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Cover image: Pottery cup decorated with painted frogs and lotus flowers. Detail. Faras (Sudan), 1st–2nd cent. AD. British Museum EA 51448.

THE REPORTS OF WARS IN MEROITIC AND AKSUMITE TEXTS

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Abstract

The corpus of Meroitic inscriptions is divided into several categories, but only the royal inscriptions are characterized by narrations. Most translated words and clauses suggest that those narrations consist of descriptions of religious events or reports of wars. The typical report of war refers to the punishments the king inflicted on the captives: 'slaughtering the men', 'enslaving the women', 'taking their (*y*)*emoqe*'. Often, these clauses are preceded by the ethnonym of the defeated enemies. The same phraseology is seen in Napatan texts, particularly in the inscriptions of the last Napatan kings, Anlamani, Amannote-erike, Harsiyotef and Nastasen, who are thought to have conducted military campaign against the Eastern and Southern regions of the kingdom of Kush in Nubia. Similarities can be found with some Aksumite royal texts. In RIÉ I 185 I e II, Ezana, after subjugating the enemies, deported the captives with their livestock and supplied them with goods and food before relocating them to a new place. The relocation of captives seems also to be a practice of some Meroitic kings as described in two Meroitic royal texts: the inscription of Akinidad, at Hamadab (REM1003) and the inscription of Kharamadoye, at Kalabsha (REM0094). The most interesting aspects include not only the similarities among the reports of wars in Meroitic and Aksumite royal texts but also the records of displacements of some populations under decree of the central power.

Keywords

Meroe – Aksum – Inscription – Report of war

Introduction

This paper attempts to augment the translation of the reports of wars in Meroitic texts by comparing them with those in Aksumite documents. In both cases, the war reports were mainly present in royal texts. The Meroitic and

Aksumite texts belonged to two political and socio-cultural systems that were far apart in space and time, the kingdoms of Meroe and Aksum. They are written in two different languages, Meroitic and Gəʿəz, the former belonging to the Nilo-Saharan and the latter to the Afro-Asiatic macro-family. However, a comparative study of these reports of war may show some similarities in their structure as well as exemplify the use of specific verbs to describe behaviours assumed during the war apparently common to both the Meroitic and Aksumite cultures.

The Gəʿəz language and its script have been known for some time and are well understood. Meroitic, however, has been not completely elucidated because of the absence of bilingual texts and the fact that the linguistic family to which Meroitic belongs was only established over the past few decades. According to Rilly (2019: 129–52), there are only about 140 translated words, but recent epigraphic studies and discoveries in linguistics allow the interpretation of several sections of texts. Three main approaches have been used to support the comprehension of the Meroitic texts: the philological method based on the rare elements of texts known so far to guess the meaning of the neighbouring elements (Rilly 2011: 14); the comparative method to establish the meaning of unknown Meroitic words or morphological elements by comparing them with proto-forms of related languages (Rilly 2010*b*); and, the parallel text method based on the idea that a record can be parsed by comparison with similar known passages written in other languages that are better understood. The exclusive use of only one of these methods, however, does not ensure accurate translation of words and phrases.

From over two thousand Meroitic inscriptions dated from the 3rd cent. BCE to the 5th cent. CE, twenty-five are royal texts. Some chronicles of reigns contain narratives with many and variegated lexical and verbal forms, and for this reason, many sections of the royal texts are largely untranslated except for the royal protocols composed of personal names and titles and some other sporadic words. The studies of Griffith (1917), Schäfer, Peust and later Rilly (2007: 185) have demonstrated that some passages from royal chronicles composed of known words are very close to certain Napatan royal inscriptions. The Napatan inscriptions, written in Egyptian, were produced from the 7th to the 3rd centuries BCE by the Nubian kings who governed the kingdom of Kush before the Meroitic kings. The study of parallel Napatan texts supports the

identification of some passages of the Meroitic royal inscriptions: the reports of war.

The Meroitic Reports of War

Five Meroitic royal chronicles contain reports of war: the Taneyidamani Stele (REM 1044), the Teriteqas, Amanirenas and Akinidad graffito (REM 0092), the Hamadab stele I (REM 1003), the Hamadab stele II (REM 1039), and the Kharamadoye inscription (REM 0094). These texts were all produced at different times and cover the entire Meroitic cultural period from the 3rd cent. BCE (REM 1044), through the 1st cent. BCE (REM 0092, 1003, 1039), to the 5th cent. CE (REM 0094). In analysing the clauses, the most interesting aspect is that for more than five centuries, the composition of reports of war followed the same model: descriptions of the outcomes of conflicts and records of the number of victims. Typically, the structure of these passages is composed of two (1.) or three verbal clauses (2.) each one composed of one (1.) or more (2.) coordinated objects and the verbal complex, as in the following schema:

[[noun + adjective + determinant] ± [noun + adjective + determinant] + verbal complex]

The nouns used in the noun phrase, already identified by Griffith (1917: 167), are *abr* 'man', *kdi* 'woman', and *ar* 'guy'.

1. *abr-se-l* :   PREF[1]*-ked*-SUFF :
   man-each-DET :   PREF-VB-SUFF :
   kdi-se-l :   *er-k*-SUFF :
   woman-each-DET :   VB-SUFF :
2. *abr-se-l* :   PREF-*ked*-SUFF :
   man-each-DET :   PREF-VB-SUFF :
   kdi-se-l :   *ar-se-li* :   *tkk* :
   woman-each-DET :   boy-each-DET :   VB :
   yemoqe :   *qebesewi* :   PREF-*erk*-SUFF :
   yemoke :   POSS PL-DET :   PREF-VB-SUFF :

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[1] For the abbreviations see the table at the end of the paper.

Usually, the verbal clauses are introduced by the ethnonym of the defeated enemy:

{[ethnonym+ determinant] + [[*abr* + *se* + determinant] + verbal complex] + [*kdi* + *se* + determinant] ± [*ar* + *se* + determinant] + verbal complex]]}

3. *tmey-l* :   *abr-se-wi* :   PREF-*rx*-SUFF :
    Tameya-DET :   man-each-DET :   PREF-VB-SUFF :
    kdi-se-wi :   *ar-se-li* :   *tkk* :
    woman-each-DET :   boy-each-DET :   VB :

In some texts such as REM 1003 the noun phrase is composed of the number of victims:

[[noun] + [[noun + number] + [noun + number] + demonstrative adjective + plural] ± [noun + possessive plural] + verbal complex];

1. *qeper :*   *abr ꝫ2 : kdi 137 :*   *qo-leb :*   *ye-dxi :*
    NAME :   man ꝫ2 : woman 137 :   DEM DET PL :   PREF-VB
2. *perite : abr 100 : kdi 1ꝫ2 :*   *qoleb :*   *apote-bese :*
    agent : man 100 : woman 1ꝫ2 :   DEM DET PL :   envoy-POSS
        tkk :
    PL : VB

These types of clause have been studied for over a hundred years, and their common structure, the use of nouns *abr* and *kdi* followed in some cases by numerals, the presence of ethnonyms, and of course the typology of the texts, led Griffith (1917: 167) to suggest that they could refer to a description of war; but it was the application of the parallel text method that allowed him to finally hypothesize the semantic value of the verbal roots. The parallel text approach, where the main idea is that analogies exist in the composition of the whole or some sections of texts, was especially useful for translating parts of religious and royal writings. Usually, the comparison was between texts written in Egyptian, Demotic or Greek produced in Nubia. The analogies depended on the fact that the writers of the inscriptions used the same model. In the case of the religious texts the priests who composed the proskynemata on behalf of

pilgrims in the temples, especially in Lower Nubia where pilgrims frequently came from different countries, used the same formulas to inscribe prayers and adorations in different language.

The translation of royal texts offers one of the most interesting examples of the use of this method. The texts used as parallels were the late Egyptian royal inscriptions of the Napatan period produced by the kings who preceded the Meroitic dynasty when the capital of the kingdom was Napata. During this period, from the 8th to the 3rd centuries BCE, the official language and writing system were the late stage of Egyptian. Scholars usually include the Napatan royal texts in the literary genre of *Königsnovelle*, consisting of Egyptian inscriptions describing the figure and the actions of the king. The Napatan royal texts, produced and preserved freely in the forecourts of the temple, partially reflect the idea of the *Königsnovelle* for chronicling the royal reigns, although some particular aspects can be considered original and belonging to a different tradition. The reports of war, especially those written during the last phase of the Napatan period when the Kushite tradition was emphasized, were composed of passages that refer to the victory of the rulers over the enemy, identified by an ethnonym. They also describe the capture of the chief and the numbers of men and women taken together with the booty. The quantities are designated by appending numerals and the use of ethnonyms associated with the words for 'man' and 'woman' is similar to the elements in the Meroitic clauses. Griffith's analysis highlighted the strong similarity in the composition of the clauses, leading him to suggest a semantic value for the verbs. The next stage in the translation of the Meroitic reports of war was initiated by the French scholar, Claude Rilly, who used the same approach as Griffith in comparing some passages of the Napatan texts with the Meroitic ones. Rilly confirmed the strong similarities with the reports of the war on the Nastasen stele.

According to the seven indices that correspond to the necessary conditions for assuring the translation of a Meroitic word, Rilly proposed the following translations: *-ked-* 'to kill', *-are-* 'to capture', *-ark-* 'to plunder, *-tkk-* 'to seize, to plunder' (Rilly 2010*a*: 76–80). He also proposed linguistic comparisons for the same verbs confirming their semantic value (Rilly 2010*a*: 116, 128, 142). Unfortunately, it is impossible to translate the tense and number of the verbs because our knowledge of the verbal complexes is limited to their roots, and the comprehension of the prefixes and suffixes is still uncertain.

The pseudo-translation of the preview examples is:

1. *abr-se-l* : PREF‑*ked*-SUFF :
    'killing each man'
      kdi-se-l : *er-k*-SUFF
    'capturing each woman'

2. *abr-se-l* : PREF‑*ked*-SUFF :
    'killing each man'
      kdi-se-l : *ar-se-li* : *tkk* :
    'seizing each woman and each boy'
      yemoqe : *qebesewi* : PREF-*erk*-SUFF :
    'plundering their *yemoqe*'

3. *tmey-l* : *abr-se-wi* : PREF-*rx*-SUFF : *kdi-se-wi* : *ar-se-li* : *tkk*
    'Tameya: killing(?) each man and seizing each woman and each boy'

4. *perite : abr 100 : kdi 1 72 : qoleb : apote-bese : tkk :*
    'seizing agent, 100 men, 172 women and their envoy'

By comparing the Napatan inscription with the Meroitic one, the similarity between the two is clear:

Nastasen Inscription FHN II, 84/53-54:	Amanirenas Stele REM 1003/3-6
Dj=j t3 p3 wr n M3-ḥ3-t J-b-s-´o` 'I had seized the chief of Mahae, Abso' *ḥ(3)k(=j) ḥmt nbt dybnty nbt* '(I) captured all the women, all the domestic animals' *nbw dbn 1212* 'gold, *deben*-weight: 1212' *jw3 22120* 'long-horned oxen: 22120' *ḥmt nbt mn(mn) 55200* 'all the women, and the livestock: 55200'	*abrsel : **yekedi** : kdi´sel` : arseli : **tkk** :* *yemoqe : ´q`ebese´w`i : **yerki** :* 'killing each man, enslaving each woman and each boy, plundering their *yemoqe*' *armeyoselxe : **adxite** :* 'taking/deporting(?) *armeyoselxe*' *qeper : abr ̣32 : kdi 137 : qoleb : **yedxi*** 'taking/deporting(?) Qeper and these 32 men and 137 women'

How can one explain this similarity? The Napatan and Meroitic royal texts were archived in the temples, as part of an epigraphical tradition. The temple of Amon at Gebel Barkal contained both type of texts and this suggests that the scribes may have used the Napatan texts, especially the late texts of Amannote-erike, Harsiyotef and Nastasen, as models for the composition of the Meroitic ones. These Napatan texts, belonging to the last kings of the Napatan period, exhibited the first real change in the royal literature by adopting a documentary style that differed from the *Königsnovelle* model, characteristic of the texts of the 25th Dynasty and the first phase of the Napatan period. The same documentary style seems to be followed by the Meroitic inscriptions, especially from the Amanirenas and Akinidad period, 1st cent. BCE.

The comparison with Aksumite inscriptions

The study of the Meroitic royal inscriptions and in particular the reports of war deserves comparison with the well-known reports of war in the Aksumite texts. Although the time frame between the Aksumite and Meroitic inscriptions is large as well as the geographical distance, there are noteworthy similarities in the description of wars. The inscription of ʿEzana RIÉ I 188 written in vocalised Gəʿəz and dated to the first half of the 4th cent. CE, includes several war dispatches. It deals with the military expeditions against the Ṣarane people and four other populations, describing the capture and killing of men and women, the numbers of prisoners and the quantity of booty. Here is an extract from the text:

RIÉ I 188 (Marrassini 2014: 230; Munro-Hay 1991: 227)
'[…]We vanquished Säʿne and Ṣäwänte and Gema and Zäḫtän, four tribes, and we seized Alitaha and his two children
And 503 men of Aˀ[fa]n and 202 women were put to death, total 705
Men and women of Gäʿaza were made prisoner, 40 men and 165 women and children, and (total) 2015
The booty comprised 33,957 head of cattle and 827 beasts of burden […]'.

RIÉ I 189/40-44 (Marrassini 2014: 235), written in vocalised Gəʿəz, describes a military expedition against the Noba people. At the end, it includes a section reporting the number of prisoners taken and enemies killed. The RIÉ

I 190 (Marrassini 2014: 242), which is in Gəˁəz but written in South Arabian characters, also includes a description of the number of defeated enemies. However, the ˁEzana description of war against Beja follows a different schema. The report focuses on the deportation and resettlement of the conquered people with their chiefs and cattle. RIÉ I 185 I and RIÉ I 270 also describe deportation and, together with RIÉ I 185 II, were engraved on the same stela but with a different writing system and language. The first inscription was in Gəˁəz but written in South Arabian characters, the second was in Greek, and the last was written in unvocalised Gəˁəz.

RIÉ I 185 I/5-17 (Marrassini 2014: 220–21):
'They arrived in the land, six chiefs with their peoples submitted; being submitted, they moved them from their land with their sons, their women, their peoples and their cattle – the number of men of each of the six chiefs amounting to 4400, cattle 3112, sheep 6224, and beasts of burden 677 – feeding them from the day they took them out of their country, every day with 22000 leaves of 'ls, and meat that they needed, quenching their thirst with beer and wine, to satiety during four months. When they arrived at Aksum to us, we clothed them all together and adorned their chiefs and we moved them in the land of Md, in the borders of our country. And we established that they would feed there, and we assigned to each chief 4190 cattle, for the six chiefs 25140.'

This report records the number of defeated chiefs and the number of their deported people and animals, and the quantity and type of food that they received every day until they reached the capital of the kingdom, where they were given supplies and transported to the final destination. The text points out that the chiefs and people were moved to a different land where they were resettled.

The Greek version of RIÉ I 270 (Munro-Hay 1991: 224–25) says:
'Since the people of the Beja rose up, we sent our brothers Saiazana and Adefen to fight them. When these had taken arms against the enemy, they made them submit and they brought them to us with their dependents, with 3112 head of cattle, 6224 sheep, and 677 beasts of burden- feeding them with cattle and provisions of the Annona and giving them beer, wine and water to drink to satiety whatever their number. There were six chiefs with their

peoples, to the number of 4400 and they received each day 22,000 loaves of wheat and wine for four months, until (my brothers) had brought them to me. After having given them all means of substance, and clothed them, changed their residence we installed them by force in a place in our land called Matlia. And we commanded again that they be given supplies, and we accorded to each chief 25,140 head of cattle.'

In the two Meroitic texts, there were some untranslated passages after the reports of the war. The few known words, composed of nouns and verbs, suggest that these passages were part of the war reports.

REM 1003/23-26

1. *kdi-se-lw :*   *abr-se-lw :*   *yemoqe*   *eqebese-wit*
   woman-each-DET : man-each-DET :   *yemoqe*   POSS   PL-
   w-kb-te :
   PREF-VB-SUFF :

2. *teneke-l-xe :*   *ete-wwi-te :*
   west-DET-towards :   PREF-VB-SUFF :

3. *nmo-li :*   *dmot-li :*   *dmbe-li :*   *mdeweyi :*
   nmo-DET :   *dmot*-DET :   *dmbe*- DET :   Meroe :
   mkde.i :   *bik : wwi-kewi :*
   goddess(?).*i* :   *bik* : *wwi*-also :

4. *kdeylk :*   *abrik :*   *wi : 3348̣ wwi-kewi :*
   female (?) :   male (?)[2] :   total : 3348̣ VB-also :

5. *erote : tinneke : wli-kid-bte :*
   erote : *tinneke* : PREF(?)-VB-*bte* :

6. *asente :*   *qer-li-selw :*   *asr :*   *axide-bx :*
   asente :   *qer*-DET-under :   animal :   *axid*-them :
   wi ̣1676
   total ̣1676

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[2] Here the lexemes, *kdeylk* and *abrik*, are composed of the nouns *kdi* and *abr* and the unknown postpositions *-ylk/ik* (most probably variants of the same postposition). It has been suggested the meaning of female and male but at the moment it is just a supposition without any comparison.

The noun phrase of the first clause is in accord with the schema of the report of war. What it changes is the verbal root *-kb-*. The second clause includes a geographical reference 'west' associated with the postposition *-xe*, which indicates the direction. The verbal root *-wwi-* is the same in the third and fourth clauses. According to the analysis of other Meroitic texts, the verbal root *-wwi-* is usually associated with the name of a place and morphemes that indicate the direction. The author appears to indicate that this root could be a verb of movement. Thus, the second clause indicates a movement 'toward the west', while the third one might indicate a movement relative to the capital, Meroe. Here the object of the verb might be the three nouns *nmo-li : dmot-li : dmbe-li*.

The fourth clause describes the movement of something or someone. Indeed the object is *kdeylk : abrik : wi : 3348*, which includes the total number 3348 that may refer to people or animals because of the words *kde-ylk : abr-ik* which include the genre. The last two passages contain the verbal roots *-kid-* and *axid-*, which were used in funerary texts (REM 1182) to describe a list of presents. According to the analysis of Millet (1982) and Rilly (2007: 144–48), the verb *axid-* would indicate movement, and in this case suggests the translation 'to bring'. Regarding *-kid-*, it appears in REM 1182 in two forms, as a noun and as a verbal form: *yikid-bite-lowi*. The fact that in REM 1183, *-kid-* is associated with lists, led to the hypothetical translation of 'offering'. Thus, the last two clauses of REM 1003 may refer to a donation and the movement of cattle. According to this analysis, the Meroitic passages might be part of the reports of war and describe the relocation of the defeated people and their animals to a different place.

The second Meroitic royal inscription that presents some similar sections is REM 0094, the last royal inscription written in Meroitic. This text is dated to the 5th cent. CE.

REM 0094/20-23
1. *br-leb :*   *kede-bx :*
    man-DET PL :   killing-them :
2. *kdi-leb :*   *mror-leb :*   *ss-leb :*   **kb-**b-te :
    woman-DET PL : *mror-DET PL :*   *ss-DET PL :*   kb-PL-SUFF
3. *pdhose : lh-leb :*   *ye-xoy-ke :*
    pdhose : great-DET PL :   I PERS SG (?)-*xoy*-SUFF :

4. *yetete : mrorbe : qes-w :   adere-ke :   mtr wse :   hr-w :*
    yetete : mrorbe : Kush-to : Adere-from: *mtr wse :*   North-to :
    pilqo-ke :   mtr : wse :   qore 8 hre-se :   *wteb :*
    Philae-from :   *mtr wse :*   8 kings of the North :   *wteb*
    **axi de*[ca.3]*
    axide

The text deals with a war and includes many geographical references as well as place names.

The first clause indicates the killing of men, while the second refers to women and other people[3]. Here the verbal root is -*kb*- the same root used in REM 1003. The last sequence presents place names with the postposition -*w* that refers to the direction and -*ke*, the spatial origin or the place from which a person departed (Rilly, de Voogt 2012: 160–62). The verb used is *axide*, the same as in REM 1003. The most interesting aspect is the reference to eight kings of the North that represents the object of *axide*. Therefore, this section may describe the killing or defeat of people and the movement of these kings. Comparing this section with that of the Aksumite text RIÉ I 185 I, it might be possible that in REM 0094 the text refers to the capture and movement of kings to another place according to the resettlement practice.

RIÉ I 185 I	REM 0094/20-23
'They arrived in the land, **six chiefs with their peoples submitted; being submitted, they moved them from their land** with their sons, their women, their peoples and their cattle – the number of men of each of the six chiefs amounting to 4400, cattle 3112, sheep 6224, and beasts of burden 677 – feeding them from the day they took them out of their country, every day with 22000 leaves of 'ls, and meat that they needed, quenching their thirst with beer and wine, to satiety during four months.	1. *br-leb : kede-bx :* 'Killing the men' 2. *kdi-leb : mror-leb : ss-leb : kb-b-te :* 'The women, the *mror*s, the *ss*s *kb*-PL-SUFF' 3. *pdhose : lh-leb : ye-xoy-ke :* 'The great *pdhose*s I PERS SG (?)-*xoy*-SUFF' 4. ***yetete : mrorbe : qes-w : adere-ke : mtr wse : hr-w : pilqo-ke : mtr : wse : qore 8 hre-se : wteb : axi de*[ca.3]**

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[3] The nouns *mror* and *ss* may indicate officials or age/gender categories.

When they arrived at Aksum to us, we clothed them all together and adorned their chiefs and we moved them in the land of Md, in the borders of our country. And we established that they would feed there, and we assigned to each chief 4190 cattle, for the six chiefs 25140.'

'*yetete : mrorbe :* to Kush : from Adere : *mtr wse :* to North : from Philae : *mtr wse* 8 kings of the North : *wteb axide*'

Furthermore, it is possible to compare other sequences of the same Aksumite texts with both REM 1003 and 0094.

RIÉ I 185 I	REM 1003/23-26	REM 0094/20-23
'They arrived in the land, six chiefs with their peoples submitted; being submitted, **they moved them from their land with their sons, their women, their peoples and their cattle – the number of men of each of the six chiefs amounting to 4400, cattle 3112, sheep 6224, and beasts of burden 677** – feeding them from the day they took them out of their country, every day with 22000 leaves of 'ls, and meat that they needed, quenching their thirst with beer and wine, to satiety during four months. When they arrived at Aksum to us, we clothed them all	1. ***kdi-se-lw : abr-se-lw : yemoqe esebese-wit : w-kb-te :*** 'Each woman, each man, their *yemoqe* PREF-*kb*-SUFF' 2. *teneke-l-xe : ete-**wwi**-te* 'Towards the west : PREF-*wwi*-SUFF' 3. *nmo-li : dmot-li : dmbe-li : mdeweyi : mkde.i : bik : wwi-kewi :* 'the *nmo*, the *dmot,* the *dmbe*, Meroe : goddess(?).*i : bik : wwi*-also' 4. ***kdeylk : abrik : wi : 3348̣ wwi-kewi :*** 'female(?), male(?), total 3348̣ *wwi*-also' 5. *erote : tinneke : wli-kid-bte :* '*erote : tinneke* : PREF(?)-*kid-bte*'	1. *br-leb : kede-bx :* 'killing the men' 2. ***kdi-leb : mror-leb : ss-leb : kb-b-te :*** 'the women, the *mror*s, the *sss kb*-PL-SUFF' 3. *pdhose : lh-leb : ye-xoy-ke :* 'The great *pdhose*s I PERS SG (?)-*xoy*-SUFF' 4. *yetete : mrorbe : qes-w : adere-ke : mtr wse : hr-w : pilqo-ke : mtr : wse : qore 8 hre-se : wteb : axi de[ca.3]* '*yetete : mrorbe :* to Kush : from Adere : *mtr wse :* to North : from Philae : *mtr wse* 8 kings of the North : *wteb axide*'

together and adorned their chiefs and we moved them in the land of Md, in the borders of our country. And we established that they would feed there, and we assigned to each chief 4190 cattle, for the six chiefs 25140.'

6. *asente : qerliselw : asr : axide-bx : wi ḷ676*

'Under the *asente qer* : animal *: axid*-them : total ḷ676'

These Meroitic passages might describe a different period of the war. Even though the meaning of the verbal root *-kb-* has not been established, the comparison with the Aksumite passages could give some insights. The presence of the verb *-wwi-* associated with the geographical reference and place name in both REM 1003 and 0094, as well as the reference to a large number of *kde-ylk* and *abr-ik* is very similar to the Aksumite passage about the description of the deportation and resettlement of defeated people. Thus, it might be possible that the sequences with *-kb-* refers to the same situation, describing a common practice in war at that time.

The representation of the capture of enemies is very common in Meroitic iconography. This is typically depicted as a group of bound prisoners or the killing of the enemy with spears (Fig. 1). In the temple of Apedemak at Musawwarat es Sufra, there is a relief of several bound prisoners, kneeling or face down, preceded by elephants (Fig. 2). One of the most striking images of prisoners of war is in the temple M250/1, at Meroe. The scene, on a fallen block, shows three native women bound with ropes and a child turning to the left (Török 2002: 221). This scene is part of other scenes depicting the occupation of a village and the capture and deportation of its people. According to Török (2002: 221), the iconography of the scenes is similar to the New Kingdom reliefs of Nubians and their occupied villages. The similarities between the Meroitic and the Aksumite reports of war might reflect a similar *modus operandi*. The target of these reports in the Ezana inscriptions was the Beja people. Amanirenas and Akinidad (REM 1003) recorded four military campaigns: one against the area of the Triakonta-schoenos in Lower Nubia, one against the 'Romans', and one each against

Mki-ws-te and *Alle*. The ethnonym, *Alle*, has not been identified, but *Mki-ws-te* might refer to the Makhi people cited in the inscription of Nastasen and identified as Nubians (Rilly 2014: 1176–80). A similar name have also been identified in the inscription of Kharamadoye where they are called *Mho*.

In view of these textual comparisons and speculations, the question now becomes: Are the similarities between the Aksumite and Meroitic descriptions of war due to literary traditions or depend on common practices of war? And how can this be explained? To answer these questions it is important to investigate the possible links between the two cultures and the archaeology that support them.

Archaeological evidence of contacts between Nubia and Aksum

The similarities in the schema of the reports of war suggest a cultural influence. However, the scarcity of epigraphical and archaeological evidence of contacts between Meroe and Aksum (Hatke 2013; Fattovich 1994) does not allow us to assume a direct cultural influence as in the case of Egypt and Nubia. The Egyptian influence on the Napatan texts can be explained through the long period of Egyptian occupation of Nubia. Indeed, during the Middle and New Kingdoms, Egyptian traditions and customs permeated all levels of political, religious and social life. The Egyptian literature influenced the Kushite epigraphical production so that the Napatan royal stelae are now considered by scholars as part of the Egyptian literary genre of *Königsnovelle*. Over the long occupation, the Egyptian elements had time to stabilize in the Kushite ideology and to blend with the local traditions, surviving into Meroitic times. Because of the sparse epigraphical and archaeological evidence, similar influences are not traceable for Meroe and Aksum. Since the Napatan and Meroitic texts are older than the Aksumite, it suggests the possibility of Nubian influence on Aksum, but no evidence has been discovered to support this. The dynamics that account for the similarities between Meroitic and Aksumite reports of war must be different. From an epigraphical point of view, no Meroitic inscriptions referring to Aksum have been found, while there are two inscriptions of the Aksumite kings, Ousanas (ca. 310–330 CE) and Ezana (ca. 330–370 CE) that refer to Nubia and its peoples. The Aksumite texts record two invasions in Nubia; however, it is likely that the invasions

were not followed by a long, organized occupation because of the few archaeological evidence.

Archaeological data from Bieta Giyorgis, near Aksum, highlight the external relationships of the kingdom of Aksum. Finds from some tombs dated to the Proto-Aksumite phase (400–50/40 BCE) suggest cultural similarities between the funerary behaviour and symbolism of the Napatan-Meroitic elite and those of the Proto-Aksumite elite (Manzo 2005: 55). Several bronze and iron axes have been found in tombs of the necropolis at Bieta Giyorgis. They were frequent in Napatan royal funerary contexts at Nuri, dating from the mid-6th to the late 4th cent. BCE. In addition to metal axes, other items of military equipment such as arrowheads, spearheads and an archer's loose have been found in the cemetery at Aksum (Manzo 1998; Fig. 3). The archer's equipment dated to the 3rd–4th cent. CE has parallels in the Meroitic and Post Meroitic contexts, in Nubia and the Middle Nile Valley. The presence of arrowheads in elitarian tombs was common in Napatan, Meroitic and Post-Meroitic societies from the 7th cent. BCE. With regard to the archer's loose, one was found in the tomb of the Aspelta's wife at Nuri, and they are frequently found in Nubian contexts. Their diffusion increased in Meroitic times, as shown by archaeological evidence from the cemeteries of Begarawiya and Jebel Barkal as well as in Post-Meroitic contexts such as at El-Hobagi and in the royal tombs at Qustul and Ballana (Fig. 4). The archer's loose was part of the Meroitic royal insignia and also found on the Meroitic representations of the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es Sufra (Fig. 5). The presence of archery equipment has been attested to in many princely tombs at Meroe as well as on two funerary reliefs at Begarawiya representing the king (Beg N 20) and the queen (Beg N 6) with the arch (Manzo 1998: 47–48). Thus, in both Aksumite and Meroitic contexts, military equipment was part of the royal insignia in the royal cemetery.

Fattovich, Manzo and Bard (1998: 48), described other possible common funerary practices represented by deposits of broken ceramics and human sacrifices. The funerary materials were associated with ceremonies in Nubia mainly in Napatan times and appeared at Aksum during the Proto-Aksumite period, suggesting that some Napatan royal rituals were adopted by the local elite at Aksum. These similarities might be explained by the multiple contacts also attested to by the presence of Nubian type wares at Aksum comparable with ceramics of the Early- to Post-Meroitic periods (3rd cent. BCE–5th cent.

CE). The two bronze bowls found at Addi Gelamo (Fig. 6) interpreted as 'diplomatic gifts' may be dated to the same periods. One of the bowls has clear parallels with the Post-Meroitic bronze bowls found at el-Hobagi and the pottery bowls from Faras (Fig. 7). They could reflect elitarian groups who had access to goods obtained from long-distance trade, at least from Early Aksumite times.

The relationship between Meroe and Aksum could be said to exist in a consolidated tradition dating back to the 5th–4th centuries BCE, according to the travertine alabastron of Napatan type found at Yeha and dated to the 8th– 7th centuries BCE and the metal model axes (Fattovich, Manzo, Bard 1998: 46–47). Fattovich, Manzo, Bard advanced the hypothesis that the contacts in the 5th–4th centuries BCE may have been due to the military activities recorded by the Napatan kings, especially Amannote-erike, Harsyotef and Nastasen in the lowlands to the southeast of the Nile. Most of the military expeditions were conducted against different tribes distributed over large territories. The study of the ethnonyms suggested that some populations corresponded to Medja (Rilly 2014: 1174) referred to in Napatan texts as *Mdd*[4] and *Mdy*[5], and later identified as Beja. The fact that the same population was the object of many military campaigns suggests that Napatan, Meroitic and Aksumite kings operated in the same territories. It might also suggest the adoption of similar practices such as the deportation and resettlement described in RIÉ I 185 I, REM 1003 and REM 0094, but it cannot explain the strong similarities between the reports of the war in the texts. The use of the same schema could be considered as evidence that the two cultures used the same models to report the outcomes of their war.

Fattovich (1994) underlined that both statal systems, the kingdom of Kush (Napata and Meroe) and the early states in the Tigrean Plateau (Daamat and Aksum), influenced each other during their development, but the nature of these influences and contacts must be sought in the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands. Fattovich (1995) found other analogies in some aspects of the kingship between the kingdom of Kush during the Napatan and Meroitic times, and the earlier states, Daamat and Aksum in the Tigrean Plateau. He maintained that there were similarities at the heart of both cultures' ideologies

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[4] Amannote-erike, line 46; Harsiyotef, line 78, 81, 85, 89.

[5] Nastasen, line 61, 64.

such as (1) the prominent position of the queen in Kushite and pre-Aksumite kingdoms; (2) the privileged relationship between the king and the warrior god-Apedemak for Meroe and Mahrem for Aksum; and (3) the importance of the Sun God. These elements all suggest a common cultural background of Nubian and Ethiopian kingship. In his view, the emergence of a common cultural background might be connected with the late prehistoric forms of complex societies in the intermediate Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands. The archaeological evidence in that region shows widespread interactions among the peoples living in the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands, the Nile Valley and Ethiopia (Fattovich 1995: 72–74).

Conclusions

The comparison between the Meroitic and Aksumite royal texts has identified strong similarities among the reports of war and it might provide new insights into the translation of some Meroitic passages. The analysis revealed two key aspects: the presence of a common model used to describe the war in Napatan, Meroitic and Aksumite texts and the practices of deportation and resettlement in the same population and territories. The model was applied to the same texts and repeated for each enemy and this standardization might be considered a characteristic for emphasizing certain aspects of the oral literature. According to studies of the most recent oral literature of sub-Saharan Africa (Okpewho 1993: 26–29), the main parts of the texts show many repeated sections, which are often associated with performances. Another relevant aspect of the oral literature of sub-Saharan Africa is the recurring topic of the war. The reports of the war aim at celebrating the event, the strength of the warriors and their success in battle (Okpewho 1993: 45–46). An example is 'The Ozidi Saga' in which the protagonist is involved in several battles and the description of each battle follows the same model. I am suggesting that the similarities in the reports of war might be adduced to the application of a common ancient model in oral traditions. This idea of course actually is speculative and need detailed studies. However, the similarities in the model could be related to the dynamics of contact between Nubia and Ethiopia in the late prehistoric and early historical times. Fattovich suggested the hypothesis of the emergence of a common cultural background in the late prehistoric period followed by indirect contacts

with people living in the Eritrean-Sudanese regions and direct contacts maintained by Napatan, Meroitic and Proto-Aksumite elites.

As regards deportation and resettlement, the practice continued to be used in Ethiopia until the 1970s and 1980s. During that time resettlement was used to solve problems of drought and famine as thousands of households were moved from one area to another (Wolde-Selassie Abbute 2010). It is probable that relocation of people was done in a similar fashion because of some particular exigences that in the case of Meroe and Aksum necessitated the control of certain populations in their territories.

Table of Abbreviations
  PREF   Prefix
  SUFF   Suffix
  DET   Determinant
  VB   Verb
  PL   Plural
  POSS   Possessive
  EMPH   Emphatic
  DEM   Demonstrative

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Fig. 1 – Representation from the Lion Temple at Musawarrat es-Sufra.

Fig. 2 – Representation from the Lion Temple at Musawarrat es-Sufra.
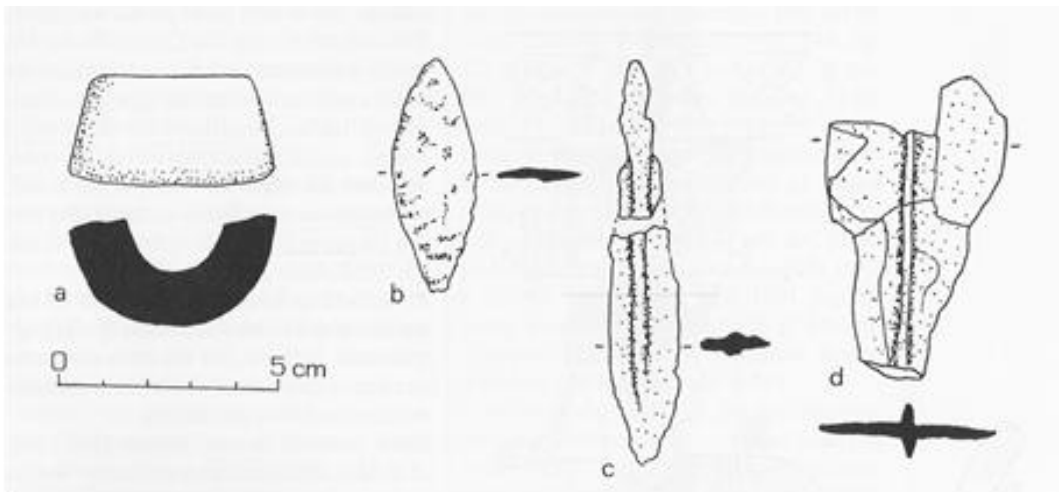

Fig. 3 – The archer's equipment from Aksum (Manzo 1998: 45).

Fig. 4 – The archer's loose from Meroe (Baud 2010: 131).
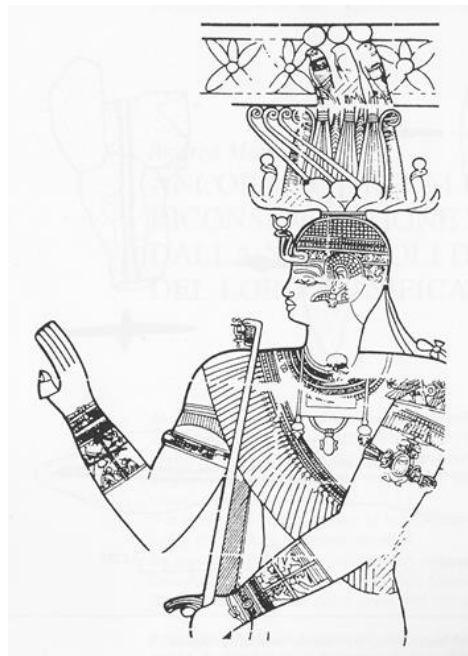

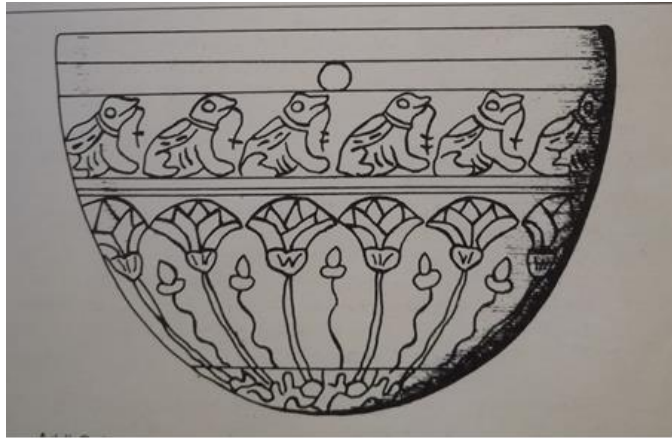Fig. 5 – Royal Insignia from the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra (Manzo 1998: 46).

Fig. 6 – Bowl from Addi Galamo (Anfray 1990: 63).

Fig. 7 – Pottery cup decorated with painted frogs and lotus flowers. Faras (Sudan), 1st–2nd cent. AD. British Museum EA 51448 (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA51448).