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VIDENCES ON MEROITIC COURT

Abstract:

Although the documentation about the Meroitic court is limited the most recent archaeological discoveries and the improvement in the translation of the Meroitic language can help to define a general view of the court. The court of the kingdom of Meroe, in Nubia between the 3rd BC and 5th AD, was likely organised around the royal family. The cemeteries, especially in the south of the kingdom, suggest that there was not a clear difference between royal family members and other court members. Most probably, the others were simply lesser members of royalty. Many Meroitic funerary inscriptions presenting the biography of the deceased in the form of *cursus honorum* include a final formula that might define a direct relationship between the king and the deceased.

The archaeological evidence highlights numerous centres of power in the country. A large number of palaces were discovered in urban sites and religious centres, most of them dated to the same period. The Napatan royal inscriptions (8th BC to 3rd BC) of the kings who governed Nubia before the Meroitic dynasty, describe multiple enthronements of the king characterised by coronation journeys in all the kingdom's main religious centres. The repetition of the royal investiture may be explained as a formulation of originally independent polities. This practice may have continued in the Meroitic period, suggesting the existence of more than one local elite family. A reference to different clans has been found in the most ancient Meroitic royal text (REM 1044).

Keywords:

court, palace, Meroitic texts, Napatan texts

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Introduction

Elias (1980: 185) defined the court as a formation of individuals bound together, a social configuration characterised by distinctive modes of communication (Spawforth 2007: 3). The study of the courts describes the dynamics that led to the formation of interdependence among people and highlights the issue of social production and reproduction of power distribution (Elias 1980: 207). In some ancient societies, the definition of court and the rules at the base of this configuration are more difficult to track down than in others. For this reason, studying the presence of the courts involves the crossing of interdisciplinary boundaries (Spawforth 2007: 2). In the case of the Kingdom of Meroe, in Nubia between the 3rd cent. BC and 5th cent. AD, the paucity of data and the difficulty in translating Meroitic texts prevent us from having a clear understanding of how it is legitimate to talk of a court and how crucial it was for the royalty's construction and conservation. So far, studies are focused mainly on the reconstruction of the administrative system.

According to Spawforth (Spawforth 2007: 3), the idea that the court is both a spatial formation and a social configuration is fundamental in the attempt to analyse and define this institution in society. In the Meroitic context, at the moment, there is no evidence of a Meroitic word that defines the court as a social space. However, the term *qorte* is in the short list of translated words found in

a block from the temple of Amon at Meroe, REM 1041, and in the Taneyidamani inscription, REM 1044.

The term is composed, *qore-le-te*, of the noun *qore* 'king', the determinant *-le*, and the locative postposition *-te*; 'at the king'. It indicates standing before the king and it might also refer to the physical space that receives the sovereign or the royal family. According to this literal translation, Hoffman (1981: 322) suggested the meaning 'palace'. This word connotes a physical space organised around the sovereign, where people interacted with them.

The paper aims not to define the administrative structure of the kingdom, nor to give a list of several titles, but to introduce the study of the social configuration around the royal Meroitic family that in other cultural contexts is defined as 'court'.

Iconography

Representations of ceremonies derive from the temples and royal funerary chapels, but not all of them represent clearly the court. Meroitic temples were designed as images of the ordered world, and the existence of the cosmos and society was secured through the interaction between the gods and royalty. Thus, the scenes represent the ruler or the royal family and gods performing specific ceremonies. Otherwise, the temples of the 25th Dynasty and Napatan period, represent some processions that include several figures, in most cases priests and priestesses. Scenes of processions are always represented in the barque ceremony. Reliefs are present in the Great Amon Temple at Gebel Barkal, in the Temple of Amon, Bull of Bow-Land, at Sanam, and the Temple of Amon at Kawa, all dated to the 25th Dynasty. Some scenes of the same ceremony are placed in the temple of Amon at Napata B700, which was constructed by the successors of the 25th Dynasty and modified during the Meroitic period.

From the north wall of the Hall of Offerings (B503) of the Great Amon Temple at Gebel Barkal, some reliefs represent a procession of priestesses and musicians (Macadam 1946: 62) during a performance of rites, likely associated with the barque repository in B504C. The barque procession was also represented on the same temple's south wall of Hall B502. The emergence of the barque of Amon of Napata from the Sanctuary is accompanied by a thurifying priest, the king as High Priest, his wife, and attendants (Török 2002: 58, 65). There is no information about these attendants. Fragments of relief that represent the feet of six figures on the north wall of the Hypostyle at Sanam seem to have been part of the representation of a procession limited to few people. This representation resembles

the relief of the south wall of the Kawa Hypostyle, which shows a long procession receiving the barque (Török 2002: 138). Likely, it was in the Hypostyle of this temple at Kawa where the court accompanied the performance of certain rites (Török 2002: 100-101). The scenes at Kawa have been interpreted as two ceremonial processes of the barque of Amon (of Kawa). In both cases, it is accompanied by priests, temple musicians, and singers, as well as members of the royal family, the queens. Moreover, the sandalled feet of six female figures shown playing the sistrum 'before the face' of god, are described in fragments of inscriptions as members of the royal 'harem'. Queens and Royal wives who play the sistrum were also represented on the temple at Gebel Barkal (Napata)'s wall B700. The procession of the royal queens and harem likely constitutes the rear portion of scenes, which represent divine barque processions (Török 2002: 164-165).

During the Meroitic period, reliefs representing members of the court appeared only in the royal funerary chapels. The royal chapels in the main cemeteries at Begrawwiya and Jebel Barkal include scenes of funerary rituals. They represent priests and gods who perform rites, people who transport objects (Beg. S. 10), or cattle and processions of palm bearers. In the majority of cases, the palm bearers are unknown. The figures do not have any characteristic element that can suggest their role except for the genre. They were represented on the walls of the chapels Beg N 11, Beg N 18, Beg N 36, and Beg N. 41 from the site of Begrawwiya North; and Bar. 6 from the site of Gebel Barkal. In some chapels, some legends describe the titles of figures who perform and attend the funerary rites.

The sources

Inscriptions may play an important role in the analysis of the phenomenon of the 'court'. In contrast to Egypt, there are no administrative texts that provide information on the etiquette and ritual at court in the Meroitic context, thus the author mainly considers three classes of texts: Meroitic funerary texts, funerary legends, and royal texts dated to the Napatan time. The reason for the inclusion of Napatan texts is that they provide more information about the administrative structure and royal ceremonies in which the elite participated. This analysis does not include Meroitic royal texts, because, though it mentions some individuals that are identified through their titles other than the king or queen, unfortunately, the context in which the functionaries are mentioned is not completely clear. Thus, information can be derived from the late Napatan period texts, written in Egyptian. In these texts, the description of the rituals linked to enthronement practices includes the presence of officials as part of the ceremonies. Despite the paucity of textual sources, there may be no doubt that a court existed.

Legends

The representation in the royal funerary chapels shows lines of figures that in very few cases are accompanied by a brief legend, which allows their identification.

The remaining legends are attested in the funerary chapel of Beg. N 28, Beg. N. 41 and Bar.6.

In Beg. N 28, the funerary chapel of King Teqorideamani, there are three legends REM 0057A, which describe the servant of the rulers *'qore 'p'şę*, REM 0057B, 0057C the great wife, *qore-sem-lh*, and the other royal wife.

REM 0057A

¹*qore 'p'şę[.]'q'[ca. 2]k[ca. 1]*

²*rq : rxy [.]e[ca.2]mpel*

³*pe[ca.3]eloqr[ca. 3]rbmq*

skt[ca. 2]lo

REM 0057B

¹*kq[.]wi[ca.3]eti*

²*po qoresemllh:1*

³*x*

The legend Bar. 6 in the chapel of Queen Nawidemak, 1st cent. AD, gives the name and the titles of the main figure who performs the rite before the deceased queen.

¹*Etreteyqo: 2pkrtrl: widelo: 3stmdeselo: qo4rpselo:pnqoselo*

¹*Etretey-q-o : 2pkr-tr-l: wide-l-o : 3stmdese-l-o : qo4rpse-l-o : pnqose-l-o*

¹*Etretey-DEM-COP : 2Prince-ADJ-DET : brother-DET-COP : 3stmdese-DET-COP : qo4rpse-DET-COP : pnqose-DET-COP*

¹*This is Etareteya, the great prince's brother, the stmdese, the servant of the ruler(2), the pnqose'.*

The funerary inscription, REM 0071, engraved on the wall of the chapel of Beg N.41 of an unknown king and dated at the first half of the 2nd century AD, presents some figures:

¹*[~6]2rtek[~3]3pli[~2]4qede[~1]5lome[~1]l.6tewtt h7emwt s8mtlihe9ktrdo10lo*

¹*[~6]2rtek[~3]3pli[~2]4qede[~1]5l-o-me[~1]l.6tewtt h7emwt s8mt-li-he9ktrdo10l-o*

¹*[~6]2rtek[~3]3pli[~2]4qede[~1]5DET-COP-me[~1]l.6tewtt h7emwt s8mt-DET-he9ktrdo10-DET-COP*

The text transcribed by Lepsius (VI, n. 43) was engraved among figures of attendees in the funerary procession (Lepsius, V, 319), as a legend of part of the scene. In this text, which is difficult to read because of the state of preservation, it is possible to distinguish the term *smt*. It consisted of a title that may refer to the later office of Gr. Δομήστικός (Ferrandino, van Gerven Oei 2022). The text also

includes the word *ktrr*, probably another title. Moreover, if one interprets the signs *..]2rtek[~3]* as part of the word *[t]rtek[ese]*, it could also include a priestly title. Unfortunately, it is not possible to add more information to these, nor to determine whether the titles refer to the same dignitary.

The idea is that these figures represent members of the court. Undoubtedly, the main figures who perform rites in front of the ruler are permanently in the ruler's vicinity, whom Spawforth (2007: 8) defines as members of the inner court. Regarding the other people, according to the limited written evidence, they may have moved from other parts of the kingdom to be part of the royal funerary ceremonies.

Funerary Inscriptions

In private funerary inscriptions engraved on offering tables and stela, members of the elite exhibited titles relating to roles in administration and their connection with other members with a higher status. Titles are the foundation of the study of the administrative structure and career path of officials. Moreover, the presence of titles and the reference to kinship suggest the respect that an individual had in society. However, unlike the Nubian funerary texts, those from south of the Kingdom of Meroe lack the description of the deceased's titles and social positions, which is why the only elements that distinguish the private texts from royal texts are the décor and the benediction formulae.

During the Napatan period, the use of funerary texts on stela and offering tables remained a prerogative of the kings, while the chapel and pyramids were adopted by the closer royal family. Otherwise, during the Meroitic period, this difference was short-lived. Indeed, the royal clan's adoption, and concurrent appropriation by the non-royal elite of textual monuments that were a royal prerogative, can be observed. It is possible, according to Török (2008: 420), that the temple *scriptorium* was the place where the Meroitic mortuary formulae for the rulers, the extended royal family, and the non-ruling elite were being created.

The earliest texts for non-ruling persons are divided into two categories: texts for the members of the extended royal family and texts for the non-royal elite. Both of these are characterised by three non-royal benediction formula, which consists of a request to the invoked deities, Isis and Osiris, to celebrate with offerings and funerary rites. The formulae named A, B, and C included respectively the offerings of *ato* 'water', *at* 'bread', and *hmlol* probably a 'good meal'. In the royal offering tables from Begrawwiya North, those offerings are changed for the formula K, L, and C'. They were composed of the noun *atbe* – untranslated – and *yer* 'milk'. Specific verbs were used for these special offerings (Rilly 2009: 68). Nev-

ertheless, these formulae, considered to be a royal privilege, also occurred in texts from the Begrawwiya West cemetery.

The site of Begrawwiya, close to the royal city of Meroe, is characterised by three relevant cemeteries: Begrawwiya North, Begrawwiya South, and Begrawwiya West. The royal cemetery at Begrawwiya North includes not only the tombs of the Meroitic rulers but also tombs of non-ruling persons such as that of the prince Arikankharor, who never ruled but appeared as a member of the royal family. Perhaps most interesting is the cemetery at Begrawwiya West, which, according to Rilly's hypothesis, was characterised by four tombs of kings, contemporary to five rulers of the Kingdom of Meroe, with lower status, who were interpreted as local kings of Meroe. If this is true, it is difficult to establish the relationship between the king of Meroe and the local kings, and, in order to understand the Meroitic court, it is also difficult to place the local kings in this social configuration.

One of the interesting aspects of the definition of the court is some ending formula that appears in very few inscriptions. Indeed, some funerary inscriptions present before or after the benediction formula consist of a request to the invoked deities, Isis and Osiris, to make funerary rites, the sequence *mlolowi* or *mlolo* (Rilly 2007: 158). It consists of a formula translated as 'he/she was good' or 'he/she was a good (man/woman)'. This formula is mainly attested in Lower Nubia, from the 1st to the 4th cent. AD and was used indiscriminately for both high and local officials. Three published inscriptions, REM 0327, REM 0521, and REM 1067, use an extended form of the formula, including the nominal syntagma realised by the word *qor* > *qor-l* or *qor-w* > *qor-l-w*, in all cases, composed of the noun *qor* 'king', the determinant *-l*, and the suffix *-w* that is considered the mark of the direct object. Although the syntactic structure is not completely understood, a possible translation has been suggested. According to Rilly, the translation might be 'for the king' or 'of the king'. In all three cases, the formula is preceded and followed by similar sequences.

REM 0327 *mlolowi* : *mklw* : *mlolo* : *qorw* : *mlolo* :

Mlo-l-o-wi : mk-l-w : mlo-l-o : qor-l-w : mlo-l-o

Good-DET-COP-EMPH : God-DET-OBJ : good -DET-COP : king-DET-OBJ :
good-DET-COP

'She was good; she was good for(?) the god; she was good for(?) the king'.

REM 0521 *mnekeleli* : *mlolo* :

mne-ke-li : mlo-l-o :

Mne-LOC(?) -DET : good-DET-COP

'he was good for(?) (who comes) from Mane'

qor : *mlolo* : *mkel* : *mlolo* : *slw* : *mlolo*

qor-l : mlo-l-o : mk-l : mlo-l-o : s-l-w : mlo-l-o

king-DET : good-DET-COP : god-DET : good-DET-COP : man(ʕ)-DET-OBJ :
good-DET-COP

‘He was good for(ʕ) the king; he was good for(ʕ) the god; he was good for(ʕ)
the man(ʕ)’.

REM 1067 *mlolo : qorw : mlolo : mklw : mlolo : slw : mlolowi : selw : mlolowi*

Mlo-l-o : qor-l-w : mlo-l-o : mk-l-w : mlo-l-o : s-l-w : mlo-l-o-wi : se-l-w : mlo-
l-o-wi

Good-DET-COP : king-DET-OBJ : good-DET-COP : god-DET-OBJ : good-DET-
COP : man(ʕ)-DET-OBJ : good-DET-COP-EMPH : se-DET-OBJ : good-DET-
COP-EMPH

‘He was good; he was good for(ʕ) the king; he was good for(ʕ) the god; he was
good for(ʕ) the man, he was good for(ʕ) the se’.

It is complicated to establish the reason for which only a few texts included the formula *mlolowi*, as it is to understand the meaning of the sequences preceded by the nominal syntagma. Nevertheless, one might suggest that the formula with the word *qore* may refer to some aspects of the service provided by officials to the king, considered great honours. It might also define a direct relationship between the king and the deceased.

One of the most interesting and underestimated aspects that Elias (1980) deals with is the reason that prompted people to be part of a court, and what kept people united in the court. The Meroitic court was likely organised around the royal family, with the elite being simply lesser members of royalty.

According to the inscriptions, a list of titles in the legends of the royal funerary chapels has been defined.

Titles from the legends of the royal funerary chapels:
<i>stmdese</i> ;
<i>pler/pqr</i> : prince
qorpse : servant of ruler
<i>pnqose</i> ;
<i>kroro</i> ; princeʕ
<i>kttre</i> :
qoresem : the king’s wife
<i>skmte</i>
<i>smt</i> : domesticos

Among the titles, only four are translated. Two of these titles include the word *qore* ‘king’. The title *qorpse* ‘servant of the king’ may suggest that the official was employed in the personal service of the king and in running the palace.

There are other titles found in different kinds of texts composed of the word *qore*, others of the adjective or associated with the genitive *qorise*. Here is a list:

Titles composed of the adjective <i>qorose</i>:	Titles composed of the word <i>qore</i>:	Titles associated with the genitive <i>qorise</i>:
<i>kreteqorose</i> <i>mrehqo qorose</i> <i>mseqorose</i> <i>sqorose</i> : the royal man	<i>qorpse/qorbse</i> : servant of the rulers <i>qoresem</i> : the king's wife <i>qorene</i> : the royal scribe (ḥ) <i>qoredek</i> <i>qorene kroro</i> : the first royal scribe	<i>apote qorise</i> : the envoy of the king <i>xbxne qorise</i> <i>pkr qorise</i> : the prince(ḥ) of the king <i>pqrtr qorise</i> : the great prince of the king <i>qorene qorise</i> : the royal scribe of the king <i>ttne qorise</i>

All these titles may express closeness to the king. However, this does not mean they run the palace. (Spawforth 2007: 290). Some of them may express only a symbolic closeness to him, maybe they were far from the palace, and likely they were part of an external court.

Except for the titles attested in the legends of the royal funerary chapels, which may suggest these offices' presence at Meroe or Gebel Barkal, the others attested in different inscriptions from different sites reside in different places.

One of the most notable of these is the title *apote qorise* 'the envoy of the king', which attests to the presence of an official who was charged with diplomatic relations. Gifts, revenues, and commercial products arrived in Meroe from great distances and were stored under the supervision of the royal administration in periods of peaceful diplomatic relations. Many imported prestige goods, originating from the Mediterranean basin, were discovered in the graves of the elite and rulers attesting to commercial and gift exchanges between Meroe and in particular the Hellenistic and Roman Egypt.

Many of these luxury goods, which were gifts of foreign sovereigns were most likely also objects of internal gift exchange between the king and the elite, an example of which might be the Sotads' rhyton, an Attic plastic rhyton made and signed around 470 BC by the potter Sotades. Found around 350 BC under a pyramid of a non-ruling person in Begrawwiya South, it was, similarly to other vessels made by Sotades, produced for Persian clientèle and may be interpreted as a diplomatic gift sent to the king of Kush by Xerxes I's Egyptian satrap (Török 2008: 365).

At the moment no clear information about the administrative system or management of these relations. According to Pliny's work on the Nero expedition, the palaces and the temples of Amon collected and redistributed the goods.

Napatan texts

A large extent of our knowledge depends on Napatan texts, which can be used as sources to identify some aspects of the ruler's court. The Napatan period is the first phase of the Kushite empire in Sudan, followed by the Meroitic era. Napatan culture reflects the Egyptian influence from periods of Egyptian colonisation (during Egypt's New Kingdom, c. 1550–1070 BCE), in particular in ideological features such as concepts of kingship evident in the iconography, archaeology, and inscriptions.

Unlike the not completely translated Meroitic royal texts, the Napatan ones, written in Egyptian, are well understood.

The inscriptions of the Napatan period are about royals. The most interesting inscriptions belong to the last kings of the Napatan dynasty: Anlamani (7th cent. BC), Amannote-erike (2nd half of 5th cent. BC), Harsiyotef (1st half of 4th cent. BC), Nastasen (late 4th cent. BC) and Sabrakamani (1st half of the 3rd cent. BC) (FHN II). They record a special form of the ruler's legitimation and his installation into the royal office in which the royal investiture was performed over the course of a northward progression around the land and the Nile, starting from Meroe, Napata, Kawa, and Pnubs, to the sanctuaries of the Nubian Amon gods, whose cults seem to have been rooted in ancient native cults and Egyptianised under the New Kingdom. These cities likely represent the centre of districts that in the inscriptions are defined in Egyptian *sp3t* translated 'nomos'.

These ceremonies and the fact that during the greater part of the Kushite kingdom, the sites of Meroe, Napata, Kawa, and Kerma seem to have worked as religious centres, centres of government, and royal residences, led Török (1992: 115) to hypothesize about the existence of an ambulatory court. Moreover, the same sites, religious and royal buildings continued to be used during the Meroitic period, suggesting continuity in the rites of legitimation. However, there is no clear evidence of that in Meroitic texts. The only trace might be found in the Taneyidamani inscription, REM 1044. Lines 8–17 are composed of god's names and numerals. According to Rilly's hypothesis¹ based on the presence of the word *mklte-wi*² 'temple', the long passage may consist of donations made to different temples, each one represented by a god-name '1 (to the temple of) Amon of Thebes, 1 (to the temple of) of Amon of Napata, 1 (to the temple of) Khonsu, 1 (to the temple of) Isis *ixne mtiwixne...*'. This list might be a record of sanctuaries restored by the king. However, the number of temples indicated by the text appears too large compared with the epigraphical evidence left by Taneyidamani on the walls

¹ Personal communication.

² Literally 'at the god'.

of the temples, which could attest to his building activity. Another hypothesis may be this list recorded on the processions of statues. Napatan texts attest processions of statues in the main temples of the districts in order to obtain the divine acceptance of legitimacy announced in each *nomos*, in the form of an oracle. Of course, this is a speculative interpretation, but, if confirmed, then the list could refer to rite of enthronements.

In the Napatan texts, the description of royal investiture sometimes refers to the presence of attendees. The Amannote-erike inscription describes the enthronement and the multitude of women and men, royal children, chiefs, and all the friends of the royal residence. The latter group of people is defined in Egyptian as *smrw nt pr-nsw*. It was used in the Egyptian context to refer to a limited group of high-status officials that probably reside in the palace, *pr-nsw*, included in the same title.

In the Harsiyotef text, no references to the attendees of the royal ceremony are present. However, in the description of the restoration of the collapsed *pr-nsw* at Napata, it records ‘there not being any place into which people go’, referring generically to people living in the palace.

The Nastasen inscription records the presence of notables and the priest of Amon who made obeisance to the king as an attendee of his ceremony.

Another interesting aspect is the name of palaces used in these texts (Maillet 2016: 262). In the Egyptian vocabulary, the terms *pr-nsw* and *pr-ʿ3* have different semantic values.

Pr-nsw: literally the ‘house of the king’ refers to the religious and ceremonial dimension, while *Pr-ʿ3*: literally the ‘great house’, refers to the place where the king resides.

In the Napatan period, there is no written evidence that these terms refer to buildings with different functions, nor if the terms were used in inappropriate ways.

Surely, several buildings, associated with the major temples of Amon in the cities such as Meroe and Napata, and also used in Meroitic times, have been discovered.

The royal spaces

According to Spawforth (2007: 3), the word ‘court’ is ‘both the spatial framework of the ruler’s existence and also the social configuration with which he shares that space’. The court as space is the place where the ruler and the members

of the ruler's family cohabitate, along with their domestic attendants and bodyguards. Moreover, it was the place of decision-making processes and governance in monarchies. From this point of view, the dwelling was the 'site of exchanges between the ruler and all manner of subjects who were not necessarily members of his household'. Thus, the architecture can reveal some aspects of social interaction. Indeed, every human aggregation reflects a specific spatial organisation, where people can be aggregated in one or more groups (Elias 1980: 34).

At present, the knowledge of the Meroitic royal cities and palaces is far from being thorough because of the structures' poor state of preservation. Thus, not much information about the place where members of the court reside is available. However, the study of Maillot (2016) has allowed identifying some aspects and functions of several Meroitic buildings, considering the structure, the symbolism, and the relationship with the urban context. The royal cities are composed of different buildings, including palaces and temples. A few buildings are considered royal residences, such as M750 at Meroe and B1200 at Gebel Barkal. Among them, some, like B100, might be considered temporary royal residences occupied during particular ceremonies. For other buildings, it is difficult to establish the function. According to Maillot (2016: 292), the Meroitic palaces have to be considered as a sort of *entité multitâche*, because they worked as the sphere of ceremonies, residence, and storage. In this context, there is no clear evidence of rooms or areas dedicated to persons identified as part of the court. In some cases, such as M294-295 at Meroe, it has been hypothesised that they were elitarian residences. The presence of storage rooms, seals, cretulae, and imported objects; including pottery, suggests areas dedicated to storage and administrative functions. Even if there is no direct evidence of a court, the number of buildings and their function implies the constant presence of groups of people who gravitate around the ruler. This is one of the most interesting aspects. The celebration of ceremonies, the management of storage, and everyday life all need the presence of a social aggregation that permeates the royal cities.

Conclusions

The archaeological and written evidence of the presence of the Meroitic elite is not enough to clarify how the Meroitic court was composed. Currently, in Meroitic texts, a word that defines the concept of the court has not been identified. The only evidence is *qorte* that, according to the interpretation discussed in the introduction of this paper, may refer to a physical place where the king and the court went about their duties. The physical aspect of the court, which is primarily

defined as a space, may correspond to both the palaces and the other buildings that compose the royal city.

It might be possible to suggest the existence of an inner court, composed of members in the ruler's vicinity. The inner court was dominated by the figure of the king, the king's mother and the king's son. The iconography and the tombs attest to the presence of the non-ruling members of the royal family, such as the wives and the other sons. Analysis of titles may allow us to add the servant of rulers, the royal men, and the *domesticos*. However, there is no indication of the number or the internal organisation or stratification of courtiers. According to the royal and elitarian cemeteries, the prestige and the proximity of the members to the focus of the court may be supposed to be based on kinship. The dimensions, the sequences, and the insignia of the figures represented in the Teqorideamani funerary chapel show the king's son as the principal performer of the rites, followed by the main wife and the second wife (Dunham 1950, vol. III, plate 21F). The other female figures are organised in two registers. The organisation of the relief's space, common to the reliefs of other royal chapels, shows the personages' different roles in the funerary rites. These may reflect different levels and stratifications of the court. Although the iconography represents people involved in official ceremonies like the coronation and funerary rites, no evidence of codified ceremonial life can be suggested, let alone be associated with a specific model of 'monarchy'.

Nevertheless, the description of the coronation journey that shows the attendees at the ceremonies as women, men, royal children, chiefs, and all the *smrw nt pr-nsw* 'friends of the royal residence', may suggest that the origin of the Kingdom of Meroe's court was during the Napatan period. Considering the attendees, this cannot be considered enough evidence of the presence of an ambulatory court, because royal residences are archaeologically attested in many cities. Instead, it may suggest the idea of an outer court that was settled in these centres. Regarding the outer court, it may be supposed that it was composed of officials who also worked in Nubia and had a kinship with the royal family, as attested by some funerary texts. Moreover, archaeological and textual evidence seems to suggest that the Meroitic court was open. The title *apote qorise* 'the envoy of the king' and *apote aromelise* 'the envoy of Rome' or 'the envoy to the Rome' in Meroitic texts, may indicate the frequency of contacts with foreign countries as well as with the north of the kingdom. Indeed, the so-called Meroitic Chamber in the temple at Philae (Török 1978), characterised by the representation of Meroitic people performing rites and brief texts in Meroitic cursive, records a diplomatic mission enjoyed by the king of Meroe to Philae. The inscriptions describe members of the embassy who were involved in the religious ceremonies on behalf of the Meroitic king.

Abbreviations

ADJ:	Adjective
COP:	Copula
DET:	Determinant
DEM:	Demonstrative
EMPH:	Emphatic element
FHN:	<i>Fontes Historiae Nubiorum</i>
LOC:	Locative
OBJ:	Object
REM:	<i>Répertoire d'épigraphie méroïtique</i>

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