

## A KUSHITE METAL IMPLEMENT AND ITS MODERN AFRICAN DESCENDANTS<sup>1</sup>

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In several Napatan cemeteries and a few other sites examples of a mysterious type of metal implement was found. This tool is very thin and elongated, with a sharp cutting edge on one side, and a broad opposite side with a hole. In most cases there is a hook or spike attached at the rear end. Until now, I have identified 18 examples of this tool. Some are very corroded, others are only fragments, but in most cases we can be very sure that they represent this type of mysterious implement (see catalogue at the end of the article and Fig. 1).

16 of these examples derive from Napatan contexts. But we know also at least one Meroitic example, which was found at Karanog. One example, excavated within Meroe City, can not be dated, since there is no information on the find spot.

12 of the objects are of bronze; 6 are of iron (5 from Sanam and 1 from Karanog). Their average size is about 9 to 11 cm in length, but the example of Missiminia, which differs in its form, is longer (16 cm). The cutting edge is about 1,5 to 2,8 cm wide, and the whole tool is 0,1 to 0,2 cm thick. Only the implement from Karanog is 0,5 cm thick, but it is decorated in the middle portion. The twisted part is thicker than the thin blade and rear end.

The graves in which this implement has been found are of the most popular types in most of the cemeteries – a rectangular shaft. Only at Sanam the tool was found in a variety of grave types. The skeletons show a contracted position in five and an extended position in two instances. The other burials were destroyed. The archaeologists described the age of the interred people as “adult” or “aged” in the cases where the skeleton was preserved.

The context of the grave goods reveals that most of the tools were found in well equipped tombs, sometimes together with precious materials. But we can not state that there is a

specific and homogeneous pattern in the accompanying grave goods.

Up to this point, I have referred to this tool only as an *implement* – this is the word that Dunham used in his description of the grave goods at El-Kurru and Begrawiya. Since he was unsure about its identification he preferred to use a general term. When it occurred in the Sanam cemetery, Griffith called it *razor*. Following this interpretation, Vila and Bonnet also described their examples as *razors*, found at Missiminia and Kerma. When excavating the cemetery of Karanog, Woolley and Randall-MacIver left their tool undescribed, referring to it together with the tweezers and scissors only as *iron tools*. For the exhibition “Ancient Nubia” in Philadelphia, O’Connor called this one a *chisel*. The example found in Meroe City was simply called *copper object* by the excavators.

In comparison with other chisels, our tool lacks the thick impact head one needs for a chisel (see Petrie 1917: pl. XXI-XXIII). The rear end is only max. 0,2 cm thick. And in comparison with Egyptian razors, the position of the cutting edge is different from our implement. Razors have their cutting edge on the long side, which is suitable to hold and shave oneself or another person (*ibid.*: pl. LX, LXI). Our implement has the cutting edge at the small front end, which would cause accidents while shaving. Therefore it seems doubtful that it was either a chisel or a razor.

Visiting the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford, I came across a tool which reminded me of our Napatan implement.<sup>2</sup> It has the cutting edge on the front side and a needle – not a hook as in our examples – at the rear end. This object is called “scarification instrument of East Africa” in the description inside the exhibition case. At the Ethnological Museum Berlin I found more

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Rachael Dann and Tim Kendall for correcting my English!

<sup>2</sup> Accession Number 1942.13.774, from Nigeria, L. 78 mm, made about 1934. I want to thank Jeremy Coote for giving me informations about this tool.

parallels (Fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> The overall features are the cutting edge on the small front side and a needle at the other end. Sometimes the middle portion or the handle is decorated, but mostly it is only the flat instrument without decoration.

Considering the modern parallels, I think our ancient tool was used for cutting facial and body scarifications.

Scarification is the practice of cutting the skin of a person to cause visible or decorative scars. It is practised widely in various parts of Africa, but especially in Sub-Saharan East Africa and Central Africa. Various patterns and designs are used, depending on the region, tribe, sex or age. For example, among the Ga'anda in Nigeria, the girls and young women are given decorative scars at different stages of their life, so that by old age, nearly the whole body is covered, forming a specific pattern for their family (Berns 1988). The nomads of the Butana use small T-shaped scars, the Shaiqiya three parallel horizontal lines on the cheek to visualise the membership to a specific tribe (Blazynski 2003).

The procedure of scarification is bloody and painful (see the description in Berns 1988: 58-63). With a glass splinter, a knife or a special scarification instrument the skin is cut. To cause a thick scar, ashes are rubbed in the wound, or the healing wound is opened again and again with a hook. Everybody may cut a scarification, but some especially skilled persons have their own instruments and are paid a lot for their skilful and aesthetic designs.

I would thus propose to interpret our ancient metal tool as a scarification instrument, in which the cutting edge was used to make the incision in the skin, and the hook to pull off the bloody crust and to open the wound multiple times.

We know of the practice of scarification at least since Meroitic times (for an overview see Kendall 1989: 672-680). The bulk of the scarification instruments, however, can be dated to the Napatan period. Because the representation of the Napatan king was so much influenced by the representation of the Egyptian pharaoh, we cannot expect to see scarification in royal figures. Unfortunately at the same time

there are only a very few representations of non-royal persons. Therefore we have to be content to look only at Meroitic depictions of scarred individuals.

The Ba-heads of Lower Nubia and the northern region of Upper Nubia sometimes exhibit a horizontal line on the forehead (see Wildung 1996: Cat. 308, 310, 312, 315-320) (Fig. 3). This is generally identified as scarification, and I would concur with this interpretation (Wenig 1978: 227, 229). Horizontal lines on the forehead already appear among Nilotic Nubians in several Egyptian New Kingdom images (Kendall 1989: 675-676). Cutting horizontal forehead lines is the traditional scarification of the Nuer even today. As Zach (1999: 298) already stated, these lines are (nearly) confined to male representations.

The other type of scarification visible in Meroitic human figures is the cheek mark: two or three vertical or slightly diagonal lines cut on each cheek (Zach 1999: 298-299). This marking is found above all in the southern region of the empire, at Meroe and the Butana (Fig. 4). We know it both among royal representations as well as from non-royals. The most famous depiction is that of Queen Amanishakheto on the pylon of her funerary chapel in Beg N 6 (Fig. 5). The three cut cheek lines on each cheek are not always interpreted as scarifications but as three uraei like those of Natakamani at Naqa (Gamer-Wallert 1983: 52 with n. 211, Tf. 36a, 37a and Bl. 7). I think that although in the depiction of Natakamani at Naqa as well as Tabo (Maystre 1973: pl. XXXV) there is no doubt of identifying three uraei as scarification, I would be unwilling to do the same with Amanishakheto. The relief of the queen is very detailed; one can even see the uraeus on the head of the ram. But the three lines on the cheek are only three lines and nothing more.

This kind of scarification was already depicted in the Egyptian New Kingdom in some representations of Nubians (see Kendall 1989: fig. 6). These two or three lines one can also find on several depictions in the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat es Sufra (Hintze 1979: figs. 5, 9, 21), at Meroe (*ibid.*: fig. 8), on some clay figures from Meroe (Shinnie and Bradley 1980: fig. 70-72) and in singular incidents in the North (Nur 1956: pl. XIII). Looking at the Musawwarat graffiti, we can

<sup>3</sup> I want to thank Dr. Junge of the Ethnological Museum Berlin for informative discussions and the permission to publish photos of two tools.

discover there both royal and non-royal persons, and even enemies marked with the same three scars. Therefore I think that the three lines are regional marks, like the horizontal line in the North.

The horizontal line on the forehead of Northerners and the three cheek-lines among Southerners should be understood as tribal or regional markings. They probably identified an individual's origin, even for outsiders. But it astonishes that not all depictions of inhabitants in the North have the horizontal line or that all those in the South have the three lines. Even not all depictions of the same person – like Amanishakheto – have their marks. Here we have to consider that the Meroitic depictions are not photographs which would show a person's real image but idealized or generic representations, which focus on their specific roles. And of course indicating the origin of the person would not have been necessary in every image. Thus we find the scarification marks only in representations where the origin or the descent of the person would be important to convey.

There might be the clue for the representation of Amanishakheto having the three scars in only one instance. It seems that the three lines on her cheek on the pylon of her pyramid chapel are lighter and thinner than the lines of the relief. Maybe the scratches were done later, perhaps with the purpose of laying posthumous emphasis on her origin – or of forging a legitimate origin for her descendents.<sup>4</sup>

To sum up: We know of representations of individuals with scarification in the Meroitic period, but since we have very few reliefs, especially of non-royal persons, in the Napatan period, we do not know if scarification was already widely practised in that time. If I am right in my interpretation of the mysterious metal implement as one used for the cutting of the scars, there is at least the technological evidence for scarification in the ancient Sudan in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. That the people used expensive metal instruments hints to the possibility that there were specialists who made scarifications. Of course it was possible to make the incisions with a knife or a flint, but the evidence of special instruments points to skilled persons who did this job better than others (see also Blazynski 2003: 49-50 for the modern Shaiqiya). Most of the tombs where the instruments were found were very well equipped, which again reminds me of famous artists who were well paid for their job. And most of the preserved skeletons showed a contracted position, which again hints to the traditional Nubian lifestyle these people had.

Scarification is used in North-East Africa even today. Various forms of markings are symbols for specific tribes or groups. With the different scars – forehead line and cheeks marks – on Meroitic depictions we can trace this tradition two millenia back. The evidence of a scarification tool in Napatan context hints to the possibility that this tradition existed even 700 years earlier.

<sup>4</sup> Of course it does not explain why the prominent goddess of the Butana, the companion of Apedemak, Amesemi, is shown with the scarification only once (Stela Sudan National Museum 31338, Welsby and Anderson 2004: Cat. 163). Maybe the three lines on the cheek of the goddess are the three uraei as in the depictions of King Natakamani, since the curved lines start exactly at a string which stretches between chin and neck.

Catalogue of Kushite scarification tools known to me:

Nr.	Place	Grave number	Grave type	Burial position	Burial Age	Burial Sex	Tool: L cm	Tool: B cm	Tool: T cm	Tool: Material	Publication	Museum	figure
1	Sanam	0162	rg	?	?	?	14,6	2,6	?	bronze	Griffith 1923: 126, pl. XXXV.6	?	1a
2	Sanam	0362	sh	S/L	adult	?	7,2+x	2,3	?	iron	Griffith 1923: 105, 126, 149, pl. XXXV.13	Berlin 2977 (lost in war)	1b
3	Sanam	0646	rg	C/L	?	?	9,4+x	2,3	?	iron	Griffith 1923: 126, pl. XXXV.14	?	1c
4	Sanam	0658	rb	?	?	?	8,4	1,4	0,2	bronze	Griffith 1923: 126, 154, pl. XXXV.8	Brussels E. 5708/1	1d
5	Sanam	0706	bus	E/D	adult	?	?	?	?	iron	-	?	-
6	Sanam	0949	rb	?	?	?	10,6	1,8	?	bronze	Griffith 1923: 126, pl. XXXV.7	Khartoum	1e
7	Sanam	1042	rg	C/L	?	?	3,4+x	2,8	?	iron	-	Berlin 2901 (lost in war)	-
8	Sanam	1203	cg	?	?	?	?	?	?	iron	-	?	-
9	El Kurru	Ku. 52	rg, bench	?	?	?	10,8	1,5	?	bronze	Dunham 1950: 81, pl. LXXI.D	?	1f
10	El Kurru	Ku. 54	rg, bench	E/D	?	f	11,5	2	?	bronze	Dunham 1950: 92, pl. LXXI.D	?	1g
11	Beg. W	W 609	rg, trench	S/L	adult	f	4,1+x	2	0,2	bronze	Dunham 1963: 35, fig. 23.b	?	1h
12	Beg. S	S 134	rg	?	?	?	10,8	1,9	0,2	bronze	Dunham 1963: 358, Fig. 189.G.2.H	MFA Boston 24.953	1j
13	Beg. S	S 134	rg	?	?	?	10,8	1,9	0,2	bronze	Dunham 1963: 358, Fig. 189.G.3.H	MFA Boston 24.954	1j
14	Beg. S	S 143	rg	?	?	?	7,1+x	1,6	0,2	bronze	Dunham 1963: 433, Fig. 227.D	?	1k
15	Kerna	t.108	rg	C	senile	m	11	2,5	?	bronze	Bonnet 1999: 6, fig. 9.2	?	1l
16	Missiminitia	2-V-6/224	rg, trench	?	?		16,2	2,4	0,1	bronze	Vila 1980: 91, fig. 92.2	?	1m
17	Karanog	585	-	?	?	?	11,4	2	0,5	iron	Woolley&Randall MacIver 1910: pl. 36; O'Connor 1993: 155, Nr. 136	Philadelphia E 7301	1n
18	Meroe	city	-	-	-	-	9	1,5	?	bronze	Shinnie&Bradley 1980: pl. XL	?	1o

rg: rectangular grave, rb : rectangular bricked, cg : cave grave; E: extended, C: Contracted, S. semicontracted, D: dorsal, L: left, m: male, f: female

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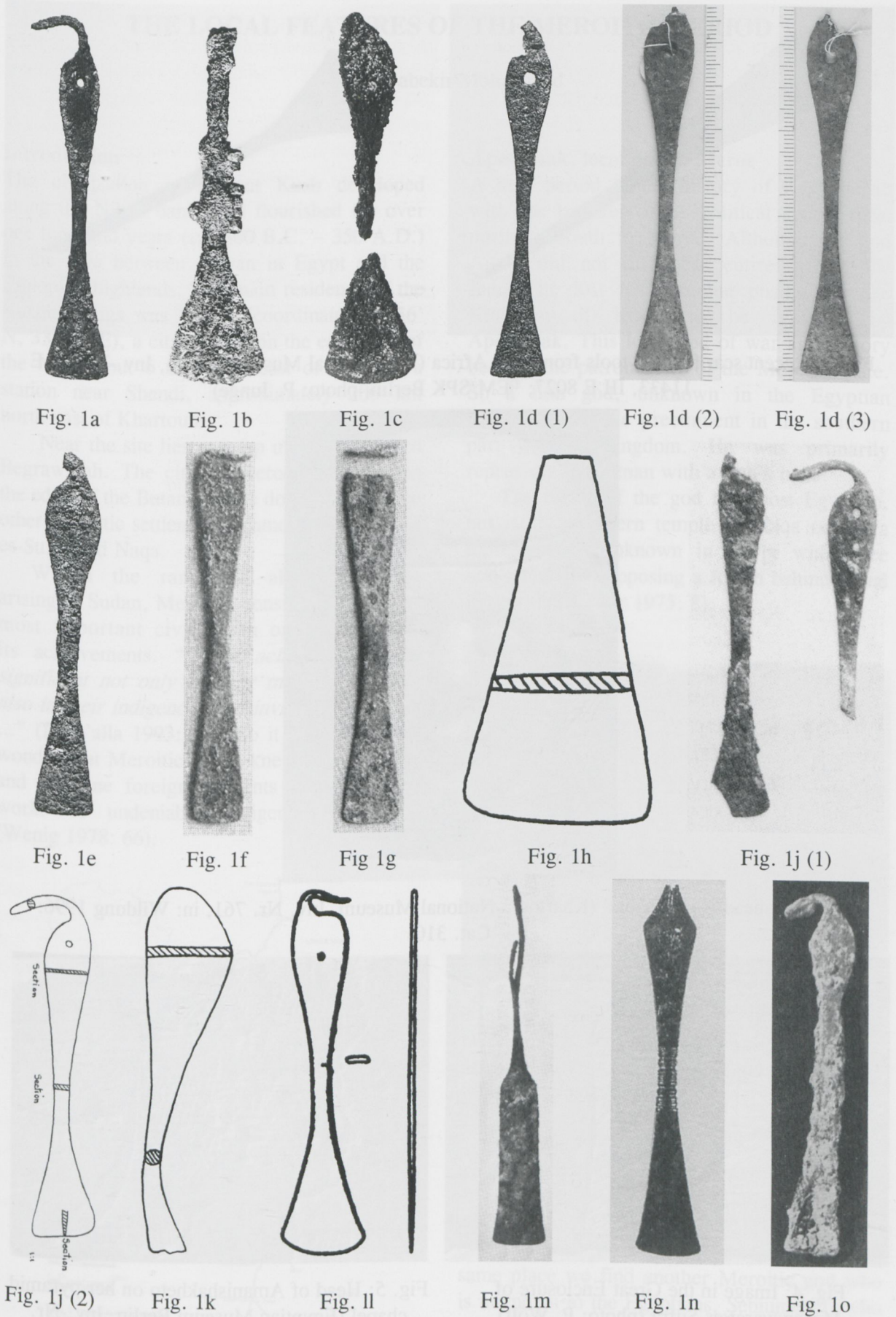


Fig. 1: Scarification tools: see catalogue of tools

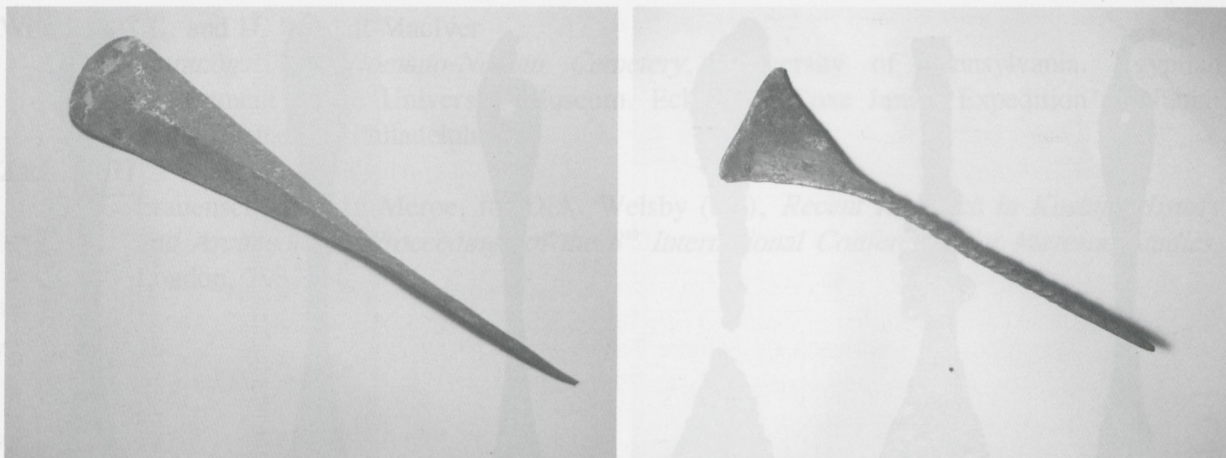


Fig. 2: Recent scarification tools from East Africa (Ethnological Museum Berlin, Inv.-Nr. III E 11433, III E 8027; ©EM/SPK Berlin, photo: P. Junge)

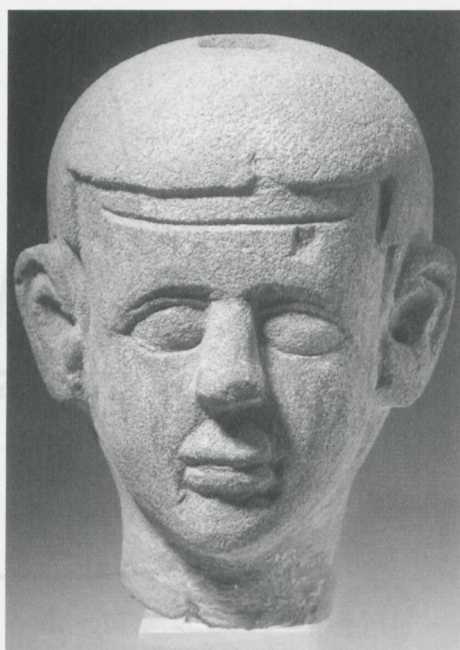


Fig. 3: Ba-head from Shablul (Khartoum National Museum, Inv. Nr. 761, in: Wildung 1996: Cat. 310)



Fig. 4: Image in the Great Enclosure of Musawwarat es Sufra (photo: P. Wolf)



Fig. 5: Head of Amanishakheto on her pyramid chapel (Egyptian Museum Berlin, Inv.-Nr. 2244, in: Wildung 1996: Cat. 322)