae and a place that I have proposed was used as a “secondary treasury” for the storage of gold.⁷⁵ Wayegate reports on his travel to Philae in order to “renew” the divine statue of Osiris, which he tells us stands in “this House of Coolness.”

I (am) doing the work of a statue of Isis and the statue of Osiris out of my piety; I (am) doing them that you bring us each year and give us much length of life. I having gilded them with gold together with the statue of Osiris which is in this House of Coolness.⁷⁶

The reference to “this House of Coolness” in Wayegate’s prayer provides us with the Egyptian name for this area of the temple (southwest Pronaos). Isis in her role as libationer⁷⁷ was often called the “Lady of the House of Coolness” in the inscriptions at Philae.⁷⁸ In his inscription, Wayegate distinguished clearly between the statues of Isis and Osiris that came from elsewhere (probably the inner sanctuary of the Main Temple of Isis) and the statue of Osiris, which was also gilded, that stood in the Main Temple Pronaos, “this House of Coolness.”⁷⁹ An inscription,

⁷³ Ashby *Calling Out to Isis*, 135-136.

⁷⁴ Inscribed on the pilaster, south of column one. See P&M VI, 233, 230 (plan).

⁷⁵ Ashby *Calling Out to Isis*, 68.

⁷⁶ Ph. 254, lines 7-13. Griffith, *Catalogue*, 84.

⁷⁷ The ancient Egyptian term *qbh* yields both translations: with “coolness” as the primary meaning (yielding the name of the temple area reference in the prayer inscription Ph. 254) and an extended meaning of “libationer” (an epithet of the goddess Isis as the principal officiant in the funerary rites for her husband Osiris). Chicago Demotic Dictionary Q (24 February 2004): 04.1, 22-23. Prayer inscription Ph. 254 is cited on Ibid., 23.

⁷⁸ Ph. 254, lines 12-13, Ph. 258, line 2-3, Ph. 350, line 1, Ph. 408, line 5, Ph. 420, line 6, and Ph. 433, line 2. Half of the prayers that are cited here are Nubian references (underlined). Holger Kockelmann, “Zur Kultpraxis auf Philae,” 102-105.

⁷⁹ The spatial deixis of the demonstrative pronoun “this” used by the author makes clear that he is referring to the same location for the gilded statue of Osiris and the place where his inscription

engraved more than one hundred years later on the panel immediately to the right of the pilaster on which Wayegate's inscription appears, confirms the ancient Egyptian name for this area as the author states that he, "wrote an obeisance before the divinity of the great Cool Place of Isis today."⁸⁰ As the divine statue of Osiris described in multiple prayer inscriptions in this area of the Pronaos was the focal point of Nubian worship, it is likely that the statue stood in the southwest corner of the Pronaos.

Unique Aspects of Nubian Worship at Philae

"Calling Out" Prayers

The Demotic verb šll "to cry out" appears solely in Nubian-authored prayer inscriptions as recorded by Griffith at Philae. What does this tell us about the unique ways in which Nubian visitors and priests performed their prayers and rites while at Philae's temple complex? Written with the classifier of a man with hands raised, the Demotic verb suggests both a verbal and physical performance of the adoration of a deity with words being spoken aloud accompanied by a gesture of upraised hands. There is a further specificity to the attestations of this word šll in that it appears primarily in Phase II (ca. 173-273 CE) of the corpus of Nubian prayer inscriptions, suggesting that it was not merely a general "Nubian" ritual practice but one that was specific to the Nubian priests who traveled to Philae on behalf of Meroitic rulers who tasked them with delivering royal donations. Burkhardt notes the heightened piety and longer inscriptions as characteristic of Nubian prayer inscriptions; in this way they differed from the shorter, less fervent Egyptian prayers.⁸¹ One earlier use of the term šll appears at Philae in inscription Ph. 24, also a Nubian inscription but dated to Phase I of the Nubian corpus. It is dated to the 17th regnal year of the Roman Emperor Tiberius (31 CE) and engraved on column 9 of the west colonnade

was engraved – the Pronaos of the Main Temple of Isis. For Griffith's py and Johnson's p'y as demonstrative pronoun "this", see Griffith *Catalogue*, 148 no. 104 and Johnson, *Thus Wrote 'Onchsheshonqy*, 48 respectively.

⁸⁰ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 84 (Ph. 253); Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, 131 fig. 19.

⁸¹ Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 47.

that stands in front of the temple of Isis.⁸² The Demotic word šl appears in the phrase p³ šl iry-ḥms-nfr referring to Arensnuphis, a Nubian god. While Griffith translated this word as “tooth” and Cruz-Urbe offered “spike” as a possible translation, I believe we have here an early attestation of the verb šll, but in a nominal form rendering the phrase as “the (place of) calling out to Arensnuphis.”⁸³ Does the focus on a spoken rendition of the prayer offered by Nubian worshippers correlate to the heightened piety expressed in their prayer inscriptions and the communal nature practiced by the groups of Nubians who traveled to Philae? One might imagine the author of the prayer inscription surrounded by “his people” all speaking aloud their supplications to the goddess Isis who “hears those who are far away”.⁸⁴

Isis and her temple as itny “resplendent”

This unique Demotic term (*itny*) appears to have been solely associated with the activity of Nubian priests at the temples of Philae and Dakka in rites that they performed at the behest of the Meroitic ruler. Those rites were organized around the donation of gold to the temples, which was applied to the divine statues to “renew” them for the annual procession to the grave of Osiris on Biga.

The Demotic word *itny* occurs six times in five inscriptions of Phase II; it is used twice in Ph. 411.⁸⁵ In an insightful translation of the lengthy Demotic graffito of Sasan, Meroitic royal ambassador to Rome (Ph. 416), Pope has greatly improved Griffith’s original translation of this text.⁸⁶ Pope noted the appearance of the Demotic word *itny* in Sasan’s prayer inscription and the limited geographical range in which the word appeared in ancient texts,

⁸² Griffith, *Catalogue*, 45.

⁸³ Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, 112.

⁸⁴ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 115, 116 (Ph. 416- Sasan), Ibid. 122 (Ph. 421-Wayekiye A).

⁸⁵ Griffith, *Catalogue*, 137, #32. (Ph. 410, Ph. 411, Ph. 416, Ph. 417, Dakka 32). The following text is from Ashby 2020, 139-142.

⁸⁶ Pope, “A Meroite Envoy to Roman Egypt (Philae 416)”: 68-103.

This sequence of graphemes occurs several times throughout the Dodecaschoenus graffiti, with very consistent orthography, yet the word they form remains wholly obscure, because it is not attested with any such writing outside of Griffith's corpus. This combination of frequency and obscurity would strongly suggest an unusual, perhaps regional orthography of a more common Demotic word.⁸⁷

While Pope noted the circumscribed usage of this term and suggested a regional orthography, he did not mention that the lexeme only appears in Nubian prayer inscriptions. Furthermore, the term appears solely in inscriptions engraved during Phase II, as I have defined it. Exploring the cultural context in which the term provides important clues as to the meaning of this Demotic word. In four of the five inscriptions in which this term was used, the word *itny* is associated with the presentation of Meroitic royal donations (gold) at the temple of Philae, where it is either used in the performance of the rites of the "Feast of Entry" (Ph. 410, Ph. 411, Ph. 416) or mentioned in conjunction with the successful return from Meroe with royal donations for the temples of the Dodecaschoenos (Dakka 32). While the fifth inscription (Ph. 417, written by Tami the "tax collector" at Philae who served a Meroitic king) does not make an explicit connection between the donation of gold by Meroitic royalty, Tami's use of the term *itny*, by definition of his role as royal Meroitic treasurer at Philae, would have involved managing gold donations to the temple and temple finance. Tami uses the term in the phrase "your bidding (?) (*smn?*) which is *itny*" in his address to Isis. This phrase follows a report of the financial and cultic activities performed by Tami at Philae and may serve to affirm that Tami had completed his work according to the way that is *itny*, that is, following a model of proper, divinely-approved, "glittering" conduct, as required by the goddess Isis.

The word *itny* is correctly understood as a qualitative form because it frequently followed the relative adjective *nty* and often was written with the hieroglyphic pestle-t sign (Gardiner's sign U33), the standard grammatical ending of the qualitative form. Five of the six occurrences of *itny* occur in a phrase headed by the relative adjective *nty*, "which". The qualitative form

⁸⁷ Ibid., 95.

served an adverbial function, describing the state that occurred as a result of a prior action.⁸⁸ Thus, in Shetelten's prayer inscription (Dakka 32) it was "your temple which is itny," in Ph. 411, "your service which is itny," and "your temple which is itny." In Ph. 416, Sasan spoke of "the way which is itny," while in Ph. 417, Tami prayed to Isis to do "your bidding (?) which is itny." In Ph. 410 of Hornakhtyotef II and Manitawawi, the lexeme was nominalized and modified by the adjective nb, "...so that we may worship you in all itny." Each of these expressions addressed to the goddess Isis imply a moral code ("your service," "the way," "your bidding" as well as the temple space itself) that is of the highest standard and reflects the glittering purity attributed to gold and its connection to the realm of the gods. Nubian worshippers were praying, pledging, and practicing this code of behavior which they understood to be one set forth by the goddess Isis and manifested in the glittering, sun-reflecting aspects of gold, which as a product of their homeland was closely associated with the Nubian worshippers themselves.

While Pope proposed the Egyptian verb tn "to exalt" as the verb from which the qualitative form itny.t was derived, I suggest that the term derived from the infrequently attested Egyptian verb itn "to shine."⁸⁹ This verbal source still would produce the translation "resplendent" or "bright," as used by Erichsen⁹⁰ and Burkhardt.⁹¹ While this new understanding of the term itny does not differ from earlier translations, it provides the vital cultural context in which the unusual lexeme was used, specifically and uniquely in the presentation of Meroitic gold donations at the temples in Lower Nubia during the third century CE. Translations in the semantic range: "brilliant," "shining," or "resplendent" describe the temple, the service, the "way," and the worship performed by the visiting Nubian priests and prophets who arrived at Philae bearing donations of gold. They came to gild divine statues and shrines, fashion cult

⁸⁸Spiegelberg, *Demotische Grammatik*, 54; Johnson, Thus Wrote 'Onchsheshonqy, 35, 38; Johnson, *The Demotic Verbal System*, 16-20, esp. 16-17.

⁸⁹ Wb. I, 145 #12; Ashby, *Calling Out to Isis*, 141.

⁹⁰ Erichsen, *Glossar*, 47 "Glanz, Freude."

⁹¹ Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 117, line 19: "[G]ib uns den Weg, welcher glänzend ist."

items, and perform the ‘q-procession for Osiris following a culturally specific understanding of the rites and spiritual teachings of the goddess Isis that are closely bound to the purity, resistance to tarnishing, and the reflective power of the sun that is inherent in gold, a precious mineral closely associated with the Wadi Allaqi home of the Wayekiye family.

Abbreviations

FHN *Fontes Nubiorum Historiae*. Bergen: John Grieg AS, 1996, 1998.

IGP *Inscriptions grecque du Philae*
Étienne Bernand, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae*, vol 2, Paris, 1969 = IGP II.

PM VI *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Relief, and Paintings. Vol. VI: Upper Egypt: Chief Temples excluding Thebes*. Oxford: The Griffith Institute.

RCK *Royal Cemeteries of Kush*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1952.

Bibliography

- Allen, J.
2005 *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature.
- Ashby, S.
2019 “Milk Libations for Osiris: Nubian Piety at Philae.” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82.4: 200-209.
- 2020 *Calling Out to Isis: The Enduring Nubian Presence at Philae*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.
- 2021 “Priestess, queen, goddess: The Divine Feminine in the Kingdom of Kush.” In *The Routledge Companion to Black Women’s Cultural Histories*, Janell Hobson, ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bernand, É.
1969 *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae*, vol 2, Paris.
- Burkhardt, A.
1985 *Ägypter und Meroiten im Dodekaschoinos. Untersuchungen zur Typologie und Bedeutung der demotischen Graffiti*. Meroitica 8. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- Cauville, S.
2012 *Offerings to the Gods in the Egyptian Temples*. Leuven: Peeters.

- Chapman, S. = RCK
 1952 *Royal Cemeteries of Kush*, vol. 3. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts.
- Cooper, J.
 2021 “Goldmines, Nomad Camps, and Cemeteries: The 2018 Season of the Atbai Survey Project.” *Sudan and Nubia* 25: 121-134.
- Dietze, G.
 1994 “Philae und die Dodekaschoinos im ptolemäischer Zeit. Ein Beitrag zur Frage ptolemäischer Präsenz im Grenzland zwischen Ägypten und Afrika an Hand der architektonischen und epigraphischen Quellen.” *Ancient Society* (AncSoc) 25: 63-110.
- Eide, T., T. Hägg, R. H. Pierce, and L. Török (eds.) = FHN
 1996 *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum: Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region Between the Eighth Century BC and the Sixth Century CE, II: From the Mid Fifth Century to the First Century BC*. Bergen: John Grieg AS
- 1998 *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region Between the Eighth Century BC and the Sixth Century CE, III: From the First to the Sixth Century AD*. Bergen: John Grieg AS
- Erichsen, W.
 1954 *Demotisches Glossar*. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard.
- Erman, A. and H. Grapow = WB
 1971[1887] *Wörterbuch der Ägyptische Sprache*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- Gardiner, A.
 1957 [1927] *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. rev. Oxford: Griffith Institute.
- Griffith, F.
 1911 *The Meroitic Inscriptions of Shablul and Karanog*. The Eckley B. Coxe Jr. Expedition to Nubia 6. Philadelphia: The University Museum.
- 1937 *Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodekaschoenos*, vol. 1. Les Temples Immergés de la Nubie 19. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Haynes, J. and Santini-Ritt, M.
 2012 “Women in Ancient Nubia.” In *Ancient Nubia: African Kingdoms on the Nile*, Marjorie M. Fisher et al, eds. Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press.
- Hölbl, G.
 2001 *History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, trans. Tina Saavedra. London, New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, J. H.

- 1976 *The Demotic Verbal System*. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 38. Chicago: The Oriental Institute.
- 2000 *Thus Wrote 'Onchsheshonqy: An Introductory Grammar of Demotic*. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 45. Chicago: The Oriental Institute.
- Junker, H.
1913 *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*. Vienna: Alfred Hölder.
- 1958 *Der grosse Pylon des Tempels der Isis in Philä*. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse Denkschriften-Sonderband. Vienna: Adolf Holzhausens.
- Klemm, R. and D.
2013 *Gold and gold mining in ancient Egypt and Nubia: geoarchaeology of the ancient gold mining sites in the Egyptian and Sudanese Eastern Deserts*. Trans. by Paul Larsen. Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer Verlag.
- Kockelmann, H.
2013 Zur Kultpraxis auf Philae. In *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Kultabbildung und Kultrealität* (Hamburg, 27 September – 1 October 2011), ed. Horst Beinlich, 97-127. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Lacovara, P. and Y. Markowitz
2019 *Nubian Gold*. Cairo: American University Press.
- Leclant, J.**
2000 *Répertoire d'épigraphie méroïtique*, vol. 1. Paris : Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres.
- Martzolff, L.**
2013 Les «trésors» des temples de Philae et d'Edfou" in *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Kultabbildung und Kultrealität. Hamburg 27 Sept – 1 Oct 2011*, ed. Horst Beinlich, 261-278. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Millett, N.
1968 "Meroitic Nubia." Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Yale University.
- Pope, J.
2008/9 The Demotic Proskynema of a Meroïte Envoy to Roman Egypt (Philae 416)" *Enchoria* 31: 68-103.
- Porter, B. and R. Moss = PM VI
1991 *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Relief, and Paintings. Vol. VI: Upper Egypt: Chief Temples excluding Thebes*. Oxford: Griffith Institute.
- Rickert, A.

- 2015 „Ein Blick nach Süden: die Prozessionen der nubischen Städte und Regionen in Philae.“ In Kockelmann, Holger and Alexa Rickert, *Von Meroe bis Indien. Fremdvölkerlisten und nubische Gabenträger in den griechisch-römischen Tempeln: Soubassementstudien V*. Studien zur spätägyptischen Religion 12, 145-292.
- Roeder, G.
1930 *Der Tempel von Dakke*, vol. 1. Cairo: Imprimerie de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale.
- Shaw, I. (ed.)
2000 *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spiegelberg, W.
1925 *Demotische Grammatik*. Heidelberg: C. Winters
- Spencer, A. J.
1993 *Early Egypt: The Rise of Civilization in the Nile Valley*. London: The British Museum Press.
- Trigger, B.
1970 *The Meroitic Funerary Inscriptions from Arminna West*. Publications from the Pennsylvania-Yale Expedition to Egypt 4. Philadelphia: The University Museum.
- Wenig, S.
2015 *Untersuchungen zur Ikonographie der Darstellungen der meroitischen Königsfamilie und zu Fragen der Chronologie des Reiches von Meroe*. IBAES 15. Berlin/London: Golden House Publications.
- Yellin, J.
1982 “Abaton-Style Milk Libation at Meroe.” In Proceedings of the Third International Meroitic Conference, Toronto, 1977, ed. by Nicholas B. Millet and Allyn M. Kelley, 151-155. *Meroitica* 6. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Figures

[Fig. 1: The Gold Fields of Nubia. Courtesy of American University in Cairo. Fisher et al., 187, Fig. 115]

[Fig. 2: Plan of Philae Temple. Karl Baedeker, *Egypt and Sudan Handbook*. (1914)]

[Fig. 3: Plan of Temple of Isis (PM VI, 225)]

[Fig. 4: TT 63 Nubian tribute Hyspaosines, CC BY-SA 2.0

<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons]

[Fig. 5: Nome of Napata bringing Gold to Philae. Junker, *Der grosse Pylon*, fig. 160]

[Fig. 1: Map of Lower Nubia. American University Cairo Press]