



BRILL

JOURNAL OF ANCIENT NEAR
EASTERN RELIGIONS 18 (2018) 167–189

Journal of
Ancient
Near Eastern
Religions
brill.com/jane

Reconstructing the Pre-Meroitic Indigenous Pantheon of Kush

M. Victoria Almansa-Villatoro

Brown University

maria_almansa_villatoro@brown.edu

Abstract

This article sets out to address questions concerning local religious traditions in ancient Nubia. Data concerning Egyptian gods in the Sudan are introduced, then the existence of unattested local pre-Meroitic gods is reconstructed using mainly external literary sources and an analysis of divine names. A review of other archaeological evidence from an iconographic point of view is also attempted, concluding with the presentation of Meroitic gods and their relation with earlier traditions. This study proposes that Egyptian religious beliefs were well integrated in both official and popular cults in Nubia. The Egyptian and the Sudanese cultures were constantly in contact in the border area and this nexus eased the transmission of traditions and iconographical elements in a bidirectional way. The Meroitic gods are directly reminiscent of the reconstructed indigenous Kushite pantheon in many aspects, and this fact attests to an attempt by the Meroitic rulers to recover their Nubian cultural identity.

Keywords

Nubia – Egypt – local religion – Meroitic Gods – Dedwen – Miket – Apedemak – Rahes

1 Introduction

During the 25th Dynasty, the Kushite world was significantly influenced by Egyptian gods who entered the Nubian pantheon and were worshipped throughout various different parts of Sudan. The ways in which those divinities were introduced into the religion of Nubia were not homogeneous. Kormysheva detected three different means of the “adoption” of elements of

Egyptian culture in Kush, which can be applied not only to religion but to every Egyptian-like aspect in Nubian culture: direct borrowing with a complete acceptance of the Egyptian god and its attributes and iconography; borrowing, with a partial change, of epithets to assimilate the Egyptian deities with gods connected with certain regions in Kush; and transformation of Egyptian gods in Kush with new functions and new consorts, creating new divine families.¹

These processes were not incompatible with one another and they were often applied together. This is especially true in the case of Amun, the most important Egyptian god in the Kushite pantheon. At Gebel Barkal and Kawa he appears with the same Egyptian epithet that he holds in the temple of Amun at Karnak, namely *jmn nb ns(w)t t3wy*, “Amun, lord of the throne(s) of the Two Lands.” He has the Kushite epithet of *jmn rꜥ k3 n t3 stj*, “Amun-Ra the bull of Ta-Seti,” very well attested in Sanam, where he was worshipped in association with the bull and as bearer of royal power. The Amun of Napata—more often without the element -Ra—had his bigger cultic center in Gebel Barkal, and also received the personal epithet of *hr-jb ḏw wꜥb*, “in the pure mountain.”²

The first research question that surfaces when approaching the topic of local religion in ancient Sudan is whether the worship of Egyptian gods in Nubia was confined to elite and royal contexts, in contrast to local gods that belonged to the wider, more popular sphere of common worship. If this were the case, it would mean that local religion was intrinsically distinct from the Egyptian gods and beliefs adopted in Nubia, the former being what people actually worshipped within their own houses. To answer this question, it is necessary to study the context in which Kushite gods appear and Egyptian gods are absent. The second point that will be questioned in this paper is the often assumed conception that the iconography of Meroitic local gods developed under a strong Egyptian influence.³ Finally, the third issue to be addressed deals with the lack of information concerning the world of the gods in Nubia until the Napatan/Meroitic period. Did the Meroitic gods exist already before their first attestation, but without a canonical mode of representation? If that were the case, their later iconography could be an extraneous borrowing. The matter

1 É. Kormysheva, “Local gods of Egypt in Cush and problems of Egyptian Settlers” in *Studia in honorem Fritz Hintze*, eds. D. Apelt, E. Endesfelder, and S. Wenig (Berlin: Akademie, 1990), 195.

2 For a comprehensive study on the names of Amun in Nubia with a list of the occurrences, bibliographical references, and analysis see É. Kormysheva, “Le nom d'Amon sur les monuments royaux de Kouch: études lexicographiques,” in *Hommages à Jean Leclant 2*, eds. C. Berger, G. Clerc, and N. Grimal (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1994), 251–61.

3 Under Egyptian and Roman-Hellenistic influence: A. Lohwasser, “Die Götterwelt im Reich von Kusch. Teil 2: Die meroitischen Götter. Der Antike Sudan,” *MittSAG* 7 (1997), 32.

could be researched through the careful observation of external sources that deal with ancient Nubia, especially those that mention Kushite gods such as Dedwen and Miket.

These questions deal essentially with the intrinsic problem of the lack of evidence for non-Egyptian Pre-Meroitic deities, but they are also seriously thwarted by this limitation. To solve this issue, it is necessary to first gain a comprehensive panorama of the religious scenario in Nubia. Therefore, the entrance of Egyptian gods into Kush needs to be initially analyzed, along with the context of their worship. Secondly, non-Egyptian gods that are associated with Nubia in Egyptian sources must be studied, in order to see whether they represent the existence of early religious traditions in Nubia that are clearly distinct from Egyptian beliefs. Finally, problems concerning the iconography and context of worship of Meroitic gods should be analyzed, along with the difference between the first and last representations of distinctly Nubian gods and how the latter relate to past traditions.

For the purpose of this paper, aspects such as temple architecture and burial customs are subordinate to the study of divine names, iconography, and poorly attested pre-Meroitic animal rituals. The description of practices that have a strong Egyptian character and in which Kushite innovations are completely absent is tangential to the aims of this article. Past studies on Kushite religion have used the Egyptian religious model and Meroitic sources as the main source of their evidence,⁴ but the present article applies an innovative methodology and a different approach, justified by the particular aim of ascertaining whether the existence of an unattested pre-Meroitic Kushite pantheon can be detected. Similarly, the debated question around the religious continuity of cattle cult will not be touched. There seems to be a cultic importance of cows in both ancient Egyptian and Sudanese rural early pastoral communities, but its influence on the development of the indigenous Kushite deities is impossible to prove.⁵

4 And the reader mainly interested in the evidence for the Egyptian religious practices in the ancient Sudan or the Meroitic divine world should refer to works such as W. Y. Adams, *Nubia, Corridor to Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); A. Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt im Reich von Kusch. Teil 1: Götter aus dem ägyptischen Pantheon. Der Antike Sudan," *MittSAG* 6 (1993), 28–35; A. Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt im Reich von Kusch. Teil 2: Die meroitischen Götter," *MittSAG* 7 (1997), 32–8; D. A. Welsby, *The Kingdom of Kush: The Napatan and Meroitic Empires* (London: British Museum, 1998); V. Rondot, "Les dieux de Méroé," in *Méroé: un empire sur le Nil*, eds. M. Baud, A. Sackho-Autissier, and S. Labbé-Toutée (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2010), 189–201.

5 There is evidence of clay models of cattle and skulls of slaughtered animals among the C-Group in the Sudan (Adams, *Nubia*, 153); also during the Late Neolithic in Nabta Playa in Egypt, see F. Wendorf and R. Schild, "Nabta Playa and its Role in Northeastern African

Finally, a relevant note about terminology needs to be made. There is a methodological issue considering the period of time covered in this paper, which ranges from the third millennium to the first century BC. Throughout its long history, the Sudan was never an entity with unchanging boundaries and unified territory, unlike Egypt, and referring to it as “Nubia” in the same way as “Egypt” is referred to is certainly imprecise. Specific terminology is used whenever possible, but the terms “Kush,” “Nubia,” or “Sudan” are maintained whenever there is a lack of more appropriate nomenclature. No evidence indicates with absolute certainty that the Pre-Meroitic deities presented here were worshipped in the entire geographic area of the Sudan, and the fact that many of the sources used in this article are Egyptian may indicate that these divinities belong to local traditions of the border area. However, the appearance of these gods almost exclusively in Egyptian sources dealing with Nubia along with the Meroitic revival and appropriation of their main features are clear indicators of a cultural coherency and unity that justify the term “Kushite pantheon.”

2 Egyptian Gods in Nubia

Egyptian gods in Nubia are attested as early as the Old Kingdom in Buhen, where an inscription dated between the 3rd and 5th Dynasties reads: “Beloved by Isis, lady of heaven and of the Two Lands, (...) beloved by Horus, the lord of the city, the great god, who set (down) the sky and the Two Lands.” This source is probably a founding dedicatory text referring to the place where it appeared.⁶ It is unlikely to indicate the establishment of early cultic centers in Nubia for Egyptian gods, but should rather be seen as a piece of evidence

Prehistory,” *JAA* 17 [1998], 108). It has frequently been noted that this archaeological evidence may point toward a worship of an early Egyptian bovine deity who would then develop into the well-known Dynastic goddesses with cow shapes, such as Hathor, see F. Hassan, “Primal Goddess to Divine King: The Mythogenesis of Power in the Early Egyptian State,” in *The Followers of Horus: Studies Dedicated to Michael Allan Hoffman 1944–1990*, eds. R. F. Friedman and B. Adams (Oxbow: Oxford), 307–22. No evidence was found that could suggest the same iconographical continuity in the indigenous Kushite pantheon reconstructed here, yet the religious importance of cattle is appreciated through the epithet of Amun in Sanam, the Meroitic milk libations and bovine processions (Rondot, “Les dieux de Méroé,” 200), and the occurrence of cow burials until the Post-Meroitic period, see: D. A. Welsby and I. Welsby-Sjöström, “Post-Meroitic Cow Burial at the Fourth Nile Cataract,” in *La pioche et la plume: autour du Soudan, du Liban et de la Jordanie. Hommages archéologiques à Patrice Lenoble*, eds. V. Rondot, F. Alpi, and F. Villeneuve (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2011), 465–80.

6 S. T. Smith, “The Rock Inscriptions of Buhen,” *JEA* 58 (1972), 58–61.

that points towards Egyptian presence in Buhen during that period, along with the occurrence of Meidum bowls, ostraca, the royal Egyptian names of Khafra, Menkaura, Userkaf, and Kakai—all of which made Emery conclude that the site was an Egyptian colony.⁷ Kormysheva proposed a cultural exchange already in the Old Kingdom between Egypt and Kerma, with Buhen as intermediary, based on the presence of apparently Kerma pottery in the site (five percent of the corpus).⁸ She also argued that Kushite adoption of burial customs, solar cult, canonic iconography of gods along with their attributes, invocations, and so on, was the result of a consistent penetration of Egyptian cultural elements into Kush from the Old Kingdom to the 20th Dynasty.⁹

During the Egyptian New Kingdom, the presence of Egyptian settlers in Nubia dramatically increased due to the conquest of Kush, and Egyptian religion began to spread throughout Kush. Many of the imported deities in Kush were local variants of certain centers in Egypt, such as Horus of Hierakonpolis, who appears in Ellesia and Buhen during the reign of Thutmose III. It is under this pharaoh that Isis of Coptos appears in Qasr Ibrim, Banebdeded of Mendes in Buhen, and Sopdu¹⁰ from the Delta in Kalabsha. Seshat appears as Sefhet Abui (*sftt ḥwy*) in the temples of Derr and Garf Hussein. Curiously, a Nubian variant of the god Amun as a lion can be found at Kawa in the monuments of Ramesses II. Epithets of Montu, “Lord of Thebes” and “Lord of Hermonthis,” and of Anubis, “Located in Imi(t)r,” appear in Wadi es Sebua under Ramesses II. Amunet, Iunit, Wepwawet, Sepsi, Harsaphes, and Bastet were other deities that appeared in Kush after the reign of Ramesses II and whose presence might be related to the spread of local Egyptian traditions by Egyptian settlers from Hermopolis, Assiut, Heracleopolis, and Bubastis.¹¹

Amun, an Egyptian god, became the state god of the Sudanese territory, in both his anthropomorphic and ram-headed form, and it was to him that most temples were dedicated.¹² The earliest known evidence of the cult of the

7 W. B. Emery, “Preliminary Report on the Excavations at Buhen 1962,” *Kush* 11 (1963), 120. In a new revision, D. O’Connor, *The Old Kingdom Town at Buhen* (EESM 106; London: EES, 2014) proposes a different chronology of the site.

8 Kormysheva, “Local gods,” 198.

9 Kormysheva, “Local gods,” 199.

10 A cult to Sopdu-Ra Horakhty was introduced by settlers from Saft el-Henne according to Kormysheva, “Local gods,” 207.

11 For discussion, references and a comprehensive account on the problem of Egyptian settlers and the diffusion of their deities in the New Kingdom, see Kormysheva, “Local gods,” 204–18.

12 Lohwasser, “Die Götterwelt Teil 1,” 31; É. Kormysheva, “Reflection on the iconography of Amun in Nubian temples,” in *Das alte Ägypten und seine Nachbarn: Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Helmut Satzinger, mit Beiträgen zur Ägyptologie, Koptologie, Nubiologie und*

ram-headed Amun in either Egypt or Nubia is a rock drawing at Kurgus from the reign of Thutmose I.¹³ Under Thutmose III a variant of Amun appears in Nubia, Amun-Ra of Napata, or “Of the Pure Mountain,” whose main cultic center was located at Gebel Barkal. This god was sometimes represented with a ram head or horns, iconography that would later appear in Luxor but originated in Nubia.¹⁴ Amun-Ra of Napata, who was closely related to the royal family, holds the important function of choosing and crowning the new king, but he was essentially a development of Amun of Luxor, with some modifications.¹⁵

Also associated with the king was Amun of Kawa (Gempaten), whose temple was visited by the Kushite king during a trip the latter undertook following his coronation. In this coronation journey, the king also visited the temple of Tabo on Argo Island, a temple devoted to Amun of Pnubs,¹⁶ a god represented with a ram’s head and a lion’s body, and the temple of Amun “Bull of Nubia” in Sanam.

It has been noted already that the iconography of the ram-headed Amun, which appears in Egypt no earlier than the New Kingdom, may have been influenced by Nubian models.¹⁷ Therefore, Amun’s crown with the sun disk and feathers could have evolved from the headdresses prepared for sacrificial rams in the Ancient Kerma period. Moreover, excavations at the site of Gism el Arba, which is contemporary with the whole duration of the Kerma culture, but which represent a rural pastoral community, have yielded cattle figurines with incised frontal disks between the horns.¹⁸ The god Amun was called Aman in Nubia, corresponding with the Nubian word for “water,” and was thus associated with inundation.

Afrikanistik, eds. M. R. M. Hasitzka, J. Diethart, and G. Dembski (Krems: Österreichisches Literaturforum, 2003), 102; Rondot, “Les dieux de Méroé,” 190–4.

13 L. Török, *The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art: The Construction of the Kushite Mind, 800 BC–300 AD* (Probleme der Ägyptologie 18; Boston: Brill, 2001), 48.

14 Lohwasser, “Die Götterwelt Teil 1,” 29.

15 Lohwasser, “Die Götterwelt Teil 1,” 30.

16 H. Jacquet-Gordon, C. Bonnet, and J. Jacquet, “Pnubs and the Temple of Tabo on Argo Island,” *JEA* 55 (1969), 103–11.

17 Kormysheva, “Iconography of Amun,” 101–10; É. Kormysheva, “On the origin and evolution of the Amun cult in Nubia,” in *Nubian Studies 1998: Proceedings of the Ninth Conference of the International Society of Nubian Studies, August 21–26, 1998, Boston, Massachusetts*, ed. T. Kendall (Boston: Northeastern University, 2004), 113–4; Rondot, “Les dieux de Méroé,” 193.

18 B. Gratien, “Some Rural Settlements at Gism el-Arba in the Northern Dongola Reach,” *Sudan and Nubia* 3 (1999), 12; B. Gratien et al., “Gism el-Arba—Campagne 1997–1998,” *Kush* 18 (2002), 86.

As Amun-Ra's wife Mut was also worshipped in Nubia, Taharqa built a temple for her at Gebel Barkal. Together with Isis and Bastet, she was seen as the mother of the king.¹⁹ Satis and Anukis were the wives of Amun of Kawa, Satis being the most commonly represented in Meroitic times.²⁰

Hathor was very often depicted on jewelry, and interestingly she does not seem to have the aspect of king's mother in spite of her close relation to Mut, Isis, and Bastet,²¹ and even though she did actually hold that maternal role since the New Kingdom in Egypt.²² Another of Isis's functions was that of goddess of the dead, along with Osiris, Anubis, and Nephthys. Meroitic inscriptions in pyramid chapels and on offering tables always begin with an invocation to Isis and Osiris.²³ Horus and Thoth are represented together in many scenes in monumental art related to the cult of the king, and Horus himself was associated with the living king. Curiously, Thoth was also worshipped privately in the Kushite domestic sphere, as evinced by ibis and baboon figurines, as well as baboon graffiti, attested in various cultic places.²⁴ Sekhmet, Onuris, Shu, and Tefnut appear in Nubia in connection with the myth of the Sun's eye, which was believed to inhabit Nubia in the shape of a lioness.²⁵ In the version of the myth found in Philae, the Sun's eye is identified with Mut, Hathor, Tefnut, and Upeset.²⁶

19 Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt Teil 1," 32. Also, the archaeologically unattested temple of Bastet was a mandatory stop in the coronation journey of the Meroitic king.

20 Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt Teil 1," 32.

21 Isis becomes iconographically indistinguishable from Hathor from the New Kingdom, see: R. H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 141; for the identification of Mut with Hathor in the Edfu texts see P. Germond, "Hathor, Mout ... ou la bonne annee?" *BSEG* 8 (1983), 47–50; also Mut, Hathor and Bastet are closely related to the Sun's Eye myth, Bastet being the benevolent aspect of the Sun's Eye from the XXII Dynasty onwards, G. S. Matthiae, "L'occhio del Sole; le divinità feline femminile dell'Egitto faraonico," *Studi epigrafici e linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico* 10 (1993), 10–19.

22 F. Daumas, "Hathor," in *LAe* 2, 1028; Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods*, 141–2.

23 Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt Teil 1," 33.

24 Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt Teil 1," 34.

25 Hathor, Tefnut and Sekhmet were seen as personifications of the Sun's eye and they often appear along with Shu who was syncretized with Onuris, both of them in charge of bringing the Sun's eye back from Nubia (Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods*, 118). Tefnut appears in Philae together with Toth of Nebes who is referred to in other sources as "The Old Shu", and Arensnuphis, a local Meroitic god in a syncretic form with Shu. D. Inconnu-Bocquillon, *Le mythe de la déesse lointaine à Philae* (Bibliothèque d'étude 132; Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001), 182–96; Rondot, "Les dieux de Méroé," 200.

26 See the whole second chapter devoted to the identification of the goddess in Philae in the work Inconnu-Bocquillon, *la déesse lointaine*.

Bes appears as both an official and a popular local god. He is represented in reliefs on columns at Musawwarat es-Sufra, Gebel Barkal B500, Amara, Wad Ban Naqa, Meroe, and Faras. A double statuette of Bes was used as a censer in Temple T in Kawa. But his representations in Kush are not limited to monumental art. Extensive archaeological material connects Bes to popular religion; these include an altar decorated with a figure of Bes from Sayala, two Bes-jars from the Sanam cemetery, liquor jars from the Karanog cemetery, amulets from Kawa, and tomb deposits in Sanam, Karanog, Faras and Aksha coming from both private and royal burials.²⁷ These apotropaic artifacts increasingly disappear in Meroitic times, probably due to a general decrease of the number of amulets found in burials.²⁸ Bes was perhaps related to another form of popular religion: a Meroitic version the cult of wine, known from Graeco-Roman Egypt.²⁹

This survey suffices to show a panorama in which Egyptian gods were perfectly integrated into Kushite beliefs, not only on a royal-official level, but also in a more personal, local dimension. They were worshipped by common people who left material goods as witness, artifacts mostly found in tombs. The adoption of Egyptian funerary beliefs is explicit in the presence of the funerary gods described above, but also in the appearance of Bas statues, which are common in late Kushite cemeteries, mostly from the north of Nubia.³⁰ If it is assumed that Meroites were concerned about their post-mortem fate, the deities that they chose to bring to their tombs must have played a crucial role in their personal faith.

Therefore, it seems undeniable that Egyptian deities were completely accepted and taken as their own by Meroites. However, wealthy and varied offerings are attested in Sudanese burials at least since the A Horizon,³¹ and

27 J. Lewczuk, "The Cult of Bes in Kush," in *50 Years of Polish Excavations in Egypt and the Near East: Acts of the Symposium at the Warsaw University 1986 / 50 lat Polskich wykopalisk w Egipcie i na Bliskim Wschodzie: Akta Sympozjum na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1986*, eds. S. Jakobielski and J. Karkowski (Warsaw: Centre d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne de l'Université de Varsovie, 1992), 203–4; E. Séguenny, "Quelques elements de la religion populaire du Soudan ancien," in *Meroitistische Forschungen 1980: Akten der 4. internationalen Tagung für meroitistische Forschungen vom 24. bis 29. November 1980 in Berlin*, ed. F. Hintze (Berlin: Akademie, 1984), 151.

28 Séguenny, "religion populaire," 151.

29 Lewczuk, "The Cult of Bes," 204; A. Sackho-Autissier, "Un aspect de la religion Méroïtique: vin et culte dionysiaque" in *Méroé: un empire sur le Nil*, eds. M. Baud, A. Sackho-Autissier; S. Labbé-Toutée (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2010), 202–7.

30 Adams, *Nubia*, 378; Welsby, *The Kingdom of Kush*, 97.

31 Adams, *Nubia*, 127.

surprisingly, interments that may suggest a well-structured idea of afterlife are not eloquently accompanied by information about the nature and iconography of the deities that preceded Egyptian as well as Meroitic gods in Kush.

3 Local Nubian Pre-Meroitic Gods

Almost nothing is known about non-Egyptian gods in Kush prior to the Meroitic period. No representations of local deities have been identified so far in the Sudan; therefore, the questioning of whether those gods had a proper iconography or even ever existed is warranted. The first name of a deity related to Nubia attested in the archaeological and textual record is that of Dedwen, who appears five times already in the Pyramid Texts in the passages quoted here:

1. *sṯ ddwn jr.k hwn šmꜥw pr m t3 st*
dj.f n.k snṯr k3pw nṯrw jm
“The scent of Dedwen, young boy of the Nile Valley who comes from Ta Seti, (goes) to you, giving you the incense with which the gods are censured” (PT 437).
2. *j3ḥs js ḥntj t3 šmꜥw ddwn js ḥntj t3 st spdḥw js hr ksbwt.f*
“As Iahes at the fore of the land of the Nile Valley, as Dedwen at the fore of Ta Seti, as Sopdu under his trees” (PT 480).
3. *sṯ ddwn jr.k ḥwn šmꜥw*
dj.f n.k snṯr.f wꜥb k3pw.f n nṯrw
“The scent of Dedwen, young boy of the Nile Valley, (goes) to you, giving you his pure incense that he censes for the gods” (PT 483).
4. *NN pw r3ḥs (var:jḥs) ḥnt t3 šmꜥw*
NN pw ddwn ḥnt t3 st
NN pw spdḥw hr ksbwt.f
“NN is Rahes (var: Iahes), foremost of the land of the Nile Valley, NN is Dedwen, foremost of Ta Seti, NN is Sopdu, under his trees” (PT 572).
5. *jw sṯ ddwn jr.k ḥwn šmꜥw pr m t3 st*
dj.f n.k snṯr k3pw nṯrw jm.f
“The scent of Dedwen, the young boy of the Nile Valley who came from Ta Seti, (goes) to you, giving you the incense with which the gods are censured” (PT 610).

Dedwen is not attested in the pyramid of Unas, but only appears in 6th Dynasty versions of the Pyramid Texts, perhaps illustrating his introduction into Egyptian religious beliefs at that time, when contacts between Nubia and Egypt were gradually increasing.³² He is represented as a man wearing a *khat*-headdress or, on one occasion, in the temple of Amun at Gebel Barkal, built by Taharqa, appearing with a crown consisting of a sun disk with ram horns and two feathers.

The name of Dedwen is also matter of discussion, and its translation is still debated. Wilkinson proposed the reading “the one who opens the hand,”³³ but if this were the case, *wn-drt* would be expected. Bunsen translated it as “establishing beings,”³⁴ identifying the first *dd* with the verb *wdj* “place.” A recent proposal also interprets the name as a form of the same verb, in this case a passive participle, together with a stative *wn*, “the one who is given, being existent,” in connection with the nature of the god as a self-generator.³⁵ However, the possibility that the name of the god does not have an Egyptian origin but is instead linguistically connected to the geographic area of the Sudan cannot be ignored. Gauthier observed that the radical *tōd* (the Ded of Dedwen) in the contemporary Nubian language means “young.”³⁶ As has been shown, Dedwen appears in the Pyramid Texts as *ḥwn šmʿw*, “young boy of the Nile Valley,” suggesting that he was a child divinity, such as Harpocrates or Nefertem. His name could be an “Egyptianization” of an original Kushite name with a root *dd*, meaning “young,” along with the Egyptian *ḥwn*, with the same meaning, resulting in the name *dd-wn* Dedwen.

Throughout his history, the god maintains the epithet *ḥntj t3 stj*, “foremost of Ta-Seti (Lower Nubia),” which also appears in the Pyramid Texts examples. His mother was said to be the goddess Medjat, and he also receives the epithet “the good Medjai” in his temple on Philae.³⁷ It is possible that Dedwen was a deity specifically worshipped by the Medja people. Like the first mention of Dedwen, the earliest textual Egyptian references to the Medja are all dated to the 6th Dynasty: in the autobiography of Uni, two rock inscriptions

32 See the autobiographies of Weni and Harkhuf, as well as other evidence like a graffito from Tomas with the 6th Dynasty officials Teti-ankh, Sabi and Iri. See: G. E. Kadish, “Old Kingdom Egyptian Activity in Nubia: Some Reconsiderations,” *JEA* 52 (1966), 23–4.

33 J. G. Wilkinson, *Topography of Thebes being a Short Account of the Principal Objects Worthy of Notice in the Valley of the Nile to the Second Cataract and Wadde Samneh, with the Fyoom, Oases, and Eastern Desert, from Sooez to Berenice [...]* (London: John Murray, 1835), 500.

34 C. C. J. von Bunsen, *Aegyptens Stelle in der Weltgeschichte* (1845).

35 J. P. Pätznick, “De l’origine du nom divin Ddwn,” *CCdE* 18 (2014), 67–9.

36 H. Gauthier, “Le dieu nubien Doudoun,” *RevEg* n.s. 2 (1920), 36.

37 Pätznick, “nom divin Ddwn,” 62.

from Hesa and Aswan, a passage from the Decrees of Dashur, and a letter from Elephantine.³⁸

An alternative interpretation of his origin has been proposed by Pätznick, who argues that Dedwen could be the divinized form of an early Nubian ruler, perhaps the subjugated enemy that appears in a fragmentary limestone stele of Khasekhem from Hierakonpolis with his head under the signs *t3 stj*. Pätznick suggests a cryptographic reading *tp t3 stj* “the Chief of Nubia,” and the name Dedwen, “the one who has been placed,” would then recall his lying position.³⁹ His argument, however, is not particularly strong, because the representation of the subjugated enemy is common in Egyptian iconography, and it is not clear whether it refers to a general enemy or a specific one. Moreover, Dedwen is a god who becomes highly integrated in the Egyptian pantheon, even appearing as the only non-Egyptian divinity alongside twenty-nine Egyptian gods on the northeastern face of the Seventh Pylon in Karnak under the reign of Sety I.⁴⁰ It is unlikely that a god embodying a subjugated enemy ruler would be worshiped as a deity in Egypt—unless, of course, the god’s origin had been forgotten throughout the centuries.

The connection between Dedwen and Kush in Egypt is undeniable. However, the question of whether he really was an indigenous Nubian god is entirely speculative, since he is not explicitly involved in any known Kushite religious traditions. This is, of course, a general problem concerning pre-Meroitic Nubian religion, due to the lack of gods’ depictions and the absence of textual evidence. A survey of the available archaeological evidence concerning Dedwen in Nubia and Egypt is provided in Table 1 below (§ 6).

As shown by the evidence, a statistical survey to identify Egyptian, as opposed to Sudanese, attestations is not very informative, since most sources are still Egyptian, even those found in Sudanese territory. People that dedicated *proskynemata* were Egyptians, judging by their personal names,⁴¹ and temples in Nubia were built by Egyptian pharaohs, with the exception of Taharqa, Altanarsa, and Aspalta—in whose reigns Nubian religion was too influenced by Egyptian traditions to be considered informative.

There are, however, some aspects of the relationship between Dedwen and Amun hat are worthy of discussion here. Dedwen, wearing the horned-sun-disk crown, appears at Gebel Barkal in the same temple where the god Amun is attested with a ram head or horns. In the Coronation Stele of Aspalta,

38 S. Giuliani, “Medja Sources in the Old Kingdom,” *DE* 42 (1998) 42.

39 Pätznick, “nom divin Ddwn,” 72–4.

40 Gauthier, “Doudoun,” 27–8.

41 Gauthier, “Doudoun,” 11.

lines 1–3 read: “the soldiers of his Majesty are in the city of the Pure Mountain, the name of the god who is there is Dedwen of Khenty-Nefert, he is the god of Kush”; in lines 11–13 of the same inscription there is a mention of “Amun-Ra, lord of the throne of the Two Lands in the Pure Mountain of Kush.” A further connection between both gods is seen in the Nectanebo II scene at Philae, where Dedwen is described as “the god of Abaton”: Amun-Ra also has the epithet of “lord of Abaton” in the Temple of Dakka during the reign of Arkamani, and at Debod in the time of Adikhalamani.⁴²

It is therefore possible that there was a syncretism between both gods from the 25th Dynasty onward. It could be understood within the context of an association of the most powerful god of the Egyptian pantheon from the New Kingdom on with a local Kushite god, and therefore the Kushite royalty. Evidence of a ram-headed Amun originally from Nubia, called Aman in Nubia and maybe related to an unknown local Nubian god of the inundation, could shed light on this issue. Ancient Kerma rituals attest to the burial of rams with crowns decorated with sun disks and feathers as part of some kind of obscure ritual,⁴³ and the same costume is attested in Elephantine for the god Khnum.⁴⁴

Dedwen appears together with Khnum from the Middle Kingdom to the New Kingdom, and this couple may have been an Egyptian way of worshiping and representing an original dyad of indigenous Kushite gods: Khnum as god of the inundation, and therefore bearer of life, represented as a ram, and Dedwen as a child god related to regeneration. The ram iconography shared by Khnum and the unknown Kushite god, perhaps in an abstract immaterial way, then became associated with Amun, as the god in question is called Aman in post-New Kingdom times, and it passes to Dedwen in Gebel Barkal. Therefore, the original dyad of Kushite gods begins to share distinctive life-bearer attributes in a syncretistic process that sees both of them associated with Amun. The prominent position of the creative and regenerative powers in the Kushite

42 Kormysheva, “Le nom d'Amon,” 255.

43 Rondot, “Les dieux de Méroé,” 193. There is also ram iconography in statuary from Kerma, Askut, and Aniba. Kormysheva, “Iconography of Amun in Nubia,” 103; É. Kormysheva, “On the Origin and Evolution of the Amun Cult in Nubia” in *Nubian Studies 1998: Proceedings of the Ninth Conference of the International Society of Nubian Studies, August 21–26, 1998, Boston, Massachusetts*, ed. T. Kendall (Boston: Northeastern University, 2004), 113–4. The Kushite 25th Dynasty show a preference for the anthropomorphic criocephalic, or zoomorphic ram shape of Amun in Egypt and Nubia, see: G. Andreu-Lanoë, “Tête du dieu Amon sous forme de belier” in *Méroé: un empire sur le Nil*, eds. M. Baud, A. Sackho-Autissier and S. Labbé-Toutée (Paris: Musée du Louvre éditions, 2010), 235.

44 Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods*, 195.

pantheon is also manifest in the purely Sudanese iconographical repertoire, often appearing in association with Amun himself.⁴⁵

There is one more aspect of the textual evidence for Dedwen that requires investigation. The god is mentioned in the Pyramid Texts along with a different deity, Iahes/Rahes. This latter figure is elsewhere often referred to as “the fore of the land of the Nile Valley (*t3 šmꜥ*).” The expression *t3 šmꜥ* is often translated as “Upper Egypt,” but Iahes/Rahes is mentioned here together with Dedwen and Sopdu, divinities related to foreign lands; therefore, in this case the reference *t3 šmꜥ* more concretely describes the southern land of Nubia or even the territory surrounding the first cataract.

The god Iahes/Rahes is not very well attested in Egypt, although he is associated with crocodiles and maybe identical with the god Sobek, who appears during the Middle Kingdom.⁴⁶ Iahes is also identified with the ram Khnum and Khnum-Ra in ritual scenes from the temple of Esna.⁴⁷ It is argued here that Iahes was the Egyptian rendering of the name of an indigenous, otherwise unattested Kushite god with a ram or crocodile shape, associated with Khnum. Iahes’s crocodile appearance would be coherent with his connection to water and inundation, and the ram-god Khnum himself has the epithet of “Lord of the crocodiles.”⁴⁸ In that case, the Pyramid Text passages would be the earliest Egyptian attestation of the local Kushite divine dyad, which would be then worshipped by the Egyptians as Dedwen and Khnum. The existence

45 Innovative devices in the cultic material culture such as the libation tables with a huge depiction of an *ankh* sign (V. Rondot and L. Török, “La maison du dieu: le temple,” in *Méroé: un empire sur le Nil*, eds. M. Baud, A. Sackho-Autissier, and S. Labbé-Toutée [Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2010], 232), or the preference of the *Sema-Tawy* motif as a couple of inundation gods who tie two papyrus stalks (K. Kroeper, “L’autel solaire du temple d’Amon à Naga,” in *Méroé: un empire sur le Nil*, eds. M. Baud, A. Sackho-Autissier and S. Labbé-Toutée [Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2010], 234). The peculiar findings of an Egyptian ram-headed scarab, and a criocephalic god with a moon-disk crown in the temple of el-Hassa are also worthy of mention, see: V. Rondot, “Le matériel cultuel du temple à Amon d’el-Hassa,” in *Méroé: un empire sur le Nil*, eds. M. Baud, A. Sackho-Autissier, and S. Labbé-Toutée (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2010), 237; and V. Rondot, “El-Hassa: un temple à Amon dans l’île de Méroé au Ier siècle de notre ère” *CRAIBL* 156 (2012), 167–82. A storejar with a depiction of a ram-headed deity and a lotus was found in tomb ARA 9 in the Late New Kingdom-25th Dynasty cemetery of Hillat el-Arab, see: I. V. Liverani, “Two Field Seasons in the Napata Region,” *Kush* 17 (1997), fig. 9.2.

46 E. Henfling, “Iahes/Rahes,” in *LAe* 3, 112.

47 S. Sauneron, *Le Temple d’Esna* III (Cairo: Publications de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1968), 225, 227; 381, 414.

48 Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods*, 194; Moreover, some plaques are attested in Sudanese sites like Sanam showing criosphinxes and crocodiles (Kormysheva, “Origin and evolution of the Amun cult,” 114).

of an anonymous Kushite crocodile god sometimes represented along with a ram deity has been previously proposed,⁴⁹ and can be corroborated by this discussion.

Another divinity that appears in very few Egyptian sources from the Middle Kingdom onwards in relation with Nubia is Miket. She is only attested in Lower Nubia until the 22nd Dynasty, and is known as the goddess of the first cataract. Her name could derive from the Meroitic words *mk* (god) and *kdj* (woman).⁵⁰ She was Onuris's wife and another form of the Sun's eye in her leonine form.⁵¹

As is shown in Table 2 below (§ 6), the goddess appears only in Upper Nubia or the border region between Egypt and Nubia, which demonstrates her connection with the first cataract of the Nile. Her appearance is always framed within the cultic context of the first cataract triad: Khnum, Anukis, and Satis.⁵² Was she seen as another consort of Khnum? Even considering the lack of information, it could be argued that the names Miket (*mjkt*) and Anukis (*ʿnkt*) are Egyptian renderings of an early indigenous Kushite goddess's name, which may have had in its root a word related to the Meroitic *kdj*, "woman."

To sum up, there are enough reasons to believe that local Kushite people had their own pantheon, without Egyptian influence on it, much earlier than the Meroitic period.⁵³ The traditions, rituals, and beliefs of the people who inhabited the surroundings of the first cataract and the border region conveyed those Kushite gods to their northern neighbors. Gods such as Khnum, Anukis, and Dedwen thus became closely associated with the south of Egypt and Nubia throughout Egyptian history.

49 É. Kormysheva, "Amun of Pnubs on the Plaques from Kush," in *Recent Research in Kushite History and Archaeology: Proceedings of the 8th International Conference for Meroitic Studies*, ed. D. A. Welsby (London: British Museum, 1999), 287; A. Lohwasser, "Devil and God: The Crocodile in Kush," in *La pioche et la plume: autour du Soudan, du Liban et de la Jordanie. Hommages archéologiques à Patrice Lenoble*, eds. V. Rondot, F. Alpi, and F. Villeneuve (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2011), 383–9.

50 Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt Teil 2," 37.

51 Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods*, 179.

52 Habachi, "Divinities," 217–8.

53 It is generally accepted that Nubians become completely "Egyptianized" after the New Kingdom due to the disappearance of local burial customs, L. Török, *The Image of the Ordered World in Ancient Nubian Art: The Construction of the Kushite Mind, 800 BC–300 AD* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 264.

4 Meroitic Gods

The earliest certain attestation of an indigenous deity in the official religious pantheon of the ancient Sudan is found in the Lion Temple of Musawwarat es-Sufra,⁵⁴ dating back to approximately 225 BC. At that time, native deities who do not have an Egyptian counterpart first begin to be represented in the monumental art that is known to us. Unfortunately, the origin and functions of those gods are still partly obscure.

As the artistic-archaeological evidence stands, Apedemak was the most important Meroitic god. He had his main cultic centers in the south of the Sudan, Naqa, Meroe and Musawwarat es-Sufra, but he was also known and represented in the north.⁵⁵ However, Apedemak was never worshipped in the north to the same extent as Aman, and it has been argued that their cults stood in opposition, maybe as two rival state gods.⁵⁶

Dedwen is usually represented as a man with a lion's head wearing a *hemhem*-crown.⁵⁷ As a war god, he is usually depicted holding a bow or arrows. In two reliefs from Musawwarat es-Sufra and Naqa, he appears to wear some kind of leather armor, which is also worn by the king in non-solemn occasions.⁵⁸ In addition to this aspect of the god, commonly represented when (?) worshipped by the king and his sons,⁵⁹ Apedemak was also the beneficiary of a very extensive popular cult, as reflected in the numerous lion graffiti at Musawwarat es-Sufra.⁶⁰ The popular cult of Apedemak was probably due to

54 F. Hintze, *Musawwarat es-Sufra, Band I,1, der Löwentempel, Textband* (Berlin: Akademie, 1993).

55 Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt Teil 2," 32.

56 N. B. Millet, "Meroitic Religion," in *Meroitistische Forschungen 1980: Akten der 4. internationalen Tagung für meroitistische Forschungen vom 24. bis 29. November 1980 in Berlin*, ed. F. Hintze (Berlin: Akademie, 1984), 118.

57 The *hemhem* crown originated in Egypt in the 18th Dynasty and the iconography passed to the Egyptian temples in Nubia, then to Napata, and then became introduced in Meroitic iconography, being worn by Apedemak and the kings. L. V. Zabkar, *Apedemak, Lion God of Meroe: A Study in Egyptian-Meroitic Syncretism* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1975), 102–3.

58 Zabkar, *Apedemak*, 13.

59 Millet, "Meroitic Religion," 118 claims that he is the male deity "*par excellence*" and is to be worshipped by a warrior king and his male sons. He bases his ideas on the representations in Musawwarat es-Sufra showing the king together with his sons, Sebiuameker and Arensnuphis, confronting Apedemak.

60 C. Kleinitz, "The Graffiti of Musawwarat es-Sufra: Current Research on Historic Inscriptions, Images and Markings at the Great Enclosure," *S&N* 18 (2014), 93–103.

his role as a protector god and provider of fertility. He is mentioned in his hymn in Musawwarat es-Sufra as “the one who created nourishment for all” and he is referred as “the one who protects” in an inscription from Debod.⁶¹ That the god also was seen as a creator has been proposed through the interpretation of his name as a derivation from the proto-root **Abede*, meaning “demiurge,” in languages related to Meroitic.⁶²

There are three unusual representations of Apedemak that are difficult to explain. Two of them show the god with a serpent body, human arms, and lion head. The first is a relief on a pylon at the Naqa temple, and the second appears in the fragments of a decorated leather garment from Semna south. Žabkar provides some parallels, in which Isis (in a mythological papyrus from the 21st Dynasty, now in the Louvre Museum), Sekhmet (in a statue at the Museum of Naples), and Wepset (reliefs in Philae), are represented in the same manner, thus suggesting Egyptian influence.⁶³ In fact, the representation of Apedemak’s serpent body can more easily be explained by means of the apotropaic aspect of the god. Isis frequently appears associated with snakes and scorpions, because she was a goddess who protected against their bites,⁶⁴ and the king’s protectors Sekhmet and Wepset need to be interpreted in the same manner. The god Bes, who appears together with Apedemak in the Lion Temple of Musawwarat es-Sufra,⁶⁵ and who has the leonine appearance, warrior aspect, and apotropaic functions in common with him, is also very often depicted in combination with snakes and other dangerous animals in artwork such as the Metternich Stele.

The third peculiar representation of Apedemak is a depiction of the lion-headed god with three heads and two arms on each side. This strange scene appears outside on the back-wall of the Lion-Temple in Naqa, and it is highly unlikely that it developed under Indian influence, as Vycichl suggested.⁶⁶ Instead, it is more plausible that, as argued by Monneret de Villard,⁶⁷ an artistic device was employed to represent two simultaneous actions of the god,

61 Séguenny, “religion populaire,” 150.

62 Rondot, “Les dieux de Méroé,” 197.

63 Zabkar, *Apedemak*, 38.

64 See, for example, the 19th Dynasty papyrus containing the myth of Isis and Ra at the Museo Egizio of Turin, with an endnote explaining that the papyrus needs to be introduced in beer or wine to heal someone from a snake’s bite (Cat. 1993 RCGE 17478). Cf. also the numerous representations of Isis with snakes in the Greek-Roman period such as the examples from the Iseum of Pompey.

65 Hintze, *Musawwarat es-Sufra*, fig. 109–11.

66 W. Vycichl, “The Present State of Meroitic Studies,” *Kush* 6 (1958), 174–6.

67 U. M. de Villard, “Il Culto del Sole a Meroe,” *RSE* 2 (1942), 127–8.

namely facing the king (with one head and two arms) and providing him with the breath of life (another head and other two pair of arms). The third head would have been added to bring symmetry to the scene.

Žabkar suggests a syncretism between the Meroitic god Apedemak and the Egyptian Maheš.⁶⁸ He asserts that Maheš's iconography and function, such as his warrior, protective, and solar aspects, coincide with what is known of Apedemak from Meroe. Maheš's main cultic center was located in Tell el-Muqdam in the Delta, but in the 23rd Dynasty Osorkon III erected a temple for him at Bubastis, and the god's cult later spread southwards to Dendera, Edfu, and Philae, eventually arriving to Lower Nubia in Debod and Dendur.⁶⁹

The name Maheš (*mꜣj-ḥꜣꜣ*), which literally means "lion with a terrible glance,"⁷⁰ is attested as early as the Pyramid Texts, but apparently without any divine connotation. It is only from the Middle Kingdom onwards that theophoric names with Maheš appear.⁷¹ Attention should be brought here to the name of the god whose origin has previously been discussed, Raheš/Iaheš. A word *rꜣw* for "lion" in Egyptian is well attested,⁷² and its variant *rꜣ-ḥꜣꜣ r-ḥꜣꜣ* could have been reinterpreted in later periods, when the graphemes *s* and *z* represent a single phoneme, as "lion with a terrible glance." This word would then have merged with the already existing *mꜣj-ḥꜣꜣ* with the same meaning. Interestingly there are no more attestations of the god Iaheš/Raheš after the Middle Kingdom, coinciding with the time when the first theophoric names bearing Maheš appear.

Egyptian imagery clearly associated lions with Kush, since the goddess that represented the Sun's Eye had a leonine appearance: Sekhmet, Mut, or Tefnut. Furthermore, Shu, who was in charge of bringing the eye back to Egypt, also had a lion shape and was closely related to Apedemak.⁷³ Moreover, the cult of the lion may be attested in ancient Sudan, since a burial of three young lions has been found in Sanam with no convincing explanation,⁷⁴ and Napatan amulets have appeared in the necropolis of el-Kurru representing winged naked goddesses with lion heads.⁷⁵ Further research on Egyptian, as opposed to Kushite,

68 Zabkar, *Apedemak*, 52–70.

69 Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods*, 178–9.

70 Wb 11, 12.2–5.

71 Zabkar, *Apedemak*, 52; Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods*, 178–9.

72 Wb 11, 403.8.

73 Monneret de Villard, "Il Culto del Sole," 113.

74 F. L. Griffith, *Oxford Excavations in Nubia* (AAA 10; Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1923), 81.

75 A. Sachko-Autissier, "Sur quelques amulettes napatéennes de la nécropole d'el-Kurru," in *Nubian Studies 1998: Proceedings of the Ninth Conference of the International Society*

iconography and symbology of lions is needed in order to explain the relation between the Egyptian feline and Sudanese religious practices. Such research could prove the existence of early indigenous traditions and cults of which no archaeological material has been preserved.

If Mahes merged with Iahes, a former Egyptian rendering of a Kushite ram-crocodile god, taking thereafter the shape of a lion, the same animal would then represent a later Meroitic god, Apedemak. If the god Mahes was seen as an originally ancient Kushite deity, the adoption of his functions and attributes by a god embodying Meroitic royal power represents a novel phenomenon, and a different dimension of interest. This process of syncretism should be explained as a political strategy and as an attempt by the Meroitic royalty to revive a past that they experienced as the cradle of their cultural identity.

Much less is known about the rest of the Meroitic gods. Sebiumeke and Arensnuphis appear together as a dyad in representations in Temple 300, the Lion Temple, Room 108 of Musawwarat es-Sufra, and also in Naqa in the Lion and Amun temples.⁷⁶ The creator aspect of Sebiumeke can be perceived from an inscription in Musawwarat es-Sufra in which the god says: "I give you the lifetime of Ra in the heaven ... I give you everything that arises from the night, everything that appears in the day ... I give you the year of the sun, the month of the moon in joy."⁷⁷ The small temple of Musawwarat IIA could have been devoted to this god (?).⁷⁸ Arensnuphis seems to have had the same iconographical attributes as Onuris, with a long garment and a crown with four feathers.⁷⁹ It has been argued that Arensnuphis is the mere (?) personification

of Nubian Studies, August 21–26, 1998, Boston, Massachusetts, ed. T. Kendall (Boston, MA: Northeastern University, 2004), 390.

76 Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt Teil 2," 35.

77 Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt Teil 2," 35–6. Rondot advanced that the pharaonic iconography of Sebiumeke is due to a reinterpretation of the god as the divinized king Shabaka whose name would mean "It is he (the god) Sebo." The meaning of Sebiumeke in this case would be "the god Sebo", see: V. Rondot, "L'Empereur et le Petit Prince: les Deux Colosses d'Argo: Iconographie Symbolique et Datation," in *La pioche et la plume: autour du Soudan, du Liban et de la Jordanie: Hommages archéologiques à Patrice Lenoble*, eds. V. Rondot, F. Alpi, and F. Villeneuve (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2011), 438.

78 S. Wenig, "Das Gebäude IIA von Musawwarat es-Sufra," in *Meroitistische Forschungen 1980: Akten der 4. internationalen Tagung für meroitistische Forschungen vom 24. bis 29. November 1980 in Berlin*, ed. F. Hintze (Berlin: Akademie, 1984), 183–7. He claims that single-room temples were devoted to Meroitic deities, but Apedemak and Arensnuphis can be excluded as the main god of the building IIA.

79 Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt Teil 2," 35.

of an epithet, rather than a genuine (?) Meroitic god.⁸⁰ Arensnuphis is identified with Apedemak in a demotic graffito in Naqa,⁸¹ and his syncretism with Shu and Onuris would further his association with the Meroitic lion-god. It is therefore possible that Arensnuphis and Sebiuwerker were the development of the original couple of local gods rendered by Egyptians in the Old and Middle Kingdom as Iahes/Khnum and Dedwen. As previously mentioned, Iahes was perhaps the origin of Mahes, who then becomes identified with Apedemak, while Dedwen, a god of regeneration, was easily associated to Sebiuwerker and his cosmogonic aspects.

Of the Meroitic god Mash nothing is known apart from a possible relation to the solar cult⁸² and the many priestly titles from Karanog and Sablul.⁸³ No iconography of Mash or Ariten⁸⁴ is known, while the opposite problem exists with an anonymous goddess who has a hawk on top of her head represented in the Lion Temples of Musawwarat es-Sufra and Naqa, and Amara, or a deity with a moon on top of the head in the Lion Temple of Naqa and the bracelet of Amanishakheto,⁸⁵ with no known name.

5 Conclusions

Egyptian gods were entirely integrated into Kushite beliefs and were worshipped in the Sudan along with local gods in both popular and official contexts. The Egyptian gods Bes and Thoth, on the one hand, are good examples of divinities represented in monumental art while also being the subject of personal piety in amulets and graffiti. On the other hand, Apedemak was a local Meroitic warrior god who became the state god of Kush and protector of the royalty, together with the Egyptian Amun. He was also venerated by private people who left numerous graffiti in Musawwarat es-Sufra. There was not, therefore, a strongly marked opposition between official and popular religion

80 K. Sethe, *Zur altägyptischen Sage vom Sonnenauge, das in der Fremde war* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912); H. Junker, *Die Onurislegende, Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien* (PHK 59 [1–2]; Vienna: Hölder, 1917).

81 M. de Villard, "Il Culto del Sole," 113.

82 M. de Villard, "Il Culto del Sole," 108–13. His name might be related to the Medieval Nubian word $\text{ḥ}a\text{ḳ}a\text{ḷ}$ and modern Nubian *masil* both meaning "sun."

83 F. L. Griffith, *Karanòg: The Meroitic Inscriptions of Shablûl and Karanòg* (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1911).

84 Probably just an epithet of Amun. M. de Villard, "Il Culto del Sole," 126.

85 Lohwasser, "Die Götterwelt Teil 2," 37–8.

in Kush, as was the case in Egypt. Their classification under one or another of those categories, if either, was never marked by the geographical origin of the deities.

Even if some details of the iconography of Meroitic gods such as the *hemhem*-crown or *ankh*-signs were doubtlessly influenced by Egyptian models, it seems that other features, such as ram horns originated in Kush. Although a thorough consideration of the ritualistic aspect of felines in the Nile Valle is beyond the scope of this paper, the iconography of lions in both Egyptian and Sudanese contexts often shows a notable Kushite inspiration. Further research should investigate whether the feline imagery is reminiscent of an earlier cult of lions in the Sudan.

There is not only firm evidence to argue for a pre-Meroitic local pantheon in some areas of Kush but also enough material to reconstruct it partially. Dedwen and Iahes/Rahes were probably the Egyptian rendering of two indigenous gods worshipped as a dyad, one related to regeneration, and the other a god of inundation, associated with rams, crocodiles, and Khnum in Egypt. The name of Rahes was perhaps reinterpreted in the Middle Kingdom as “lion of the terrible glance” and developed into a god called Mahes, whose attributes would be transferred in Meroitic times to Apedemak. Apedemak was identified with Arensnuphis, and maybe his partner god Sebiemeker was seen as a development of Iahes’s partner, Dedwen himself. Miket and Anukis are probably identical, and their names are Egyptian renderings of some local goddess with the Meroitic word *kdj*, “woman,” in her name.

In sum, Meroitic gods seem to be a development of ill-attested early indigenous traditions. In the border region between Egypt and Sudan, those religious practices were in continuous contact with one another since the time of the Old Kingdom, which facilitated the introduction of Kushite traditions into Egypt, and their reciprocal adoption and reinterpretation. Those unattested indigenous Kushite gods became represented in Egypt as Dedwen and the gods of the cataract, and reinterpreted in Meroitic times, perhaps in an attempt to recover an ancient tradition that was experienced as reminiscent of earlier indigenous roots and identity.

6 Tables

TABLE 1 Survey of attestations of Dedwen in Egypt and Nubia⁸⁶

Attestation	Context	Notes
Pyramid Texts in Saqqara	Lower Egypt (2345–2181 BC)	Appears as “Fore of Ta Seti” and “Young Boy of the Nile Valley.”
Temple in the fortress of Semna	Nubia, time of Sesostriis III (1878–1841 BC) Reconstruction in the time of Thutmose III (1477 BC approx.)	Two dedicatory inscriptions for him appear in two nearby rocks. Devoted to Dedwen, Khnum, and Sesostriis III divinized.
Inscription on a statue of the king Khutawyre Wegaf in Semna	Nubia, Second Intermediate Period (1794–1757 BC)	
Proskynema in a rock in Semna	Nubia, Middle Kingdom? (2055–1650 BC)	
Temple in the fortress of Kumna	Nubia, time of Thutmose II–III (1493–1425 BC)	Devoted to Dedwen, Khnum, and Sesostriis III divinized.
Rock temple of Ellesia	Nubia, time of Thutmose III (1479–1425 BC)	Devoted to Amun-Ra, but Dedwen appears represented along with divinities such as Khnum, Anukis, and Sesostriis III divinized.
Stela in Konosso	Border region, time of Thutmose IV (1401–1391 BC)	Commemorating the king’s victory over enemies.
Temple of Deir el-Bahari	Upper Egypt, time of Hatshepsut (1479–1457 BC)	Dedwen receives the title “who inhabits the foreign lands of the West” for the first time.

86 Table created through the comprehensive gathering of attestations in Gauthier, “Doudoun,” 1–35.

TABLE 1 Survey of attestations of Dedwen in Egypt and Nubia (*cont.*)

Attestation	Context	Notes
Seventh Pylon of Karnak	Upper Egypt, time of Sety I (1290–1279 BC)	
Western annexed room to the Temple of Gebel Barkal	Nubia, time of Taharqa (690–664 BC)	Only attestation of the horned-sun-disk crown for Dedwen.
Edifice of Taharqa in Karnak	Upper Egypt, time of Taharqa (690–664 BC)	Horus representing Egypt; Sopdu, Asia; Sobek, Lybia; and Dedwen, Nubia.
Fragment from temple B700 at Gebel Barkal	Nubia, time of Altanarsa (633–623 BC)	
Stele of the Coronation of Aspalta	Nubia, time of Aspalta (573 BC approx.)	Both Dedwen and Amun-Ra described as lords of Nubia in different lines.
Central gate of the great pylon of the Temple of Isis in Philae	Border region, time of Nectanebo II (360–342 BC)	Dedwen mentioned as “Lord of Abaton” for the first time.
Temple of Isis in Philae	Border region, time of Ptolemy VII (145 BC approx.)	Evidence of the triad Arensnuphis-Toth-Dedwen.
Temple of Arensnuphis in Philae	First cataract, time of Tiberius (42 BC–37 AD)	Identification of Arensnuphis with Dedwen.

TABLE 2 Survey of attestations of Miket in Egypt and Nubia

Attestation	Context	Notes
Middle Kingdom statue of Irgemtef in Elephantine ^a	Border region, Middle Kingdom (2055–1650 BC approx.)	Miket mentioned together with Khnum, Anukis, and Satis.
Chapel of Amenyatu in the Sanctuary of Heqaib in Elephantine ^b	Border region (1803–1649 BC)	Miket mentioned together with Khnum, Anukis, and Satis.

TABLE 2 Survey of attestations of Miket in Egypt and Nubia (*cont.*)

Attestation	Context	Notes
Southern temple of Buhen ^c	Nubia, New Kingdom (1550–1077 BC)	Mentioned as mistress of <i>pr-nw</i> , primitive sanctuary of the Lower Egyptian deity Wadjet.
Rock stela of Thutmosis III in Sehel ^d	Border region, time of Thutmosis III (1479–1425 BC)	Miket mentioned together with Khnum, Anukis, and Satis.
Rock temple of Horemheb in Gebel es-Silsila ^e	Border region, time of Horemheb (1319–1292 BC)	Miket appears together with other deities, among which are the gods of the cataract region.
Temple of Beit el-Wali ^f	Nubia, time of Ramesses II (1279–1213 BC)	Mentioned as mistress of <i>pr-wr</i> , primitive sanctuary of the Upper Egyptian deity Nekhbet. The gods of the cataract are also represented in the temple.
Elephantine ^g	Border region, time of Amasis (570–526 BC)	Other gods of the cataract are also mentioned.

a L. Habachi, "Divinities Adored in the Area of Kalabsha, with a Special Reference to the Goddess Miket," in *Sixteen Studies on Lower Nubia*, ed. L. Habachi (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'Archeologie orientale, 1981), 213–5.

b Habachi, "Divinities," 212–3.

c D. Randall-MacIver and L. Woolley, *Buhen* (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1911), 56, 60.

d Habachi, "Divinities," 215–7.

e J. F. Champollion, *Monuments de l'Egypte et de la Nubie: notices descriptives conformes aux manuscrits autographes redigés*, vol. 2 (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1889), 264.

f H. Ricke, G. R. Hughes, and E. F. Wente, *The Beit el-Wali Temple of Ramesses II* (Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition; Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1967), 30.

g Habachi, "Divinities," 217.