

B 500: The Statue cache

In 1916 George A. Reisner discovered, in two separate caches, ten complete or nearly complete hard stone statues, representing, sometimes in multiple image, Taharqa and four of his five successors to the early sixth century BC: Tanwetamani, Senkamanisken, Anlamani, and Aspelta. (The only king not represented in the group was his presumed son and second successor Atlanersa, for whose statue, see B 700). Seven of the statues were life size or nearly life size; three others were of colossal scale; and one represented a contemporary queen (**figs. 4-7**).

The find was full of ironies. One was that Reisner discovered the first cache completely by accident, in an otherwise vacant area immediately beside the pylon of B 500 (**figs. 1, 2**). This was an area being probed by him as a prospective dump site. Here he expected, indeed hoped, to find nothing at all. Six weeks later, he found the second cache just as unexpectedly, in and around a room of the neighboring Amun Temple B 800 (q.v.), 120 m west of the first cache (**fig. 3**). The surprise was the discovery that many of the fragments found here joined those from the first cache.



fig. 1. *The statue pit at Jebel Barkal, 20 m northeast of the NE end of the first pylon of B 500, as found by Reisner in 1916. Photo B 2681, from the photographic archive of G. A. Reisner's Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Expedition. Photographer: Mohammedani Ibrahim Ibrahim. Feb. 28, 1916. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*



fig. 2. *Detail of fig. 1. Photo B 2683, from the photographic archive of G. A. Reisner's Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Expedition. Photographer: Mohammedani Ibrahim Ibrahim. March 1, 1916. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*



fig. 3. *The second cache of statue fragments found by Reisner in one of the side rooms of B 800. Photo A 2357. Photo B 2681, from the photographic archive of G. A. Reisner's*

Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Expedition. Photographer: Mohammedani Ibrahim Ibrahim. March 30, 1916. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Because the fragments of the second cache were found mixed with a thick layer of ash, charcoal, and burned wood and appeared to have been dumped carelessly in their burial place with rubble from a conflagration, Reisner speculated that the statues had been deliberately broken in a violent episode that had also included a fire. Since the generally larger, heavier fragments of the first cache lay immediately outside the and to the right (northeast) of the entrance to B 500, he speculated that all the statues had originally been set up inside the great temple, that they had been toppled and broken in place, and that the temple (i.e. its massive wooden roof) had then been burned. He concluded that, as an initial step toward restoring the temple after the disaster, the workers had removed the broken statues and burned debris from the damaged temple and buried the fragments in the two widely separated caches before commencing the building's restoration.

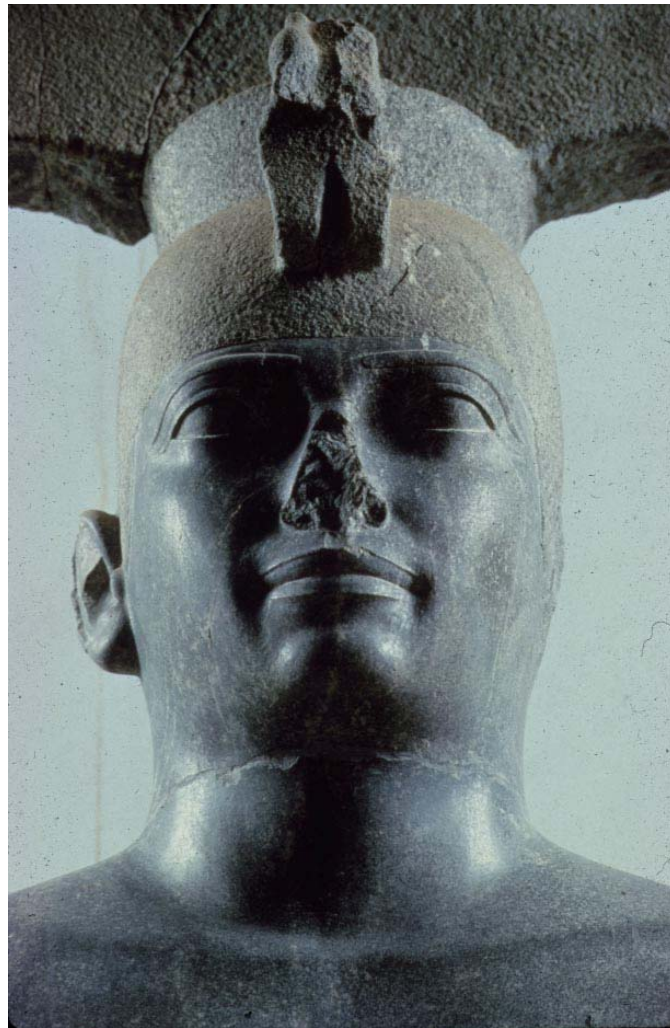


fig. 4. *The largest statue in the cache, at 4.18m, represented Taharqa, wearing the crown of the god Shu (for explanation, see B 200-300). Sudan National Museum, Khartoum.(Photo by Enrico Ferorelli).*



figs. 5, 6. *The large statues of Anlamani and Aspelta from the cache, as restored in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Each, like Taharqa, wears the crown of Shu (see fig. 2). The former is about 4 m in height; the latter is 3.32 m high. (MFA 23.732 and 23.730. Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Expedition. Photos © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)*

The statues exhibit similar patterns of breakage. When found, most were split at the base, the legs, and in the middle, and all the heads were broken off. Five of the statues are still headless. Of those whose heads were recovered, only that of the small Senkamanisken statue in Boston shows no other damage to the face. The statue of Taharqa is missing its nose and one ear. The head of the large statue of Anlamani lacks its nose and chin, while

the face of Aspelta was also found noseless. (The nose was later recovered in debris between B 500 and 800). The tall feathered crowns of each of the colossal statues associated each of the kings with the god Shu, the first born son of Amun as Creator god (for explanation, see B 200 and 300); the feathered crests had all been split from their heads. Five of the statues lack their right hands or exhibit damage to their lower right arms and hands. Although there are no obvious indications of hammer blows to the stone, the damage is clearly not natural and suggests a concerted attempt at mutilation. The work appears to be that of an enemy determined to "kill" the spirit of the statues and to render them - and the individuals they represented - powerless to avenge their destruction.

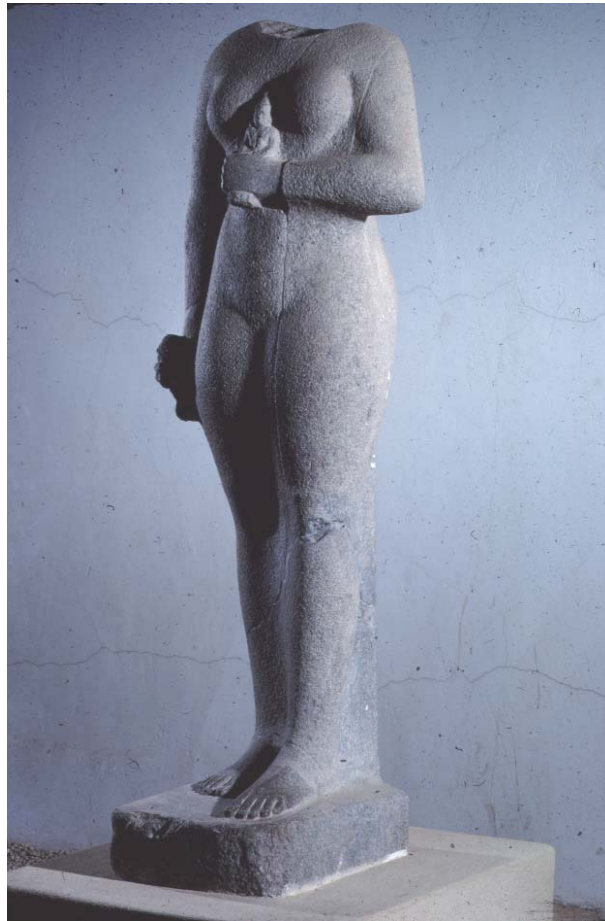


fig. 7. *Statue of Queen Amanimalel(?), from the Barkal cache. Courtesy of Sudan National Museum, Khartoum. (Photo by Enrico Ferorelli).*

Reisner realized that the destruction of B 500 - and of the statues - must have occurred during or soon after the reign of Aspelta (ca. 600-580 BC), the last king in the statue series. Although he attributed the destruction to a hypothetical dynastic quarrel in the mid-sixth century BC, recent examination of destruction patterns at both Jebel Barkal and at Sanam Abu Dom, across the river, suggest that each of these sites suffered violent destruction and fire damage contemporaneously, sometime early in reign of Aspelta (For this king's burned palace, see also B 1200). Because it would be most unlikely that the

royal and sacred buildings of Jebel Barkal, as well as the statues of kings spanning over half a century - especially that of Taharqa - would be deliberately destroyed by a rival dynastic faction, the vandals must have been outsiders. Since the reign of Aspelta coincided chronologically with the well-known attack on Kush in 593 BC by the new Egyptian king Psamtik II of Dynasty 26, we are drawn to the conclusion that the vandals were his troops, many of whom were Greek and Carian mercenaries. His objectives are not hard to imagine. He would surely have wished to put an end forever to Kushite claims to his throne - the throne of Egypt - and to destroy the oracle of the god that kept encouraging those claims.

In 2003 a second cache of broken statues was found by the Swiss archaeologist Charles Bonnet at the site of Dukki Gel (ancient Pnubs), near Kerma. This cache included the very same kings represented at Jebel Barkal - Taharqa, Tanwetamani, Senkamanisken, Anlamani, and Aspelta - but these were carved at much smaller scale. These statues, too, had been deliberately broken, after which their pieces had been carefully gathered up and buried in a pit, also near the local temple (**fig. 8**). Today the Dukki Gel statues, all restored, are exhibited as a group in the Kerma Museum, while the Jebel Barkal statues are divided among the Sudan National Museum, the Jebel Barkal Museum, and the art museums of Boston, Toledo and Richmond in the United States.



fig. 8. The cache of statues from Dukki Gel, found in 2003. C. Bonnet and D. Valbelle, *The Nubian Pharaohs: Black Kings of the Nile*. Cairo, 2005. p. 76.

Refs:

D. Dunham, *The Barkal Temples*. Boston, 1970, pp. 17-25, pls. I, II, VII-XXII.

T. Kendall. "Fragments Lost and Found: Two Kushite Objects Augmented." In P.D. Manuelian, Ed, *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson*, vol. 2. Boston, 1996. pp. 468-476.

