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## KHONSU SITTING IN JEBEL BARKAL

*Dedicated to Tim Kendall for his 70th birthday!*

Tim Kendall dedicated most of his energy, time and thoughts to the Jebel Barkal. Starting with the re-evaluation of the work of George Andrew Reisner, he went far beyond the excavation of this forefather of Nubian Archaeology. I have the privilege to reside in a house nearby Tim's digging house in Karima during my own field campaigns; therefore I am one of the first to learn about his new discoveries and considerations. Together we climbed the Jebel Barkal in the moonlight, to see the sunrise and to appreciate the various impressions produced by different lights. We had a good time while discussing the situation of Amun being worshipped as a god IN the mountain itself. With this little article I want to contribute to Tim's research on the Jebel Barkal – combining his research with my own in Sanam.

The subject of my contribution<sup>1</sup> is a small plaque, found by Francis Ll. Griffith in the cemetery of Sanam (fig. 1). It was found in grave no. 0195, which Griffith described as a shallow rectangular grave, lined with bricks, ext. 210 by 115, axis 295.<sup>2</sup> In the grave were found the remains of seven dismembered skeletons, with their head pointed towards the river. Four skeletons were associated with amulets. The inventory of the whole grave was given to Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Bissing, who was one of the sponsors of Griffith's excavation.<sup>3</sup> After his departure from Germany, von Bissing lived in the Netherlands, where he sold part of his Egyptian collection to the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden between 1937 and 1940.

With the skeleton B (upper one next to southernmost), the following items were found: a green glaze scarab, two steatite scarabs, a green glaze plaque, and a ball bead of amygdalite.

The plaque of green glaze is the item we are analyzing. It was numbered as F 989 by von Bissing and is now registered as F 1940/11.49 in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden.

Although a photograph of it was published by Griffith,<sup>4</sup> it escaped the attention of researchers (including Tim), since the black and white photograph is without contrast and difficult to read.

## DESCRIPTION

The dimensions of the rectangular plaque are 2,25 x 3,0 x 0,73 cm. It is drilled vertically and decorated on both sides. The sides of the plaque are engraved with two lines.

The recto is decorated in high relief. Within a framing is represented a crouching mummified god. It seems to be falcon-headed. On its head there is a disk (sun or moon) and a crescent with a uraeus in its middle. On his knees there seems to be a Maat-feather and on the top of it can be seen a smaller crouching figure. The god himself is squatting on a basket, either a *nb*- or a *hb*-sign. In front of the basket, which is used as a cushion by the god, is represented a plant. It is difficult to decide what kind of plant it could be; it looks like a lotus flower with blossoms and buds. But the most interesting detail is the huge uraeus depicted in front of the god. The uraeus is hanging down from the frame and raises its forebody spreading its hood. On its head there is a big sun disk.

The verso is decorated in low relief.<sup>5</sup> There are three hieroglyphs (?): a bird with a long beak, a basket, and a horizontal stroke. It is difficult to clearly identify the type of bird, but I suggest a *b3* (G 29). The *nb* (V 30) is quite clear, but the last sign can be either a sandy tract (N 18) or a land (N 16), or even the sky (N 1). When finding three signs on a Late Period

1 I want to thank Dr. Annik Wüthrich as well as Dr. Carlo Salzani for correcting my bad kitchen-English!

2 See for a short description Griffith 1923: 145, for the entry in the tomb cards Lohwasser 2012: 434.

3 Grimm 2010: 15, 47.

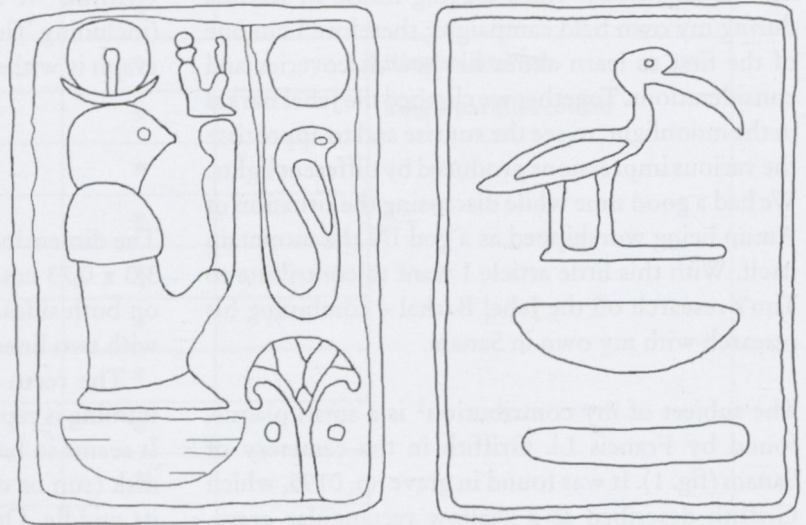
4 Griffith 1923: 133, pl. LII.8.

5 For discussions especially about the verso I want to thank my colleague Dr. Annik Wüthrich.





Fig. 1: Plaque from Sanam (Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Inv.-Nr. F 1940/11.49. Photo: A. Lohwasser. Drawing: F. Joachim)



plaque, one immediately thinks of a cryptographic spelling of the name Amun. Although the basket is frequently used as cryptographic sign, neither this bird nor the flat sign have any equivalent in the list of cryptographic signs collected by Etienne Drioton in his article about cryptographic script of Amun's name.<sup>6</sup> Another suggestion would be a pantheistic spelling, but this specific signs are not attested in the literature.<sup>7</sup> It could be a variant of the epithet *b3 nb h3yt* (Ba, Lord of the Sky), which was used in the Late Period and in Graeco-Roman times.<sup>8</sup> To date, it is attested only for Amun and Re-Horakhte, but it could have been used to suit the Kushite ideas.

I propose to identify the crouching god with the falcon head on the recto as Khonsu. This god, when represented as mummified, is shown several times in a squatting position. Since in the parallels (see

below) the combination of disc and crescent – both symbols of the moon – on his head is clearly visible, this indicates the identification with Khonsu.

This god is usually represented standing in the form of a mummy with several attributes (*hk3*, *w3s*, *nh* and flagellum) in his hands. In this iconography, he is the third god in the Theban triad. There he represents the child of Amun and Mut. For example, in the lunette of the Adoptionstela of Henuttakhebit, he is represented behind Amun, Bull of Ta-Seti, and Mut, Eye of Re.<sup>9</sup>

In the temple B 300 at Jebel Barkal, room 305 (northwall) he stands behind the human-headed Amun of Karnak and Mut.<sup>10</sup> There he is called "Khonsu of Thebes, Neferhotep".<sup>11</sup> In the same room, on the southwall, he is represented in a totally different form:<sup>12</sup> not as a mummy, but as a human

6 Drioton 1957.

7 See for example Ryhiner 1977, Koenig 2009.

8 LGG II: 682-683.

9 New facsimile in Valbelle 2012: pl. 1, 2.

10 Robisek 1989: 117.

11 See also the compilation in LGG V: 761.

12 Robisek 1989: 118.





with a falcon head. His name is again “Khonsu of Thebes, Neferhotep,” and he follows the ram-headed Amun of Napata and Mut. Although one could argue that the human-headed Khonsu is the child in the Theban triad and the falcon-headed Khonsu is part of the triad of Jebel Barkal, there is evidence against this hypothesis: On one of the cylinders in the tomb of Aspelta, there is the antithetic depiction of the Theban and the Nubian triad.<sup>13</sup> On both sides, Khonsu is represented in the same way – standing, mummiform and human-headed with disc and crescent.

The falcon-headed Khonsu has his origin in Egypt. Especially in the temple of Khonsu in Karnak, decorated in the Third Intermediate Period, there are several depictions of Khonsu with a falcon-head.<sup>14</sup> Since the kings of the 25<sup>th</sup> dyn. laid their emphasis on the Thebaid and did a lot of construction work in Karnak, the encounter with the falcon-headed Khonsu and the adoption of this form into the Kushite iconography is plausible.

But if we look at all the depictions of Khonsu in the temples, we find that he is always represented as standing. The squatting position is never attested. However, we can find this posture in several representations of minor arts. Again on another cylinder of Aspelta, there is Khonsu represented as mummiform and with a falcon-head, but squatting.<sup>15</sup> Although his name is not given here, the identification with Khonsu is quite certain since he wears on his head the disc and crescent with a uraeus. He is sitting on a hieroglyph: in this elaborated depiction, it does not appear to be a *nb*-basket, but a *hb*-sign. Under the sign there is a clump of papyri.

The various elements of this motive – the mummiform falcon-headed squatting god, the *hb*-sign and a plant – are parallel to the depiction on our plaque.

The plaque in question was found in Sanam, and examining all the findings from Sanam, I found some more amulets with a similar motif.

13 openwork amulets were found in grave 0722 (fig. 2).<sup>16</sup> The tiny amulets are of blue and yellow glaze. Khonsu is squatting in a semicircular frame. He is again mummiform and falcon-headed. On his head there is a disc and a crescent of the moon. On his knees there is the feather of Maat and on its top a



Fig. 2: Amulets from Sanam (Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, ÄM 7815. Photo: A. Lohwasser)

small figure (of Maat?). Another amulet of the same form was found in grave 1360.<sup>17</sup>

In grave 0662 was found a plaque in form of a cartouche.<sup>18</sup> On the recto within the cartouche there is a representation of the mummified falcon-headed Khonsu, sitting on a *nb*-basket. On his head one can see a disc and a crescent, and on his knees stands the feather of Maat.

In grave 0760 was found a rectangular plaque with the depiction of two gods on one side and an enigmatic (cryptographic?) inscription on the other side.<sup>19</sup> The two squatting gods look at each other. On the left side there is Khonsu, mummiform, falcon-headed, with the disc and crescent on his head. On his knee and in the center of the plaque, there is a big *nh*-sign. On the right side sits the baboon of Thot, with disc and uraeus on his head.<sup>20</sup>

In grave 0679 were found two silver amulets.<sup>21</sup> Griffith described the amulets in his tomb-cards: “silver gilt plaits with outline as a vaulted shrine, embossed representing Khonsu seated on lotus flower.”<sup>22</sup> Again in the tomb-cards, he presented a sketch drawing, and the iconography seems to be the same: mummiform, squatting, with falcon-head,

17 Griffith 1923: 168. See for the whole entry Lohwasser 2012: 496. Although described by Griffith as set to Berlin, it was never part of this collection.

18 Griffith 1923: 154, pl. LIV.19. Today in Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin, Inv.-Nr. 2918.

19 Griffith 1923: 158, pl. LII.7. Then in Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin, Inv.-Nr. 7855, lost in WW II.

20 A very similar plaque was found in grave 1164. Again two gods are sitting facing one another, on the right side the human-headed Nefertem with a lotus flower on his head, on the left side a squatting falcon-headed god with a disc and an enormous uraeus on his head. Since we cannot discern a crescent, I suggest Harakhite as the counterpart of Nefertem. (Griffith 1923: 167, pl. LII.12. Today Sudan National Museum 1650; Kormysheva 2006: 84.)

21 Griffith 1923: 155, pl. LX.14.

22 See for the whole entry Lohwasser 2012: 461.

13 Dunham 1955: pl. CIA.

14 See for example the representations collected in Dégardin 2000.

15 Dunham 1955: pl. CVIIA.

16 Griffith 1923: 158, pl. XXXIX.7. Today in Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin, Inv.-Nr. 7815.





disc and crescent.<sup>23</sup> On his knees there is a feather of Maat and the whole figure sits on a lotus-flower, accompanied by two small circles (buds?).

It is interesting to note that neither in El Kurru nor in Nuri or in the early graves in Begrawiya similar amulets came to light.<sup>24</sup> And neither in the other known (and published) cemeteries of the Napatan period was I able to find any parallels.

But in the Palace M 294 in Meroe was found an Early Napatan bronze seal in the form of the squatting falcon-headed god with disc (broken) on his head.<sup>25</sup> In the lower part of the body is inscribed the name *hnsu*, therefore this figure can be identified with certainty with Khonsu. On the verso there is a short inscription (although not visible in the photograph): “A boon which the king gives to the Uraeus, plenty/full of beauty.”

Another bronze seal was found in the same palace.<sup>26</sup> It presents a cartouche-like object with a falcon head, as well as a disc and crescent on its head. Within the cartouche, there is an inscription. Kormysheva (2006: 154) interprets it as cryptographic for “Amun (of) multiple (forms) (or: many perfections).” But one can also interpret it as a combination of the signs for moon (crescent instead of sky), Nefer and uraeus, Lord of everything. Although I cannot offer an explanation of this inscription, the combination of the figure of Khonsu and an inscription mentioning (possibly) the moon and the uraeus is highly significant.

If we consider all the parallels here presented, I think we can be quite sure that the figure on our plaque is the god Khonsu. The cushion can be either a *nb*-basket or the *hb*-sign, both hieroglyphs are attested in the parallels. In several representations we notice the combination with a plant, either papyrus or lotus. And in most parallels there is the feather of Maat on the knees of the god.

But the most striking element is the huge uraeus hanging down. In some of the plaques from Sanam, Khonsu is sitting in a round-topped frame which Griffith describes as shrine. In our plaque, the frame

is rectangular, but because of the hanging uraeus here, too, the idea of a shrine is present. I suggest that this is the depiction of Khonsu sitting in his chapel within the Jebel Barkal, symbolized by the hanging uraeus. The moon-god is a member of the triad composed by Amun, Mut and Khonsu. Tim Kendall has presented good arguments to see Amun as a god dwelling IN the Jebel Barkal.<sup>27</sup> This mountain is extraordinary because of the pinnacle, a rock needle which gives the Jebel Barkal its unique appearance. The pinnacle has been shaped by human hand to correspond to the silhouette of a gigantic uraeus.<sup>28</sup> The idea of Amun dwelling IN this specific mountain is given through the representation of a big uraeus hanging down in front of the god.

Exactly beneath the pinnacle are situated the temples of the goddesses Mut (B 300) and Hathor-Tefnut (B 200).<sup>29</sup> Both of them are hemispeoi, therefore their sanctuaries are located within the mountain itself. Hathor-Tefnut can be identified as one of the cobra-goddesses, and Mut is the female member of the Amun-triad and therefore logically worshipped IN the mountain, like her male counterpart.

On our plaque, we can observe a similar situation with the hanging uraeus in front of Khonsu. I want to argue that it is the depiction of Khonsu dwelling IN the mountain. Although no sanctuary has been discovered yet, it is quite conceivable that Khonsu was worshipped at the Jebel Barkal just like the other two members of the triad. The representation on this object of minor art can hint to this – either destroyed or yet hidden – sanctuary.

The aim of this short article was to point out the possibility that there was the idea of Khonsu dwelling IN the Jebel Barkal like it is postulated for Amun and Mut. Now it is Tim’s turn to make something of it!

23 Thanks to the helpfulness of the team the Griffith-Institute, Oxford, I had the possibility to check the whole documentation.

24 However, in El Kurru (Ku. 52) was found a amulet, which depicts a squatting falcon-headed god with an *nh* on his knees (Dunham 1950: pl. LIV.A,B; Kormysheva 2006: 51). The crown is broken, but the traces let us reconstruct the double feather of Amun – therefore this specific posture is not unique for Khonsu in Kush.

25 Kormysheva 2006: 153–154.

26 Kormysheva 2006: 154.

27 Summarized in Kendall 1996: 168–170.

28 Kendall 2004.

29 For B 300 see Robisek 1989, for B 200 see Wolf 1990: 144–147.





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Eine kleine Plakette aus Sanam, heute im Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden (Inv.-Nr. F 1940/11.49), steht im Mittelpunkt dieses Artikels. Auf der Plakette ist auf einer Seite ein hockender mumienförmiger Gott gezeigt, der auf seinem Falkenkopf die Scheibe und Sichel des Mondes trägt. Mehrere Parallelen, vor allem aus der Kleinkunst, weisen darauf hin, dass es sich dabei um den Gott Chons handelt.

Das auffälligste Merkmal ist aber der große, von der Umrahmung herabhängende Uräus. Der Pinnacle, eine markante Felsnadel am Gebel Barkal, wurde in der Antike künstlich zu einem überdimensionalen Uräus umgeformt. Damit ist die Silhouette unverkennbar und Symbol des Gebel Barkal. Amun von Napata, der im Gebel Barkal wohnt, wird als thronender Gott in einer Höhle bzw. unter einem Baldachin dargestellt, wobei vor dem Gott ein Uräus herabhängt. Eine vergleichbare Darstellung ist nun auf unserer Plakette zu finden, die diesmal allerdings Chons unter dem hängenden Uräus zeigt. Dies führt zu der Annahme, dass Chons als Teil der Triade des Amun ebenfalls im Gebel Barkal verehrt wurde, so wie Mut im Felstempel des B 300 – auch wenn ein Heiligtum bisher nicht gefunden wurde.