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NEWS FROM THE CEMETERY OF SANAM

In the winter of 1912/1913, Francis L. Griffith carried out excavations at Sanam, the village nearly opposite Gebel Barkal on the south side of the Nile. Beside investigations of the Amun temple and the so-called treasury, he also excavated a major part of a large cemetery, containing 1619 graves with 1573 burials (Griffith 1923).¹ Almost all the graves he found were disturbed and some of them were completely empty. Nevertheless, about 50% of them contained objects as well as human remains.

There are three types of evidence available for categorizing the site:

- 1) various grave types, with their architecture;
- 2) human remains;
- 3) finds associated with the graves and remains respectively. In the following, I would like to reconsider the chronology of the cemetery of Sanam, discussing all categories of evidence.

According to Griffith, the cemetery was used in the period dating from Piye to Irike-amanote, that is, from early to middle Napatan times. As he stated in his publication of the cemetery (1923: 83): "... one might be tempted to think that some of the cave tombs at Sanam (especially 154 which, by exception, had remains at many different levels including a scarab of Sety II) began to be used at or not long after the end of the New Kingdom. But Dr. Reisner's research at Kurru and Nuri proves that in the royal graves the old fashioned vertical pit and side chamber did not give place to the stairway until Piankhy, although the stairway thereafter continued as a regular feature beneath the royal pyramids of Napata. The citizens probably followed the lead of the king, and we may, therefore, date all the cave and built graves with stairways in the Sanam cemetery as not earlier than the reign of Piankhy".

As far as I know, Robert Morkot (2000: 138) was the first to consider the possibility that some of the graves might be earlier: "Griffith thought

that the earliest graves belonged to the reign of Piye, the Kushite conqueror of Egypt, but it is likely that some of them date much earlier, perhaps even to the Viceregal period".

Griffith (1923: 111-112; Pls XLI, XLII) mentioned already scarabs with New Kingdom royal names. These are Thutmosis IV, Amenhotep III, Ramses II and Sety II, and several scarabs bearing the name Menkheperre. The latter are not easily dated, since they were in use as memorial scarabs of Thutmosis III until the Late Period.

Thutmosis IV: This scarab is badly preserved, thus Jaeger (1982: 248, note 1003) was not sure if it was contemporary with this king or made in the Late Period (Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrusammlung Berlin, Inv. No. 3214).

Amenhotep III: Some scarabs with the name of this king are dated to the Late Period, but the one found in Sanam might be already from the New Kingdom (Griffith 1923: 112; Pl. XLI 14).²

Ramses II: *Wsr m3ʿt rʿ stp n rʿ* — Hölbl (1979: 164) thought that it might be Piye, since his praenomen is also *Wsr m3ʿt rʿ* and the figure of *m3ʿt* is bearded, which hints at the Late Period. But the second part of the name, *stp n rʿ*, is never attested with Piye, and the beard of the *m3ʿt* — figure is only lightly incised (perhaps there is no incision at all, but a small flaking of the stone as on other parts of this scarab), thus in my opinion this scarab is to be dated rather to the late New Kingdom. Other possibilities include, of course, the names of Shoshenq III or Pamui of the Twenty-second Dynasty.

Sety II: This scarab with the praenomen of Sety II, *Wsr hprw rʿ stp n rʿ*, was found at the lower level of a collapsed cave tomb, where several skeletons were interred. The type of engraving hints at the late New Kingdom.

Menkheperre: Scarabs with the praenomen of Thutmosis III were widespread throughout

¹ In his report, Griffith mentions about 50% of the graves and 35% of the finds. Therefore, a new investigation of the cemetery of Sanam by the author has been completed (Lohwasser 2008; 2010). I would like to thank Dr. J. Malek and his colleagues from the Griffith Institute, Oxford, for allowing me to record the written documentation of this excavation. Furthermore, I wish to thank Dr. T. Kendall for correcting my English and Dr. M. Fitzenreiter for several discussions.

² The scarab in Griffith 1923: Pl. XLI 10, as well as the plaque in Pl. XLII 1, were made in the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. See also Jaeger 1982: 248, note 993.

Egypt, Nubia and on the Mediterranean coast. Most of them are not contemporary with this glorious king of the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, but later. During the New Kingdom as well as in the Late Period, scarabs with Menkheperre were common and at least 30 were found in the cemetery of Sanam (as well as in other Napatan cemeteries, e.g. Missiminia: Vila 1980: 168, Fig. 191).

Furthermore, there exists a plaque without royal name, but the special kind of engraving is attested only in the time of Amenophis II (Jaeger 1982: 248, note 999). Thus it might be of such early date.

Three ivory headrests, found in graves 44, 963 and 976, might have been made already in the New Kingdom [Fig. 1].³ These are the only headrests found in the cemetery — and the only ones from presumed Napatan graves. Even in the local royal tombs no such furniture was ever found. Given the common presence of headrests in New Kingdom tombs (Smith 1992: 205, Table 8) and the extreme rarity of headrests in Late Period tombs, I think there is a good chance that these headrests may be of New Kingdom date.⁴ Ivory as material for headrests is seldom encountered, but not unique. The form corresponds to earlier types (long base, single stem), which occur several times at Kerma (Reisner 1923: 232-236).

Another object probably datable to the New Kingdom, is a fragment of cosmetic spoon [Fig. 2]. Wallert (1967: 44) dated this example to the Late Period, since it was found in a presumed Napatan cemetery. But as far as I know, it is the only cosmetic spoon in the form

of a foreigner carrying a bag or vessel on his shoulders that has been dated to the Late Period. There are parallels depicting exactly the same motif, datable to the New Kingdom (Louvre 1735, Wallert 1967: Table 25, P 11; Louvre 1738, Wallert 1967: Table 25, P 13; better visible in Boston 1982: Cat. 245; private possession, Page-Gasser 1997: Cat. 82). The Late Period forms of this toilet tool are square and often depict more than one container (e.g., Cairo JE 67954 and Berlin 14114, both illustrated in Wallert 1967: Table 37).

But not only objects, also tombs itself can be dated to the New Kingdom. I suspect that the cemetery of Sanam existed already in New Kingdom times for the following reasons. There are various types of tombs in this cemetery and most of them have parallels in other Napatan cemeteries:



Fig. 1. Ivory headrest from grave 976 at Sanam, inv. no. 2960 (Courtesy of the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin)



Fig. 2. Faience cosmetic spoon from grave 11 at Sanam, inv. no. 3131 (Courtesy of Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin)

³ There is no photo in Griffith's report. The headrest from grave 963 can be seen in Griffith 1923: Pl. XXIII, that from grave 976 is today in the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin, inv. no. 2960. I thank Prof. D. Wildung for permission to publish a photo of this object and of the cosmetic spoon shown in Fig. 2.

⁴ I did not have the opportunity to study the unpublished thesis of Milena Perraud (Strasbourg 1997).

1) Sand burials without built tombs or cut graves — here the bodies were simply buried in loose sand; no “grave” is visible.

2) Simple pits, most of them rectangular, but also oval and round forms (pits are very common in all phases of Nubian culture; for Napatan pits in Qustul, Williams 1990: 3; Kerma, Bonnet 1999: 5; Mirgissa, Geus 1975; Missiminia, Vila 1980: 22, type N I; and Begrawiya W, where they are very common, Dunham 1963: *passim*).

3) Pits with lateral niche (e.g. Missiminia, Vila 1980: 22, type N II; Qustul, Williams 1990: 3, 41; Sai, Geus 1976: 62, Fig. 2; Geus, Lecoite, and Maureille 1995: 107, Fig. 7. Also the earliest tombs in el Kurru were of this type, Dunham 1950: 129).

4) Rectangular graves with brick-built sides (e.g. Missiminia, Vila 1980: 26, type N V).

5) Brick-built graves with descending stairways (not a common type of tomb, it seems to be a substitute for cave graves in areas where the soil is not solid enough to allow for hollowing out a cave; only Ku. 17 (Piye) and Ku. 18 (Shebitqo) use built graves with stairways, Dunham 1950: 64, 67).

6) Cave graves with one or more chambers (with one chamber in Missiminia, Vila 1980: 25, type N IV; Kerma, Bonnet 1999: 4; Sedeinga, Janot, Berger, Cartier, Martin, and Labrousse 1997: Fig. 1; Begrawiya S, Dunham 1963: *passim*).

Although the cave grave with single axial chamber is very common in Napatan times, no cave tombs with more than one chamber are known, except in the royal cemeteries. After a formative phase in the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, the rule for royal tombs was to have three chambers for a king or ruling queen, two chambers for a queen and one chamber for non-royal individuals (easily recognized in Dunham's charts, 1950: 129). Starting with Shebitqo, the substructure of the pyramids of the kings of Kush had two rooms, and starting with Senkamanisken, they had three axial rooms. But absolutely no non-royal individual had a tomb with more than one subterranean chamber.

Only in New Kingdom cemeteries in Nubia are there cave graves with several subterranean rooms. At Soleb there are 38 graves with multiple subterranean chambers, most of them with a pit approach (Schiff-Giorgini 1971: 81). But in T 21 there is a staircase descending to the substructure of this tomb (Schiff-Giorgini 1971: 230-231, Fig. 448, 449). Michaela Schiff-Giorgini dates T 21 to the time of Tut-ankh-Amun, because the name of

the *jdwn n Kš* (deputy of Kush) Amenemope is mentioned in the stela of the tomb and he is known to have lived at the time of that king.

At various sites in Lower Nubia there are New Kingdom tombs with mostly two subterranean rooms (for example, Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991: Pls 145-148; see especially Site 37, Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991: 295, where one grave has four subterranean chambers). At Mirgissa some graves were dated by Vercoutter already to the Middle Kingdom. They have a stairway and two to four subterranean rooms (Vercoutter 1975). These tombs are to be seen as forerunners from which the New Kingdom graves emerged. At Aniba nearly all the tombs datable to the New Kingdom had several chambers (Steindorff 1937: plates, *passim*). There, stairs leading down are most common.

A very near parallel to our graves is found near Ginis West at Kashasha (Vila 1977: 145-160). Not only is the number of the rooms and the stairway approach identical, but the arrangement of the chambers as well.

The last mentioned tomb, as well as several of the other graves in the New Kingdom cemeteries, were all reused in Napatan times. I suspect that this was also the situation in Sanam: the New Kingdom graves were reused several times or were in use continuously from the New Kingdom through mid-Napatan times.

Apart from the cave graves with more than one subterranean chamber, there exist three more tombs in Sanam which should be dated to the New Kingdom again for architectural reasons. All three are bricked graves with two chambers and stairway approach. Tomb 36 is of typical New Kingdom form: the staircase leads to an open rectangular pit with remains of crude brick sides. In the middle of the inner half, a well opens into a chamber, running back eastward.⁵

Grave 89 in Sanam is designed like the double-room cave graves with chamber and axial smaller room. Grave 1619 is also a stairway tomb with two chambers, which was rebuilt at a later date. I think that the originally double-chamber grave dates to the New Kingdom and the reconstruction to the Napatan Period.

In sum, we find 39 graves in the cemetery of Sanam which were likely erected already in the New Kingdom and were reused in the Napatan period [Fig. 3]. Perhaps the tombs were used continuously like family graves. This is not uncommon in the region. At Hillat el-Arab, on the opposite bank of the Nile, there is a group of

⁵ See the parallels in the Theban Necropolis, for example TT 49, the tomb of Neferhotep (Davies 1933: Pl. VII). It is also similar to tomb 2 of Site 37 in Lower Nubia (Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991: 295): in the middle of the rock-cut chamber there is a shaft giving access to four rooms.

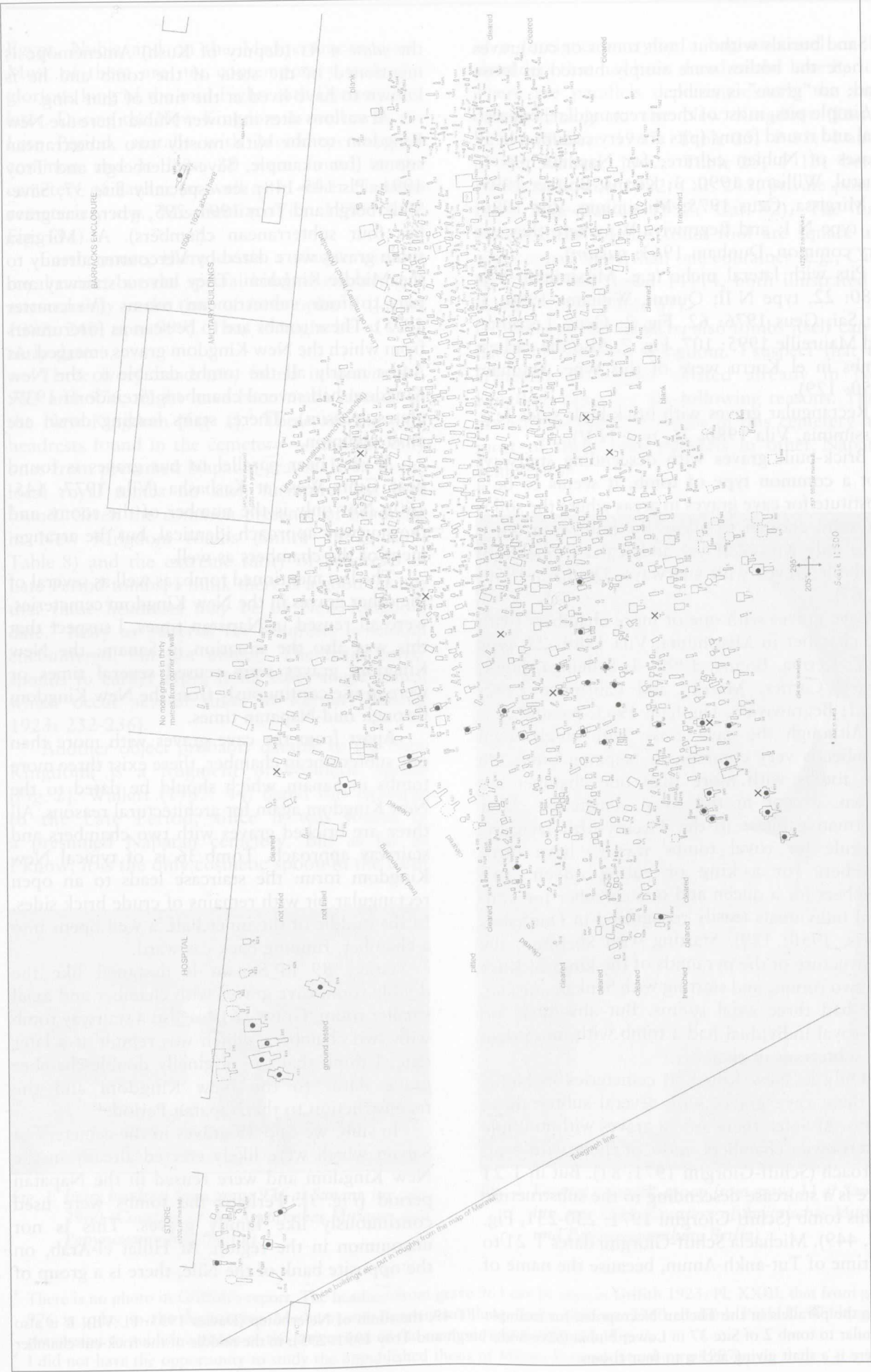


Fig. 3. Plan of the cemetery: dots indicate graves datable to the New Kingdom, x-marks refer to objects datable to the New Kingdom

graves which can be described as tombs of chiefs (Vincentelli-Liverani 1997; Vincentelli 1999; 2002; 2004). The construction of these tombs was dated by the excavator to the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, but they were in use until Napatan times. Especially tomb ARA 1 an ARA 19 contained material from the New Kingdom, Third Intermediate Period and Napatan Period, which indicates that these tombs were not reused, but used continuously for several generations (Vincentelli 2004: 140).

Since the evidence in the cave graves at Sanam is so rare, we cannot be sure that these tombs were continuously used as family graves. But in other types of tombs, especially in the rectangular bricked graves and in built graves with stairway, there can be several interments, even up to seventeen. Therefore, it can be suggested that these were family graves used from the New Kingdom into the Napatan period.

It is quite possible that a New Kingdom settlement existed at Sanam. Quoting again Morkot (2000: 138): "Its position [at the end of another road to Meroe] suggests that it was already important much earlier, and it may have been the seat of an indigenous principdom in the

New Kingdom". The strategic position at the end of Wadi Dom, nearly opposite Gebel Barkal, is naturally inviting for the establishing of a trading station.

The temple of Amun, the visible structures of which were built by Taharqo, very likely had a New Kingdom predecessor, just like the temples at Gebel Barkal and Dokki Gel. Taharqo himself says in his long inscription in the First Court of this Temple that he found (*gm*) already the temple of Amun, Bull of Nubia, which was built (?) by the ancestors (*tpyw-ʿ*) (Griffith 1922: 102-103, Pl. XXXVIII).⁶ He refers to the earlier kings, most likely from New Kingdom times.⁷

To conclude, I would suggest that the cemetery of Sanam was established in the New Kingdom with at least 39 graves having multiple subterranean chambers. Of these 36 are cave graves with staircases and three are brick graves with stairways. Apart from the architecture of these graves, the presence of New Kingdom objects indicates the use of this cemetery in this period. The first step in the investigation of this cemetery is therefore establishing its chronology and it should be kept in mind that it started being used as a cemetery already in the New Kingdom.

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⁶ The inscription is only partly preserved, hence the exact meaning is doubtful.

⁷ I am grateful to Dr. Timothy Kendall for this suggestion.

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