B 500: The Reliefs of Piankhy

The fine relief with which Piankhy covered the walls of his great temple has now either disappeared due to erosion or is now in very poor condition. Fortunately, large sections of it, which are now lost, were carefully recorded in drawings by travelers in the early and mid-19th century, and these drawings, when joined to other surviving fragments, recently exposed by excavation, can be used to present a fairly complete description of the king's decorative program. The temple map indicates the locations of the scenes described below (fig. 1).

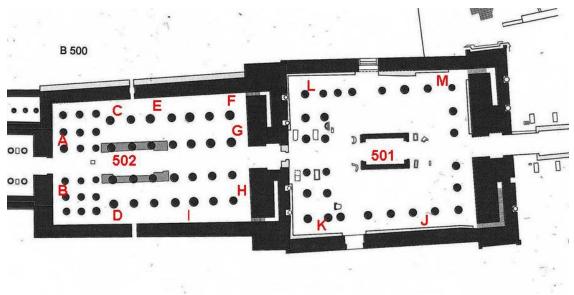


Fig. 1: Key to Piankhy's relief program.

Hypostyle Hall 502 Wall Sections: A and B

The end walls of 502, flanking the doorway leading into 503, were originally carved with near mirror-image scenes of the king, standing, facing inward, toward an enthroned figure of Amun, facing outward, followed by a standing figure of Mut. The oppositional Amuns would probably have been ram-headed and human-headed, upstream and downstream, respectively.

C and D

Each of the side walls of 502 was bisected by a doorway. The wall sections to the rear of the doorways pictured the emergence of the bark of Amun leaving the temple. The NE wall (C) depicted the king and his chief queen (fig. 2), followed by a retinue of offering and standard bearers, all facing left, greeting the bark, proceeding right, which was carried on the shoulders of twenty-four priests, in two files of twelve. The opposite (SW) wall (D), now lost, once preserved lines of standard bearers and dancing women greeting the bark as it emerged from the temple (fig. 2).

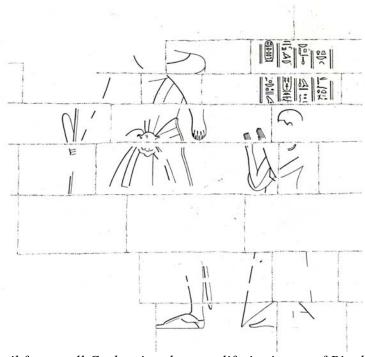


Fig. 2. Detail from wall C, showing the over-lifesize image of Piankhy, greeting the bark of Amun (approaching from left), accompanied by his "great royal wife" Peksater. The text above her head is now lost, but it was largely preserved in an early photo taken by J. H. Breasted of the University of Chicago in 1906. The text recorded the queen's words: "Oh Amun-Re, Lord of the Throne of the Two Lands (i.e. Jebel Barkal) in Napata, your son, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Piankhy has made [for you] this beautiful monument, the most beautiful monument in Nubia, [so that you may establish him] upon your throne on [earth], his words having authority over mankind.")(Drawing: T. Kendall, inked by Susan Osgood).

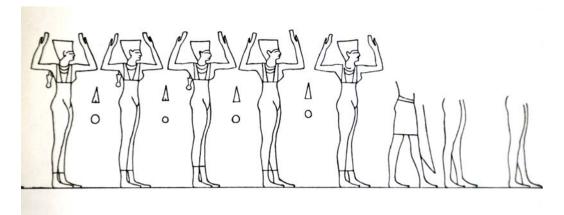


Fig. 3. Detail from wall D, depicting a row of dancing girls greeting the bark of Amun shown on the opposite wall. After a drawing by Alessandro Ricci, who visited Jebel Barkal in October 1821, now preserved in the British Museum.

E and F

The wall sections forward of the side doors in 502 are very poor condition. Despite the damage, however, enough remains to suggest that the pictorial narrative was composed in a clockwise direction, which moved from the NE side door (E > F), across the rear walls of the second pylon (G > H), to the SW side door (I). In other words, it moved from upstream ["south"] to downstream ["north"]) and depicted the early events in the king's Egyptian campaign, which were described on his Victory stele (Il. 1-9), which was set up in Court 501. Legs of two standing queens at E suggest that the king appeared here standing or seated with his women, facing right, receiving a messenger from Egypt, represented by the feet of a small figure facing left. This would have been the messenger who brought the news to the king in Napata of the grave threat to the Thebaid posed by the newly formed confederation of Lower Egyptian city-states under Tefnakht of Sais.

Piankhy's decision to mobilize his troops and to go himself to Egypt (stele II. 9-26), his arrival at Thebes and his celebration of local festivals (II. 26-29) was probably the subject of the missing middle sections of the wall. The different registers, now lost, would probably have depicted the king's military preparations at Napata, his march downriver to Thebes, and the homage paid by him to Amun at Karnak. Section **F**, at far right, portrayed a striding groom leading a horse (**fig. 4**). The groom survives only as two sandaled feet, while the horse can be traced only in the faintest outlines.

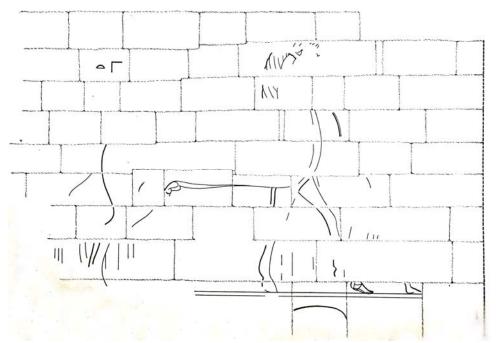


Fig. 4. A full-sized horse at F (fig. 1), being led to the right ("north" to Egypt) by a groom. The dotted line on the right is the intersection of the wall with the pylon. (Drawing: T. Kendall, inked by Susan Osgood)

G and H

The second pylon of B 500 is much ruined and eroded, but its rear wall surface was once fully carved and evidently pictured the continuation of the story told on the NE side wall (E > F). Today no part of the original pylon wall surface exists higher than 3.5 m, but in the early nineteenth century these walls still stood at least 10 m. high on each side, as revealed by drawings of the ruins made by several of the early European visitors to the site. At that time the original relief on the rear walls still survived almost to that same height, and these scenes were carefully drawn and recorded by several of them.

As we now know it, the rear side of the NE pylon tower (G) was divided into at least five registers. The upper two, now completely lost, depicted scenes of Kushite chariots moving right ("north") with Egyptian troops fleeing before them (fig. 5). Behind the wheel of the lower chariot was the figure of a kneeling enemy being slain by a larger Kushite warrior, and behind them was a pair of large feet, suspended in the air. These were surely the feet of a captive grasped by the hair and suspended by an even larger figure of the king, who would have stood over the door leading up into the pylon tower. His image would have filled the top two registers behind the chariots (fig. 5).

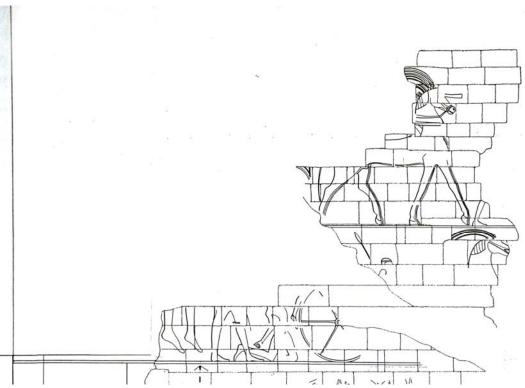


Fig. 5. Reliefs preserved on the upper wall (G) of the NE tower of the second pylon in the 19th century. (Drawing: T. Kendall)

Below this battle scene, there was a narrow third register containing a badly eroded view of the Nile. At the far left, faint traces of a ship appeared moving right on a watery surface toward a long ramp, with figures of men and horses disembarking (**fig. 6**). Based

on lines in the Victory Stele, we could guess that the river action culminated on the right side of the wall with the siege and surrender of Hermopolis (II. 30-69). This was apparent by what was preserved in the two registers below.

Under the riverscape, large scale figures reappeared - again part of a row of horses led by grooms, proceeding to the right. Of these only a single horse on the left side of the wall is partly preserved, together with the feet, neck, and shoulders of its groom. The evidence for believing that the theme of the wall was the fall of Hermopolis is found on the fifth and lowest register.

Following his acceptance of the surrender and tribute of Nemlat, the Hermopolite king, Piankhy went to the temple of Thoth, and, as the text of the stele says (l. 59): "slew oxen, calves, and geese for his father Thoth, the Lord of Hermopolis, and for the Eight Gods, who were in the House of the Eight Gods." These sacrifices appear to be illustrated below the horses, for here are traces of nine tiny trussed oxen - one for each god - prepared and bound for slaughter, each beside a table supporting two conical round-bottomed pots, a small bouquet of flowers, and two vertical palm fronds (fig. 6).

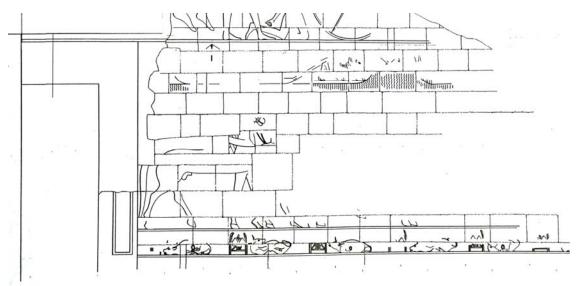


Fig. 6. Reliefs preserved on the lower wall (G) of the NE tower of the second pylon, as recorded in 1986-87. At left is the doorway to the stairway inside the pylon. (Drawing: T. Kendall)

If these oxen represent the sacrifices made to the gods of Hermopolis, the horses above must represent those presented to Piankhy by Nemlat. Although many of the details of Nemlat's surrender are lost in the sixteen line break in the stele at this point, it can be presumed that the procession of horses above the sacrifices were led by the figures of Nemlat, carrying a sistrum (l. 58), and his wife, both of whom appear together on the Victory Stele leading a horse before Piankhy. On the destroyed right half of the register there would seem to be just enough room for one more pair of horses and the two royal persons leading it, who would have stood as tall as the horses.

On the opposite (SW) wall of the pylon (H), fragments of two registers of relief also survived in the 19th century which no longer exist today (**fig. 7**). These were about 3 m above the floor level in 502, at the same level as the chariot scenes on the other side (**fig. 5**). These, too, depicted scenes of battle. The upper register pictured three Kushite foot soldiers moving left, each overpowering a smaller Egyptian opponent wearing a peculiar tall knobbed helmet, reminiscent of the White Crown. Two are stabbing their fleeing foes with spears, while the third stands over his slain enemy and shoots an arrow at another, who flees on horseback over the carcass of a dead horse. A palm tree in the background gives the scene a realistic touch.

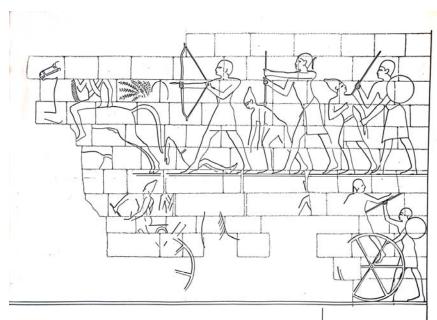


Fig. 7. Battle scene on the upper section of rear wall of the SW tower of the second pylon (=fig. 1, H), as it was preserved in the early 19th century.

In the lower register, a Kushite infantryman, carrying a round shield over his shoulder, like his comrade above, spears an Egyptian charioteer. The latter stands on the platform of his chariot fending off his foe, while his fellow charioteer urges his horses forward to escape the field of battle. One of the animals appears to be stumbling or dying. At the left, two Egyptians stand close together in a chariot, of which only a part of the wheel is preserved.

I

No trace has survived of the original surface of the SW wall, forward of the side door, but it may be supposed that this section (I) featured scenes culminating with the siege and capture of Memphis.

Court 501 Wall Sections: J

The reliefs of the outer court (501) complete the picture of the Egyptian campaign. On the long SW (=downstream, "north") wall (J) they illustrate the final episode: the submission of the Lower Egyptian rulers before Piankhy (fig. 8). Here the Kushite conqueror appeared – unfortunately preserved only from the knees down – receiving the tribute of four (of the nine) Egyptian rulers, "on their bellies" (as the text says) and "smelling the earth" before him in a bow of total submission, just as they are depicted in miniature at the top of his Victory Stele. Behind the bowing kings are four pairs of horses, each representing the animals that each ruler was said to have brought to Piankhy as part of his tribute.

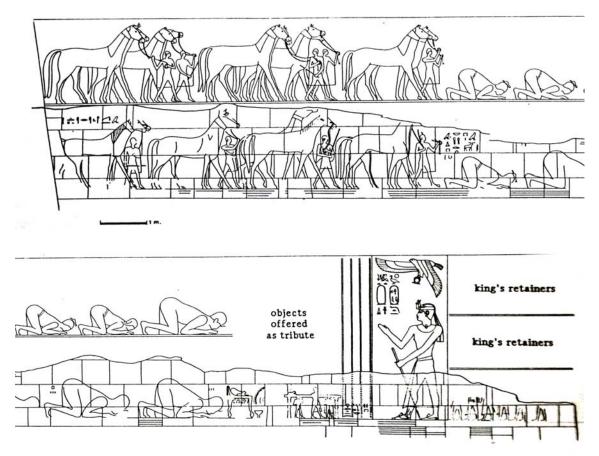


Fig. 8. The left and right halves of the forward section of the SW wall of 501 (*J*). The drawing shows the preserved line of masonry with the surviving reliefs below it, while the upper half shows the supposed composition of the destroyed upper part of the wall. (Drawing: T. Kendall)

In front of the bowing kings appear objects from their tribute: a cushioned throne with armrests in the form of recumbent lions and lattice-work between lion legs in the form of

tiny bound enemy prisoners. Other objects are a footed offering vessel, piled with palm fronds. Three men are also shown carrying forward a fancy four-post couch or bed, also with a small recumbent lion and carved legs.

Piankhy, appears at the right side of the scene, facing left, to receive the homage and gifts from the conquered. His figure was carved in raised relief within a panel sunk 2 cm deeper than the plane of the remainder of the wall, where the figures are all carved in sunk relief. He wears a long, sub-knee length skirt with a hem pointed in front and a pair of elaborate sandals. He also carries a long staff or walking stick. Six smaller attendants stand behind him on the wall, one of whom carried a large feathered fan (as revealed by a large loose fragment found in the debris nearby).

K

To the right of the previous scene, there is a doorway, which is now just a wide gap in a line of tumbled stones. To the right of this gap, no trace of carved surface survives for the first 6.3 m. At that point, however, there is a single large foot, indicating the reappearance of the king, standing, facing right. Before him is a row of ten tall offering stands bearing loaves of bread, followed by more vessels, and a badly damaged figure of a large seated god, facing the king. This is undoubtedly Amun of Karnak at Thebes. Between him and the corner of the wall stands a goddess, doubtless Mut, bent slightly at the waist, facing left, holding a compound amuletic staff, signifying long life to the king.

\mathbf{L}

On the northeast (=upstream, "south") wall the relief depicted events that took place after the king's return to Napata: namely, the construction and dedication of the Jebel Barkal temples. The wall is divided into five panels, each representing a specific ritual activity. From left to right, they are:

Panel I: The king, wearing a cap crown (a detail now lost but preserved and visible only in one of Breasted's photos), faces left, accompanied by his heir (?) (who stands in front of him) and his ka (his "divine double," who stands behind him). He holds a staff toward a group of five shrines, shown schematically, which rise from a common rectangular foundation. This foundation is inscribed with two names, which appear within twin vertical rectangular frames. One seems to say Dju-Wa'ab Neferu ("Beauties of Jebel Barkal). The scene appears to show Piankhy dedicating five temples (fig. 9). Panel II: The king (facing left) runs a ritual race before a goddess, facing right, who stands before a shrine. The king is accompanied by a smaller running human figure (his heir, his ka?) as well as by a running bull calf (perhaps symbolizing also his "ka" [since the Egyptian word for "bull" is also "ka"]). Texts in front of the goddess read "Coming and bringing; coming and bringing."

Panel III: The king holds a very large hoe, apparently initiating the construction of the temples at Jebel Barkal.

Panel IV: Two figures stand on either side of the king's *serekh*, which is inscribed "[Strong bull arising] in Thebes."

Panel V: The king faces left, standing behind an *iwn-mutef* priest, wering leopard skin robe.

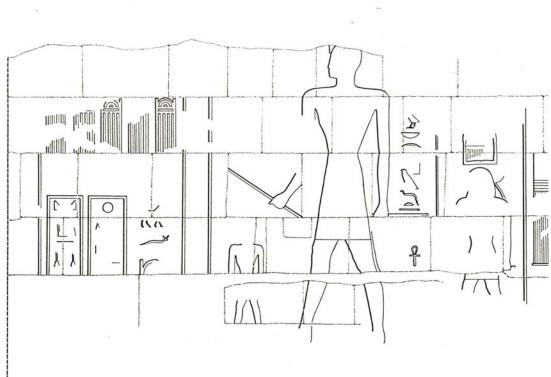


Fig. 9. Detail from wall section L, showing Piankhy, accompanied by his heir and his "ka", dedicating five temples at Jebel Barkal, which seem to be named "The Beauties of Jebel Barkal." (Drawing by T. Kendall, inked by Susan Osgood)

M

This section of the wall depicted Piankhy's celebration of his Heb-Sed or 30-year jubilee festival. From right to left, the scenes are:

Panel I: the king, followed by his ka, being led forward by Horus (**fig. 10**);

Panel II: the king seated in an enthronement pavilion receiving offerings (fig. 11);

Panel III: the king led forward by Montu and Thoth (?), with an *iwn-mutef* priest and a panel with the king's Horus name: "[Strong Bull arising in Na]pata";

Panel IV: the king instructed by Seth, and shooting arrows to the four directions to claim his kingdom. The remainder of the wall is lost.

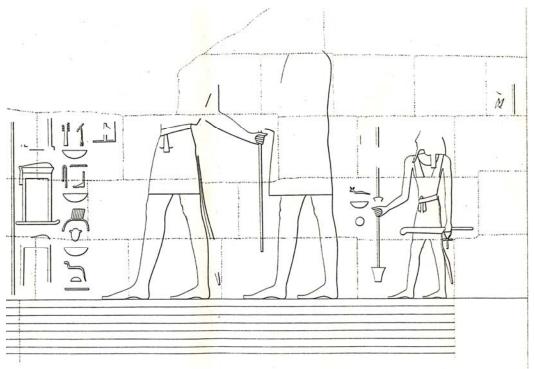


Fig. 10. Scenes from Piankhy's Heb-Sed (wall section M, from right to left). The king, followed by his "ka", led forward by Horus, as the text says: [given] "all stability and dominion, all health, and all joy forever." (Drawing by T. Kendall, inked by Sudan Osgood)

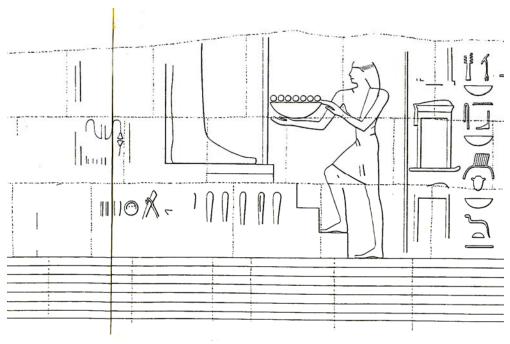


Fig. 11. The king seated on a throne, under a baldachin, being brought a basket of offerings by a servant (M). The throne is reminiscent of those in B 500, room 520, and in B 600 (q.v.) (Drawing by T. Kendall, inked by Susan Osgood)

Facade of Second Pylon

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The second pylon of B 500 was completed by Piankhy, perhaps rebuilt on a foundation of an earlier unfinished pylon of Ramses II. Piankhy raised four flagmasts in niches against its façade and flanked its approach with four ram sphinxes brought from the temple of Amenhotep III at Soleb. Even before he had carved the reliefs on its front face, however, the king had planned the new, larger court 501. This is clear by the fact that his reliefs on the pylon façade fit within the side walls of 501, which were built directly against the sides of the pylon face.

Each pylon bore four flagmasts, two on each side of the doorway. Their niches divided each side into three vertical relief panels. The panels on either side of the doorway each bore a colossal standing guardian figure facing inward, of which today only the feet are preserved, 1.3 m in length. (The right figure had blue-painted skin). These were probably Atum (on the left [west] side) and Shu (on the right [east] side). The end panels each bore an image of a colossal striding king, facing inward, wielding a mace or sword in one hand and grasping a single large enemy figure by the hair with the other. The ground line of these panels was supported by a row of bound and fettered enemy name ovals, facing inward, like the king. Because in the middle panels the enemy name ovals face outward, it is evident that colossal images of the god Amun must have stood on them, facing the king, who would have been offering his victims to the god. Today both figures of Amun are completely lost.

Of the enemy name ovals, only those in the center panel on the center left (SW) side can be reconstructed. Those on the far left are almost totally obliterated, and those in the far right panels, being late Meroitic restoration, contain no names at all. Fragmentary though the names are in center panel, one can see that their traces reveal an identical sequence to several enemy names appearing on the inner pylon at Sanam. With this parallel they can be reconstructed, thus, from left to right: *Fnhw* (i.e. Syrians), *T3w nbw* ("All Lands"), *S3sw* (i.e. Peoples of the Northeastern Desert), *T3 Mhw* ("Lower Egypt"), and *Pdwt Swt* ("Neighboring Bow-people") - altogether, fairly good accounting of Piankhy's real and perceived potential enemies.