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Sanam

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The remains at Sanam represent a royal town site of the mid-first millennium BCE, an important center of the Early and Middle Napatan Period Kushite kings (defined here as encompassing the reigns of the kings Piankhy to Aspelta, c. 750 BCE – 580 BCE). Comprising a temple, royal administrative buildings (often called the "Treasury"), and a cemetery, Sanam is a valuable source of occupational and non-royal data in Nubian archaeology, a field in which royal cemeteries have been over-represented in the record. Nevertheless, the site's importance has not often been recognized thanks to its early, poorly-recorded, and poorly-published excavation by Francis Llewellyn Griffith in 1912. Recent excavations and new analyses of Griffith's archival data demonstrate Sanam's potential to reveal the importance of Kush's position in the wider Iron Age Mediterranean world, and to intervene in debates on cultural entanglement and hybridity.

هي موقع أثري مهم بالسودان، تمثل بقاياه مدينة ملكية ترجع لمنتصف الألف الأول قبل الميلاد، كانت مركزاً هاماً لحكام مملكة كوش في فترة نبتة (نپاتا) المبكرة والوسطى (أي من عهد الملك بيا / بعنخي حتى أسبلتا، تقريبًا بين حوالي 750 ق.م و580 ق.م). يتكوّن الموقع من معبد، ومباني إدارية ملكية (تُسمّى غالبًا الخزانة)، بالإضافة إلى الجبانة. ويُعدّ موقع سنام مصدرًا ثمينًا للمعلومات غير الملكية في علم الآثار المتعلق بالنوبة، وهو المجال الذي تسيطر عليه المقابر الملكية أكثر من غيرها. ومع ذلك، لم يُعطَ هذا الموقع الأهمية التي يستحقها غالبًا بسبب الحفريات المبكرة ضعيفة التوثيق والنشر التي أجراها عالم الآثار البريطاني جريفث في عام 1912. تُظهر الحفائر الحالية والدراسات الجديدة للمعلومات الخاصة بحفائر جريفيث إمكانات موقع سنام في الكشف عن أهمية موقع مملكة كوش في عالم البحر المتوسط خلال العصر الحديدي، بالإضافة الى تعزيز النقاش والجدل الحالي حول التعقيد الثقافي لها.

The site of Sanam, or Sanam Abu Dom, is located in the modern village of Merawi, just downstream from the Fourth Cataract of the Nile (fig. 1). It is part of the wider region of Napata, the heartland of the Nubian kings who ruled in the mid-first millennium BCE. The site is located on the east bank of the Nile: the Nile runs north-south at this point of the Dongola bend, so the normal orientation of the architecture to the river is reversed. Sanam lies south (downstream) of Gebel Barkal, the religious center of the area, and Nuri, the royal cemetery where King Taharqo and the Middle and Late Napatan kings are buried; and north (upstream) of el-Kurru, the burial place of the early Napatan and 25th Dynasty kings.

Abu Dom is the name of both the wadi at whose mouth the site lies, and the village that was located there before the British colonial occupation of Sudan (Griffith 1922: 76). The name of the current village, Merawi, belonged to another village on the opposite bank of the Nile before the arrival of the British; the British built their new Dongola district capital around Abu Dom and gave it the name "New

Figure 1. The location of Sanam and other major Napatan sites within what is today Sudan.

Merawi," from where the current village derives its name. "Sanam," Griffith suggests, comes from the Arabic word for "idol" or "fetish" (Griffith 1922: 74), presumably thanks to the large quantities of small antiquities that were scattered across the surface of the site. Griffith notes that the locals pronounced the name as "Sanab," and this is how the site name is recorded in Lepsius's *Denkmäler* (*LD*) (Griffith 1922: 74 n. 2; *LD* Textbände V: 282).

The remains of the site stretch over a kilometer and incorporate the varied remains of a town or royal center (fig. 2). To the south, now located under the modern village, is the large non-royal cemetery of the mid-first millennium BCE; north of this, with its

Figure 2. Plan of Sanam showing the temple at lower left, Treasury (labeled), and cemetery (shaded).

Figure 3. Satellite image, using Google and Maxar Technologies, of Sanam Temple with Griffith's spoil heaps visible around the structure.

pylon gateway oriented west toward the river, is the Amun temple of Taharqo; and north/north-east of the temple are the remains of the Treasury and other administrative buildings of the Napatan kings. The most significant phase of occupation of the site was the Early to Middle Napatan Period in the mid-first millennium BCE, encompassing the reigns of the Kings Piankhy to Aspelta (c. 750 – 580 BCE). The temple's main occupation therefore covers both the 25th Dynasty rulers and their successors, who ruled only over Nubia, before the 26th Dynasty king Psammetichus II invaded Nubia.

Excavation and Research History

Frances Llewellyn Griffith

The major excavator of the site was Francis Llewellyn Griffith, who excavated at Sanam on behalf of the Oxford Expedition to Nubia during a single season in 1912. At breakneck pace, a large local workforce, supervised only by Griffith and his wife, cleared the temple, along with over 1500 graves in the cemetery, and a monumentally large administrative building he named the "Treasury." Griffith's presence at Sanam transformed the site and has left traces still visible today (fig. 3) (Howley 2018b: 86-88; 2024).

Most of the small number of "museum quality" artifacts Griffith recovered were brought back to England and entered the collections of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University (his employer). His excavation notes and photographs were given to the Griffith Institute. Other objects remained in his personal collection and were later donated to museums in the United Kingdom and abroad (for a list, see Lohwasser 2010: 13). Griffith did not publish any of his results until 1922, when preliminary reports appeared in successive issues of the *University of Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* (Griffith 1922, 1923). The initial report, concerning the temple and Treasury, is heavily narrative and was hampered not only by the shortcomings of the excavation and recording methods used (even for the time period, Griffith was not particularly careful in his methodology) but by the fact that Reisner had not yet published his still-ongoing excavations at the Kushite royal cemeteries, meaning that very little was then known about the Kushite kings. Griffith was therefore interpreting his results in a near-historical vacuum: "Of the kings who reigned at Napata and Meroe after Tanwetamane . . . of their history almost nothing is known" (Griffith 1922: 71). Line drawings of the relief decoration of the temple walls are included in the publication, though close reading of the accompanying text shows that, in many cases, these were not epigraphic copies but were, rather, based on sketches made in the field (fig. 4) (Griffith 1922: 92). Griffith's publications in general express disappointment with the state and richness of the remains at Sanam, and at several points he demonstrates the Egyptocentric lens through which he interpreted the site, commenting on the "barbarism" and "feeble imitation" of the Kushite culture (Griffith 1922: 71). The many photographs Griffith took at Sanam are probably the most useful part of his work for archaeologists today, though they clearly show the damage that has occurred to the soft sandstone of the temple remains since 1912 as a result of his failure to backfill (fig. 5).

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century work at Sanam

Griffith was not the first Westerner with an interest in the past to visit Sanam. Lepsius visited the site in 1843 while on his Nubian expedition and included in his *Denkmäler* drawings of some of the temple's wall decoration—better preserved than when Griffith investigated 70 years later, and thus of great value (*LD* Textbände V: 141, 282-286). The traveler Bayard Taylor also stopped here and described the remains of the temple and cemetery (Taylor 1854: 434; Lohwasser 2012: 25). Griffith relates that Albert Deiber and a certain M. d'Allemagne reportedly excavated at the Treasury in 1908, but never published the results of their work (Griffith 1922: 76; the history of research on Sanam is related in greater detail in Lohwasser 2012: 23-25).

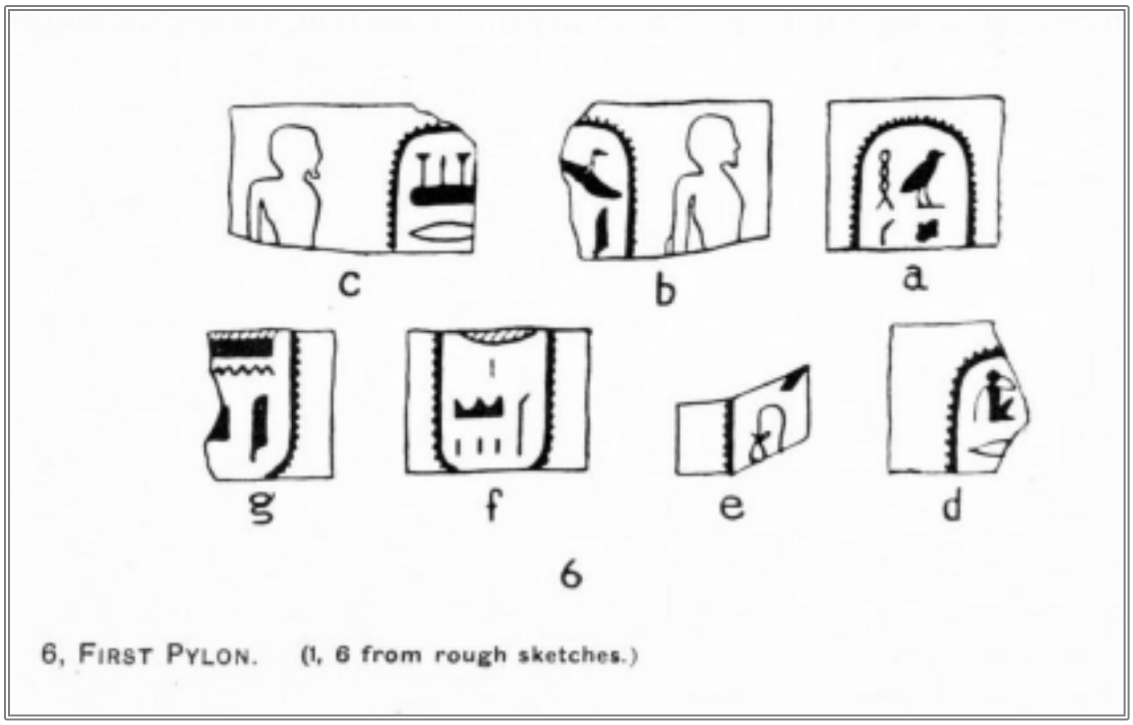

Figure 4. Illustration of carved temple decoration prepared by Griffith from rough sketches.

Figure 5. Photographs of a single section of the Sanam Historical Inscription, taken in both 1912 and 2018, demonstrating the temple's deterioration.

George Andrew Reisner

Griffith conducted only one season of work at Sanam, and after a few years the concession was awarded to the American archaeologist George Andrew Reisner, famed for his excavations at Kerma and the royal Napatan cemeteries at el-Kurru and Nuri (Griffith 1922: 67). Reisner worked for over a month at the temple at Sanam in February and March of 1916; the work was never published but is described in his excavation diaries, which are kept at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Reisner 1916: 161-203 [entries for March 2 to March 21]). Reisner directed most of his efforts toward investigating the large (three meters in diameter) pit in the first court of the temple; Griffith had discovered the pit in 1912 and presumed it to be a well (Griffith 1922: 82). Griffith had hoped to find a statue cache or other exciting finds in the pit, but abandoned digging at a depth of 7.5 meters. The local British governor, Colonel Jackson, communicated this fact to Reisner, who was unable to resist making a second attempt to recover whatever treasures might be lying within; however, he was also forced to admit defeat before getting to the bottom due to the height of the water table, having only recovered fragments of alabaster vessels and granite. The only other project Reisner

completed at the temple was an investigation of its foundations, which was similarly uninformative.

Twenty-first-century work at Sanam

Sanam was largely ignored by archaeologists for the rest of the twentieth century, in part because little archaeological work took place in Sudan and partly because Griffith gave the impression in his publications that he had almost completely excavated the site. Such scholarly neglect has led to the site often being overlooked in the literature, despite its importance: it is omitted, for example, from the gazetteer in Fisher et al. (2012). A new phase of research at Sanam, corresponding with a new wave of interest in Sudanese archaeology in Western institutions, was inaugurated by an Italian team under the direction of Irene Vincentelli in 2001. Their excavations at the Treasury and surrounding buildings have greatly enriched knowledge of the economic (especially trade) activities of the Kushite kings (Vincentelli 2001, 2006, 2011, 2015, 2018a, 2018b). The greater area surrounding the Treasury has recently been surveyed with geomagnetic methods by Greg Tucker and Geoff Emberling (Tucker and Emberling 2016; Tucker, Vincentelli, and Emberling 2019), revealing its place as part of a large settlement of monumental and probably administrative buildings.

The cemetery at Sanam is no longer archaeologically accessible as it lies under the modern village, but Angelika Lohwasser returned to the rich potential of Griffith's records of the large burial ground. Her analyses, published in 2010 and 2012, provide new insights into the population of the cemetery and its culture (Lohwasser 2010, 2012). A higher status cemetery known as et-Tameer has been excavated to the north of Sanam by a Sudanese team led by Murtada Bushara Mohamed and Mahmoud Suliman Bashir 2004 – 2018 (Bashir 2014; Bushara Mohamed 2018).

Historian Jeremy Pope used Griffith's archival photographs to produce a new edition of the fragmentary Sanam Historical Inscription from Sanam Temple that allows far more information to be gleaned than was apparent from Griffith's published translation (Griffith 1922: 101-105, pls. XXXVIII-XL; Pope 2014: 59-144). New excavations began at the temple under the author's direction in 2018 (the Sanam Temple Project: Howley 2018b, 2020, 2021, 2024). Consistent with Vincentelli's findings at the Treasury, work has revealed that Griffith's activities did not clear the area as thoroughly as had been thought and archaeological deposits still remained. Griffith cleared only within the temple walls, and several exposures have therefore been opened outside the temple over three excavation seasons, revealing production areas and pre-temple occupation not previously known.

Features

Temple

The Sanam Temple is dedicated to the god Amun and was founded by the Napatan/25th Dynasty king Taharqo in the seventh century BCE. It measures approximately 68.5 meters long and is tripartite in plan (fig. 6). Though smaller and simpler than the representative royal temples of New Kingdom Egypt, Taharqo's temple was constructed according to the principles of traditional Egyptian temple architecture: it is fronted by a large pylon gateway, which, while now mostly destroyed, was carved with monumental images and texts of the king. Behind the pylon, the space grows progressively smaller and darker, an architectural characteristic that in Egyptian temples signified the increasing sacredness of the space and ever more limited access to worshippers. The visitor first enters a colonnaded court, followed by a hypostyle hall and sanctuary area behind, which is flanked by storage rooms and a "throne room" containing a raised dais approached by steps (fig. 7).

The temple's main plan seems to have been entirely constructed by Taharqo, but it underwent several rounds of additions. Taharqo added a small shrine between the pillars of the hypostyle hall (the shrine abuts the columns and is not integrated into the main structure of the temple; Griffith 1922:

Figure 6. Aerial (kite) photograph of Sanam Temple.

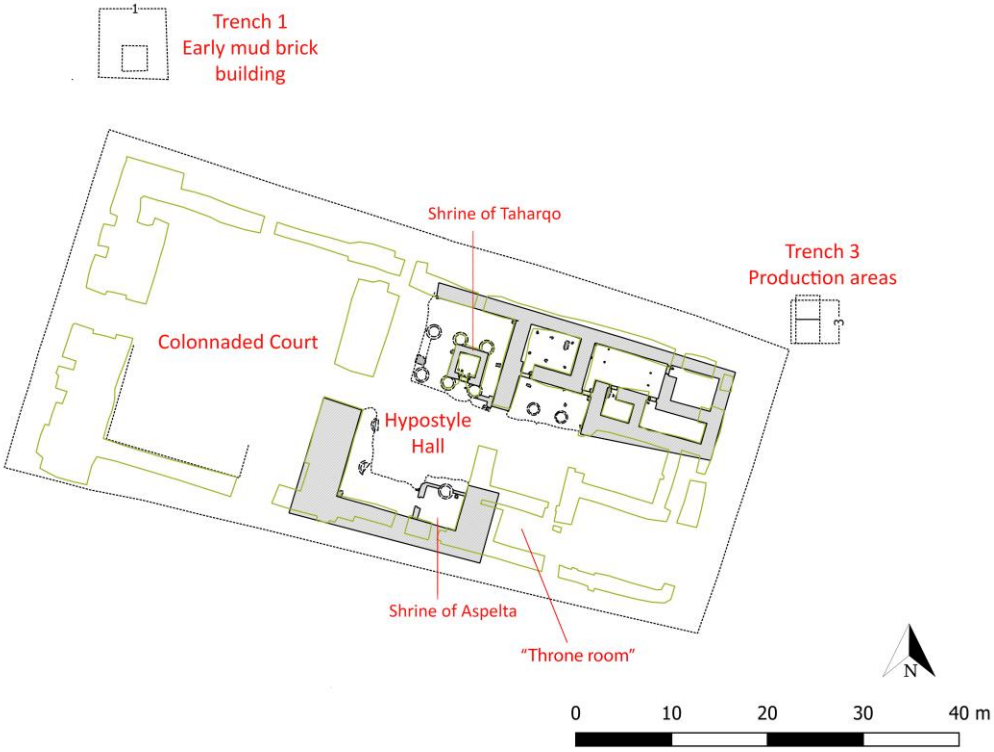

Figure 7. Plan of Sanam Temple showing areas excavated by the current project.

Figure 8. The Taharqo shrine in the hypostyle hall of Sanam Temple.

Figure 9. The Aspelta shrine in the hypostyle hall of Sanam Temple.

107, pl. XLIII; Howley 2020: 121-123) (fig. 8). The Middle Napatan king Senkamanisken's name was found on several collapsed blocks, suggesting he also added to or renovated the temple (Griffith 1922: 85), and his successor Aspelta added his own shrine across from Taharqo's in the hypostyle hall (Griffith 1922: 107-110, pls. XLIV-XLVII; Howley 2020: 121-123) (fig. 9). Though this addition was larger than Taharqo's, it was of poorer construction, using an especially friable limestone that had been cut into narrow blocks. The extensive decoration on the walls that was visible to Lepsius (*LD* Textbände V: 285) has now more or less entirely disappeared. At some point doorways in the temple's side walls were blocked up and new ones opened.

In Nubia there was no indigenous tradition of monumental building in stone before the Napatan Period, and textual evidence shows that Taharqo used Egyptian builders to construct his Amun temple at Kawa, which is identical in plan to the Sanam Temple (Stela of Taharqo from year 6 at Kawa: Macadam 1949: 14-21, and pl. 17; Eide, Hägg, Pierce, and Török eds., Vol. 1: 135-145). It is therefore likely that the Sanam Temple was also constructed by Taharqo's Egyptian subjects. However, the temple, though built by Egyptians in an Egyptian style, exhibits the Nubian culture of its Kushite users in several important ways. Temples in Egypt are renowned for their monumental statuary, of gods, kings, and the elite, who commissioned statues of themselves to stand in the colonnaded court. Sanam Temple seems to have had remarkably little of this monumental statuary; Griffith found only a few fragments of granite statues of a cobra, vulture, and the god Amun, none of which were monumental in scale (Griffith 1922: pls. XIII-XVI) (fig. 10). Rather, small votive offerings left in the hypostyle hall seem to have been used for Nubian worshippers to communicate with and honor the god, and the small shrines in the hypostyle hall were apparently foci for this offering activity (Howley 2020: 121ff.; 2021: 27-29).

Figure 10. Fragment of statue of Amun found by Griffith at Sanam Temple.

The decoration on the walls of the temple is mostly fragmentary, but also demonstrates the Kushite character of the worship activities that took place there. Scenes on the exterior walls recorded by Griffith primarily include processional scenes, including musicians and donkeys (some pulling carts) (Griffith 1922: pls. XXVII-XXXIV) (fig. 11). These are very similar to better preserved scenes at Taharqo's sister temple of Amun at Kawa, and likely refer to the festival circuit that would have traveled from Amun temple to Amun temple (Macadam 1949: pl. XIV; Török 1992). Decoration within the temple was more conventional from an Egyptian perspective, with scenes of the king offering to the gods. There are some exceptions, however: the ceiling of the Taharqo chapel in the hypostyle hall was decorated with yellow and red stars on a blue background, a style used for the decoration of tombs in Egypt (and also for royal tombs in Nubia; Howley 2020: 120-121); and the Sanam Historical Inscription in the colonnaded court listed offerings particular to

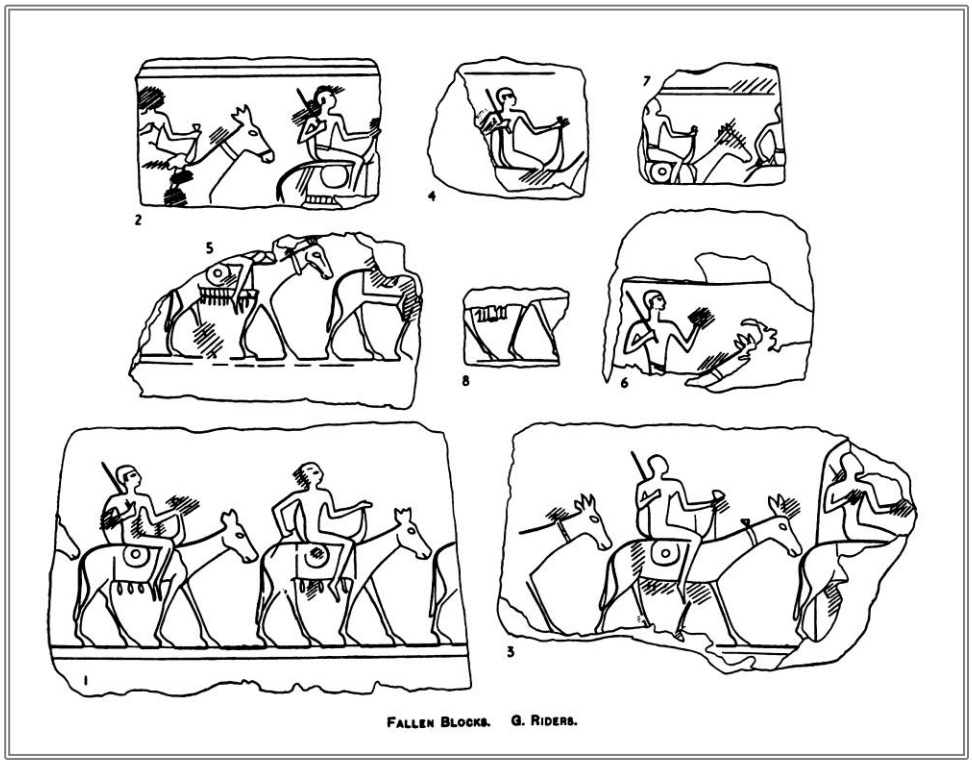

Figure 11. Processional scene inscribed on the walls of Sanam Temple.

Figure 12.

Terracotta mold for royal *shabti* funerary figurine, Sanam Temple.

Nubian (rather than Egyptian) foodways and ecology, along with illustrations of the vessels used to contain them (Pope 2013).

Temples in Nubia, as in Egypt, did not exist in a societal vacuum, and the temple would have supported a wide variety of people and activities. Although Griffith disposed of the vast majority of the temple pottery without recording it, the current excavations discovered a large dump of broken bread molds where Griffith had left them southwest of the pylon. These would have supported food offerings in the temple, as well as perhaps the provisioning of food for the temple's personnel. Griffith, and also the current excavations, discovered in the temple several pottery molds for faience objects, including *shabti* funerary figurines that would have furnished the royal tombs at el-Kurru and Nuri (Griffith 1922: 87-88; pl. XVII) (fig. 12). Directly to the rear of the temple, our new excavations have discovered an extensive production area that seems to have manufactured pottery, faience, and perhaps metal objects (Howley 2018b: 85-86; 2020: 125-126). This is one of the very few production facilities known from the Napatan Period, and the only such faience production area. Both the location and the character of the area suggest differences between Kushite and Egyptian production of the period that belie the Egyptian appearance of many of the objects manufactured there.

The last royal name to appear in the temple, and throughout the wider site, is that of Aspelta, whose successful reign (as demonstrated by his abundant building activity and rich grave goods) was then marked by the invasion of Nubia by the Egyptian king Psammetichus II. It is likely that the temple, and the rest of the settlement at Sanam, fell into disuse for a period. The temple was later re-occupied, however, as shown by the large number of secondary mud-brick walls that crisscross its interior (visible especially in Figure 9; Griffith 1922: 85; Howley 2018b: 82-83). These walls create small enclosures—often too small to be considered rooms—by bridging the gap between the temple's stone walls and columns. The purpose of these enclosures, as well as their date, is unknown; most do not have recognizable entrances. However, bronze Osiris votive figurines are often found incorporated in the fabric of the mud bricks, which makes it clear that the walls were constructed after the building's original use-life as a temple had ended (Howley 2020: 123-124; 2024: 147-150).

The Sanam Historical Inscription

Griffith was attracted by the long, 180-column inscription that covered the southern wall of the temple's colonnaded court. Though when complete it would have been the longest known inscription from Taharqo's reign, similar in length to the text of the Piankhy Victory Stela, the upper part of the wall (and of every column of inscription) is lost, and therefore the text is fragmentary and difficult to understand—a frustrating limitation, given that it represents the southernmost known historical narrative written in Egyptian hieroglyphs (Pope 2014: 144). In 2014 Jeremy Pope completed a new edition of the text, which, despite its Egyptian appearance, has brought to light many interesting features that reflect the underlying Nubian culture of the Kushites (Pope 2013; 2014: 59-144). The text includes a recounting of vegetal offerings to the temple, not included in other Kushite royal texts, and the name of an unusual form of vessel that appears to have been used for sorghum-based porridge or beer. The text thus attests to culinary traditions that would have been foreign to the Egyptians but were likely long-standing among Nubian cultures. The text appears to have described the "miracles" that occurred in the sixth year of Taharqo's reign, events that are also recounted at Kawa, Coptos, Mata'nah, and Tanis, a repetition that underscores the importance of networks in the governance and culture of Kush. Other subjects apparently covered in the inscription include the founding of the temple, nautical expeditions, and military and political conflicts; there are also mentions of the most important cultic centers in Kush and Egypt, and lists of toponyms and ethnonyms, only some of which can be identified. Several

officials of the Kushite court are also mentioned, at least one by name, providing a rare attestation of non-royal Kushites at a time when Egyptian writing was generally restricted to the royal family (columns 6, 9, 12, 15, 24, 26, fragments 12-13; Howley 2015: 334-350).

"Treasury"

During his 1912 season, Griffith also excavated a large rectangular building of 267 x 68 meters to the northeast of the temple (Griffith 1922: 114-124). The building contained 35 large rooms, measuring an average of 14 x 21 meters and containing 76 columns (Vincentelli 2011: 270). The building was elite in both its size and architectural features: the rooms were arranged on either side of a central courtyard and flanked by columned porticoes (see fig. 2). Well-dressed slabs of white sandstone paved the floors and lined the bottom half of the walls to a height of 70 centimeters (Vincentelli 2018b: 127). Griffith discovered a large amount of small faience objects and a large quantity of elephant ivory in this complex (Griffith 1922: 117). Sealings bearing the names of several Napatan kings confirmed the royal character of the building and its chronology. Griffith therefore identified the building as a Napatan royal storeroom that he named the "Treasury." Sanam was a particularly suitable location for a trade depot, not only because of its status as a royal center (and it is likely that the royal family in Kush had a monopoly over many sorts of trade and trade goods; Howley 2018a: 28-30), but also because of its location at the mouth of the wadi Abu Dom, which served as a convenient route to the south (Vincentelli 2018a: 177). Although Sanam is today a short distance from the Nile, the ancient river course would have passed much closer to the site, allowing easy access to river traffic. The building's enormous scale and the extensive use of stone columns in its architecture exemplify the way in which the Kushite royals used their control over trade routes as a form of display (indeed, Griffith initially named the building "the Palace" because of the grand nature of the architecture: Griffith 1922: 117).

More recent excavations in the area of the Treasury by Irene Vincentelli have discovered other stone and brick buildings around the site of Griffith's excavations (Vincentelli 2011: 275-282). These structures are of an architectural form similar to that of the Treasury, with columned porticoes flanking rooms arranged around courtyards; they likewise have an administrative character, attested by the hundreds of clay sealings—found at the doorways in some rooms—which would have sealed both doors and amphorae containing traded substances (Vincentelli 2006). The sealings bear the names of Napatan kings and show that the site was in use at the same time period as the cemetery and temple. The project has found large quantities of stone and ivory flakes, which suggest that manufacturing activity was taking place in the area (Vincentelli 2011: 270). The pumice found was probably used for polishing stone vessels, whose numerous fragments are scattered at the site. Goods from inner Africa (elephant ivory, to be traded with Egypt, Syria-Palestine, Assyria, Phoenicia, and Cyprus; Vincentelli 2018b: 131), the Red Sea coast (11 kilograms of shells: Vincentelli 2018b: 131), and the wider Mediterranean (Phoenician amphorae and Anatolian silver: Vincentelli 2018b: 132) are present, but the majority of the goods in the complex demonstrate the Napatan kings' intensive trade activity with Egypt (including blocks of unworked calcite: Vincentelli 2018a, 2018b). Much of the pottery can be linked to the Theban region, which was the Nubian kings' center of power when they ruled over Egypt in the 25th Dynasty, and to which they continued to have strong links in the Middle Napatan Period. Although similar structures are not known to have belonged to Egyptian kings, a comparable building belonging to the Nubian 25th Dynasty king Shabaqo has recently been excavated at Karnak (Licitra 2014, 2016, 2018). The extent of the economic activity at Sanam is therefore considerable and must be read as a testament to the substantial influence of the Kushite kings within the Mediterranean and African worlds of the first millennium BC—a realization that runs counter to the traditional,

Egypto-centric narrative of Kush as an uncivilized backwater.

No royal name later than that of Aspelta has been found at the Treasury, and the administrative buildings at Sanam are therefore unlikely to have been used after his reign. Burning traces on some of the elephant ivory indicate that the buildings were destroyed by fire; however, the rooms were mostly found empty, suggesting that the complex was already abandoned at the moment of destruction (Griffith 1922: 118; Vincentelli 2011: 271-272).

"Town site"

Recent geomagnetic survey covering the area to the northeast of the temple has shown that the Treasury is part of a much larger complex of monumental buildings that may represent a town site (Tucker and Emberling 2016; Tucker, Vincentelli, and Emberling 2019). Reflecting Vincentelli's excavation findings, the architecture identified in the geomagnetic data is strikingly large. Domestic housing and a city wall appear, however, to be lacking, raising questions as to the nature of this complex: the planned, monumental scale of the structures suggest a royal, administrative purpose, but the question of where the people interred in the cemetery would have lived remains unanswered. Regardless, work in the area to the north of the temple has made clear the large scale of the site of Sanam and its likely importance within the Kushite royal administration, something not immediately obvious from the few remains visible on the surface; and it exemplifies the potential of the site to offer new insights to future archaeology conducted there, despite the apparent thoroughness of Griffith's clearance in 1912.

The cemeteries of Sanam and et-Tameer

The main cemetery of Sanam was excavated by Griffith during his 1912 season and the results published in 1923 (Griffith 1923). The cemetery contained approximately 1,619 graves, making Sanam the largest non-royal Napatan cemetery currently known (Lohwasser 2010: 101-104). More recently, Angelika Lohwasser returned to the archives of the excavation, including "tomb cards" and photographs held at the Griffith Institute in Oxford, to undertake extensive analyses of the cemetery (Lohwasser 2010, 2012).

The population buried at the cemetery was non-royal, though mostly relatively elite, as exemplified by the beaded net body-covering and fine grave goods in the burial shown in Figure 13; Lohwasser has plausibly suggested that the cemetery was used to inter the craftsmen who would have worked on the royal tombs at Nuri (Lohwasser 2020). The graves do not appear to have had superstructures, though some form of marker for which no archaeological evidence remains is likely to have existed, because the substructures of the graves did not encroach on one another (Lohwasser 2012: 32). Four different types of grave can be distilled from those in the cemetery, including bricked tombs, sand burials, shaft graves, and cave graves (Lohwasser 2012: 36-53); likewise, different types of burial position are present and the deceased could be interred in a contracted, semi-contracted, or extended position (Lohwasser 2012: 59-64). Some graves contain multiple inhumations, and men, women, and children are all found among the interred bodies (Lohwasser 2012: 55-58, 68-71). Because of the different types of burial customs on display and the existence of one group of particularly tall skeletons, Lohwasser has suggested that it is possible that different Nubian ethnic groups, with differing customs, are represented among the graves at Sanam (Lohwasser 2012: 71-72).

About half the graves at Sanam contained grave goods, mostly items of adornment and funerary ritual, the study of which informs our analysis of the status and cultural identity of the cemetery's population (Lohwasser 2012: 72-282). Amulets, often of Egyptian type, were a common find, as was jewelry, some of which makes striking use of pebbles, natural stones with interesting forms, and shells. Jewelry was used to adorn the whole body, and diadems, anklets, belly chains, and lip plugs were discovered in addition to necklaces, rings, and bracelets. Offering tables, incense burners, and charcoal provide

Figure 13. Burial at Sanam cemetery with remains of bead net covering the body.

evidence for some of the funerary rituals that would have taken place at the cemetery. What form the rituals took, and how similar they may have been to contemporaneous Egyptian practice, is far from certain; though remains of coffins are sometimes found, along with accoutrements such as bead nets to cover the body (see fig. 13), there is no further evidence at Sanam (or elsewhere in Nubia) for the preservation of the body (Lohwasser 2012: 337; cf. Griffith's description of "mummies" in his publication of the cemetery, e.g., Griffith 1923: 83, reflecting his Egyptocentric bias).

Graves at the cemetery did include Egyptian or Egyptian-style objects, but in comparison with the contemporaneous Nubian royal graves at el-Kurru and Nuri, the types of such objects were limited. In particular, *shabti* funerary statuettes, ubiquitous in graves in Egypt, are missing from non-royal graves in Nubia and therefore from Sanam cemetery. Those Egyptian objects that do appear tend to be small and portable, such as scarab seals; others, like offering tables, appear to have been adopted specifically because of their utility to Nubian funerary practices and beliefs (Howley 2017: 225-227). Such objects represent a conduit for syncretic practice and perhaps should not be thought of as "Egyptian" per se.

A smaller series of graves has been excavated at et-Tameer, to the north of the main cemetery, by Mahmoud Suliman Bashir and Murtada Bushara Mohamed (Bashir 2014; Bushara Mohamed 2018) and apparently represents a higher status burial ground than the larger southern cemetery. Graves were, in general, of a type similar to those found by Griffith and contained similar graves goods; one exceptional rectangular mudbrick tomb, TR14, contained at least 59 interred individuals. Another, DS100/T1, has a corbeled sandstone vault and dressed masonry walls that resemble the royal tombs of Kashta and Piankhy at el-Kurru, and Bushara Mohamed has therefore suggested that this may also have been a royal tomb. Given the

tomb's apparently early date and monumental form, a link with the early Napatan mud-brick building recently found underneath the temple would be interesting to investigate further.

Pre-temple features at the site

Current excavations at the temple have revealed new information about the pre-Taharqo occupation of the site (Howley 2020: 126-130). Investigations beneath the temple floor and outside the temple walls have demonstrated that a thin layer of crushed white limestone chips runs beneath the entire temple and beyond its walls, probably representing a sort of preparation layer through which the ground was prepared for the construction of the temple. Directly beneath this layer to the north-east of the temple pylon, our excavations over several seasons have uncovered a small portion of a monumental mud-brick building in which domestic and production activities took place (fig. 14). The stratigraphy of the deposits within the building demonstrates that the structure was in use for some time, but ceramic and carbon-14 dating evidence place the floor-level occupation in the tenth century BCE. This dates to the so-called "Dark Age" of Nubian history, after the end of Egyptian colonial occupation of Nubia but before the beginning of the 25th Dynasty when Kushite kings conquered Egypt. There is no evidence that Sanam was ever an Egyptian colonial settlement in the New Kingdom; indeed, the proportion of marl-clay vessels (generally identified as "Egyptian") is low, and local, handmade vessel types predominate in the building's earliest stages, suggesting that this structure is the product of an indigenous elite of the early first millennium BCE (Shinn, Hafiz, Howley 2025). Data from Sanam can therefore be added to the growing body of archaeological evidence dated to the Nubian "Dark Age," yet among sites such as Tombos, Amara West, Kawa, and Saï, the mud-brick building at Sanam represents the only evidence unequivocally from the period that is domestic rather than funerary and that does not derive from an Egyptian colonial town (Smith 2008; Binder 2014; Welsby 2019: 612-613; Thill 2006). Taharqo's choice of Sanam to build his temple, and the apparent destruction of this early, Nubian building to do it, is a tantalizing trace of the state-building techniques of the Napatan kings and perhaps suggests where the origins of the Napatan dynasty lie. It is tempting to link this archaeological evidence of Napatan emergence to the later textual reference in Nastasen's stela that proclaims Taqat (identified by both Priese 1978: 77 and Pope 2014: 20, n.105 as Sanam) "the garden from which King Piankh-Alara sprouted" (Berlin ÄMP 2268; Schäfer 1901: Taf. II).

Significance and Historical Context

Sanam Temple was constructed by the Kushite King Taharqo, the most prolific builder of the Napatan rulers. While his predecessors had added to the nearby complex at Gebel Barkal (founded by Egyptians in the New Kingdom), Taharqo was, to our current knowledge, the first Kushite king to build free-standing stone temples. The construction at Sanam, though not exceptionally large by the standards of Egyptian temples, formed part of a truly ambitious construction program across Taharqo's Kushite territory: temples almost identical in size and plan to those of Sanam were also constructed at the sites of Kawa and Tabo in the vicinity of the Third Cataract, many days' journey from Sanam, and the same rituals seem to have been performed at each temple, with a processional circuit linking them (Török 1992; Howley 2020: 122-123; 2023). Stelae recovered from Kawa recount that Taharqo used Egyptian stonemasons and architects to achieve this large-scale development in an area where there was little tradition of stone-built architecture. Although Kawa is the most well-preserved of the Taharqo Amun temples (it was excavated in the 1930s by the Oxford Expedition to Nubia and published in comprehensive volumes by Macadam [1949]), it is now buried under meters of windblown sand, while Tabo is mostly destroyed (Jacquet-Gordon and Bonnet 1969). Sanam is therefore particularly valuable because it is the only one of Taharqo's Amun temples currently archaeologically accessible, and offers the

Figure 14. Monumental mud-brick building dating to the early first millennium BCE, northeast of Sanam Temple.

potential to obtain new evidence to answer questions about Kushite religion, royalty, and state. The temple's status as a rare archaeological resource is complemented by the cemetery, the largest Napatan Period non-royal cemetery known, and the Treasury complex, a unique find in Nubia. Together, the remains at Sanam represent a large royal settlement of great importance to the Kushite state, whose potential for our understanding of first millennium BCE Nubia has yet to be fully realized.

Sanam is an excellent source for the study of the interplay between Egyptian and Nubian features so exemplary of Kushite material culture (and the interpretation thereof as hybridity, entanglement, or acculturation, depending on one's theoretical stance). The Sanam Historical Inscription demonstrates how the Kushite kings used Egyptian vocabulary to express indigenous Nubian concepts, while the production areas to the rear of the temple show how Egyptian-style objects such as *shabtis* were produced using Nubian methods and for Nubian cultural ends (to furnish only royal, not non-royal, tombs). The Treasury provides evidence for the trade and distribution of foreign goods and raw materials, and the cemetery is an example of how the cultural value of foreign goods in Kush and the mixing of indigenous and Egyptian practices were manifested in the non-royal sphere.

Despite the vast potential of archaeological data from Sanam, some limitations should be borne in mind in its interpretation. The site, by modern standards, was excavated exceedingly quickly by Griffith. Griffith also did not use modern excavation or recording methodologies, which limits the utility of his documentation. He did not backfill the site after he left, which has contributed greatly to its current deteriorated state (Howley 2024). Like many sites in Nubia, Sanam's architecture was constructed from the local, very friable, sandstone and mud brick, meaning that the current level of preservation is in many places limited. Because of the topography of the site some parts are badly denuded (especially the Treasury: Griffith 1922: 114).

Historical context/chronology

The large number of sealings with royal names found in the Treasury allow for a reasonably detailed picture of the duration of its use. The earliest royal name to appear is that of Piankhy, the first Nubian king to rule over all Egypt and generally described as the first king of the Egyptian 25th Dynasty (750 – 722/21 BCE); the latest is that of Aspelta, the Middle Napatan king under whose rule Kush was invaded by the Egyptian 26th Dynasty king Psammetichus II (595 – 589 BCE). Evidence from the temple supports this chronology: built by the 25th Dynasty king Taharqo, it was later added to by the Middle Napatan kings Senkamanisken and Aspelta. Aspelta is also the latest royal name attested among the burial goods at Sanam cemetery.

There is currently no evidence at Sanam for any Late Napatan occupation after the reign of Aspelta. It is tempting to attribute this fact to the aftereffects of Psammetichus's invasion. Although a modicum of evidence from the Meroitic Period has been found, including an ostracon with Meroitic text from the temple (Griffith 1922: 85), this is so minimal as to suggest that there was no meaningful Meroitic presence at Sanam. In particular, the distinctive Meroitic ceramics are missing from the archaeological record at the temple, cemetery, and Treasury. In the temple, there was extensive secondary occupation marked by the construction of small mud-brick enclosures, but these are of unclear date. Vincentelli has found Meroitic and Christian Period ceramics at the edges of the site towards the modern cultivation, along with remains of mud-brick walls that may belong to this late period of occupation (Vincentelli 2011: 269).

The question of when occupation at Sanam began is somewhat more controversial. Lohwasser has argued that the site was first settled in the late New Kingdom, following Robert Morkot's conjecture that Sanam is so strategically located, it would be strange if it had not been settled before the first millennium BCE (Lohwasser 2012: 283-289). Lohwasser's suggestion is based on several lines of reasoning: 1) other Kushite temples such as Kawa and Gebel Barkal were founded on the site of older Egyptian New Kingdom temples (Griffith's throwaway and unsupported remark about some fragments possibly earlier than Taharqo is given too much weight here: Lohwasser 2010: 97; Griffith 1922: 85); 2) the multi-chambered tomb architecture used for some graves at Sanam is more similar to examples from the New Kingdom in Nubia than to examples from the Napatan Period; and 3) some tombs

contain objects that could be dated to the New Kingdom, including headrests, "swimming girl" spoons, and scarabs bearing names of New Kingdom kings. The evidence from the tombs presents interpretive problems, since the possibly New Kingdom objects are small in number, invoke the name of New Kingdom kings whose names continued to have amuletic power after their reigns, and could represent "heirloom" objects. The architectural evidence is also far from conclusive, given that Sanam is the best source we have for Napatan Period tombs, and that the simple architecture is far from diagnostic. Nevertheless, the nearby cemetery of Hillat el-Arab (Vincentelli et al. eds. 2006) can be much more definitively dated to the end of the New Kingdom and the period before the 25th Dynasty, and therefore it is possible that the Sanam graves Lohwasser discusses also date to the same period. However, in light of recent excavations at the temple, it must be stressed that there is no evidence at all that the structure was built on a New Kingdom foundation. Excavations below the temple floor show no trace of an earlier Egyptian temple (only small amounts of undiagnostic ceramics and finds more suggestive of Nubian occupation, such as ostrich shell beads), and there is a complete lack of New Kingdom Egyptian ceramic forms at the site. The underlying mud-brick domestic building just to the north of the temple pylon, discussed above, is Nubian rather than Egyptian in character. The current evidence suggests that Sanam, unlike other temples in Taharqo's network, was a *de novo* construction that was not preceded by an Egyptian New Kingdom temple. The site of Sanam was therefore certainly inhabited before the 25th Dynasty and the founding of the Amun temple, and it is possible that the cemetery was also established at this point, in the tenth century BCE. This occupation was likely not connected with Egyptian colonial presence in the New Kingdom, however, but with indigenous Nubian cultural groups.

Bibliographic Notes

Griffith's two publications in the *University of Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* are still foundational for studies of Sanam, despite their flaws and age. The first (Griffith 1922) deals with the temple and Treasury; the second, the cemetery (Griffith 1923). Since Griffith's work, publications on Sanam tend to focus on each of the main features separately rather than on the site as a whole, reflecting in part the organization of archives and in part the current division of the site into separate concessions. Lohwasser's publications on the cemetery of Sanam present Griffith's data in greater detail and provide an illuminating and exhaustive analysis informed by modern understandings of archaeological theory and the Nubian past. Her full study is published in German as *Aspekte der Napatanischen Gesellschaft: archäologisches Inventar und funeräre Praxis im Friedhof von Sanam – Perspektiven einer kulturhistorischen Interpretation* (Lohwasser 2012), but its results are summarized in English in *The Kushite Cemetery of Sanam: A Non-royal Burial Ground of the Nubian Capital, c. 800 – 600 BC* (Lohwasser 2010). Vincentelli's work on the Treasury and its surrounding buildings has been only sporadically and preliminarily published, in Italian and English, mostly in volumes of conference proceedings and *festschriften* (Vincentelli 2001, 2006, 2011, 2015, 2018a, 2018b). The current excavations at the temple have been preliminarily reported in the journal *Sudan & Nubia* (Howley 2018b; 2020). Jeremy Pope's analysis of the Sanam Historical Inscription, using Griffith's archival photographs, supersedes that of Griffith, published in the *University of Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* 9 (Griffith 1922), and is contained in chapter three of his monograph, *The Double Kingdom Under Taharqo: Studies in the History of Kush and Egypt, c. 690 – 664* (Pope 2014).

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Figure 1. The location of Sanam and other major Napatan sites within what is today Sudan. (Plan by author, using base map https://www.sudarchrs.org.uk/resources/maps-of-sudan; © The Sudan Archaeological Research Society.)

Figure 2. Plan of Sanam showing the temple at lower left, Treasury (labeled), and cemetery (shaded). (© The joint Sudanese-Italian Archaeological Mission at Sanam.)

Figure 3. Satellite image, using Google and Maxar Technologies, of Sanam Temple with Griffith's spoil heaps visible around the structure. (Image prepared by Martin Uildriks, using map data from Google and Maxar Technologies.)

Figure 4. Illustration of carved temple decoration prepared by Griffith from rough sketches. (Griffith 1922: pl. XXIII.)

Figure 5. Photographs of a single section of the Sanam Historical Inscription, taken in both 1912 and 2018, demonstrating the temple's deterioration. (Black and white photograph © Griffith Institute, University of Oxford; color photograph by the author.)

Figure 6. Aerial (kite) photograph of Sanam Temple. (Photograph by the author.)

Figure 7. Plan of Sanam Temple showing areas excavated by the current project. (Image by Martin Uildriks.)

Figure 8. The Taharqo shrine in the hypostyle hall of Sanam Temple. (Photograph by the author.)

Figure 9. The Aspelta shrine in the hypostyle hall of Sanam Temple. (Photograph by the author.)

Figure 10. Fragment of statue of Amun found by Griffith at Sanam Temple. Quartzite, height 33.6 centimeters. Ashmolean Museum AN1922.157. (Photograph © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.)

Figure 11. Processional scene inscribed on the walls of Sanam Temple. (Griffith 1922: pl. XXXIII.)

Figure 12. Terracotta mold for royal *shabti* funerary figurine, Sanam Temple. (Photograph by the author.)

Figure 13. Burial at Sanam cemetery with remains of bead net covering the body. (Photograph © Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.)

Figure 14. Monumental mud-brick building dating to the early first millennium BCE, northeast of Sanam Temple. (Photograph by the author.)