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Iconographical Evidence of Egyptian Influence in Upper Nubia

Sara Yassin Mostafa Mahmoud ^a , Ahmed Mohamed Aboelmagd ^b ,
Walaa M Abd Elhakim ^c ,

^a *PhD Researcher, Tourist Guidance Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Minia University, Egypt*

^b *Professor, Tourist Guidance Department, Faculty of Tourism and hotels, Minia University, Egypt*

^c *Assistant Professor, Tourist Guidance Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Minia University, Egypt*

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Abstract

Art is one of the most prominent aspects of civilization; it characterizes one culture from the other. Egyptian art reflected the essence and character of its civilization in its entire religious, political, and economic aspects. Based on its art production found in certain foreign countries, one can easily estimate the level of its influence and expansion in these neighboring lands. The current research deals with some examples found in Nubia, which have pure Egyptian artistic style that corresponds to their counterparts in Egypt. Egypt's Political, Economic, and Religious influence on this region confirmed by the finding of the current evidence. This paper includes examples and comparisons of those objects with the ancient Egyptian art style which confirms with determination the Egyptian influence in the south.

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Introduction

The archaeological sources related to the history and civilization of ancient Nubia is very rare compared with the history and civilization of its closed neighbors. In fact, few historical remains left by the Nubians, thus, we depend on the few miscellaneous left by the Egyptian kings who cared about the South in general, and Nubia in particular. Those kings have given this region great consideration as they were aware of its importance as a southern gateway to Egypt, overlooking the neighboring countries of Africa in the south and the need to secure the borders and to benefit from its wealth (Adams, 1995). Links with Nubia are very old; they existed since the early humans in the region, but these relations often fluctuated. Historical sources refer to the Egyptian attempts to submit the area south of the First Cataract, or at least Lower Nubia submitted by the Egyptian reign (Ciatowicz, 1998). Since the fifth Dynasty, the title of “the ruler of the south” has appeared, and its holder controlled the distance between El-Kab, at the North and the Second Cataract in the South. Their main task was to collect taxes from those areas and to lead the military campaigns to secure the borders, as well as to lead campaigns to quarries and mines. Together with leading inspectoral campaigns in order to explore the region, and to introduce comprehensive reports to the royal palace (Taylor, 1977).

As a result of the internal political stability in Egypt during the archaic period, the Egyptian external force evolved. The Egyptian kings planned for foreign conquests. Consequently, they achieved these conquests firstly in Nubia, which was the natural extension of Egypt to the south (Erman , 1976) , as Nubia was very rich with natural resources manifested in gold, copper, solid stones such as granite, diorite, and sandstone, as well as many semi-precious stones. This was a reason for the acquisition of Egyptian kings. Nubia represented an important strategic point; it was part of the commercial road, linking the peoples of the Mediterranean Sea in the North with southern Africa in the south. Nubia was also famous for its wonderful products such as ivory, incense, tropical animals (Taylor, 1991).

One of the oldest references to the Egyptian artistic influence in the Nubia, dates back to the unification period; the palette called “The lion and The Eagles- now in the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford” –which represents a high-ranked person submitting captive, his arms were tied behind his back, the content indicates control and hegemony. The name of the captive’s origin was interpreted as “tasty” which means Nubia (١٩٩٢ ، عبدالعزيز صالح).

Examples of Artworks

First: the incense burners

1.1 Qustul Incense burner

The Egyptian artistic influence in the south during the proto-dynastic period is manifested in two incense burners, the most important of which was found among a large group of incense burners within Qustal cemetery in Nubia (Fig. 1), decorated with scenes in Egyptian-style. Among which we find: The royal palace facade, a common feature in ancient Egyptian artworks, known as the “srx”. A boat is represented with an open sail followed by a kneeling prisoner with his hands tied behind his back while the guard is standing behind holding the end of the rope that connects directly to the captive. There is a second with a seated person on board represented in the same appearance of the Egyptian ruler; he is wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt (Ciatowicz , 1986) , with a falcon standing in front of him,

which is the sacred bird of god Horus, which refers to the Egyptian kingship. The third boat has a falcon on a pedestal, in front of him an unknown animal. This incense burner resembles the Egyptian style of royal artwork, manifested in the religious symbols, as well as the attitude of submitting prisoners and rebels (Ciatowicz, 1986).

1.2 Horus Incense Burner

The second incense burner, which was found in the same cemetery, is so badly damaged that it is difficult to interpret the overall of scenes portrayed on it; The remaining part of these scenes (Fig. 2), a falcon representing the sacred bird of god Horus, he carries in his claw a rope that comes out of the royal palace façade, a seated person, who can easily be explained as a king, according to the Egyptian art style. Through these scenes, we find that the majority of the artistic style is similar to the works produced in Egypt in this period, the proto-dynastic period in particular. It is close to the artworks produced at the time of King Narmer, the content refers to a strong Egyptian influence in northern Nubia during this period (Ciatowicz, 1986).

Second: Rock drawings

2.1 inscription of Garf Husein

Numerous rock drawings had been found in Nubia that reflect the depth of the relationship between Nubia and Egypt, they are confirming the immense Egypt's interest in those southern lands. This rock art can be used for interpreting the nature of this relationship, as well as explain military activities, religious thought, and economic purposes.

Rock drawings at Garf Hussein refer to how old were the contacts between Egypt and its neighbors in the south. One of these drawings shows a standing masculine shape of a king, he is wearing the crown of Upper Egypt, in his hand he is carrying a shield (Figure 3), a traditional attitude used by the Egyptian kings in fighting during the archaic period. It is a clear evidence of the Egyptian military existence in those areas, which was meant to secure trade routes and economic exploitation (Weigall, 1906).

2.2 inscription of Gebel Sheikh Soliman

During the reign of king Djer, an inscription shows the Egyptian army at the second cataract, the inscription is carved on a rock at Gebel Sheikh Soliman (Fig. 4) south of Buhen, It records the military campaign carried out by the king. A boat is represented on the side, underneath it, we see bodies of the defeated enemies, and two circles filled with crossed lines, together with the eagle and Crescent, which symbolizes the seized cities. Also, there is a standing prisoner with his hands tied behind his back and the name of king Djer, which can be read clearly (Trigger, 1976). This indicates the Egyptian interest in the region and reflects military and economic activities (سيريل الدريد ، ٢٠٠٠).

2.3 inscription of Toshka

One more example shows the famous Middle Kingdom king Senusert III (fig. 5), while he is smiting a humbled southern rebel, the scene is placed on the rock at Toshka, it gives clear idea of Egypt's interest in the South, and the effort of the twelve's dynasty rulers, manifested in securing trade routes and put an End of the danger of the rebels, the royal cartouche is shown in front of the king, exactly above the rebel, it seems that the iconography has been achieved quickly, as the human

limbs are not quite strapping, although they are painted with the hands of an Egyptian artist, in a very Egyptian style (Leclant , 1978).

2.4 Lions of Thutmose I

During the New Kingdom, and thanks to the magnificent efforts done by the ambitious kings, the artist paid no attention nor consideration for the original and local iconographies, as in this example (fig. 6) we find the lion, in Egyptian style, faced by the name of the King Thutmose I, in this case, the lion evoked the Egyptian King himself, as his animal manifestation, it refers to the domain of Egyptian Kings, as well as Egypt's influence on this region, actually, the depiction was placed on another local one, with no care nor consideration, which supports the view that Egypt's influence was very notable in Nubia during the New Kingdom (Davies , 2017).

2.5 Bulls of Thutmose III

In the current examples the bulls had been portrayed in Egyptian style, (fig. 7) accompanied by hieroglyphic signs that had been placed over the original and local art drawings, which reflects the range of Egypt's influence in the South, the bulls represent Amon, the Egyptian god, in his form of fertility, called "kA mwt.f", "the bull of his mother". The iconography confirms a kind of religious influence in the region (Hart, 2005).

The above-mentioned pieces of evidence are supported by the golden objects found in Egypt, dating back to the Old Kingdom, such as the jewelry found in the tomb of King Djer, among which are four bracelets, which indicates the interest of Egyptian kings in the south (Trigger , 1983).

Concluding Remarks

The examples discussed above are considered clear iconographical evidence of the Egyptian influence on Nubia; based on the existence of a lot of Egyptian royal and non-royal features, appeared and used by the Egyptian artist, manifested in the royal palace façade, the crowns of Egypt, an attitude of smiting enemies, together with the boat shapes represented in a pure Egyptian style, as well as religious symbols represented in the depiction of the falcon, sacred bird of the Egyptian god Horus, the bull and the lion, sacred animals of the moon and the sun gods. They are showing also a kind of absolute domain of Egypt in this region during the New Kingdom period, since they are achieved and placed over the original rock drawings, with no consideration for the local people. The discussed examples give us an important source for the Egyptian influence on its neighbors in the South.

The manufacture of the above-studied evidences indicates that they were made by pure Egyptian hands. It is possible to consider that there were Egyptian artists who lived in Nubia. This suggestion is supported by the strong Egyptian existence in Nubia, Which supports the view that an Egyptian artistic school was present within Nubia territory.

Figures

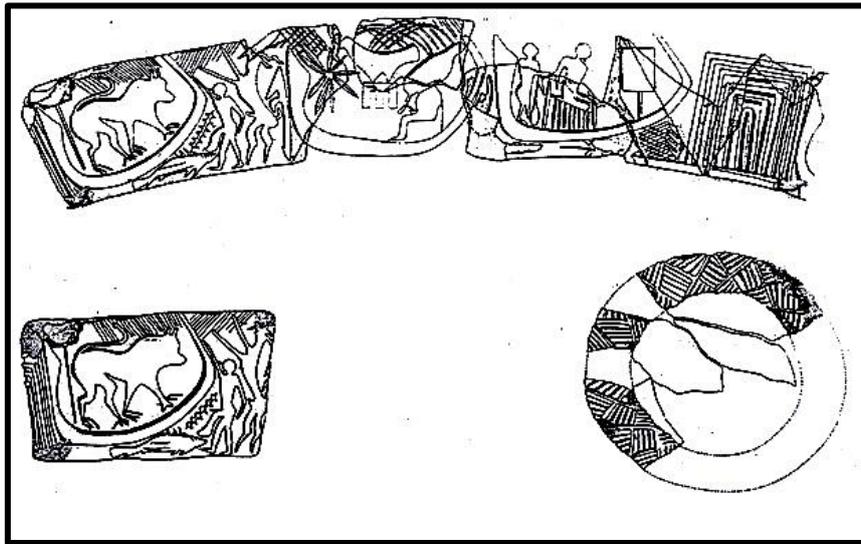


Fig. 1. Incense burner found at Qustul cemetery, Lower Nubia

After, O'Connor, D, Ancient Nubia, 22; William, B, The (A- Group) Royal Cemetery at Qustul, Excavations between Abu Simbel and the Sudan Frontier, Vol. III, Chicago, 1986.

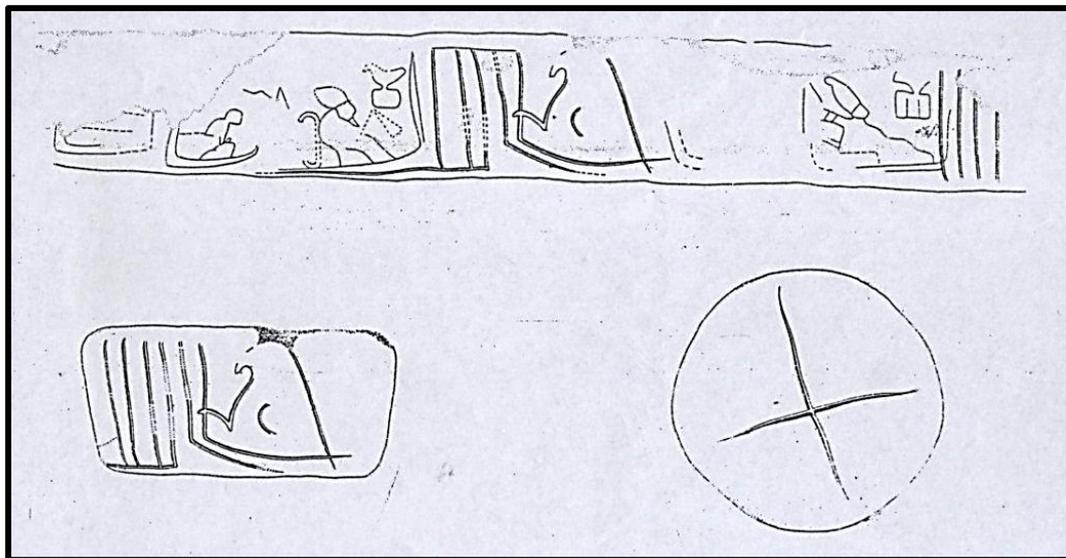
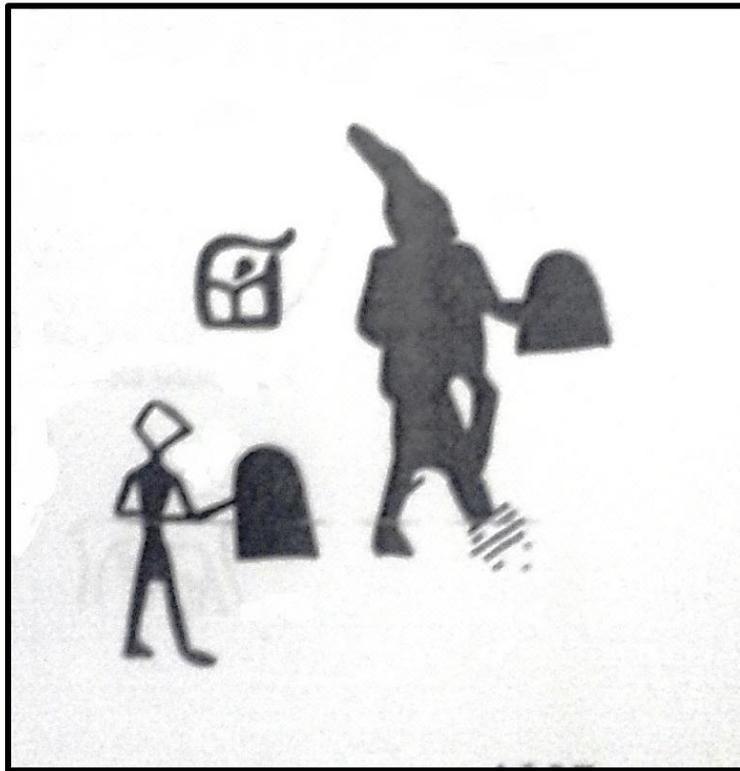


Fig. 2. The so-called "Horus incense burner" from Qustul cemetery, Lower Nubia

After, Ciatowicz, K, The Earliest Evidence of Egypt's Expansion into Nubia, 1998, 19.



*Fig. 3. A primitive graffiti depicting Egyptian-like royal masculine shape,
from Garf Husein, Lower Nubia*

After: Weigall, A., A Report, pl. XXXVII

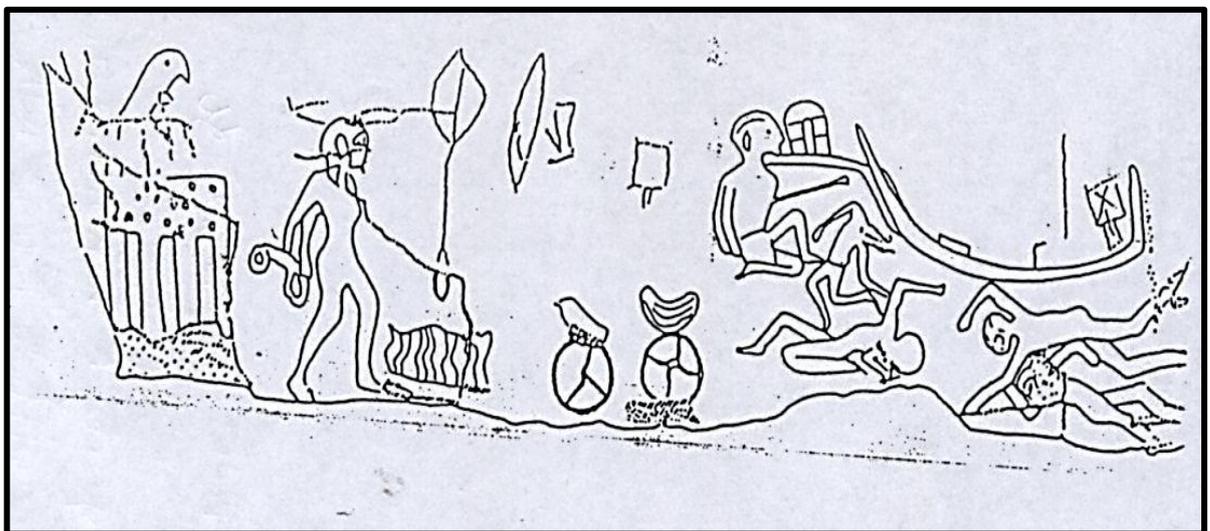


Fig. 4. inscription of King Djer from Gebel Sheikh Soliman, Lower Nubia

(National Museum of Khartoum)

Ciatowicz, K, The Earliest Evidence of Egypt's Expansion into Nubia, 1998, p. 17.

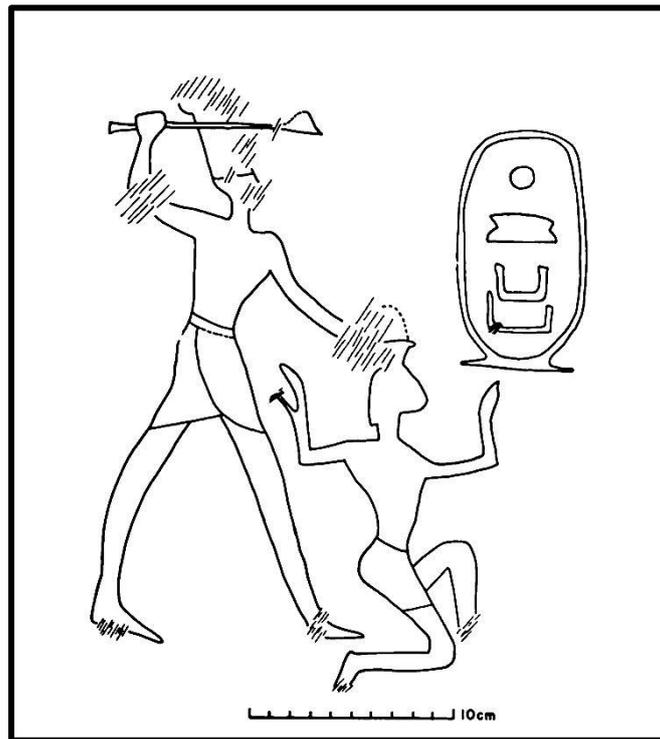


Fig. 5 King Senusert III Smiting an enemy, from Toshka

Leclant, J., Egypt in Nubia during the Old, Middle and New Kingdom, in Africa in Antiquity, Brooklyn, 1978, fig. 42.

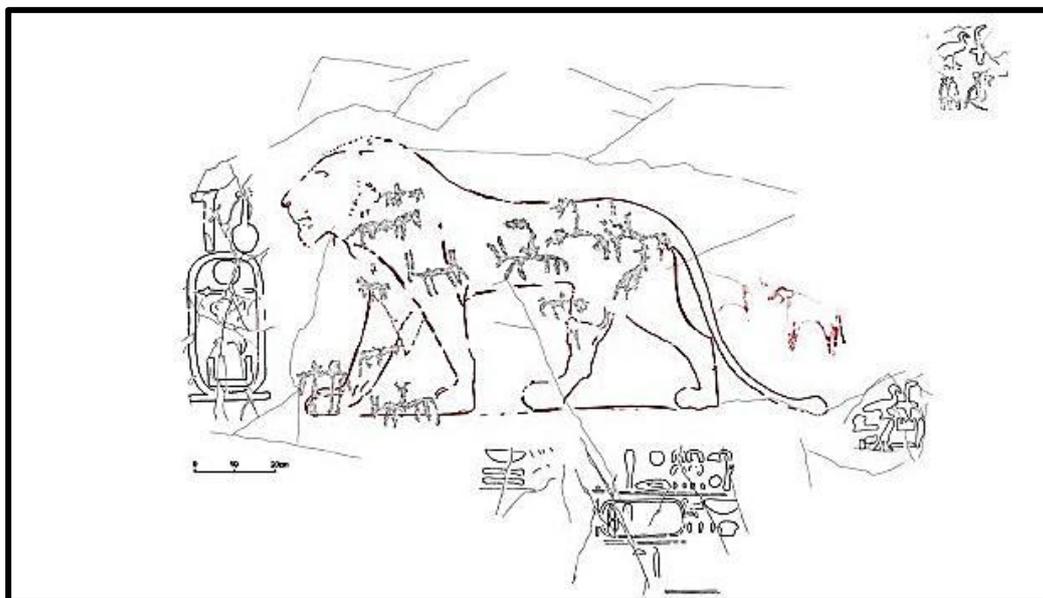


Fig. 6 The lion of king Thutmose I placed over the original decorations

Davies, W., "Nubia in the New Kingdom", in Spencer, N., and Others (eds.) Nubia in the New Kingdom, Paris, 2017, 73, fig. 9.

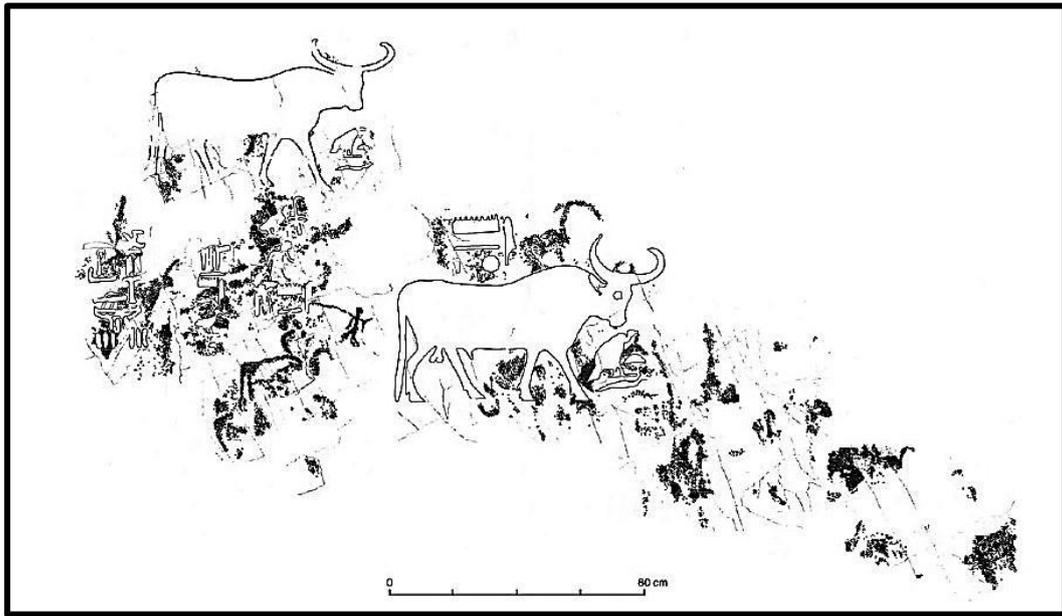


Fig. 7 Relieve from the reign of Thutmose III placed over original decorations

Davies, W., "Nubia in the New Kingdom", in Spencer, N., and Others (eds.) Nubia in the New Kingdom, Paris, 2017, 73, fig. 8.

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