

PhD Proposal for Italian Agency for Development Cooperation

A: Project Description

1. Project title

Meroitic and Post-Meroitic Amulets from the third century BC to the sixth century AD

2. Project summary

Amulets are among the most characteristic artefacts from graves and settlements for the Meroitic period. In spite of heavy looting of cemeteries, they survived in substantial quantities from the royal burials of Begrawiya, Gebel Barkal cemetery, not to mention high status and commoner burials in Meroe, Naqa, Sanam, and Gabiti. Even some of the humblest graves in provincial cemeteries had at least one amulet included. Regardless of the richness of grave goods in upper and lower Nubia in the Post-Meroitic period, it seems that the usage of amulets has been transformed. The aims of this project is to present a typological study for Meroitic and post-Meroitic amulets, analyze their distribution from a genderism perspective, and determine their method of manufacture from a variety of materials. Furthermore, shed light on their indigenous and external influences.

3. Project Description

• **Background**

During the last few centuries of the first millennium BC, the Kushite state emerged with a new center, focused on Meroe in the fertile Shendi Reach between the Sixth and Fifth Cataracts. Over a period of more than 500 years, the Meroitic kingdom established its control of very extensive areas of the riverine Middle Nile and its hinterlands (Edwards, 2004, 141). The construction of the Meroitic Empire and its imperial culture, drawing on many traditions, probably represents the most extensive political structure of the region during this period and was almost certainly the greatest state hitherto seen in sub-Saharan Africa (Dafaalla, 2005, 327; Edwards, 2007, 219).

Amulets are one of the most important artefacts of the Meroitic civilization, where hundreds of them were found in the royal and non-royal tombs, and several were also found in the Meroitic settlements of Upper and Lower Nubia. The significance of these amulets is that they reflected the continuing or transformation of the concept of the believing in the symbolism (Pinch, 1994, 18), which appeared in the early Nubian civilizations.

The archaeology of the Post-Meroitic period was first recognized in the cemeteries of northern Lower Nubia. Archaeological surveys by Reisner found burials just south of Aswan and they were identified to date to this Post-Meroitic period, and designated the 'X-Group'. The presence of these 'X-Group' burials throughout Lower Nubia helped to

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introduce the Post-Meroitic period, filling the gap between the Meroitic and Christian medieval periods (Emery, 1948; Trigger, 1969). The identification of Post-Meroitic archaeology in Upper Nubia proved rather more problematic than in the north. Even 25 years ago, very little was known of this period (Edwards, 2004, 187). However, some general features of this period are now becoming apparent. It is generally accepted that the term “Post-Meroe” was widely applied to the period succeeding the end of central authority in Meroe in Lower and Upper Nubia as well (El-Tayeb, 2010).

This project focus on the Meroitic and Post-Meroitic amulets in two chronological sequenced periods; the **Meroitic periods** commencing with the burial location of the Kushite kings being shifted from the Napata region to Meroe. The relocation of the royal cemetery has been interpreted to symbolize a relocation of the kingdom’s capital sometime after 300 BC (Dunham, 1946; 1947; Welsby, 1996; Török, 1997, 442). Towards the middle of the fourth century, the political and cultural hegemony of Meroe and the Meroitic kings seems to have declined, with temples and palaces going out of use (Edwards, 2007, 220). The **Post-Meroitic** period followed the Meroitic period from the mid-fourth century AD till the sixth century AD with introduction of Christianity in Nubia and the emergence of Christian medieval Nubia (El-Tayeb, 2010).

- **Project Aims, Significance and Innovation, and Expected Outcomes**

- This project has five aims. **Firstly**, to catalogue the Meroitic and Post-Meroitic amulets. **Secondly**, analyze the shapes and the functions of the Meroitic and Post-Meroitic amulets. **Thirdly**, examine their indigenous and external influences. **Fourthly**, investigate the social distribution of these amulets at an intra-site and more general regional level within Post-Meroitic society. **Finally**, discuss the development of Post-Meroitic amulets in comparison to earlier Meroitic amulets examples.
- During the 1990s, further fieldwork and research projects on sites related to the Meroitic and Post-Meroitic periods has been carried out. Most of these works have been dictated by the construction of dams and roads. As a result, a lot of new and valuable data concerning these periods have been sourced from central and northern Nubia, extending down river, from the Khartoum to the third Nile cataract (Harkless, 2006, 33-6). Furthermore, recent re-analysis of this material has, however, thrown up some surprising conclusions, which do not always agree with the interpretations that were developed during the course of the Nubian Salvage Campaign in the 1960s (Brass, 2014; Bakheit, 2016, 81).

Therefore, this research will be significant in evaluating the value of the Meroitic and Post-Meroitic amulets from past publications and museum collections.

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This include analyzing their spatial distribution within Meroe and surrounding areas, and their cultural development and usage between the Meroe and Post-Meroe periods.

- Nonetheless, several outcomes from this project may be achieved such as a better understanding of the Meroitic and Post-Meroitic amulets (types, shapes, materials, and function). Develop a study that focuses on a multi-scaled observation of Meroitic and Post-Meroitic amulets by analyzing their distinctive context. Moreover, to investigate to what extent was their Egyptian influences in the religious and funerary practices.

- **Approach and Methodology**

Across the allocated 3 years, three stages will be defined; ‘research, digest and write’. The first year will look to research the data needed for this project, which will derive from excavation reports, articles and inventories of archaeological evidence. For example, the reports of Dunham in the Royal Cemeteries of Kush and the reports of Nicholas Millet in Gebel Adda in the 1960s. The second year will entail to digest the data, to prompt further questions about the Meroitic and Post-Meroitic amulets from different perspectives. The option of going overseas to access museum collections will also be considered, such as the National Museum of Sudan (NMS), Fine Art Museum (MFA), University College of London Museum (UCL), the Fitzwilliam Museum, Italian museums (*e.g.* Museo Egizio, Egyptian Museum, Florence, Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna, Naples National Archaeological Museum, Egyptian Museum, Milan). In addition, a database for the Meroitic and Post-Meroitic amulets using Microsoft Access will be created, which will make it possible to obtain statistical data, qualitative and spatial distribution on the amulets. The third and final year will focus on writing the PhD dissertation from the data that has been collected and understood. As well as using analytical and the comparative methods, to show the characteristics of amulets in these periods and outline their indigenous and external influences.

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