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The iconography of the boston MFA bronze bowl with incised decoration from Tomb S 155 in the southern necropolis at Meroë in Sudan

So, you will ascend to the Sun’s eye, to the identity that the gods have made for you: (that) of Horus of the Duat.
Pyramid Text 612

Introduction

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the kingdoms and tribes of ancient Nubia have played a compelling role in the development and maintenance of the ancient Egyptian state. In fact, they represent a paradox that underpins much of Egypt’s ambiguous position with regard to its neighbours and ideological notions of the foreign. For the Nubian kingdoms played many roles in interregional relations at various periods in its long cultural history; as iconic enemies of the Egyptian state and its kingship, as important allies and sources of prestigious exotica and essential minerals which were used for the maintenance of the same edifice and, at the time of the artefact under

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1 I wish to sincerely thank Prof. Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert for his suggestion that I contribute a discussion on visual semantic to his examination of the inscription in ‘Ein Spruch gegen den Bösen Blick in Meroë: Anmerkungen zur Bronzeschale Boston MFA 24.900 aus Grabe S 155 der Süd-Nekropole’. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Katharina Stegbauer for the discussions we have had over parallelisms between text and icon and Dr. Robert Steven Bianchi for kindly pointing me in some interesting directions in the past.
2 PT 612 (P 555), Allen and der Manuelian 2005, 195.
3 Chimko 2003, 26; Shaw 2000, 315.
discussion here, as conquering foreign rulers of a weakened local hierarchy.\textsuperscript{4}

The regions directly to Egypt’s south along the alluvial valley of the Nile proper and further south to the Blue and White Niles were a considerable source of valuable consumables for the Egyptian state. They supplied prestigious commodities such as ivory, exotic flora, hardwood, incenses, precious metals and live fauna to their northern neighbours.\textsuperscript{5} In return, it appears that interregional diplomacy, hostilities and trade with Egypt were equally influential on the development of social stratification for local elites and for the ideologies of power in the Nubian sphere from as early as the Middle Kingdom.\textsuperscript{6}

This paper proposes to address the semantic significance of a bronze offering bowl from Tomb S 155 in the southern cemetery at the site of Meroë in Sudan. The vessel currently resides in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts,\textsuperscript{7} having been excavated in the early twentieth century by a joint Harvard University and Boston Museum expedition. It is dated to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, Napatan Period, during which time Egypt came under the control of Nubian rulers (ca. 752–656 BCE).\textsuperscript{8} The South Cemetery at Meroë was dated from the second half of the eighth century by the excavators, beginning from the reign of the second ruler of the Napatan dynasty, Piye (Piankhy).\textsuperscript{9} Piye is credited with setting his ambitions northward and conquering Egypt, whereas his brother and successor Shabaka moved the capital of this empire north into Egypt to Memphis.\textsuperscript{10} Both rulers were quick to emphasise their role in uniting the ‘two lands’, and readily appropriated the terminology and visual ideology of the

\textsuperscript{5} Ikram 2012, 210; Phillips 1997, 423–57; Schroer and Eggl 2009; Smith 1998, 257.
\textsuperscript{6} Török 2004, 132; Smith 1998; Smith and Buzon 2014, 431.
\textsuperscript{7} Accession number: 24.900.
\textsuperscript{8} Dates employed in this paper are derived from Dodson and Hilton 2004.
\textsuperscript{9} Dunham 1963, X, 1947, 3; Török 2009, 313, places cemetery S after the reign of Kashta (after ca. 750 BCE): Boston MFA to 745–655 BCE (‘Twenty-fifth Dynasty’).
\textsuperscript{10} Dodson and Hilton 2004, 234–5.
New Kingdom empire builders into their own royal rhetoric.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Archaeological context}

The Meroë cemeteries however were not used for the burial of members of the royal family, who were instead buried at the capitol El Kurru near Gebel Barkal, rather the cemeteries represent successive generations of Nubian elite burials.\textsuperscript{12} The excavators noted two distinct burial types at Meroë and at El Kurru for this and the preceding period. The first they named a bed burial where the body was placed without mumification and flexed on its side facing east on a wooden bed. This burial type was assumed to represent the local population. The second was a pit burial and reflected Egyptian burial customs, often employing a coffin, mumification and bead netting shrouds with the body laid out in an extended position and facing west. This type was assumed at that time to represent an Egyptian bureaucratic population.\textsuperscript{13}

The bronze bowl that is the object of this study is from the second burial type: pit grave (Beg) S 155 that was substantially looted in antiquity and only contained a small group of fragmentary grave goods. While use of an anthropoid coffin was evidenced by one fragment of inlaid alabaster, the grave contained no skeletal remains. The few objects gleaned from the debris comprised vessel fragments, faience and shell beads, a cowrie, faience amulets and a steatite scarab seal. Prestige metals were represented by a bronze mirror, some bronze scraps and two bronze bowls, one in fragments, the other the Boston bowl.\textsuperscript{14}

A considerable period of time has elapsed since the conclusions of the original excavators who could be considered to have made judgements based on

\textsuperscript{11} Smith 2013, 98–100; Török 2009, 324.
\textsuperscript{12} Török 2009, 313.
\textsuperscript{13} Dunham 1963, IX; 1947, 4–5; 1946, 382–3; Török 2009, 313.
\textsuperscript{14} Dunham 1963, 358, figs. 190–1.
material evidence that may not in fact point to the ethnicity of a population. Current archaeological research imposes a more nuanced understanding on notions of Nubian identity, and in this case we face a culturally entangled period that comes after centuries of changing power dynamics where Kushite kings were in fact the military conqueror of their neighbour, yet who chose to appropriate the rhetoric of power of their subject state, presumably in a strategic act to further legitimate their north African empire.

The individual buried in grave 155 appears to have consciously identified with Egyptian cultural values by choosing an Egyptian afterlife. Whether the deceased was an Egyptian national or an elite Nubian who chose to identify with the Napatan royal family for whom Egyptian culture was an expression of statehood may not be resolved with the paucity of evidence and while the burial context contributes to this discussion, it is not the sole objective of this paper, which is the visual content of a vessel from the grave.

Visual semantic

Due to spatial limitations it shall not be possible to discuss the wider implications of semantic theory here, but for the benefit of discussion, it is important to outline basic pitfalls that mar examining the visual representation of past cultures. When any scholar takes on the task of discussing meaning inherent to an iconographic program, there is a great deal of pressure, both internally and externally, to remain objective with their conclusions. Yet there is also awareness that this task is an ideal rather than a reality. When addressing Egyptian or Egyptianising visual symbolic we are reasonably advantaged by a longstanding academic awareness of their complex symbolic systems that has been gained from extensive material culture, text and the plethora of visual culture, but we currently do not have a grasp of every

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15 Smith 2013, 84–107; Török 2009, 314.
16 Smith 2013, 85, 98–9; Smith and Buzon 2014, 240.
facet of their signalling.\textsuperscript{17} This equally applies to aspects of Nubian visual semantics which employ fused indigenous and Egyptian models.

When one examines an image or images, we automatically impose categories of significance onto the available syntax.\textsuperscript{18} Notions regarding many complex human states such as myth, cult, gender, social and economic status, environment, taxonomy and power may be gleaned from iconography, assuming one has the skill to recognise the signals. Yet iconography is but one aspect of the signalling of an object and in order to assess the semantic value of any artefact it is essential to be aware of the potential for multivalence for the whole object: the iconology. This article will attempt such a synthetic approach by examining the many potential layers of meaning for this funerary vessel: via visual representation, magical text, medium, colour, texture, function and spatial design.

1. The iconography of the Meroë bronze bowl (Fig. 1)

The bronze bowl from Meroë is small and deep, with vertical sides and a rounded base. It has incised decoration over the entire external surface. Spatially the bowl is broken up into three horizontal registers of varying widths, with the base of the vessel efficiently resolved with an open nymphæa lotus blossom,\textsuperscript{19} the centre of which composes the base proper in the form of an eight petalled rosette. The uppermost register beneath the vessel’s rim carries a hieroglyphic text that has recently been the subject of analysis by Professor Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert in his paper entitled ‘Ein Spruch gegen den Bösen Blick in Meroë’.\textsuperscript{20} Beneath this uppermost register, there is

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\textsuperscript{17} See Angenot 2010; 2011 and 2012.
\textsuperscript{18} For a discussion of symbolic theory see Robb 1998, 329–46.
\textsuperscript{19} The author is aware that the nymphæa is not a true lotus, but prefers to retain the term for the sake of clarity, as the alternate title ‘lily’ can cause conflation with the ‘south flower’ that is present in Egyptian iconography from the Middle Kingdom.
\textsuperscript{20} ‘An Incantation against the Evil Eye in Meroë’, https://uni-leipzig.academia.edu/HansWernerFischerElfert.
a horizontal band of feathering ornamentation and beneath this the larger iconographic register. Each register is separated by horizontal lines with the exception of the lowest which also has a geometric ‘ladder’ pattern. Beneath this the large nymphaea lotus resolves the base.

The iconography of the focal register is a horizontal frieze containing, beginning from the left field, a hunting dog pursuing two antelopes.21 This scene is followed by a papyrus thicket which is superimposed with a falcon wearing the double crown of Egypt and mounted upon a small podium. On either side of the thicket there is a small indeterminate tree, perhaps a stylised sycamore, or persea. Moving further to the right of the thicket is a doum palm with a small monkey, perhaps a vervet, clambering up a branch. Beyond this

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21 The horns of the first animal would indicate oryx (or addax), but the second figure is ambiguous, as male and female oryx are both horned. The figures also resemble gazelle in body mass, whereas oryx are heavy animals, which may indicate unfamiliarity or intentional ambiguity.
there is a left facing baboon whose hind leg almost intersects with that of the hunting dog from the first zone, which thus resolves the action of the frieze.

The animal figures on the left and right of the register face inwards and move dynamically towards the papyrus thicket and the enthroned falcon, which therefore may be assumed to be the focus of the narrative. The negative space of the frieze is resolved with a decoration of alternating wedjat eyes and pendant nymphaea lotus flowers, both as buds and as open blooms. The composition of this primary frieze appears to be broken up into two juxtaposed zones of action, one a hunt scene on the left and the other a cultivated or alluvial landscape on the right. These two zones compositionally converge on the central subject, the figure of a falcon bearing the double crown mounted on a podium in a papyrus thicket. At face value the Egyptian influence on both content and visual style is relatively apparent.22

1.1. Zone one: hunting dog and prey

In the ancient Near East and Africa the theme of the hunt was a core visual motif which served to demonstrate human power over the irrational forces of the natural world.23 This basic premise extended out in royal iconographic programs to employ the image of the ruler conquering the hostile foes of the wilderness, particularly the supreme symbol of power, the lion, but also wild bullocks, antelopes and other game animals. In Egypt the motif of the ruler hunting noxious beasts on foot24 demonstrated his physical fitness to rule and may be traced to the earliest images related to kingship and royal prerogative in the Predynastic period.25 In this imagery the protagonist, whether an elite

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22 Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 34–5, fig 2, also draw this rather obvious conclusion.
24 Or in a chariot, as after the early New Kingdom this vehicle takes precedence in royal iconography, as it does throughout the eastern Mediterranean: see Calvert 2013, 45; Shaw 2010, 77; Mooney 1986, 196–215.
male or the pharaoh, hunted a variety of steppe animals, often accompanied by his hunting dogs. In Nubia, the hunter and hound similarly carried the same value of elite male power in visual representation, but the theme was not as dominant.

This visual program of hunting wild beasts was a prominent theme employed for pharaonic and later elite funerary imagery and may be seen as tied to the reinforcement of social stability and to the guarantee of regeneration both for the cosmos and for the deceased. It ought to be noted that this theme was often intentionally juxtaposed in tomb iconography with imagery of fishing and fowling in lush marshlands. In Egyptian and Nubian visual canon, the noxious beasts of the regions of mountain desert and steppe, like the antelope, were symbols of the chaos god Seth and employed as metaphors for the negative forces which threatened social stability at all levels of society. As such, iconography which represented the hunt of these creatures served as a magical metaphor for subduing and controlling the chaotic energies of the cosmos.

Interestingly, in addition to this semantic value, antelopes had another side, as, with the cat and monkey, they were a popular choice for elite domestic pets, and in the material realm were employed to decorate prestige household and funerary objects, such as seals, toiletry articles and vessels in a variety of media. This value may reflect the role of steppe animals as symbols of renewal and regeneration, but equally of the feminine half of the notional dichotomy of cosmic balance. In this same vein, the gazelle and ibex were

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26 By the end of the Old Kingdom, elite males had adopted this idiom of power into their funerary architecture.
27 Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 146.
28 Angenot 2012.
subjects for the construction of protective amulets in faience and stone from as early as the Predynastic. In this instance they may be viewed as apotropaic and be associated with the cults of specific female deities as the nurturing animal natures of the goddesses Hathor, Tefnut, Satis and Anuket.

This apparent contradiction in value from chaos to regeneration and the feminine principle may be resolved by an excerpt from an Eighteenth Dynasty love poem where the pursuit and desire for a lover is likened to the terror the prey feels when pursued by hunting dogs:

Oh that you were to approach your sister speedily, like a gazelle fleeing in the desert, her legs rush forward, but her body weakens, and fear courses through her limbs. A hunter pursues her, hunting dog by his side ... The Golden commends her to you, friend!

P. Chester Beatty I verso G40

The semantic value of this love poem does not coalesce with a contemporary western notion of cosmic forces in intricate balance, but it is in fact an Egyptian New Kingdom poetic term of reference and one which seamlessly fuses the symbolism of the hunt with that of human passions.

As a foil to these desert animals which potentially represent disorder, yet also love and regeneration, the hunting dog was both a symbol of his master’s masculine power and of the forces of stability. For, while it may be argued

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32 Andrews 1994, 60.
34 An epithet of the goddess Hathor.
35 Author’s translation from the *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae*.
36 ‘[T]hese pairs represent not individual and separate functions but the two outer limits of a single phenomenon ... the characterisation of these oppositions as male and female entails envisioning complementarity as comprising the capacity for procreation’, Troy 2002, 3.
that species of both dog and jackal inhabited the liminal spaces of the Egyptian and Nubian terrestrial realms as scavengers dwelling between desert waste and cultivated land, the domestic hunting dog was fundamentally a symbol of elite prestige, magical power over nature and a valuable import to pharaonic Egypt from Nubia.

Images of domestic hunting dogs pursuing and pulling down antelope may be traced in funerary iconography to as early as the Predynastic and the First Dynasty in Egypt and Whitney Davis sums up the early significance of the dog from Predynastic palettes with: ‘If we were to accept these objects as having a ‘magical’ status, then the dog could be said to be a magical guide or reinforcement of the hunter’s action’. A particularly fine example of this motif is on a disk from the tomb of Hemaka at Saqqara (Fig. 2). Equally, there are many examples of hounds from the cult and funerary monuments of rulers and court officials from the Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom (Fig. 3). These precedents establish the longevity of the domestic dog in the iconography of prestige and funerary art in Egyptian and in fact Nubian canon. In the example we have on the bowl, the hunting dog is clearly wearing a collar as he pursues the fleeing antelopes and while gender is not visible due to surface wear, it might be assumed it is male, as the hound was a metaphor for both the absent master and for this individual’s generative power.

In this vignette, the movement of the three animals towards the right across the register is not constrained by the ground-line as all three, pursuer and pursued,
Figure 2: Disk from the tomb of Hemaka at Saqqara, First Dynasty, Cairo Museum: JE 70614. Image © A. Sinclair 2016.

Figure 3: Palette/wall fragment from the tomb of Khety, TT 311, western Thebes, Eleventh Dynasty, Metropolitan Museum of Arts: 26.3.354–5. Image © A. Sinclair 2016.
have their forelegs raised as though captured in an extended leap so that only hind legs are nominally attached to the horizontal line. This dynamic action is a characteristic of the iconography of the Eighteenth Dynasty wherein the influence of foreign visual styles and idioms stimulated more freedom of movement for animal figures in Egyptian art. After this period Egyptian visual representation substantially returned to more formal and less mobile models.\textsuperscript{45} However, it should be pointed out that the Eighteenth Dynasty is not the sole source for animals depicted in mobile poses. Fig. 4 represents an earlier example of this visual motif on a vessel and dates from the Eleventh Dynasty.\textsuperscript{46}

It is also during the New Kingdom that entangled idiom was present in Egyptian artistic contexts and plays some part in this discussion, as many vessels, furnishings and cosmetic tools containing scenes of desert hunt are found under the aegis of the trans-cultural artistic style: the ‘international’ or ‘international koine’ style.\textsuperscript{47} It is worth noting that the artefact under discussion may be dated to a period some five hundred years after the end of the New Kingdom, yet it appears to exhibit idiom which may be associated with earlier, potentially international iconography. However, while many artefacts may be compared stylistically with this visual idiom, the theme itself and its contents are here intrinsically pharaonic Egyptian, with a long history of meaningful use.\textsuperscript{48}

\textbf{1.2. Zone two: Nilotic landscape and apes}

The dichotomy of desert steppe landscape juxtaposed with fertile river plain was a core visual theme for demonstrating balanced cosmic forces and the
governance of universal order in the funerary and ritual iconography of elite ancient Egypt and by extension the visual programs of the Napatan kingdom. In addition, the fertile Nilotid landscape that sustained Egypt and Nubia both literally and figuratively had its conceptual origins within Nubia at Gebel Barkal where the world was believed to have been formed and the annual flood was thought to be generated. In this vein, it would be natural for us to expect a similar binary arrangement within the composition of the bowl and this is provided by the adjacent scene of a long tailed monkey clambering to gather fruit on a doum date palm, accompanied by a larger baboon in the foreground.

While it may be argued that baboons and monkeys were native to north-

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49 Török 2002, 8, 10–11.
50 In Egyptian cult the site of Heliopolis was the original source of world creation, but the role of Gebel Barkal as alternate primeval mound was developed in the early New Kingdom and reinforced by the Napatan kings, Kendall 2002, 4–5, 16.
eastern Africa and therefore to Egypt, it is also acknowledged that in the second and first millennia wild species of ape could be considered imports brought to Egypt from central Africa via the intermediary of Nubia.\textsuperscript{51} In the Middle Kingdom Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor the hero lists gifts from the lord of Punt: ‘elephant’s tusks, greyhounds, long-tailed monkeys, baboons and all kinds of precious things’.\textsuperscript{52} This is similarly borne out by the frequency of visual evidence of gifts and tribute from the southern kingdoms in which monkeys and baboons are depicted carried and led in procession by Nubian figures (Fig. 5). These objects of exotic trade were prized as sacred animals and, like the gazelle, also valued as domestic pets in elite households.\textsuperscript{53} Interestingly, their popularity in Nubian visual representation was not as ubiquitous, for while they are attested as amulets from cult contexts, they were otherwise not a feature of Napatan official art.\textsuperscript{54}

![Figure 5: Nubian gifts of apes from the tomb of Rekhmire, TT 100, western Thebes, Eighteenth Dynasty. Image © A. Sinclair 2016.](image-url)

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Foster 1998, 325–8; Schroer and Eggler 2009.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Lichtheim 2006, 214.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Boessneck 1988, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 124; Ikram 2012, 218.
\end{itemize}
In addition, baboons and monkeys were thought to noisily greet the rising sun at dawn and the lunar orb at sunset, making them apparent active participants in the ideology of diurnal cycles of decay and rebirth. As such, the male baboon was symbolically associated with both the moon and the sun, and was the animal familiar of the lunar gods Thoth and Khons.\textsuperscript{55} In funerary texts and related iconography the baboon was ritually associated with the sun god and with kingship, both as protector and adorer of the solar disk and as companion to the god on the solar barque.\textsuperscript{56}

With regard to the representation on the bowl, the closest parallels for monkeys on a doum palm come from the Eighteenth Dynasty and in fact have connections with both Nubia and with Punt. Notable are a representation of monkeys on palms as tribute from Punt to queen Hatshepsut in her mortuary temple at Deir el Bahri and a similar themed representation of a gold set piece presented by the rulers of Nubia to Tutankhamen from the tomb of Huy, TT 40 in Western Thebes. It could be claimed that each example references the image on the bowl.\textsuperscript{57} In addition, monkeys held considerable semantic value as symbols of nurture and fertility and by extension with the feminine.\textsuperscript{58} In New Kingdom iconography they occur as a common motif with lotus, papyrus, tilapia nilotica fish, gazelles and female musicians on faience offering bowls, bezel rings and on ostraca.

Thus, to draw the narrative back to the themes of the two adjacent vignettes, we seem to be viewing a dichotomy of desert steppe and fertile plain, wherein both feminine (antelopes and monkeys) and masculine elements (hunting

\textsuperscript{55} Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 123.
\textsuperscript{57} Also a smaller vessel from the same tomb, a tattoo on the underarm of a Nubian captive from chariot no. 120 from the tomb of Tutankhamen, KV 62 and another gold set piece presented to Amenhotep II for his jubilee from the tomb of Kenamen in western Thebes, TT 93.
\textsuperscript{58} Schroer and Eggler 2009; Wiese 1996, 137–40.
dogs and baboon) are combined, with the notionally female animals flanking the central papyrus thicket. As an additional subtext, the images of antelope and the monkey may be viewed as nurturing, domestic and apotropaic figures, perhaps as metaphors for the protective goddesses Isis and Hathor. Yet equally, antelope and date palm could be treated as suitable icons for traditional ritual offerings considered appropriate for sustenance of the divine and for the deceased.  

These two vignettes move dynamically towards the falcon enthroned in a thicket. However, either side of the central papyrus motif is a small stylised tree that could be an arbitrary framing motif, or may build on the imagery already encountered. The two trees are highly schematic and could signal sycamores, persea or even provide a visual signal for the hieroglyph determinative for emmer (bd.t, Gardiner M34) which they resemble. However, it is the sycamore that is of particular interest here, as it grew in the realm of Hathor, in the liminal space between the alluvial floodplain and the desert steppe. In both funerary text  

and iconography two sycamores framing a central solar motif are in fact an iconographic device that signals the eastern horizon mountain zone, through which the sun god is manifested with each daily renewal. As a result one might expect a solar deity as the central subject to such a framing device.  

1.3. Focus: falcon in papyrus  

The falcon crowned with the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt mounted within a papyrus thicket signals the celestial god Horus, son of Isis, who was destined in myth to avenge the death of his father Osiris through the agency of the god Seth, and to replace his father as divine king over Egypt. 

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59 Hofmann and Tomandl 1987, 112.  
60 Coffin Texts, Spells 159 and 161.  
62 Wente 2003b.
This myth of kingship underpinned royal ideology from the beginnings of the Egyptian state in such a way that every ruler was the terrestrial representative of the god Horus until his demise when he became aligned with the father Osiris. The mythological reign of Horus as primeval ruler of Egypt set the precedent for all subsequent rulers who were required, as mediators between heaven and earth, and in their role as Egypt’s protector, to maintain cosmic balance just as their divine predecessor had. In first millennium Nubia the crowned falcon was similarly a signal for the god, kingship and the Nubian king.

Here the image of this god on the bowl could be interpreted as a reflection of a few aspects of this myth of divine kingship, of the youthful god hidden in the papyrus thickets of Lower Egypt at Akh-bit (Chemmis) by his mother Isis, protected by her magic and also by the spells of the nurturing goddess Hathor. ‘Horus who is upon the papyrus’ is one of this god’s titles and depictions of him hidden in the primeval marsh from his traditional foe Seth were common for apotropaic magic. Such images signal the birth and vulnerable youth of the god conflating with the rebirth of the sun each morning and thus contributed to the magical guarantee of rebirth for the deceased with whom the object was interred.

It would be possible to cite many compositional precedents for this motif of divine falcon in papyrus thicket from canonical Egyptian and Nubian visual representation, but for the benefit of this discussion a close parallel with clear ritual and protective intention comes from a contemporary bronze menat counterpoise in the Metropolitan Museum collection (Fig. 6). On the circular base of this artefact the divine falcon rests on a similar podium before

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64 Török 2002, 204; Hofmann and Toman 1987, 127.
65 Hathor is also attested as mother of Horus and by extension of the pharaoh, see Graves-Brown 2010, 130.
66 Dated to dynasties Twenty-two to Twenty-six, accession number: 08.202.15.
an encircling thicket of papyrus, but in this case there is a uraeus mounted before the god. The association between the protective function of the cult of Hathor is to be understood from the character and function of the artefact, a menat, and is reinforced by the upper field of the piece, where a figure of Nebethetepet, a divine associate of Hathor, is framed by hathoric columns and by protective uraei. Similarly, this idiom of royal falcon hidden in the thickets of Akh-bit was a motif employed in later Nubian visual rhetoric as a means to reinforce a ruler’s power and legitimacy.67

1.4. Decorative fill: wedjat and nympheae

The wedjat eye as an element of background fill is prominent in the upper field of the two panels on either side of the papyrus thicket in the main register. Interestingly, there are three eyes, two above the hunt scene and one

67 Török 2003, 204.
placed above the baboon figure. The apotropaic image of the divine eye was a ubiquitous protective symbol in Egyptian visual ideology, which served as an icon for the dual celestial phenomena, the sun and the moon. As such, in the Book of the Dead the eyes of the deceased could be addressed as the night and day barques of these gods, alluding to the eyes of Re and of Horus respectively.

However, the eye of a god was not necessarily gendered masculine and usually female deities were equated with the wedjat eye, as this symbol was notionally feminine and embraced the symbolic vocabulary of a variety of protective goddesses. Each nuanced divine aspect fulfilled a familial role with the sun god, as his daughter, his wife or mother. The goddesses Hathor, Tefnut, Sekhmet, Bastet, Maat, Anukis, Satis and Weret-Hekau could each be addressed as ‘the eye of Re’, in which case their role was as vengeful protectresses of the solar god, and his defenders from the forces of chaos that held the potential to upset the natural order of the world.

The eye of Horus, by contrast, may at times be equated with the moon and with similar diurnal lunar cycles. This eye, like the sun, may be accompanied by baboons in its passage through the underworld at night. However, reference to the god’s two eyes again mirrors the diurnal barques sun and moon and may also be equated with gender dichotomy through association with the gods Shu and Tefnut. In addition, in the myth of the contending of Horus and Seth, the eyes of Horus were gouged out in the battle for kingship and cosmic order with his father’s murderer Seth and then were later healed with

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68 Whether the sun was the right eye and the moon the left has been subject to considerable semantic slippage in the Egyptian consciousness and may vary, see Darnell 1997, 35.
69 For example, the text from the funerary mask of Tutankhamen where the deceased’s right eye is described as the night barque and the left, the day, Hornung 1979, 318–9; and Book of the Dead, Spell 151, Allen 1974, 147.
antelope milk and restored to him by Hathor.\textsuperscript{71}

Similarly, Thoth as a lunar god may also have a semantic association with the ‘protective eye’ as exemplified in the Instructions of Amenemope:

> While the Baboon has taken his place in the temple of Hermopolis, his eye simultaneously encircles the Two Lands.\textsuperscript{72}

British Museum Pap. 10474: 17.9–10

Perhaps the presence of three wedjat eyes on the vessel may be explained by this reference, as one eye does in fact rest above the baboon on the right panel. In which case, the other two eyes above the hunt scene could potentially reference the eyes of Horus and/or Re, moon and sun, or they could allude to yet another myth that contains elements used here: that of the Wandering Eye or Distant Goddess. In this myth the eye-goddess quarrelled with the sun god and abandoned Egypt in a fit of pique to roam the Nubian desert. This disruption of the ordered cosmos had to be resolved by the gods and the goddess was eventually placated by another god, Shu, Onuris\textsuperscript{73} or Thoth.\textsuperscript{74} As a part of this process of reconciliation she was transformed from lioness to gazelle and returned among rejoicing to her temple accompanied by an entourage of joyous monkeys and baboons.\textsuperscript{75} There she underwent a ritual marriage with her pacifier, or indeed with the god Horus himself.\textsuperscript{76}

In this way order was restored to Egypt and the god’s eye was returned to

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\textsuperscript{71} Te Velde 1967; Gardiner 1932, 50–1; Wente 2003b.
\textsuperscript{72} Author’s translation from the \textit{Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae}.
\textsuperscript{73} Onuris (‘Arensnuhipis’) son of Amen and the gazelle goddess Anukis was a symbol of Nubian kingship, a hunting god of some significance in the Nubian pantheon and was paired in iconography with Hathor/Tefnut, Török 2002, 153, 155.
\textsuperscript{74} Darnell 2010, 121.
\textsuperscript{75} Darnell, 1995, 80–4.
\textsuperscript{76} First attested as the Myth of the Heavenly Cow in Theban tombs of the Amarna period, Wente 2003a, 289; Darnell 2010, 100; Horváth 2015, 134.
\end{flushleft}
its proper place as the uraeus on the brow of Re. This anecdote is explicit in many cult precincts of Hathor throughout Egypt, in particular a Graeco-Roman dedication from the temple of Rat-Tawy7 at Medamud near Thebes in Upper Egypt. The text that adorns the walls of the temple contains many elements already discussed here: such as offerings of baboons, antelopes and monkeys, and it fittingly ends with a drunken ritual celebration of the eye’s return.78 An earlier related context would be the employment of this same myth by Twenty-fifth dynasty kings to legitimate their military expansion by promoting themselves as the divine saviours of Egypt, just as Onuris retrieved and pacified Hathor.79

Regardless of these multivalent and not mutually exclusive divine associations for the wedjat symbol, which all have celestial significance and a strong connection with both the sun and moon as divine instruments of celestial order, the wedjat eye served a protective function in daily life, warding off the evils of the cosmos and was therefore common in the mundane realm as an amulet designed to protect the bearer in both life and in the afterlife. It was a prominent protective amulet from the Napatan period decorative arts, particularly in the glazed material faience.80

In juxtaposition to the wedjat, the symbolism of the nymphaea lotus is equally profuse in the decoration of this vessel, from fill motifs in the main register to the large flower on the base. This icon too has specific protective functions associated with statehood and the guarantee of regeneration, both diurnal and in the afterlife. In the ideology of state the nymphaea represented Upper Egypt in juxtaposition with the papyrus which signalled Lower Egypt. The solar value of the blossom can be ascribed to the diurnal pattern of the blue caerulea nymphaea, which opens in the morning with the rising sun and

77 An aspect and/or syncretism with Hathor.
78 Richter, 2010; Darnell 1997; Junker 1911; Horváth 2015.
closes in the evening with its setting. The white nymphaea by contrast flowers at night, as a metaphor for the passage of the sun through the netherworld, or for the nocturnal power, the moon. Thus each flower manifests the regenerative nature of the sun, moon and of the celestial deities.

In isolation, many motifs present on the figural register of the bowl; monkeys, baboons, wedjat eye, nymphaea blossoms, papyrus and even antelopes served a protective function in iconography and were employed for amulets, rings, seals and for votive objects in a variety of media, particularly in faience, another material which was symbolically aligned with divinity and with regeneration. By extension the themes and subjects of the decoration of this vessel are typologically consistent with the decoration and composition of funerary and offering vessels dating from as early as the Middle Kingdom in Egypt and Nubia.

However, it may be argued that in thematic terms, the use of similar juxtaposed scenes of hunt and fertile plain are most apparent from precious metal vessels of the New Kingdom. Equally, idiom combining monkeys, papyrus, nymphaea lotus and antelopes is similarly apparent on ceramic and faience funerary and cult vessels from this same period. However, these visual conventions for luxury vessels continued to be produced through from

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81 The nymphaea depicted here is most likely white, as the blue is usually indicated by rounded petals.
82 Pinch 2002, 158; Meskell 2002, 152.
83 Particularly in the New Kingdom when antelopes and caprids were common for decorating small luxury vessels and cosmetic tools, see Kozloff and Bryan 1992, 439; Hope 1982, 90.
85 For example, vessels from the Tell Basta Treasure (Late New Kingdom) in the Metropolitan, Cairo and Berlin museums, see Simpson 1959; Lilyquist 2012. Also objects from KV 62, the tomb of Tutankhamen.
86 For the idiom on faience offering bowls see Strauss 1974; Bianchi 1998, 25, 211; Patch 1998, 32–44; Pierrat-Bonnefois 2005, 69. For New Kingdom ceramic see Hope 2001, 24–7, 43; Yon 1981, 18 (Tell el Amarna), 74 (Deir el Medina) and the Twenty-second Dynasty 119–20 (faience goblets from Hermopolis).
the New Kingdom into the Third Intermediate Period until the period under discussion here.

1.5. Semantic function of the iconography

The governing characteristic of ancient Egyptian visual style must be its relatively consistent artistic tradition, wherein a set of formal conventions were established at an early period and then adhered to throughout the long history. Within this canon, the core themes and objectives were of an intrinsically ideological and political nature and served to complement text in visually reinforcing social stability by depicting the overarching unity of the state and ordered governance of the Nile valley. Naturally, this also displayed the divine sanction of the pantheon of this same ordered system. This selfsame notion of social unity extended into the realm of the afterlife, where funerary architecture and equipment reflected this pursuit of cosmic order, particularly in guaranteeing protection and rebirth for the deceased.

Central to this notion of unity is the abstract concept of ma’at, both as a concrete divinity, the goddess Maat, and as a social ideal. The implementation of this ideal of universal balance and order contributes to the paradox of the almost calcified longevity of Egyptian religious, scribal and visual traditions. The suppression of isfet (isf.t: chaos, disorder) by ma’at (m3’t: order, justice, truth) and the determination of cosmic flux and flow guaranteed economic and social productivity, plant, human and animal fertility. Thus it was the moral responsibility of the entire ancient population from ruler down to commoner. To breach this contract was to impose chaos on an ordered system. Visual representation contained the power to reinforce this ideological canon with as equal force as written incantations could.

87 By relatively consistent, I refer to elite canon which while experiencing renaissances of artistic innovation over time, predominantly adhered to specific models and idiom.
In the case of this small vessel the iconography may be argued to serve a similar magical function by representing the balanced dichotomies of the cosmos: Upper Egypt with Lower Egypt, desert steppe with fertile plain, masculine potency balanced with feminine agency. These fully integrated elements and symbolic allusions to various myths surrounding the youth and conflicts of the god Horus served to manifest a strong apotropaic presence on a vessel which comes from a funerary context and may have served a similar role both as an offering medium and as a protective vessel.

2. Text: the apotropaic inscription of the bronze bowl

It would be an injustice to a synthetic approach to this bronze vessel if the single horizontal inscription that circumnavigates the rim of the bowl were not briefly included in the discussion. The inscription and similar literary parallels have been recently addressed by Professor Fischer-Elfert of Leipzig University in his article ‘Ein Spruch gegen den Bösen Blick in Meroë: Anmerkungen zur Bronzeschale Boston MFA 24.900 aus Grabe S 155 der Süd-Nekropole’ and the transcription therefore shall merit brief mention here.

[Spruch der Abwehr des Bösen Blicks (?), des Bösen Klatsches (eines(?)) jeden Mannes (oder) (einer(?)) jeden Frau, eines jeden Flachlandes, eines jeden Hügellandes, das da herkommen sollte, um den Bösen Blick zu werfen gegen *Mkse-kdi-q, geboren der Dpsk (?), indem(?) ihr kommt, um den Bösen Blick gegen sie zu werfen, diejeniger, welche [...] [...] werden.

91 ‘Evil Eye’ https://uni-leipzig.academia.edu/HansWernerFischerElfert.
92 ‘[Incantation for defence against the evil eye], from the evil slander of every man, (or) of every woman, from all lowlands, from all highlands, from whoever should come with the intention of casting the evil eye against Mkse-kdi-q, born of Dpsk, from whoever comes to her with the intention of casting the evil eye against her, anyone who would [...] [...]’ , author’s translation of Fischer-Elfert 2014, 43.
This fragmentary text spanning the vessel’s rim functions as an adequate complement to the semantic value of the iconography which resides below it, since the protective and apotropaic function for the deceased is reasonably manifest. The incantation adjures against the threat of the ‘evil eye’ (ir.t-bin.t) from human agents and perhaps here Nubian cultural values finally intrude, as this is an uncommon theme for Egyptian magical texts.\textsuperscript{93} Consistent with the iconography, the incantation draws upon symbolism enveloping the ideal of an ordered universe. Within the phrasing neat dichotomies of human and topographical landscape are arranged, both gendered: ‘from any man, or any woman’, and geographical: ‘from all lowlands and all steppes’, are employed to frame this universal protection from the threat of the evil eye. In this instance these may be deemed a potential threat to the subject, the lady Mkse-kdi-q, and presumably also to threaten her imminent rebirth as a justified soul in the afterlife.\textsuperscript{94}

3. Materiality, techne and topos

3.1. Bronze

At this point in the discussion it is fitting to turn from iconographic and textual content to the iconicity of medium, material and form for this small bronze vessel, for a funerary object has potential value beyond mere surface decoration. These components contribute equally to the semantic significance of the artefact. First and foremost, the bowl is a vessel for containing liquids, perhaps ceremonial or funerary offerings, or in fact to serve as a receptacle for the use of the justified deceased. As a case in point, an incantation from the Pyramid Texts contains a magical spell for the consuming of the ‘eye’, where the drinking of beer poured into a metal bowl could be assumed to be a component of early funerary ritual. The deceased may, by drinking the

\textsuperscript{93} Borghouts 1973; Ritner 2008, 42.
\textsuperscript{94} Gender is indicated by the use of the feminine pronoun ‘s’.
god’s eye, literally or symbolically, assume the regenerative powers of the god Horus.

Unis, accept Horus’s eye, which was rescued for you: it cannot be away from you ONE METAL BOWL OF BEER.95

Pyramid Texts, Unas PT 56.

In addition, the introduction of drinking vessels and of drinking rituals was a relatively late innovation for Egypt and perhaps also to Nubian elite practice,96 and has been associated with specific holy festivals: such as those associated with the aforementioned celebration of the return of the Distant Goddess. Vessels made from precious or semi-precious metals were not quotidian and were created for restricted uses, serving temple ritual, elite funerary culture or conspicuous display in royal households.97 It is worth noting that because of ease of reuse, few metal embossed or undecorated vessels have survived in the archaeological record, which makes a vessel such as this bronze bowl exceedingly valuable to research.

In keeping with this notion of metaphor with solar deity, the vessel is constructed of prestigious forged metal and would have manifested in its original state a lustrous red-gold, for bronze, while having visual similarities with copper, exhibits a darker orange-red lustre. Although undervalued in the past, lustrous qualities for prestige artefacts are beginning to rate the attention they deserve, for they were indeed another potential visual metaphor for divinity, and divine presence.98 But not any divinity, again here the sun god is evoked, with whom the deceased aspired to travel in the barque of heaven after death.

96 Beginning in the New Kingdom.
97 Lilyquist 2012, 21.
Within the ancient Egyptian language the term most associated with the
divine, with magic and the afterlife, akh (ḥ), which is usually translated as
‘effective’ in English and ‘Wirksam’ in German, is built from the core meaning
of ‘to shine’, or ‘radiance’ and may be employed to convey this notion of
otherworldly lustre. From this semantic root all manner of nuanced values
have been built from the original stem, many with direct connection to
aspects of the divine and to funerary cult. In the Book of the Dead the gods,
rulers and the deceased may be addressed as ‘shining’ or ‘radiant’. In this
way any object that bore surface lustre could be argued to outwardly manifest
heavenly radiance and sanctity.

3.2. Bronze as a colour value

To compliment lustre, the colour of the bronze may not be considered of
arbitrary value. Red colours, while potentially signalling negative qualities in
Egyptian visual expression, were equally ritually powerful, evoking the heat
of the sun, the sun god himself and the protective goddesses of the eye. As has been stated earlier, the goddess Hathor may be alluded to in texts
as ‘the golden one’, here arguably a reference to gold rather than bronze.
However, in the Egyptian colour vocabulary yellow, orange and red conflate
to cover the semantic range of these warm colours in the term desher (dšr).
This is borne out by the disc of the sun being painted red in polychrome
monumental hieroglyphic inscriptions and often constructed using gold or
the red stone carnelian in metalwork, particularly for elite jewellery.

However, there are more factors to take into account than just the primary
vessel hue. The incised decoration of the Meroë bowl was filled with white

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99 This connection has been contested by Karl Jansen-Winkeln (1996), but the author
considers that by the period under discussion the conflation of the two forms, assuming
they were freestanding, would have been thoroughly embedded in Egyptian and Napatan
elite text and thought.
101 Baines 1985, 283.
paste, so that in fact the object is bi-chrome, and in its original state with the white paste insets it would have presented a striking effect. What is interesting is the potential for visual metaphor with this dichotomy of red and white, for while red signalled the solar forces, white signalled sanctity, purity, silver, the moon and lunar gods.\textsuperscript{102} Again reinforcing dichotomies of diurnal patterns, but equally the two signal the unity of state and land under one crown, such as the crown on our Horus falcon, the sekhemty (\textit{šhm.tj}, Gardiner S5), a fusion of the red crown of the Delta and white crown of Upper Egypt. It is almost trite to point out again the importance of duality, since there is this example of the crowns that united Egypt via the medium of the ruler, the representative of Horus on earth.

In funerary culture, red and white appear to also have had some significance for the justified deceased: both the Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom Book of the Dead often emphasise the value of red emmer beer with white emmer bread as fitting sustenance for the ritually pure deceased.\textsuperscript{103} Similarly, in the New Kingdom metalworkers are thought to have consciously manipulated funerary gold-work to produce objects using copper infused red gold and silver or white gold.\textsuperscript{104} Here again we have multiple visual signals that relate both to the promise of rebirth after death and to cosmic stability.

I would hazard to suggest further that this willful manipulation of colour may extend out to include the dark/light dichotomy of gender, where red-brown signalled male and pale yellow or pink female figures in elite iconography.\textsuperscript{105} This is equally manifest in representations from funerary contexts of the sibling gods of earth and sky, Geb and Nut, where the goddess may be

\textsuperscript{102} Schorsch 2001, 57; Robins 2001, 291–4; Sinclair 2012, 122–3.
\textsuperscript{103} Coffin Texts, Spell 173.
\textsuperscript{104} Schorsch 2001, 55–71.
\textsuperscript{105} Robins 2001, 291.
rendered in white pigment.\textsuperscript{106} This suggestion is made in the awareness that in the New Kingdom and in the Napatan period the role of elite women in state ideology was considerably elevated, and light with dark dichotomies on prestige artefacts may in some way subtly signal this altered rhetoric.\textsuperscript{107}

3.3. Horizontal and vertical programs of value

Even the circular nature of the vessel’s surface may not in fact be lacking semantic significance, but rather may be another vehicle for the manifestation of the Egyptian and therefore Nubian topos. The enclosing circularity of an offering or libation vessel could also reflect the encircling protective power of the solar deity or his allies, just as the incantation against the evil eye encircles the rim and the registers of protective feathering, eyes and icons all symbolically embrace and protect the contents of the vessel. In the text quoted earlier, the eye of Thoth can be thought to protectively encircle the Two Lands and thus guarantee world order. The verb used in that phrase, \textit{phr}, is usually translated as ‘to encircle’ or ‘go around’, but equally has a magical use and value that includes ‘to enchant’ or even ‘to control’, in this way protecting the vessel’s contents.\textsuperscript{108}

In addition, a vertical program may complement the horizontal encircling one. This visual scheme may be yet another vehicle for the manifestation of the Egyptian world order in microcosm: with the divine realm, earthly (human and animal) and the underworld all present in the design. In this way the feathered uppermost register signals the protective wings of nurturing celestial goddesses who facilitate regeneration and protect the sun god. The central panel, again with encircling wedjat eyes, manifests the earthly plane and the balance of universal forces in harmony, male and female, desert and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{106} See for example the Twenty-first Dynasty coffin of Amun Nani from the Metropolitan Museum, accession number: 30.3.24.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Gozzoli 2006, 483; Lohwasser 2001, 61–2.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Ritner 2008, 57–66.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
field, wild and domestic. Finally the lowest register ought to represent the underworld that the solar barque and the deceased must navigate each night before being reborn each morning.

However, the motif of opened nymphaea lotus that adorns vessels in a variety of media does not convey a notion of the negative nature of this subterranean world. On the contrary, it manifests the promise of its positive nature: the Egyptian fields of turquoise, the Sekhet-Hetep and Sekhet-Iaru. Thus, the entire vertical scheme of the bronze bowl from Meroë may manifest a subliminal sketch of the topos of the afterlife: the divine celestial canopy where the deceased hoped to travel with the sun god in the solar barque, the mundane, but essential world of the earthly tomb and offerings to keep the deceased alive in human memory and finally the fertile marshes of the Osirian underworld paradise.

This vertical scheme could make a fitting conclusion to the visual signalling of the composition of this vessel as each component contributes to a layered polyvalent scheme. To summarise, the iconography of the bowl manifests complex dichotomies of stability and protection, using gender and place to situate the viewer. The apotropaic text on the rim repeats this formula and finally the fabric, lustre and colour of the vessel reinforce dichotomies of cosmic stability and hope of regeneration for the deceased tomb owner, who, if one follows the evidence of the inscription was likely to have been woman of some social standing in Napatan society.

**Conclusion: Egyptian ideology on a Nubian funerary vessel**

Ancient Egyptian visual style and religious ideology was embraced and adapted by the rulers and elites of the Meroitic kingdom, and therefore visual representation, idiom and stylistic influences were employed extensively for prestige state, funerary and cult art and artefacts in the Napatan Period. Equally, at this time when Nubia had extensive political influence in Egypt
and further north to the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia, Egyptian art was notionally influenced by that of Nubia. It could also be assumed that international hybrid idiom may have been an additional medium for the horizontal transference of similar ideological motifs.

What is of interest is the apparent continuation of semantic function for archaising Egyptian idiom within Napatan iconography,\textsuperscript{109} such as these traditional elite funerary themes of desert hunt and fertile marshes. While entangled and Egyptianising iconographies on prestige metal vessels are understood to be circulating in the Mediterranean during the eighth and seventh centuries BCE,\textsuperscript{110} there is, in the author’s view, no reason to argue that these may have had a significant impact on the iconography of this Nubian funerary bowl. Rather, the iconography appears to be consciously Egyptian in intention and in execution, but this may not argue a purely Egyptian value within Meroë elite culture.

The fascination of this unique funerary object from the final dynasty of the Third Intermediate Period is its adherence to archaising Egyptian iconographic forms and idiom. The evidence of the iconography of this prestige vessel speaks volumes for the importance for the Nubian rulers on validating their right to rule in Nubia and abroad via the visual medium of earlier dynastic models and their prestige material culture.\textsuperscript{111} What is most interesting is the apparent focus on iconographic elements from the material culture bequeathed by the military giants of the Egyptian Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties.

Equally, I would maintain that the stylistic similarities, both in semantic structure and in composition, exhibit considerable awareness by both craftsman and patron of original artistic models for the design and not for

\textsuperscript{109} Török 2002; Tiradritti 2008; Morkot 2014.
\textsuperscript{110} Matthäus 1985; Markoe 1990, 14–16; Vella 2010.
\textsuperscript{111} With some emphasis on Theban ideology and cult.
vertical transference of idiom, as this would argue for gradual diachronic changes in style, of which there is less evidence. However, the semantic value of the iconography can be considered a fitting accompaniment to the theme of the inscription on the rim, as both may be ascribed a protective and regenerative function for the deceased patron. The value of the visual idiom is firmly grounded in securing the natural order of the universe and of regeneration for the deceased owner of the vessel, with particular emphasis on the role of the sun god’s diurnal rising both in the preservation of cosmic order and in the guaranteed resurrection and protection to the deceased.

Finally, where this imagery diverges from New Kingdom Egyptian iconographic models is in the choice of the individual components of the primary frieze. Each animal in the complementary scenes framing the central icon of godhead, be they monkey, baboon, antelope or hunting hound, is in actuality indigenous fauna of prestige specifically associated with the lands of Kush and Punt. Similarly the pronounced wedjat eyes in the negative space and the theme of protection from the evil eye in the text may have specific local significance. In this way purely Nubian elements seamlessly penetrate the ostensibly canonical Egyptian iconography on this bronze bowl from Meroë.
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