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**Meroitic  
(Review article)<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

Meroitic is attested by written records found in the Nile valley of northern Sudan and dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. through the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. They are inscribed in a particular script, either hieroglyphic or more often cursive, which has been deciphered, although our understanding of the language is very limited. Basing himself on about fifty words, the meaning of which is relatively well established, on a few morphological features and phonetic correspondences, Claude Rilly proposes to regard Meroitic as a North-Eastern Sudanic tongue of the Nilo-Saharan language family and to classify it in the same group as Nubian (Sudan), Nara (Eritrea), Taman (Chad), and Nyima (Sudan). The examination of the fifty words in question shows instead that most of them seem to belong to the Afro-Asiatic vocabulary, in particular Semitic, with some Egyptian loanwords and lexical Cushitic analogies. The limited lexical material at our disposal and the extremely poor knowledge of the verbal system prevent us from a more precise classification of Meroitic in the Afro-Asiatic phylum. In fact, the only system of classification of languages is the genealogical one, founded on the genetic and historical connection between languages as determined by phonological and morpho-syntactic correspondences, with confirmation, wherever possible, from history, archaeology, and kindred sciences.

Meroitic is believed to be the native language of ancient Nubia, attested by written records which date from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. through the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Its name was coined from the city-name Meroe. Located on the east bank of the Nile, some 200 km

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Rilly, *Le méroïtique et sa famille linguistique* (Afrique et langage 14; Société d'Études linguistiques et anthropologiques de France 454), Peeters, Louvain-Paris 2010, 557 pp., 24 x 16 cm.

to the north-east of present-day Khartoum, Meroe was the capital of a great empire on the Nile, famed for the pyramids of kings and queens who dominated the region between 270 B.C. and 350 A.D. However, other sites provided Meroitic texts as well. There are inscriptions on monuments, tombstones, funerary altars, as well as graffiti, also on potsherds. They are inscribed in a particular script, either hieroglyphic or more often cursive, called likewise Meroitic.

Meroitic writing was deciphered in 1910 by F.Ll. Griffith after the discovery of a large number of new inscriptions in lower Nubia and at Meroe. The language, however, still remained a sealed book, though names of persons, deities, and places, as well as certain titles, either borrowed from Egyptian or Meroitic but occurring in Egyptian demotic texts, like *kntjky*, “Candace”, have readily been recognized. It could also be stated that the Meroitic language shows agglutinative formation, absence of formal gender distinction, and apparently some degree of connection with Nubian. However, the Nubian language is an African enigma as well, while its vocabulary very likely contains some Meroitic loanwords.

Philological analysis of the inscriptions enabled Claude Rilly, co-editor of the *Répertoire d'épigraphie méroïtique*<sup>2</sup>, to increase the small corpus of understandable and translatable Meroitic words, while a further comparison of 200 words in a group of Nilo-Saharan languages provided the information needed to determine a North-Eastern Sudanic branch of this group, thus including Nubian (Sudan), Nara (Eritrea), Taman (Chad), Nyima (Sudan), and Meroitic. The results of this methodical and valuable research are presented in the volume under review.

The introduction (pp. 11–24) sketches the history of the kingdom of Napata, followed by the kingdom of Meroe, briefly records the history of the Meroitic language and script, indicates the phonetic value of the signs and describes the phonological system, then presents the typology of the texts and offers a short survey of the research done in the past. The latter subject is developed in Chapter I (pp. 25–36), recording the various hypotheses: Cushitic, Nilo-Saharan, Afro-Asiatic. Chapter II (pp. 37–58) presents the Nilo-Saharan language family with its various branches, while Chapter III offers a comparison of 43 Meroitic words with their supposed Nilo-Saharan lexical equivalents (pp. 59–156). Three supplementary words are listed in the Addendum of p. 411. Chapter III is the key section of the book, as far as concerning Meroitic, since Chapter IV (pp. 157–350 and 557) already attempts to determine a North-Eastern Sudanic branch of Nilo-Saharan by comparing 200 basic words from various dialects of the Nubian, Nara, Taman, and Nyima languages. These words are alphabetically listed with their meanings on pp. 413–529. Chapter V (pp. 351–410) then aims at inserting Meroitic in this particular branch of Nilo-Saharan. The book ends with a general bibliography (pp. 531–543) and with indexes of subjects (545–548), languages or dialects (pp. 544–554), and proper names, both personal and geographic (pp. 555–556). Among the Nubian languages, one finds Birgid, which was

<sup>2</sup> J. Leclant et al. (ed.), *Répertoire d'épigraphie méroïtique. Corpus des inscriptions publiées I-III*, Paris 2000: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. Abbreviation: *REM*.

spoken in the Darfur (Sudan) to the east of the road connecting El-Fasher with Nyala (p. 163). This idiom should not be confused with Birgit, a Chadic language spoken in the eastern Chad Republic, in the district of Guera.



Pyramids of Meroitic kings and queens at Meroe (photo: Claude Rilly)

The book is clearly and systematically redacted with all the material needed to examine the languages in question. It is surprising nevertheless that regarding Afro-Asiatic it only mentions the work of Kirsty Rowan who recently tried to relate Meroitic to this language family<sup>3</sup>. Her demonstration, built on the consonantal compatibility restriction in Afro-Asiatic and Meroitic, is based on a material too slim to reach a firm conclusion, while the incompatibility of homorganic consonants in the same root is no characteristic that can be regarded as an Afro-Asiatic peculiarity. However, Alexander Yu. Militarev has already pointed at some lexical analogies<sup>4</sup> and Hans Mukarovsky has found 22.7% of Afro-Asiatic parallels among the 178 Nubian proto-morphemes set up by Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst<sup>5</sup>. In any case, striking analogies with Semitic occur among the 43 Meroitic words listed by Cl. Rilly. We shall briefly examine them, one by one, without entering in the detailed discussion of their epigraphic context. A short foreword is nevertheless required to record that the supposedly Meroitic culture of the kingdom of

<sup>3</sup> K. Rowan, *Meroitic – an Afroasiatic Language?*, “SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics” 14 (2006), pp. 249-269; eadem, *Meroitic. A Phonological Investigation*. PhD of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London 2006. – Instead, it is quite understandable that Rilly never mentions the aberrant S. Hummel’s attempt to connect Meroitic with an assumed “proto-Altaic” substratum. A concise critical presentation of his views can be found in the article of M. Knüppel, *Zum “proto-altaischen” Substrat im Meroitischen oder: Sprachwissenschaft auf Abwegen*, “Rocznik Orientalistyczny” 63/2 (2010), pp. 151–156.

<sup>4</sup> A.Yu. Militarev, *Yazyk meroitskoy epigrafiki*, “Vestnik Drevney Istorii” 1984-2, pp. 153–170.

<sup>5</sup> M. Bechhaus-Gerst, *Sprachliche und historische Rekonstruktionen im Bereich des Nubischen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Nilnubischen*, “Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika” 6 (1984 [1985]), pp. 7–134. Cf. H.G. Mukarovsky, *The Nubian Language – An African Enigma?*, in: P. Zemánek (ed.), *Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures. Memorial Volume of Karel Petrůček*, Praha 1996, pp. 379–391.

Kerma, around the third cataract, goes back to the third millennium B.C. and that this kingdom maintained excellent relations with the West-Semitic Hyksos, both opposed to the Theban XVII Dynasty (pp. 12–13). These events are often neglected in the “Egypto-centric” history of the Nile valley, but Chapter VII of L. Török’s history of the frontier area between Egypt and Nubia deals precisely with the Kerma domination in Lower Nubia and its relations with the Hyksos capital Avaris<sup>6</sup>. The good relations between these distant realms can be explained easier if there was a common cultural background, and even a recognized appurtenance to the same language family, the dialects of which were to some extent intelligible to both sides.








































No. 1, *abr*, “man”, “male” (pp. 114–115), can easily be related to Akkadian *abru* and Hebrew *’abbīr* “strong”, as well as to Ugaritic *’ibr*, “bull”. Of course, one should go back to Proto-Semitic dialects, spoken in and around the present-day Sahara in the fourth millennium B.C., before the migration of its population to the Levant<sup>7</sup>. At any rate, since the change  $b > \underline{b} > w$  is a characteristic Ethio-Semitic feature, one should also refer to Amharic and Argobba *awra*, “male”, used for instance in *awra doro*, “cock”, to distinguish the male from *doro*, the “hen”. This word must in turn be related to *wūr*, “male”, hence “principal”, attested in various Gurage dialects. It is apparently borrowed as *wər*, *war* with the meaning “brother” in Kwama, a language spoken in Northern Ethiopia. *Wiir* is found also in Gafat, at least in the expression *wūr sämbättä*, “Sunday”, which occurs in Gurage as well: *wur sänbät*. “Strong” must be the original meaning of the word, since its Semitic opposite “woman”, *’nt*, is a derivative of the same root as the verb *’nt*, in Akkadian *enēšu*, “to be weak”. The same conception lies behind the French qualification “sexe faible”.

No. 2, *ar*, “boy, male” (pp. 115–116), seems to be related to Arabic *’air* and Old Aramaic *’yr*, “male”, that is also recorded in the Akkadian lexical list of synonyms *Malku* = *šarru* I and its explicit version, where *a-ia-rù* is translated by *zi-k[a-ru]*, “male”<sup>8</sup>. The monophthongization  $ai > \bar{a}$  is quite common in Semitic languages and suggests the presence of a long vowel in Meroitic *ār*. However, initial “a” can also stand in Meroitic for /u/, and Cushitic languages must be taken into account as well, in particular Beja *’ōr*, “son”, and Awngi *ira*, likewise “son”. The element *or* appears in proper names, for instance in *Netror* (REM 1165), “God’s boy”, with the Egyptian loanword *ntr*, “god”, *ntr* in Demotic. The “genitive” modifier precedes the modified noun like in South-Ethiopic and in Highland East-Cushitic.

<sup>6</sup> L. Török, *Between Two Worlds. The Frontier Region between Ancient Nubia and Egypt, 3700 BC-500 AD* (Probleme der Ägyptologie 29), Leiden 2008.

<sup>7</sup> E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (OLA 80), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leuven 2001, §3.2.5.

<sup>8</sup> A. Draffkorn-Kilmer, *The First Tablet of malku = šarru together with Its Explicit Version*, JAOS 83 (1963), pp. 421–446 (see pp. 427: 168 and 434: 64).

hieroglyphic	cursive	transliteration	value
		<i>a</i>	initial /a/ or /u/
		<i>b</i>	/ba/
		<i>d</i>	/da/
		<i>e</i>	/e/, /ə/, vowelless
		<i>h</i>	/ya/
		<i>h</i>	/y'a/
		<i>i</i>	modifier /i/
		<i>k</i>	/ka/
		<i>l</i>	/la/
		<i>m</i>	/ma/
		<i>n</i>	/na/
		<i>ne</i>	/ne/, /nə/ or /n/
		<i>o</i>	modifier /u/
		<i>p</i>	/pa/ (?) or /ba/
		<i>q</i>	/k'a/
		<i>r</i>	/ra/
		<i>s</i>	/sa/
		<i>se</i>	/se/, /sə/ or /s/
		<i>t</i>	/ta/
		<i>te</i>	/te/, /tə/ or /t/
		<i>to</i>	/tu/
		<i>w</i>	/wa/
		<i>y</i>	/ya/
		<i>:</i>	separator

Meroitic syllabary after Claude Rilly, *Le méroïtique et sa famille linguistique*, p. 16

No. 3, *are-*, “to take, to receive” (pp. 116–117), is used in *razzia* contexts which rather suggest the meaning “to seize”, “to take possession (violently)”, like in the case of the Arabic verb *‘arā* (*‘rw*). Of course, Arabic *‘arā* has other connotations as well, but this might have also been the case of Meroitic *are-*. There is no particular Meroitic character indicating the voiced pharyngeal *‘ayin*. Rilly regards *erk-* or *yerk-* as a form

in *-k* derived from *are-* and meaning “he plunders” (pp. 77–78). One would rather relate it to Semitic *ʿrk*. Its frequent Hebrew and Aramaic connotation is “to range”, “to gather”. Meroitic *erk-* in a *razzia* context would then mean “to keep back”.

No. 4, *arohe*, “to protect, to warrant, to subdue” (p. 117), is doubtless related to Coptic *hareh* or *areh*, “to watch over”, and to Demotic *hrh*, which apparently goes back to the Late Neo-Egyptian verb *hrhr*, “to watch over”. This neologism seems to be based on Egyptian *hrj*, “who is over”, obviously reduplicated. It is doubtful whether Coptic *harouhe* or *arouhi*, “evening”, has any relation to *hareh* / *areh*. The Meroitic verb *arohe* seems to have been borrowed from Late Neo-Egyptian with the loss of the initial *h* and of the final *r*, missing also in Demotic and Coptic scripts. The vowel *o* of *arohe* may have occasioned a labialization of the second consonant.

No. 5, (*a*)*sr*, “meat” (p. 118), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, is obviously the same word as Akkadian *štru* and Hebrew *šēʿēr*, “flesh”. The vowel (*a*) does not belong to the root.

No. 6, *at*, “bread” (pp. 118–119), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, is doubtless related to ancient Egyptian *jt*, “barley”, in Coptic *eiôt*, *eiout*, *iôt*. It was probably pronounced [ut]. Barley is one of the most important cereals, widely used in the ancient Near East for human food. Since barley bread was a staple food in settled agricultural societies, the word has probably been borrowed from Egyptian with the meaning “bread”.

No. 7, *ato*, “water” (pp. 119–120), can certainly be related to *otu*, *utu*, “water”, in Nubian of Kordofan, in central Sudan, but also to the Coptic verb *hate*, *hôt*, “to flow”. Old Nubian *outti*, “stream”, is indeed very close to Sahidic Coptic *hôt*, “to flow”. The verb is attested in Demotic as *ht* or *hd*, and in ancient Egyptian as *hdj*, “to fare downstream”, hence “to travel north”. The verb is probably denominative, as shown by the final *j*<sup>9</sup>, and the basic root is very likely *hd* > *t*, belonging to a proto-language of the Nile valley. The ancient names of the Nile and of its tributary streams, *Astasóbas*, *Astápous*, *Astabóras*, may contain the same lexical element, as noticed by the Author (p. 120). However, instead of witnessing an unlikely and rarely attested assimilation *st* > *tt* in *asta-* > *atto*, we have to do with the dissimilation *atta* > *asta*, occurring in ancient Egypt and elsewhere in North Africa<sup>10</sup>. A form with geminated *t* is in fact attested e.g. in the Old Nubian gloss *ettô*, “water”, of an ostrakon<sup>11</sup>.

No. 8, *dhe*, “a child brought forth”, “a mother’s child” (p. 120), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, does not seem to be a substantive, but a verb meaning “to bring forth”, “to give birth to”. It is used eventually as an active or passive participle, and it appears

<sup>9</sup> Compare E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages* (n. 7), §41.13.

<sup>10</sup> E. Lipiński, *Syro-Canaanite Goddesses*, “Chronique d’Égypte” 80 (2005), pp. 122–133 (see pp. 126–128). For this widespread phonetic change see: R. Růžička, *Konsonantische Dissimilation in den semitischen Sprachen*, Leipzig 1909; A. Spitaler, *Zur Frage der Geminatendissimilation im Semitischen*, “Indogermanische Forschungen” 61 (1952–54), pp. 257–266; E. Lipiński, *Dissimilation of Geminatation*, in: P.G. Borbone, A. Mengozzi, M. Tosco (eds.), *Loquentes linguis. Studi linguistici e orientali in onore di Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti*, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 437–446.

<sup>11</sup> A. Erman, *Miscellen – Nubische Glossen*, “Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde” 35 (1897), p. 108.

three times in the phrase *kdi-m-dhe*, translated by N.B. Millet “woman who have not given birth”<sup>12</sup>. The word *dhe* thus alludes to the childbirth and should be related to Semitic *daḥā* (*dḥw*), “to spread out”, “to expel”, “to dismiss”, and to Berber *dhy* with the same connotations. The reviewer does not know any Semitic or Berber use of this verb in connection with childbirth, but its meaning perfectly suits the process of parturition.

No. 9, *dime*, “cow” (pp. 120–121), might imply a *d < l* change and be then compared to Amharic and Argobba *lam*, “cow”, Gafat *ä-lam<sup>w</sup>ä*, “cow”, and to Tuareg *a-lam*, “dromedary”. However, considering the contexts, one could also regard *dime* as a unit of counting, head of cattle, just like Arabic *ra’s*, in plural *ar’us*, can be used as a numerative of cattle. In this sense, “head” may appear in “four head” as said of cows (cf. p. 86: REM 0064 and 0070). One can then relate *dime* to Ethio-Semitic and Cushitic “head”: *dima* in Amharic, *demah* in Argobba, *däm<sup>w</sup>ä* in Gafat, *dum*, *dumi* in Gurage dialects, *dumi* in Oromo. Such a metonymic appellation of cows could be compared to Ugaritic *gdlt*, “cow”, etymologically “big (female cattle)”.

No. 10, \**dm-*, “to take, to receive” (p. 122), is a hypothetical verb, induced from a lengthy demonstration (pp. 82–86). One could rather interpret *dm* as Semitic and Egyptian *tm(m)*, “to be complete”, “totality”, followed by an enumeration. Instead, in texts referring to sacrifices, the phrase *dmk-te qo* (cf. p. 86) with the substantivizing suffix *-te* possibly means “this game”. *Dmk* would then correspond semantically to Semitic *syd* and be etymologically related to *tnk*, in Akkadian *tamāḥu*, “to seize”, “to held”, hence also “to support”, “to sustain”. The interpretation is, in any case, uncertain. As for *qo*, translated “this” (p. 93), it should be compared to Semitic *koh*, “here”, as in *st qo*, “here are the feet of ...” (compare pp. 93–94).

No. 11, *erike*, “begotten”, “a father’s child” (pp. 122–123), parallels *dhe* and designates a child as begotten by his father. This word corresponds to Semitic *’arīk*, “prolonged”, an allusion to the male copulatory organ that “became long”, metaphorically “begot”. The verb *’rk* is used with this particular connotation in a Ugaritic myth from the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>13</sup>, where the penis of god El is said “to become long like the sea” and “to be long like a stream”, *t’irkm.yd.’lkym / wyd.’lkmdb.’ark*. There is here a reference to the procreation of a divine progeny. This use of *arāku* is found also in Old Akkadian and Early Old Babylonian proper names from the third and the beginning of the second millennia B.C.: *Issu-arik*<sup>14</sup>, “His penis was long”, *Arik-idi-Enlil*<sup>15</sup>, “Long was the penis of Enlil”, *Ark-idi-Aštar*<sup>16</sup>, “Long was the penis of Ashtar”, *Arak-ilī*<sup>17</sup>, “Begotten by my

<sup>12</sup> N.B. Millet, *The Wars against Noba*, in: P. Der Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*, Boston 1996, pp. 609–614 (see pp. 612, 613), followed by Rilly, p. 398.

<sup>13</sup> KTU 1.23, 33 and 34.

<sup>14</sup> AHw, p. 63b.

<sup>15</sup> H. Ranke, *Early Babylonian Personal Names*, Philadelphia 1905, p. 67a.

<sup>16</sup> St.D. Simmons, *Early Old Babylonian Documents* (Yale Oriental Series. Babylonian Texts XIV), New Haven 1978, No. 81, 4.

<sup>17</sup> AHw, p. 63b.

god”, literally “The long one of my god”, or the shortened form *Be-lí-a-ri-ik*<sup>18</sup> of \**Idu-bēlī-arik*, “[The penis of] my husband was long”. Such names either congratulate the father or express the view that the child was an offspring begotten by a deity, eventually the father’s personal god. The word *yd* or *idu*, i.e. “hand”, is used in these names and in the Ugaritian mythological text as an euphemism for “penis”, the mention of which was regarded as inappropriate in literary compositions and in personal names. Instead, the word “penis”, in Akkadian *išaru* or (*m*)*ušārum*, is used in Babylonian physiognomatic texts, where the apposite logogram GĪŠ occurs in the same context: *šumma GĪŠ GÍD*. *DA-ma*, “if the penis is long”<sup>19</sup>.

The word *erike* occurs in the Meroitic royal name *Aman-ine-te-ierike*, which apparently means “Who is begotten by Amon himself”. The element *-ine-* seems to be the particle of insistence *-n*, which is used in Ge‘ez, Tigre, Amharic, and Gafat, while *te* corresponds here to the Semitic demonstrative *dū / tū*. The verb is at the end of the name, like in the Meroitic genitival expression *Ddokr t-erike*, “begotten by Dadukara”. Instead, the royal name *Ark-amani*, comparable to *Arak-ilī*, means “Begotten by Amon”.

No. 12, *hlbi*, “ox, bull” (pp. 123–124), might be based on the Cushitic name of the “bull”, *a-gur* in Afar, *a-gor* in Somali<sup>20</sup>, with the post-positive determinant *-b* which qualifies the grammatical gender of wild and dangerous animals<sup>21</sup>. One could also refer to Gafat, in which *g<sup>w</sup>inā* means “ox, bull”. The alternations *l/r* and *l/n* are equally possible. This explanation assumes that Meroitic *h* has the value /*ya*/. However, the word *hlby* appears in two different contexts (pp. 86–87), which seem to indicate that we deal with two homographs. REM 0064 and REM 0070 obviously refer to royal sacrifices of cattle, very likely of oxen and cows. In this context, *hlby* should mean “ox” and be related to Egyptian *hrp*, “tribute ox(en)”<sup>22</sup>. The alternation *l/r* is no problem, while *p* does not seem to have a phonetic status in Meroitic. Therefore it is replaced by *b* in this loanword.

The second context is provided by the royal protocols of REM 0094, 5 and REM 1228, 3, where *hlbi* is a deity mentioned after several hypostases of Amon and supposed to protect the king. It is apparently *H’pi*, Hapi, the deified Nile. Egyptian ‘*ayin* with no counterpart in Meroitic script would then correspond to *l*, though this cannot be regarded as a regular change in loanwords. The idea is not completely new, since Otto Rössler had already proposed forty years ago to identify, at least occasionally, Egyptian ‘*ayin* with Semitic *l*, notwithstanding the fact that ‘*ayin* exists in Semitic languages<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> I. J. Gelb, *Glossary of Old Akkadian* (Materials for the Assyrian Dictionary 3), Chicago 1957, p. 64, cf. p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> F. R. Kraus, *Texte zur babylonischen Physiognomatik* (AfO. Beih. 3), Berlin 1939, No. 9d, rev. 9.

<sup>20</sup> M. Bechhaus-Gerst, *Nubier und Kuschten im Niltal. Sprach- und Kulturkontakte im “No Man’s Land”*, Köln 1989, pp. 32–33, rightly assumes that Nubian *gor / gur* is borrowed from a Cushitic language.

<sup>21</sup> E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages* (n. 7), §30.10.

<sup>22</sup> R. Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen. Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800–950 v. Chr.)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Mainz a/R 1997, p. 618: “Zinsrind”.

<sup>23</sup> O. Rössler, *Das Ägyptische als semitische Sprache*, in F. Altheim, R. Stiehl, *Christentum am Roten Meer I*, Berlin 1971, pp. 263–326, followed by H. Satzinger, *The Egyptian Connection: Egyptian and the Semitic*



No. 13, \**hre*, “meal”, “food” (p. 125), if properly reconstructed (pp. 68–71), is obviously the same word as Egyptian *hr.t*, Demotic *hr(.t)*, and Coptic *hre*, “food”. The ancient Egyptian word meant “ration”, “due”, and it was most likely borrowed by Meroitic at the time when it designated “(a man’s food) due” for his work, for the day, etc. The semantic evolution may have led to the general meaning “food”, like in Coptic, but the Meroitic phrase *h[r-] mlo* may still mean “entire ration”.

No. 14, *hr*, “north” (p. 126), must etymologically mean “left”, exactly like *šm’l*, “left” or “north” in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic (*šamāl*, *šimāl*); in fact, people faced eastward to adjust the direction of their journey in relation to the sunrise. If Meroitic *h* has the value /ɣ<sup>w</sup>a/, *hr* is obviously the Cushitic word *gurale*, “left”: *gure* in Somali, *gura* in Saho and Afar, *gura-ččo* in Sidamo. As noticed already by E. Cerulli<sup>24</sup>, the word was borrowed by South-Ethiopic: *gəra* in Amharic and Argobba, *gərä* in Gafat, *gurä* in Harari and Gurage, while a derivative *geraw*, “left handed”, occurs in Tigrinya. Meroitic *hr* provides an example of pharyngealized *g*. Its labialization must be occasioned by the presence of the vowel *u*.



Meroitic offering stone, 35.5 x 27 cm. (REM 0132)

No. 15, *kdi*, “woman” (pp. 126–127), very likely corresponds to the Proto-Bantu word *-kádí*, “female”. If someone nevertheless attempts to find an Afro-Asiatic etymology, he

*Languages*, in: Sh. Izre’el (ed.), *Semitic Linguistics: The State of the Art at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Israel Oriental Studies 20), Winona Lake 2002, pp. 227–264 (see p. 234, No. 71).

<sup>24</sup> E. Cerulli, *Studi etiopici II. La lingua e la storia dei Sidamo*, Roma 1938, p. 204.

should start comparing *kdi* with Hebrew and Aramaic *nqbh*, “woman”, “female”, literally “pierced”. The Semitic root *qdd* means “to pierce” as well, at least in Ethio-Semitic, sometimes in Arabic. The noun *kdi* could thus be a derivative of this root, the more so because *qdd* would imply a gemination with an eventual dissimilation<sup>25</sup>. The latter would be attested by Hesychius’ κἀνδη, translated “woman”<sup>26</sup>. A different vocalization, parallel to *qud*, “hole, orifice” in some Gurage dialects, is found in Old Nubian *koudi*- and Kenuzi-Dongolawi *kūd*, both designating a secondary wife, but Nara *kàdè*, “sister”, supports Hesychius’ κἀνδη.

No. 16, *kdise* / *kdite*, “sister” (p. 128), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, most likely derives from *kdi* (woman), unlike κἀνδᾶκη, “Queen Mother” (Acts of Apostles 8, 27) in the Meroitic kingdom. The suffix *-se* / *-te* is likely to form a diminutive (p. 128 with n. 229; p. 447, No. 55; p. 513, No. 171): “little woman”. It is probably the same suffix as the Semitic “feminine” *t*-ending, while the alternation *-te* / *-se* may indicate that the postvocalic non-geminated *t* was spirantized ( $t > \text{t}$ ), hence *te* and *se* could eventually alternate.

As for the title of the Queen Mother, it possibly consists of two words, the first one being *ka(h)n-*, related to Semitic *khn*, “priest”, “diviner”, and the second one *dakty*, “pure”, “bright”. Since there is no formal gender distinction in Meroitic, the title could mean “bright priestess”.

No. 17, *ked*, “to slay” (pp. 128–130), belongs to the well-known series of onomatopoeic verbs meaning “to beat”, “to cut”, *t-k* or *k-t*. In Semitic, one could refer to Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic *qtl*, *qtl*, *kṯl*, “to kill”, assuming that *d* corresponds here to *tl*. The weak phoneme *l* can also disappear or be regarded as an additional element, at least in G. B o h a s’ theory<sup>27</sup>. Since the separation of voiced and unvoiced plosives does not seem to be strict in Meroitic script, one could also refer *ked* to the root *ktt*, attested in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, with a general meaning “to clap repeatedly”. The usual Hebrew connotation is “to crush”, “to smash”, like Berber *ket* or *kedd*, “to slay”, “to strike”.

No. 18, *l-*, “to give” (pp. 130–132), could be related to the Semitic root *dn* / *tn*, assuming the change  $d > l$  and an assimilation of *n*. However, another explanation is preferable to these speculations. The Arabic verb *lawā* means “to turn”, “to turn away”, and Ethio-Semitic *ly(y)* is used in the sense “to separate”. Besides, the same Afro-Asiatic root is attested in Egyptian: *rwj*, “to depart” (intransitive), “to send away” (transitive), in Coptic *lo*, *la*. One might thus assume for Meroitic *l-* the connotation “to give away”.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. here above, n. 10.

<sup>26</sup> I. H o f m a n n, *Material für eine meroitische Grammatik* (Veröffentlichungen der Institute für Afrikanistik und Ägyptologie der Universität Wien 16. Beiträge zur Afrikanistik 13), Wien 1981, p. 41. The arbitrary correction of κἀνδη into κἀνδᾶκη does not take the Greek translation into consideration and should be discarded.

<sup>27</sup> G. B o h a s, *Matrices, étymons, racines. Éléments d’une théorie lexicologique du vocabulaire arabe* (Orbis Supplementa 8), Leuven-Paris 1997; idem, *Matrices et étymons – développement de la théorie (Séminaire de Saintes 1999)* (Instruments pour l’étude des langues de l’Orient Ancien 3), Prahins 2001; G. B o h a s, M. D a t, *Une théorie de l’organisation du lexique des langues sémitiques: matrices et étymons* (Collection Langages), Lyon 2007.

No. 19, *lh*, “big”, “first-born” (p. 132), can be related to Ethio-Semitic *l’ly*, “to be above”, to Sabaic *l’l*, “upwards”, and to Syriac *le’lāyā*, “upper”. Both phonemes *l* are preserved in Ge‘ez (*la’lä*), Tigre (*lä’al*), Tigrinya (*la’li*), and in the Gurage dialect Aymallal (*lalä*), but the second *l* disappears in Amharic (*lay*), Harari (*lä’ay* or *lay*) and Gafat (*lağğä*), where the affricate *ğğ* goes back to *yy* (\**layyä*). Instead, Meroitic *lh* may witness a change ‘ > γ, since there is no Meroitic character indicating the ‘*ayin*.

On the other hand, one may mention the isolate case of Argobba *läham*, “big”, with a final *m*, possibly reduced to *am* > *aw* > *ū* and causing a labialization of the preceding consonant. In this hypothesis, one might accept the pronunciation [lay<sup>w</sup>a], proposed by the Author, but this word would require further etymological research.

No. 20, *mhe*, “abundant, plenty” (p. 133), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, can certainly be related to Egyptian *mḥ*, “to fill” (transitive), “to be full” (intransitive), with its derivatives, also present in Coptic and in Beja (*muha*). This does not mean of course that the word was borrowed from Egyptian. The vowel *u*, attested by Coptic *mouh* and Beja *muha*, may have occasioned a labialization of the second consonant, but the word is spelled also *mhe*.

No. 21, *mk*, “god” (p. 153), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, should be related to Semitic *mlk*, which is a divine name in the Semitic languages of Mesopotamia and North Syria. It means “king” in West-Semitic, “counsellor” in Akkadian, and its “broken” plural ‘*amlāk* is used in Ge‘ez in the sense “Lord, God”. The weakness of Semitic liquids is amply exemplified at Ebla, in the 24<sup>th</sup> century B.C. *L* can be omitted in the beginning of a word, like in *La-ru<sub>12</sub>-ga-tù* / *A-ru<sub>12</sub>-ga-tù*, a city name attested at Ugarit as *Lrgt*. It can also disappear in the middle of a word, like in *a-a-gú-um* < *hlk*, “to go”<sup>28</sup>.

The sonant liquid *l* can function either as consonant or as vowel, becoming then silent. It serves as syllabic peak in *malk* or *milk*, so that it functions as vowel and thus goes back to an older *mlk*. The latter explains the variety *malk/milk* and corresponds to Meroitic *māk*. This case can be compared to *kḷb*, “dog”, which appears in Ḥarsūsi as *kōb* and in Šhawri as *kæb*.

The word *mk* occurs in the name of the Meroitic lion-god *Apede-māk*, *Pede-māk* in recent inscriptions (pp. 369–370). Since *p* does not seem to belong to the Meroitic series of phonemes, *pede* probably stands for [bede], that can be compared with Ge‘ez *bädəw*, “non-cultivated land”, with Oromo *bada* and Gafat *bädä*, “forest”. The word would thus designate the “savannah”, a large area of grass land, covered in part with threes and spiny shrubs. The initial *a* of the theonym is probably a prosthetic vowel, like the one occurring in Ethio-Semitic, also before a labial consonant. If this interpretation is correct, the divine name (*Apede-māk* would etymologically mean “King-god of the Savannah”, attributing to *māk* the usual Semitic meaning of *mlk*. The modifier (*a*)*pede* precedes the modified element *māk*, like in South-Ethiopic and in Highland East-Cushitic.

<sup>28</sup> See further: E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages* (n. 7), §17. 2.

No. 22, *mlo*, “good, nice” (pp. 133–134), has been related to Arabic *maluḥa*, *malāḥa*, “to be beautiful”, and to Egyptian *mnḥ*, “to be good”<sup>29</sup>. On the other hand, Berber *a-mellay* means “good, nice”, and Tigre *mālmāla*, “to be beautiful”. However, it seems that Meroitic *mlo* should rather be seen in connection with the Semitic root *ml’*, “to be full”, the more so because the Gafat adjective *mulä* means “entire”, and the same connotation may occur in the Meroitic phrase *h[r-] mlo*, “entire ration”. Another connotation, probably “perfect”, appears in the Meroitic titles *mk-l mlo-l*, “the perfect god”, *qor[e-l] mlo-l*, “the perfect sovereign”, *ḥrpḥe-li mlo-l*, “the perfect governor” (Egyptian loanword). This connotation also suits the formula *mlo-l-o* in funerary inscriptions: “he/she<sup>30</sup> was perfect”, often with the addition of the words “in the king’s eyes”, “in the god’s eyes”, etc.

No. 23, *mse*, “child” (p. 134), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, should obviously be related to Gafat *mossay*, “child”, and to Egyptian *mś*, “child”, with the denominative verb *mśj*, “to give birth”. This word appears as *mossa* in Amharic, in Oromo *mučä*, “child”, and in Omotic *bušä*, “child”<sup>31</sup>.

No. 24, *ns(e)*, “sacrifice” (p. 135), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, is obviously Semitic *nš’*, “offering”, which occurs in the Punic phrase *nš’ l-’lm*, “offering to the gods”<sup>32</sup>, frequently transcribed *nasililim* in Latin inscriptions from North Africa<sup>33</sup>. The word *per* in the Meroitic phrase *ns-per* must designate the sacrificer who provides the victim. In Punic inscriptions, a certain type of sacrifices is eventually specified by *b’l*, “proprietor”, thus *mlk b’l*, “*mlk*-sacrifice of the proprietor” who provided the victim. As a matter of fact, *b’l* seems to be the same word as *per*, since *p* stands in Meroitic for *b*, the ‘*ayin* is not marked, and *r/l* are quite regular alternatives.

No. 25, *pwrite*, “life” (pp. 135–136), should probably be read [bawarit] or the like, since [p] does not seem to have a phonological status in Meroitic. The word is obviously related to Gafat *buyra*, “old”, *barä*, “to be old”, Tigre ‘*abbära*, “to become old”, and to the Ethio-Semitic, Cushitic, and Chadic words meaning “grandfather”, “grandmother”, “old man”, “old woman”<sup>34</sup>. In Ge‘ez, ‘*aber* means “grandfather”, in Wolane (Gurage), *eber* or *yäber* is “grandfather” or “grandmother”, in Zway (Gurage) *ibiri* and in Selti *äber* mean “grandmother”. In Cushitic, Oromo *bera* means “old woman” and Saho *bara* means “old man”. In Kajakse, a Chadic language spoken in Chad, ‘*àbir* means “grandfather”<sup>35</sup>. In Berber dialects one finds *a-burey*, “old bachelor”, and *ta-burey-t*, “old maid”.

<sup>29</sup> M. Cohen, *Essai comparatif sur le vocabulaire et la phonétique du chamito-sémitique* (Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études. Sciences historiques et philologiques 291), Paris 1947, p. 191; A.Yu. Militarev, *Yazyk meroitskoy epigrafiki* (n. 4), p. 158, No. 9.

<sup>30</sup> The vowel *o* corresponds to Semitic *hū*.

<sup>31</sup> See further: E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages* (n. 7), §8.18.

<sup>32</sup> A. Berthier, R. Charlier, *Le sanctuaire punique d’El-Hofra à Constantine*, Paris 1952–55, No. 87, 2.

<sup>33</sup> CIL VIII 14950, 14987, 15050, 15072, 15075, 15095, 15098, 15115, 15169.

<sup>34</sup> W. Leslau, *Étude descriptive et comparative du Gafat (éthiopien méridional)* (Collection linguistique publiée par la Société de Linguistique de Paris 57), Paris 1956, p. 196.

<sup>35</sup> Kh. Alio, *Préliminaires à une étude de la langue kajakse...*, in: G. Takács (ed.), *Egyptian and Semito-Chamitic (Afro-Asiatic). Studies in Memoriam W. Vycichl*, Leiden 2004, pp. 229–285 (see p. 239).

The original root seems to have been *\*bwr* or *\*byr*, and the derivative *pwrite* should then mean “old age”, a realistic interpretation of Egyptian “life” in ritual formulas (cf. pp. 89–91). For instance, the prayer to Amon for the king, *pwrite l-ḥ-te*, would then mean: “give him an old age”.

No. 26, *qore*, “sovereign” or the like (p. 136), is very likely a derivative of the Semitic root *qr*’, since Sabaic *qr*’ means “to command”, “to order”. A similar connotation “to summon” is attested in Akkadian for *qarā’u*, *qērū*. The probable presence of a final vowel confirms this explanation and seems to exclude the Nubian parallels. If Meroitic *q* implies labialization, the latter can be explained by the influence of *o*.

No. 27, *-se*, “each” (p. 138), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, should perhaps be compared to the Ethio-Semitic enclitic *-ss* expressing emphasis or insistency and suffixed to any part of speech. It occurs in Ge’ez, Tigrinya, Amharic, Argobba, and Gafat. One could also record the enclitic *-š* of Arabic colloquials, used in negative and interrogative sentences.

This affix should be distinguished from the Meroitic genitive marker *-se*, post-posed like the prepositions (p. 79, n. 138; cf. pp. 352–353), for instance: *ant*<sup>36</sup> *Wos-se*, “priest of Isis”. This *-se* corresponds to the Semitic determinative-relative *dū* in Arabic, *ša* in Akkadian, *d-* in Aramaic, *ze* in Hebrew, etc. In ancient Harari, for example, the determinative-relative element *zi-* normally functioned as a genitive marker, e.g. *zi-dāna tāya*, “the cloud’s shadow”.

No. 28, *sdk*, “travel”, “return” (p. 138). This interpretation is not favoured by parallel Demotic clauses, referred to by the Author (pp. 97–98). A correct understanding of *sdk* was already proposed in 1977 by Nicholas B. Millet<sup>37</sup>, who translated *sdk* by “safely”. However, this must be a substantive used as object, as shown by the verbal suffix *-ne*: *Wos-i Bedewi-k sdk p-roḥe-ne*, “O Isis, let him go safe and sound to Meroe”.

The name *šaddīq / šiddīq* means “righteous” in Hebrew and Arabic, but Sabaic use witnesses larger connotations: “good”, “in proper order”. The latter meaning seems to suit the Meroitic inscription. The local connotation of the postpositive preposition *k* can be related to the basic meaning of *k* in Mehri, namely “with”<sup>38</sup>. The verb *roḥe* can be compared to Arabic *rāḥa* (*rwḥ*), “to go”. The element *p* has probably a causative function. It might be an abridged form of an auxiliary verb, perhaps *pl*, related to Semitic *p’l*, “to make”, “to do”, with *l* assimilated to the following *r*.

No. 29, *sem*, “wife” (p. 139), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, should be related to Coptic *shime*, *sime*, “woman”, “wife”, from Egyptian *s.t-ḥm.t*, Demotic *s.ḥm.t*. Another possibility is provided by the Ethio-Semitic verb “to kiss”, *sä’ama* in North-Ethiopic, *samä*, *sa’amä*, or *sahama* in South-Ethiopic. Meroitic has no particular sign to indicate the phoneme *‘ayin*, which was eventually reduced to the contiguous vowel. Finally, one could refer to Egyptian *sm3y*, “companion”, a derivative of *sm3*, “to unite”, which occurs in phrases like *sm3 m s.t-ḥm.t*, “to have intercourse with a woman”.

<sup>36</sup> The word *ant* corresponds to Coptic *hont* < *ḥm ntr*, “priest”.

<sup>37</sup> N.B. Millet, *Some Meroitic Ostraka*, in: E. Endesfelder (ed.), *Ägypten und Kusch. Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients*, Berlin 1977, pp. 315–324 (see p. 318).

<sup>38</sup> A.D. Rubin, *The Functions of the Preposition k- in Mehri*, JSS 54 (2009), pp. 221–226.



Meroitic offering stone, 49 x 30 cm. (REM 0131)

No. 30, *shī*, “small” (p. 139), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, should very likely be related to Akkadian *ṣḥru* or *ṣḥru*, “small”, Hebrew *ṣā’īr*, “small”, Ugaritic *ṣgr*, Sabaic *ṣgr*, Arabic *ṣagīr*, Aramaic *ṣe’ar*, “small”. Meroitic script does not distinguish the various sibilants of the Semitic languages, while the loss of the final *r* occurs in various Semitic dialects<sup>39</sup>.

No. 31, *st*, “pair of feet” (p. 139, cf. pp. 93–94), may simply mean “pair”, “two”, like Hebrew *šēṭ*, but one should rather relate *st* to Semitic *šd / št*, generally with a prosthetic vowel. Thus Akkadian *išdu* designates the legs with buttock, hence “foundation”, while Arabic *’ist* and Hebrew *šēt* mean “buttocks”. Akkadian *išdu* can also refer to a support, a stake or the lower part of a body. All this explains the Meroitic use of *st* as a singular or a plural.

No. 32, *ste / sete*, “cognate”, “tutor”, “mother” (p. 140), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, occurs in South-Ethiopic. In Gafat, the kinship names *əstabbwä*, “uncle”, and *üstimwitä*, “aunt”, are composed with an element *əst / üsti* and the usual words for “father” and “mother”<sup>40</sup>. This prefixed element corresponds to Meroitic *ste* with addition of a prosthetic vowel.

<sup>39</sup> E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages* (n. 7), §17.2.

<sup>40</sup> W. Leslau, *Étude descriptive* (n. 34), p. 40, §28b, and p. 184.

At first sight, a similar appellation seems to occur in Berber dialects, where *setma*, *sâtma*, *ti-stama* at Siwa, means “sisters”, but *set-*, *sât-*, *-stə-* is the demonstrative feminine plural *s(w)t*, certainly related to Akkadian *šūt* and followed by the usual word *ma* for “mother”; hence the literal meaning “those of the mother”. The same demonstrative appears as *sat* or *set* at Ghadames or *sut* in Kabyle.

No. 33, *tbo*, “two, second” (?) (p. 140), with no apparent parallel, is the Semitic numeral *tn-*, “two”, in Qatabanic *tnw*, with the change  $n > m > b$ . The phonetic change  $n > m$  is very common, while *m* and *b* can alternate in Ethio-Semitic<sup>41</sup>. Also the Meroitic plural suffix *-b-* corresponds to Semitic *-m/n* (see below).

No. 34, *teneke*, “west” (p. 141), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, must be a noun alluding to the daily descent of the sun below the horizon. A derivative of Semitic *nāḥu*, *nūḥ*, “to settle down”, with the prefix *t* like Akkadian *tanēḥtu*, “resting”, seems to provide the solution. The difference *k/ḥ* does not constitute a major difficulty, since e.g. Semitic *tmk* and *tamāḥu*, “to support”, present the same alternation, without mentioning the spirantization of *k* in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Akkadian.

No. 35, *tke-*, “to love” (p. 141–142), is justified by the Author in the light of the parallelism of *Mni tke* with the Egyptian title *mry Jmn*, “beloved by Amon” (pp. 91–92). However, the Meroitic formula may express another kind of approach to the deity, similar to Arabic *taqīy*, “God-fearing”, “devotee”. Since *k* apparently corresponds to Semitic *q*, *tke* could be related to this Arabic noun, attested five times in the Qur’ān and expressing a pious fear of God<sup>42</sup>. *Mni tke* can then mean “devotee of Amon”, like the feminine name *Jmn3tk3*, while *Wos-tke* would be a “Devotee of Isis”. The modifiers *Mni* and *Wos* precede the modified element *tke*, like in South-Ethiopic and in Highland East-Cushitic.

No. 36, *tkk*, “to plunder, to pillage” (pp. 142–143), is regarded by Rilly as a derivative of a simple verb *tk*, “to take” (pp. 77–78). However, *tkk* seems to be closely related to Semitic *tkk*. In Arabic, *takka* means “to trample underfoot”, Akkadian *takaku* and Aramaic *t<sup>e</sup>kak* mean “to oppress”, “to press”, and the Hebrew noun *tok* expresses the idea of “oppressing”. The same root with the meaning “to strike” appears in Cushitic: Oromo *tak-*, Saho *tak/dag-*, Rendille *taḡ-*, Dasenech *ta’*. It is found also in Chadic: Logone *tku*, Masmaje *tàc*<sup>43</sup>. The Egyptian verb *tjtj*, “to trample down”, is used in war narratives, and Meroitic *tkk* appears in a similar context, possibly with the broader and concrete meaning “to put under the joke of servitude”, as suggested by the scene of prisoners sculpted on the stele of Akinidad (REM 1003).

No. 37, *tre*, “to offer”, (pp. 143–144), can be related to Akkadian *turru*, “to give back”, the D-stem of the root *twr*. This particular connotation is suitable in a sacrificial context, especially when sacrifices are brought to thank the deity.

<sup>41</sup> E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages* (n. 7), §11.6.

<sup>42</sup> E.S. Ohlander, *Fear of God (taqwā) in the Qur’ān: Some Notes on Semantic Shift and Thematic Context*, JSS 50 (2005), pp. 137–152.

<sup>43</sup> Kh. Alio, *Préliminaires* (n. 35), p. 284.

No. 38, *wide*, “brother”, “sister” (p. 144), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, should most likely be related to the Semitic root *wdd*, “to love”, and to the Ethio-Semitic noun *wəd*, “dear”, “beloved”. The word “brother” can have a large meaning with various connotations.

No. 39, *wle*, “dog” (p. 145), appears also in Highland East-Cushitic, attested in Derasa as *wæl-*, “dog”<sup>44</sup>. The word was probably pronounced [wullə] and it is certainly related to Egyptian *whr* and Coptic *ouhor / ouhar*, “dog”, with the well-known alternative *l/r*. It can also be compared to Gafat *würrä*, Amharic *urrä*, Somali ‘*urri* and *hurri*, “cat”.

The word *wle* appears in a graffito written next to the drawing of a dog pursuing a hare”: *wle qo p̄hn 3 tlt Netror-se-l-o* (REM 1165), “Here is Netror’s triply trained dog”. The word *p̄hn* is an adjective or passive participle of the Semitic verb *b̄hn*, “to put to the proof”, “to test”, well attested in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac. In relation to a dog it must mean “to train”, while *tlt* following the cipher 3 means “three (times)”, like Semitic *tlt*. In Aramaic documents, the cipher is sometimes confirmed by the numeral<sup>45</sup>. In the present case, “three” is used metaphorically to express the idea “very well”<sup>46</sup>.

No. 40, *yer*, “milk” (p. 146), could be related to Egyptian *jr̄t.t*, Demotic *jr̄t(.t)*, Coptic *erôt(e)*, *arôt(e)*, “milk”, but without the final *-t*.

No. 41, *yet-mde*, “niece” in a large sense (p. 147), consists of two words: the personal feminine pronoun “she”, *yə’ati* in Ge’ez, *yət* in Gafat, and a derivative of the Semitic root *wdd*, “to love”, attested as *mwd*, “friend”, in archaic Sabaic texts. In other words, *yet-mde*, probably pronounced [yet-môd] or the like, means “she-friend”. The use of the word implies that the pronoun *yet* is distinct from a masculine \**wet*, like in Ge’ez and Gafat, where the Semitic pronominal elements *wa* and *ya* receive a determinative suffix *-t*<sup>47</sup>, possibly found also in Nilo-Saharan (p. 429).

No. 42, *yireqe*, “south” (p. 147), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, is very likely the same word as Ugaritic *yrkt* and Hebrew *yarkā(h)*, which designate the “remotest” or the “innermost part” of the earth. One can also mention Aramaic *yirkā*, Tigre *warkat*, Akkadian (*w*)*arkatu*, the “part behind”. While the northern lands along the Nile valley were a fairly well-known region of the Nilotic world, its extreme south was a largely unknown territory. This explains the use of a word designating the “part behind” or the “innermost part” of the earth.

No. 43, *yirewke*, “east” (p. 147), with no Nilo-Saharan parallel, is probably a derivative of the Semitic root *rwq*, “to be clear”, Arabic *rāqa*, with a preformative *ya-/yi-*, occurring in Semitic with place-names. It refers to the point of the horizon where the day breaks and the sun raises. A related word is, for instance, the Syrian Arabic derivative *tarwīqa*, “breakfast”.

On p. 411 the Author adds two animal names to the list of translatable Meroitic words: *abese*, “gazelle”, and *pete*, “snake”. The word *abese* seems to present a metathesis

<sup>44</sup> H.G. Mukarovsky, *The Nubian Language* (n. 5), p. 383.

<sup>45</sup> TAD II, B2.3, 14; B3.1, 4; B3.5, 15; B3.7, 4; B3.8, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. E. Lipiński, *Trois hébraïsmes oubliés ou méconnus*, RSO 44 (1969), pp. 83–101 (see pp. 93–101).

<sup>47</sup> W. Leslau, *Étude descriptive* (n. 34), pp. 53–54, §37, and p. 248.



of Hebrew *šebî*, Akkadian *šabîtu*, Sabaic and Arabic *zaby*, *Gazella dorcas*, thus: \*šabe > [abse].

Since *p* does not seem to belong to the Meroitic phonological system, *pete* is likely to be a loanword, possibly borrowed from the Aramaeans of Syene and Elephantine. In fact, *peten*, *pitnā*, *patnā* is an Aramaic and Hebrew name of the snake, identified with the Egyptian cobra. It was used by charmers, as is the Indian cobra today, and Psalm 58, 5-7 notes that it does not always obey charmers. The words of Psalm 58, 7, “Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth”, may be a reference to the practice of the charmers who extracted the poisonous teeth of the *peten*. The black-necked *peten*, the *Walterinnesia aegyptia* or *Naja nigricollis*, is the most widespread cobra and it is found in the Judaeen Desert, hence the use of its name in ancient Hebrew literature. It is a dangerous poisonous snake, in appearance similar to the non-poisonous black serpent. The loss of the final *n* of *peten* is a quite frequent phenomenon that does not create any real problem.

The meaning of some Meroitic words, not occurring in Rilly’s list, is well-known, namely *abore*, “elephant”, *kelwe*, “as well as”, *ms*, “sun”, *Nob*, “Nubian”.

The word *abore*, “elephant” (pp. 370–371), is certainly related to Semitic *pīru* or *pīl*. The prosthetic vowel is attested in South-Ethiopic also before a labial consonant, while *b* replaces the *p*, which does not seem to belong to the Meroitic phonological system. The Kenuzi-Dongolo and Nobīn *fīl*, “elephant”, is borrowed from Arabic. The word *kelwe*, translated by the Author “as well as” (p. 86), should be compared to Arabic *kullamā*, “in the same way as ...” *Nob*, “Nubian” (pp. 373–374), is of course identical to the Semitic gentilic noun *Nōbî*.

The Meroitic word *ms*, “sun” (pp. 192–193, 371–372), was already related by Hans M u k a r o v s k y to Akkadian *šamšu*, Hebrew *šemeš*, Syriac *šemšā*, and Arabic *šams*.<sup>48</sup> He stressed that only Semitic languages possess an at least partially similar morpheme. In fact, Old Nubian \**maša-l* is borrowed from Meroitic (p. 514) with addition of the determinative *-l*. Now, one could notice that Egyptian *šw* is the “sunlight”<sup>49</sup>, that a denominative verb *šwj* means “to dry”<sup>50</sup>, and that Berber *ti-msi* is the “fever”, a feminine noun like “sun” was initially in Semitic. The Semitic noun *š-mš* is apparently formed by two words, the first one being related to Egyptian *šš*, “to burn”<sup>51</sup>, also to Berber *a-ss-an*, “day” and to the plural *i-ss-an*, “lightening”, both with a “tensed” sibilant. In this hypothesis, Proto-Semitic *šams* would etymologically mean “sunlight”.

The obvious lexical correspondences between Meroitic and Afro-Asiatic, especially Semitic and Cushitic, require a different approach to the phonological system and to the morphological correlations. However, verb paradigms are badly needed, but so far they are not available. One could add that also Nara and, to a lesser degree, Proto-Nubian contain lexical elements close to Afro-Asiatic, but the reviewer cannot deal here with this question.

<sup>48</sup> H.G. M u k a r o v s k y, *The Nubian Language* (n. 5), p. 387.

<sup>49</sup> R. H a n n i g, *Die Sprache der Faraonen* (n. 22), p. 809.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 809.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 754.

The few morphological correspondences examined by the Author (pp. 381–399) perfectly fit in an Afro-Asiatic frame. The postpositive particle *-l(i)* (pp. 381–386) can be related not only to the Arabic article *l-*, but also to Tigre *la-*, used as definite article. The copula *-o* [-u] (pp. 386–388) plays the same role as the agglutinated pronoun *-hu*, employed as copula in Arabic colloquials, while other morphemes are used in Ethio-Semitic. The plural suffix *-b-* (p. 389) corresponds to Semitic *-m/n* and appears as a phonetic variant of *-m* with alternation of labials. Its Meroitic use with the suffixed pronoun in *-bḥ(e)*, “their”, is an interesting feature, also for Proto-Semitic studies, because it shows that the plural pronominal suffix *-hm / -hn* consists of two originally independent morphemes. The Meroitic pronominal suffix *-he / -w* (pp. 390–398) parallels Semitic *-h / -w*, since *h* is certainly an equivalent of Coptic *h*. The negative particle *m-* (pp. 398–399), corresponds to Arabic *mā*, “not”<sup>52</sup>, and to the Ethio-Semitic postpositive particle *-(a)m*, used with verbal forms.

One could be tempted to regard Meroitic as a Semitic language, close to South-Ethiopic and influenced, as expected, by Cushitic, ancient Egyptian, and Coptic. However, the lack of verbal paradigms, very important in this question, does not allow us to follow this idea in the present state of our knowledge. The question should thus remain open.

*Le méroïtique et sa famille linguistique* is an important work. It does not settle the question of the linguistic appurtenance of Meroitic, but it constitutes a major contribution to the study of Nilo-Saharan languages. As indicated on the back cover of the book, the Author deals at present with the spoken Nara and Nyima languages, a research which will certainly provide new insights.

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<sup>52</sup> F.A. Pennacchietti, *Sull'origine della particella Arabica “mā”*, AION 27 (1967), pp. 15–23; M.E.B. Giolfo, *La particella mā nel sistema della negazione verbale in arabo classico: un'interpretazione sincronica*, in: P.G. Borbone, A. Mengozzi, M. Tosco (eds.), *Loquentes linguis. Studi linguistici e orientali in onore di Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti*, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 307–317.