B 1200: The Napatan palace and the Aspelta throne room.

The labyrinthine mud brick walls southwest of B 800 are the remains of the Napatan palace, designated "B 1200," at Jebel Barkal (fig. 1). Until now this sprawling ruin has been only partially excavated, but a recent geophysical examination suggests that it is about 70 m square. When Reisner first probed it in 1919, he found that it was not merely one building but a series of buildings, built one on top of the other, each with a slightly different plan. He thought he could discern four levels, but recent research suggests that there may have been as many as eight rebuilding phases - one about every 100-150 years. The first may have been Ramesside, given the discovery of blocks inscribed for Ramses II in one sounding. The next six or seven phases, beginning in the early eighth century BC, were Napatan, while the last was early Meroitic. In the inscription of Harsiotef (late fourth century BC) we are told that in his day "the king's house" had over sixty rooms but was "falling down," and that he rebuilt it. B 1200 seems finally to have been abandoned as the site of the royal residence by the mid-first century BC. It was replaced by B 100, which was built just in front of the southeast corner of B 1200, which is still unexcavated).

fig. 1: Photo of the excavated walls of B 1200 (foreground) and those of B 100 (background), as exposed by G. A. Reisner by February 19, 1919, as seen from the summit of Jebel Barkal. (Photo A2757, Photographer: Mohamed Shadduf. Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Expedition. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).
About 85 cm below the level of the visible mud walls on the surface, Reisner found remains of an older level with a different plan, with finely carved and painted stone columns and doorways bearing inscriptions naming the kings Senkamanisken, Anlamani and Aspelta (ca. mid-seventh to early sixth century BC). He also discovered that this level had been destroyed by fire and that its charred ruins had been evenly buried with a layer of earth 80 cm thick, in order to create a foundation for a new palace, which was built probably in the late sixth century BC.

In 2007 the NCAM Mission undertook extensive excavations of this buried and burned level (believed to be the fourth) and exposed a well-preserved throne room of Aspelta (figs. 2, 3). Its walls had been painted with murals (now reduced to tiny fallen fragments) and colored bands; its ceiling, supported by four columns, had been plastered and painted, seemingly with repeating designs of udjat eyes.

**fig. 2:** Plan of the northwestern half of B 1200, as excavated and drawn by Reisner, showing the location (shaded) of the throne room of Aspelta, excavated in 2007 (shown in fig. 3).

**fig. 3:** Throne room of Aspelta after excavation in 2007, looking northeast.
The columns of this room were of unique papyrus bud form, with secondary capitals in the form of four projecting rams heads, crowned with sun disks (fig. 4). The column shafts, also brightly painted, were carved in sunk relief with registers of "year goddesses," accompanied by hieroglyphic texts expressing their magical spells (fig. 5). These sayings, designed to protect the king from harm, indicate that this room had served as the ritual setting for ceremonies connected with the advent of the New Year (which coincided with the rising of the Nile in mid-summer). The spells were supposed to protect the king during the five dangerous epagomenal days preceding the start of the New Year (see B 200-300, fig. 3).

![Ram-head column capital: one of four from the Aspelta throne room.](image)

The focus of the room was the NE end, where there were four sandstone sockets set into the floor in a rectangle. These would have supported the four wooden columns of a baldachin or canopy under which the king sat on his throne (fig. 6). The king would have faced the opposite (SW) end of the room where there was a formal large doorway, through which visitors and officials would have entered for audiences with the ruler.

Unhappily for Aspelta, the protective words of the goddesses could not help him. His palace seems to have been deliberately set on fire and destroyed. The destroyers in this case were almost certainly the troops of the Egyptian king Psamtik II (595-589 BC), whose army invaded Kush in 593 BC, apparently ravaging the Jebel Barkal sanctuary and leaving it a ruin.
fig. 5: A well-preserved "year goddess" from one of the columns in the Aspelta throne room. Strangely, each goddess was crowned with a pair of sun disks.
**fig. 6:** Tentative reconstruction of the Aspelta throne room, with colors reproducing those actually preserved on the columns (Compare with fig. 3). (Artwork by Geoff Kornfeld, Learning Sites, Inc.)

**fig. 7:** During siftings of Reisner's spoil heaps from B 1200 in 2014, this tiny gold appliqué was recovered. Representing a hawk-headed warrior god, it appears to have been an ornament from a royal garment like that in fig. 8.
**Fig. 8.** King Tarekenival of the second century AD wearing a corselet decorated with figures of warrior gods much like the gold ornament discovered in B 1200 (see fig. 7). From the relief on the pylon of his pyramid at Meroë, Beg. N. 19.

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