B 561-B 560: The Mammisi Temple and Kiosk

In 2014-15 excavations in front of B 500 led to the discovery of a previously unsuspected avenue of small temples, of which B 561 and its associated kiosk B 560 have been the first to be cleared. This avenue probably led down to the center of the town of Napata and to an ancient Nile quay, while the small temples lay perpendicular to it.

Temple B 561 seems to have been built in the early first century BC (fig. 1). Although no royal names have been found associated with it, its surviving reliefs show a king and queen before various deities (figs. 2, 3). As suggested by its pylon towers, which appear to have fallen forward simultaneously, B 561 was probably destroyed by an earthquake. Radiocarbon dates suggest that this event occurred in the second or third century AD.

Fig. 1. Temple B 561 as excavated, March 6, 2015. (Photo: Bryan Whitney).
Fig. 2. Relief on the inside NW jamb of the sanctuary, showing a king approaching Khonsu. (Photo: T. Kendall).

Fig. 3. Doorjamb fragment preserving the body of a queen, from the antechamber, B 561. The figure of the lady parallels those of the royal women pictured in Meroitic tomb chapels of the late second and early first centuries BC. (Photo: T. Kendall).
The temple, built largely of fired brick, was plastered and brightly painted, but little of its painted decoration has survived. Behind its pylon, it had three interior chambers. The first featured two columns, carved in high relief with water plants and inscribed with a repeating Meroitic hieroglyphic inscription (fig. 4). The second was an antechamber, with stone doorjambs preserving well-carved images of Thoth and Horus pouring jars of water toward those passing through the doorway, as if to purify them (fig. 5). The third chamber contained a central sanctuary with stone walls carved in relief. The focus of these reliefs was a scene of the goddess Isis suckling the child Horus in company with a second goddess (fig. 6). The surrounding walls feature a series of monstrous deities, many holding knives (fig. 7). Although these scenes are now in poor condition, their surviving details match precisely those in contemporary temples at Dendera, Edfu, and Philae in Egypt, which were all temples of the type known as "mammisi," leaving no doubt that B 561 was a Meroitic mammisi, the first yet discovered in Sudan.

Fig. 4. Columns with swamp plants and lines of Meroitic hieroglyphic text. B 561. (Photo: T. Kendall).
Fig. 5. View to the sanctuary through the second gateway, with reliefs showing the gods Horus and Thoth making ablutions. B 561. (Photo: T. Kendall).

Fig. 6. Photo (above) of rear wall of sanctuary, B 561, with reconstruction drawing (below) based on Egyptian parallels, by Lyla Pinch-Brock.
Mammisi temples were built as symbolic nurseries for the child god Horus and simulated in stone the Delta marshes in which he was said to have been raised by his mother Isis. Within the marshes (and the temple), he was thought to be safely hidden from his wicked uncle Seth (personifying Chaos), who had slain his father Osiris in order to usurp the throne, which young Horus would later have to fight to regain. As the Egyptian mammisi temples served the rulers of Egypt, so B 561 would have served the later rulers of Kush. As each king would have considered himself Horus incarnate, such temples would have allowed him ritually to go back in time to the birth of his divine ancestor and to magically merge with him and his divine mother, whose role may have been played by his own mother.

**B 560: The kiosk of the Mammisi**

Sometime after B 561 was built, an elaborate kiosk, B 560, was added to its front as an entrance structure (figs. 8, 9, 10). Unlike the temple itself, which was constructed mainly of fired brick, the kiosk was built mainly of stone. In keeping with the theme of the "mammisi" - namely to simulate the marshes in which the child Horus was raised - the kiosk was designed with a double colonnade, in which the columns simulated papyrus and other marsh plants. If its exterior walls and columns were plastered and brightly painted blue, yellow, and red, the walls of its small inner chamber were carved with relief scenes showing the departure and return to a temple of a divine "bark," carried on shoulder poles by a double file of priests. On one wall, the carried bark appears accompanied by a pair of chariots and a military guard (fig. 11). Each chariot was drawn
by a team of three horses - a type of harness depicted eight centuries before in the Piankhy reliefs in B 500! - and was accompanied by soldiers, one of whom carries a spear and another, a throwing stick. The larger chariot was undoubtedly the king’s, but the king’s figure, sadly, has not survived. Fortunately, the name of the royal builder of the kiosk is partly preserved, written in a single line of very late Egyptian hieroglyphs on architraves from the central chamber ("ka-r-m"). He was the Meroitic king Amanakhareqerema - probably dating to the late first or early second century AD (fig. 9).

B 560 and 561 both continued to be used into the second or third century AD, but both seem to have been felled simultaneously by an earthquake, after which, in late Meroitic times, the abandoned ruins were reoccupied by squatters, who used them as dwellings. Temples B 600 and 700 (q.v.) seem also to have been destroyed in the same earthquake, which sent enormous boulders crashing down upon them from the cliff above.

Fig. 8. Kiosk B 560 after excavation, March 2014. (Photo: Bryan Whitney)
Figs. 9, 10: Temple B 561 with its kiosk B 560, in preliminary computer models (shown as it appeared in relation to the Great Amun Temple (B 500). (Models by N. Reshetnikova and Geoff Kornfeld © 2015 NCAM Mission and Learning Sites, Inc.)
Fig. 11. The king in his chariot, followed by a smaller second chariot, accompanies the divine bark of Amun(?). Interior relief (SE wall) from Kiosk B 560. (Photo: Bryan Whitney).

Fig. 12. Lintel from B 560 inscribed in late Egyptian hieroglyphs (".....karem") with the name assumed to be that of the Meroitic king Amanakharegerema, thought to belong to the late first or early second century AD. (Photo: T. Kendall).