

JULIA BUDKA

THE THIRD CATARACT
ITS HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL IMPORTANCE
ACCORDING TO ROYAL AND PRIVATE ROCK INSCRIPTIONS AT TOMBOS

This paper deals with the manifold information provided by rock inscriptions as historical, administrative and prosopographical sources by the example of the Third Cataract¹. It will discuss the historical and geographical implications connected with the great rock stela of Tuthmosis at Tombos. Private inscriptions of administrative character that are also showing the close relationship of the officials to the king will be presented. Finally, I intend to show how important the contextual study of rock inscriptions is².

THE LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY OF THE THIRD CATARACT

The Third Cataract of the Nile is an important landmark - both on the way to and from Egypt. The rapids and granite boulders of the cataract form a natural barrier. Coming from Egypt, the site of Tombos, which is located ca. 25 km north of the city of Kerma, may be considered as a kind of northern entrance to the Dongola region, where the Nile is easily navigable³. On the other hand, coming from the South, the site marks the end of this navigability⁴. Because of its geographical position, which is of special importance for nautical military expeditions, the site was chosen as place for some graffiti of the 18th Dynasty.

¹ I am indebted to Alexa Jirez for checking my English.

² SEIDLMAYER 2003, 445.

³ BRADBURY 1984-1985, 17.

⁴ BONNET 1978, ii; VANDERSLEYEN 1970, 253, n. 1, BRADBURY 1984-1985, 17.

ROCK INSCRIPTIONS AT THE THIRD CATARACT

Both royal and private rock inscriptions were carved at Tombos. Tuthmosis set up a large rock stela⁵. This stela has already attracted the interest of several scholars. Because of limitation of space, I just want to focus on three points – its geographical implications, the date of its carving and its questionable character as boundary stela. These aspects will lead to some historical results and insights to the war policy of the early 18th Dynasty in a broader sense.

The text begins with a full year date (year 2, second month of Akhet, day 15) and the complete royal titulary. The main section of the stela focuses on the power of the king and his victories against the enemies. The emphasis is placed upon Nubia. But as Spalinger has pointed out: “*The entire text is devoted to the omnipotence of the Pharaoh. No specific enemy is named, nor is any casus belli given*”⁶. The last lines of the inscription point out the close relationship between the king and Amun and the Ennead of Karnak⁷.

Just in short, I want to mention the often but very differently discussed phrase *mw pf qd hdd m hnty* “*«the inverted water»” which flows north in flowing south*”⁸. Clearly, this terminus does not refer to the Euphrates, like some scholars argued many years ago⁹. According to Bradbury *mw qd* means the area around the Fourth Cataract near Kurgus where the Nile is changing directions along the S-curve of the river and many different currents may be noticed¹⁰. With this placement of *mw qd* in the south of Egypt it is no longer necessary to solve the problem how Tuthmosis I could manage to get as far as to the Euphrates within the first two years of his reign¹¹.

The considerable debate regarding the date of the stela – e.g. the approach of Säve-Söderbergh and Redford¹² that the Tombos inscription was backdated to year 2 – becomes therefore superfluous. Following Bradbury, it is more likely that the king gave order to carve inscriptions at Tombos after a successful return from Upper Nubia in his second year¹³.

⁵ LD III, 5a; *Urk.* IV, 82–86.

⁶ SPALINGER 1982, 46. For the three thematic sections of the stela, see BEYLANGÉ 2002, 680.

⁷ *Urk.* IV, 86, 11–12.

⁸ *Urk.* IV, 85, 14.

⁹ GOEDICKE 1974, 13; SPALINGER 1978, 37, with bibliography; in addition NIBBI 1976, 91–95.

¹⁰ BRADBURY 1984–1985, 7 ff., and 17; BRADBURY 1992, 54 (with fig.); SPALINGER 1995, 275; VANDERSLYEN 1995, 257 ff.; ID. 1999, 115, n. 91.

¹¹ SPALINGER 1978, 37.

¹² SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH 1941, 149; REDFORD 1979, 276 ff.

¹³ BRADBURY 1984–1985, 5, n. 31. A carving on the return trip is now generally accepted, see GOEDICKE 1996, 174.

The large stela may be linked to an inscription at Hagar el-Merwa, near Kurgus upstream of the Fourth Cataract, dated to year 2, first *Akhet*-month. Kurgus was an important site – it has been one of the major crossroads of caravan traffic¹⁴. Therefore it is very likely that the Egyptians were eager to come as far as Kurgus and to mark the site as southern boundary of Egyptian territory¹⁵.

In connection with the inscription at Hagar el-Merwa an interpretation of the Tombos-Stela as boundary stela, as proposed by Breasted¹⁶, Goedicke¹⁷ and Spalinger¹⁸, is quite difficult. Following Bradbury and Zibelius it commemorates Tuthmosis I's conquest of the Third and Fourth Cataract and his defeat of the Nubians and “*was never intended as a southern boundary marker*”¹⁹.

Besides the large rock stela, Tuthmosis ordered the carving of four minor inscriptions at Tombos²⁰. These smaller tableaus without year dates in the inscriptions have so far received very little attention²¹. They are lined up one after the other on the eastbank along the river, in the north of the large stela. The texts are also referring to the successful Nubian campaign, the role of Tuthmosis I as victorious king and last but not least to his close connection to various gods.

On these minor stelae the royal names are carved in a large scale and therefore visible even from a considerable distance – especially for people passing by on the river. All stelae together give the complete set of royal names.

The first inscription – in geographical order, coming from the large stela in the South and moving to the North – is well preserved and clearly visible (*LD III, 5e*): “*Horus Victorious Bull, Beloved of Maat, the good god ʿ3-hpr-k3-Rʿ, given life, who has stroken Kush, beloved of Amun-Re*”.

The epithet *beloved/chosen of god*²² shows certain orthographic aspects. On each stela the name of the god faces the royal name and the individual hieroglyphic signs are looking at each other.

The next inscription reads (*LD, III 5c*): “*Nebty Who appears with Neseret, great of strength; good god, Lord of the Two Lands ʿ3-hpr-k3-Rʿ,*

¹⁴ BERG 1987, 1. Note also the large number of rock inscriptions at Kurgus, see PEDEN, 89, 113.

¹⁵ BRADBURY 1984-1985, 1 ff.

¹⁶ BREASTED 1906, 28.

¹⁷ GOEDICKE 1974, 14.

¹⁸ SPALINGER 1982, 46.

¹⁹ BRADBURY 1984-1985, 16; see also ZIBELIUS 1988, 193.

²⁰ *LD III, 5b–e; Urk. IV, 87–88.*

²¹ VANDERSLEYEN 1970, 253, n. 1, 261; BUDKA 2002, 60 ff., Figs. 2–4.

²² *mry* may be translated in both ways because the love of the gods grants the legitimacy of the king; see BEYLANG 2002, 683, n. 2457.

given life, who has rescued the land (upon earth?)... , beloved of Montu, the Lord of Thebes”.

The third minor stela is rather badly preserved (LD III, 5d): *“Gold-Horus Beautiful of years, who enlivens the hearts, son of Re of his body Tuthmosis, who appeared like Re, given life; the Lord of Nubia (nb t-sty), in (the land, on the island?...)”²³, everywhere, beloved of Amun, the Lord of the Throne of the Two Lands”.*

The last tableau was carved on the neighboring rock (LD III, 5b): *Horus Victorious Bull, Beloved of Maat, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Lord of the Two Lands a3-ḥpr-k3-Ra, given life, the victorious ruler, who destroyed the Nubians, beloved of Amun, the Lord of the Throne of the Two Lands”.*

Because of the epithet of the birth name *who appeared like Re* on the third minor stela, which is not attested within the first 4 years of Tuthmosis I, Sethe proposed a second Nubian campaign of the king, following the war in year 2²⁴. Säve-Söderbergh explained the epithet by post-dating the large rock stela (see above)²⁵. According to Goedicke the epithet *Lord of Nubia*²⁶ *“indicates the administrative incorporation of Nubiai”*²⁷.

In my point of view the rock inscriptions of Tuthmosis I at Tombos form a single corpus and should be close in date to each other. Their distribution and texts are by no means accidental. Quite on the contrary, they were set up in what I assume is a geographical order. The royal names illustrate this sequence: Horus, Nebty and Gold Horus-name follow in their distribution the order of origin of each name (fig. 1).

The birth name occurs only once, whereas the first cartouche name was used in the other three cases. Significant is also the very last, northern stela, which is the closest one to Egypt and where the full titulary *the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Lord of the Two Lands* appears.

The gods that were selected for the *mry*-names also follow a certain scheme – Amun, Amun-Re and Montu are all local gods of the Thebais. This reference to Thebes resembles very closely the final remarks of the large stela (Amun and the Ennead) and the minor inscriptions should therefore be regarded as its supplements.

Similar to the large stela the smaller rock inscriptions represent a victory proclamation and demonstrate the omnipotence of Tuthmosis in the newly conquered territory. On his way back to Egypt the powerful ruler left

²³ Text partly destroyed; reading uncertain.

²⁴ *Urk.* I, 45, n. 1.

²⁵ SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH 1941, 149.

²⁶ LD III, 5d.

²⁷ GOEDICKE 1965, 106, n. 17.

North = Egypt		
LD III, 5b	Royal names	Horus + First cartouche <i>(njswt bjty, nb t3wj)</i>
	epithets	<i>the victorious ruler who destroyed the Nubians</i>
	mry-name/God	<i>Amon, the Lord of the Throne of the Two Lands</i>
↓		
LD III, 5d	Royal names	Gold-Horus + s3-R ^c
	epithets	<i>the Lord of Nubia</i>
	mry-name/God	<i>Amon, the Lord of the Throne of the Two Lands</i>
↓		
LD III, 5c	Royal names	Nepty + First cartouche <i>(ntr nfr)</i>
	epithets	<i>who has rescued the land</i>
	mry-name/God	<i>Montu, the Lord of Thebes</i>
↓		
LD III, 5e	Royal names	Horus + First cartouche <i>(ntr nfr)</i>
	epithets	<i>who has stricken Kush</i>
	mry-name/God	<i>Amun-Re</i>
South = Nubia		

Fig. 1. The distribution and layout of the four minor royal stelae (Tuthmosis I) at Tombos.

visible traces of his presence in Nubia – his full fivefold titulary in five rock inscriptions as one single message at Tombos.

Some high officials chose the backside of the large granite boulder that carries the large stela of Tuthmosis I to carve their own records. The nicely carved tableau of the viceroy of Kush under the reign of Amenhotep III, Merimes, shows the official in adoration of the royal cartouches²⁸. Some

²⁸ SPIESER 2000, 224, n. 123 with bibliography; BUDKA 2002, 61, Fig. 5.

iconographical details are very remarkable – e.g. the figures of bounded Nubians between the *sm3*-sign under the cartouches are extraordinary for private graffiti. This specific motif was adopted from bases of royal statues²⁹. The adoration of royal names in general demonstrates the loyalty of the official to the king³⁰.

The inscription reads as follows:

“Giving adoration to the Lord of the Two Lands, kissing the earth for the good god, by the King’s son, the overseer of the southern countries, the fanbearer on the right of the king (...) Merimes”.

Merimes was the highest official in Nubia during the reign of Amenhotep III, who is known for a very intense Nubia-policy. There was much building activity and the responsible viceroy is well attested, also in many rock inscriptions, especially in the area around Aswan³¹.

Another official left a graffito far above the one of Merimes. This tableau shows twice the overseer of the foreign lands, Paheqanisutemrataui (*P3-hq3-nswt-m-Rc-t3wj*), standing back to back, his arms raised in adoration, in front of a single column on the left side and two columns on the right. The text begins with the name of Amenhotep II³². At the left side the text is still readable:

“c3-hprw-Rc, given life: Adoration by the overseer of the foreign countries, the overseer of a Law-court (guard), Pahekanisutemrataui”.

At the right hand side only traces of the inscription survived, the royal name is still partly preserved. Another viceroy left an inscription on the island at Tombos. The graffito dates to year 20 under Tuthmosis III³³. The inscription (8 horizontal lines) is an offering formula, carved by a *s3-nswt* and *jmj-r3 h3swt rsjw*t whose name was hacked out twice³⁴. According to the text this official fulfilled his duties to the satisfaction and approval of the pharao. A list of products coming from Kush and transported to the royal residence in Egypt follows right after the name of the viceroy³⁵:

“1) Year 20: The good god, who overthrows him who attacked him ... (who builds) 2) the house of his father, that he may grant power 3) (...) Mn-hpr-Rc [and Amon, Lord of the thrones of the Two Lands, given life

²⁹ SPIESER 2000, 52 ff.; see BUDKA 2002, 61.

³⁰ BUDKA 2001, 60 ff.

³¹ SPIESER 2000, 218 ff., n. 101 and 102, and 222, n. 115.

³² LD Text V, 244.

³³ Reading the cartouche as Tuthmosis IV as proposed by some scholars (see BRYAN 1991, 6–9) is not possible, see PEDEN 2001, 90.

³⁴ *Urk.* IV, 1375; SÄVE-SÖDERBERG 1941, 208, Fig. on 209.

³⁵ SÄVE-SÖDERBERG 1941, 207 ff.; MÜLLER 1976, 352.

eternally] 4) A boon [which the king gives] and Amon, Lord of the thrones of the Two Lands and (of) the Ennead within Ta-Sety, may they give valiance and vigilance... 5) [in the presence of]... life, prosperity, health and alertness as well as royal praise and all [good] and pure things for the ka of the King's son and overseer of southern countries (Amunemnekhu) 6) [vindicated, (...), a servant] useful for his lord; who fills his (the King's) house with [gold], red jasper, ivory, ebony, wood of the *tjšps-trDD*, 7) [skins] of panthers, *hsjt* (= kind of spice?), incense of the *Md3jw*, 8) being the precious things of the vile Kush; who is caused to ascend to the palace of the Lord of the Two Lands; who comes in as praised one, who leaves as beloved one, the King's son (Amenemnekhu)".

The crucial point of the identification of this official is the date of year 20 that affects the sequence of viceroys under the reign of Tuthmosis III³⁶. Following Pamminger, the reading as Amunemnekhu, who is known to have been viceroy in year 18, is the most reasonable one. This would mean that Amunemnekhu followed right after viceroy Seni and Nehi took over his succession³⁷.

All of the so far known rock inscriptions at Tombos date to the 18th Dynasty and were carved on the eastbank of the river.

These inscriptions form a very small but interesting corpus. Seidlmayer has already pointed out the rich potential of rock inscriptions in general – beyond their role as source of prosopographical data, they “*can provide important information on the ancient use of the landscape*”³⁸. Therefore it is necessary to study them in their historical context and to consider their location and grouping.

According to the royal inscriptions at Tombos, the Nubian war of Tuthmosis I took place in year 2; the Asiatic campaign of the king must therefore have been later – possibly in year 4 or 5. No building activity of Tuthmosis I is attested so far at Tombos – Breasted mentioned mud building-remains on the island of Tombos³⁹, but they were never published. Although it is very likely to assume a fortress or outpost around Tombos, there is still no archaeological or textual evidence⁴⁰.

³⁶ PAMMINGER 1992, 100, n. 40.

³⁷ This interpretation results in neglecting the proposed viceroy named Jnj (see HIKADE 2001, 72, n. 402, 92, n. 515), who was only attested by the graffito in question, see PAMMINGER 1992, 97 ff.; BUDKA 2002, 62.

³⁸ SEIDLMEYER 2003, 445.

³⁹ BREASTED 1906, 28.

⁴⁰ The word *mnw* on the large stela does not refer to a fortification – it is a metaphoric expression for the king, see BEYLANG 2002, 216 ff.

The inscription of Amunemnekhū tells us about the successful payment and handing over of the tributes of Nubia to the king. It points to the role of Tombos as trading point. Being the last easy accessible site before the currents of the Third Cataract on the way to Egypt, products were collected at Tombos and afterwards shipped farther north under the direction of the viceroy.

The inscriptions of Paheqanisutemrataui and Merimes illustrate mainly the loyalty of these officials to the king. The discovery of a broken stela of the viceroy Setau in the desert near Tombos⁴¹ could very well point to a small sanctuary or temple in the neighborhood.

Reisner noted the presence of copper oxide in the quarries at Tombos. Possibly this was the supply source of this metal for the ancient city of Kerma⁴². It might be possible that this copper source was still used during the New Kingdom⁴³.

Probably already in the 18th Dynasty the area around Tombos also served as a royal quarry⁴⁴. Especially in the Napatan and Meroitic period this quarry flourished and large royal statues were cut out of the distinctive grey granite.

Some several hundreds of meters further south of the rock inscriptions, an unfinished royal statue is still lying in the quarry. This colossus is closest in style to statues of Tanutamani⁴⁵. A pair of royal statues of the temples of Argo also comes from the quarries at Tombos⁴⁶.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summing up, the rock inscriptions at Tombos are important sources for royal activities in Nubia at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty. The inscriptions of Tuthmosis I seem to indicate that this king conquered the area around Kerma⁴⁷ during the military campaign in his second year and even went as far upstream as Kurgus and certainly beyond the Fourth Cataract. Thus, the New Kingdom expansion and Egyptianization of Nubian territory was set in motion⁴⁸.

⁴¹ HINTZE / HINTZE 1967; see RAEDLER 2003, 143, n. 95 with bibliography.

⁴² BONNET 1982, 46; ZIBELIUS 1988, 42, 72.

⁴³ ARKELL 1955, 84 refers to Tombos as administrative center in connection with the quarrying of the grey granite and a possible fortification.

⁴⁴ DUNHAM 1947, 63.

⁴⁵ DUNHAM 1947, 64; *PM* VII, 174; BUDKA 2002, 61, Fig. 5; BEYER 2003, 360.

⁴⁶ These statues, probably Natakamani, are now standing in front of the National Museum at Khartoum, see ARKELL 1955, Pl. 17a.

⁴⁷ TRIGGER 1976, 108; ZIBELIUS-CHEN 1984, 85.

⁴⁸ BRADBURY 1992, 53.

By the example of Tombos the close connection between the orientation of pharaonic graffiti and the Nile as road of transport and traffic is quite obvious. The four smaller royal stelae were carved at places overlooking the river where busy traffic occurred.

It should have become evident that the private rock inscriptions of southern-based officials at the Third Cataract are not only prosopographical but also administrative sources. The inscriptions point to the role of Tombos as an important custom point for assembling the annual tributes to Egypt. The graffiti on Tombos-island is of great importance for the reconstruction of the sequence of viceroys during the time of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III.

In 1991 the University of Khartoum undertook a survey at Tombos that revealed the remains of an important Egyptian colonial cemetery of New Kingdom date. The University of California excavated some tombs of high officials in 2000 and 2002⁴⁹. This new archaeological evidence fits well into the use of the ancient landscape as reconstructed by the inscriptions. All together, the contextual interpretation of the rock inscriptions at Tombos gives us important insight to the history and policy of this part of Nubia during the 18th Dynasty.

⁴⁹ SMITH 2003, 137–166.