



# An Ethnoarchaeological Approach to Interpreting the Graffiti at Musawwarat es-Sufra

*Nuba Abdel Hafiz Abdel Aziz*

## Introduction

Musawwarat es-Sufra is located 180km north east of Khartoum, 20km north of Naqa and approximately 25km south east of the Nile. The site contains many archaeological features, among them the Great Enclosure, Small Enclosure, Apedemak temple, the great and small *bafirs*, in addition to three smaller shrines (ID, IIA, IID). There are also cemeteries dated from the Neolithic to the Post-Meroitic period, a workshop area, and a small permanent habitation quarters (<http://musawwaratgraffiti.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de>).

Most features of the site date to the Meroitic period (300 BC-AD 350), but there is evidence for occupation that goes back to the Napatan period (650-300 BC) (Hakem 1988, 222). The main structure on the site is the Great Enclosure, which consists of three temples (MUS 100, 200, 300) and a number of smaller chapels as well as numerous adjacent rooms and courtyards. The Lion Temple, the god Apedemak's temple, has been dated to the reign of King Arnekhamani (235-218 BC) (Török 2011, 190-191). The Great Enclosure probably originates from the Napatan period (Török 1997, 399). It was rebuilt at least six times (Wolf 2004, 47).

The function and nature of the Great Enclosure is one of the controversial issues in Meroitic studies. Among the many theories advanced for the purpose of the Great Enclosure was that it was either used for the accommodation of pilgrims, or as a centre for training elephants for both war and ceremonies, or to accommodate the animals required for the cult ceremonies (Welsby 1996, 146).

Török tried to define the function of the Great Enclosure by discussing all the hypothesis made about it by early travellers and archaeologists which he summarized (Török 2002, 173-177):

- A college – Linant de Bellefonds and Frederic Cailliaud
- A palace – Lord Prudhoe and Puckler-Muskau
- A desert palace – Török
- A hospital – Hoskins
- A centre for training elephants – Shinnie
- A religious place in which festivals were attended by numerous pilgrims from all over the kingdom – Hintze, Wenig and the majority of modern authors (Török 2011, 193-195).

The most puzzling feature of the site is the thousands of informal graffiti, which adorn the Great Enclosure's walls. Many of these graffiti may be dated to the Meroitic period but some of them are of Post-Meroitic, Christian and Islamic date. The graffiti take a vast range of forms, among which are representations of gods, humans and animals – sometimes

arranged in scenes – and symbols, objects and other motifs. The Musawwarat graffiti may be a means to provide an understanding of the nature and use of this site.

Here we aim to study some of these graffiti, especially those which depict hunting scenes using throwing sticks and dogs. The study attempts to determine the identity of the artists and the purpose for drawing the scenes as well as the activities associated with them. Some examples of the hunting scenes can be seen in (Plates 1-3).



*Plate 1. A hunter holding a throwing stick with his dog.*



*Plate 2. A dog chasing a hare.*



*Plate 3. A dog chasing a hare.*

To interpret and understand these graffiti, the study has adopted an ethnoarchaeological approach: an integrated and comparative study which depends upon comparison between the hunting graffiti and ethnographic data. The data has been collected from four different groups around Sudan. In addition, we review some previous ethnographic studies, which studied the use of throwing sticks for hunting in Sudan and South Sudan.

The Musawwarat graffiti have been the subject of few studies in spite of the fact that they include many features which could reflect the behaviour and beliefs of Meroitic people as well as the palaeoenvironment. Steffen Wenig was one of the scholars who noted them (Wenig 1975, 419) and he suggested that Musawwarat's graffiti would contribute much to our understanding of the creative ability of the Meroitic people in the field of non-official art. Ursula Hintze was the first person who tried to document and classify the graffiti; she took photographs and documented a selection of the graffiti in the 1960s, and a summary of her results were published (Hintze 1979, 135-15).

In the 1990s, Pawel Wolf published four articles on the graffiti (Wolf 1994; 1999a; 1999b; 2001).

Since 2007 the Musawwarat Graffiti Project, led by Cornelia Kleinitz at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, has been dedicated to the study of the graffiti that cover Musawwarat's walls. The Musawwarat Graffiti Project ([http://musawwarat-graffiti.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/the\\_site/the\\_great\\_enclosure](http://musawwarat-graffiti.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/the_site/the_great_enclosure)) published many articles between 2007 and 2014 (Kleinitz 2007; 2008; 2012; 2013; 2014; Kleinitz *et al.* 2009).

## Hypothesis

In order to understand and interpret the graffiti in the Great Enclosure at Musawwarat, especially those related to hunting scenes using an ethnoarchaeological approach, the author proposed the following hypotheses:

Using an ethnoarchaeological approach in interpreting these graffiti will reveal one aspect of the daily life of the Meroitic people.

We may be better able to identify the artist and the purpose behind those drawings.

We may better understand the activities of the hunting trips involving throwing sticks and dogs by the Meroitic people.

It may give us a new vision to interpret the function of the Great Enclosure and the Musawwarat site as a whole.

It gives us a new view as to the function and identity of the Meroitic gods especially Arensnuphis.

## Ethnographic data derived from previous ethnographic records

Evans Pritchard recorded in his observations of the Ingessana groups in Jebel Tabi,

which lie between 33° 45' and 34° 15' E longitude and 11° 15' and 11° 45' N latitude, the use of the boomerang known to them as *luin*, and that they have long used it in war and hunting. They think that they used it before they practised metalworking. Evans Pritchard compared the *luin* and the similar Australian weapon and found that the Australian version has the characteristic of returning back to its launching point after been thrown towards the target, while the Ingessana *luin* does not have this characteristic.

Evans Pritchard also mentioned that this weapon is used extensively in the area between the Blue and White Niles but he did not notice a weapon similar to the Ingessana boomerang in its wide tipped form in that area. He recorded six forms of boomerang named in different local languages, all used in war and in hunting (Evans Pritchard 1927, 70-83).

Nalder wrote about throwing knives in the Nuba Mountains. Those throwing knives were considered to be a modification of the classic boomerang with an iron blade added to it (Figure 1; Nalder 1935, 297). Nalder recorded in his ethnographic observations of the Nilotic tribes, the presence of this sort of weapon among the Shiluk, Dinka, Nuer and Barso of Southern Sudan (MacTier Pirrie and Nalder 1908, 377-384).

Arkell also recorded the throwing sticks and throwing knives used by the Fur tribe in his observations during five-year service in Darfur (Arkell 1939). During that period he collected several examples now in Khartoum Ethnographic Museum. He compared the throwing knives and throwing sticks (Plates 4 and 5), both of which were of approximately

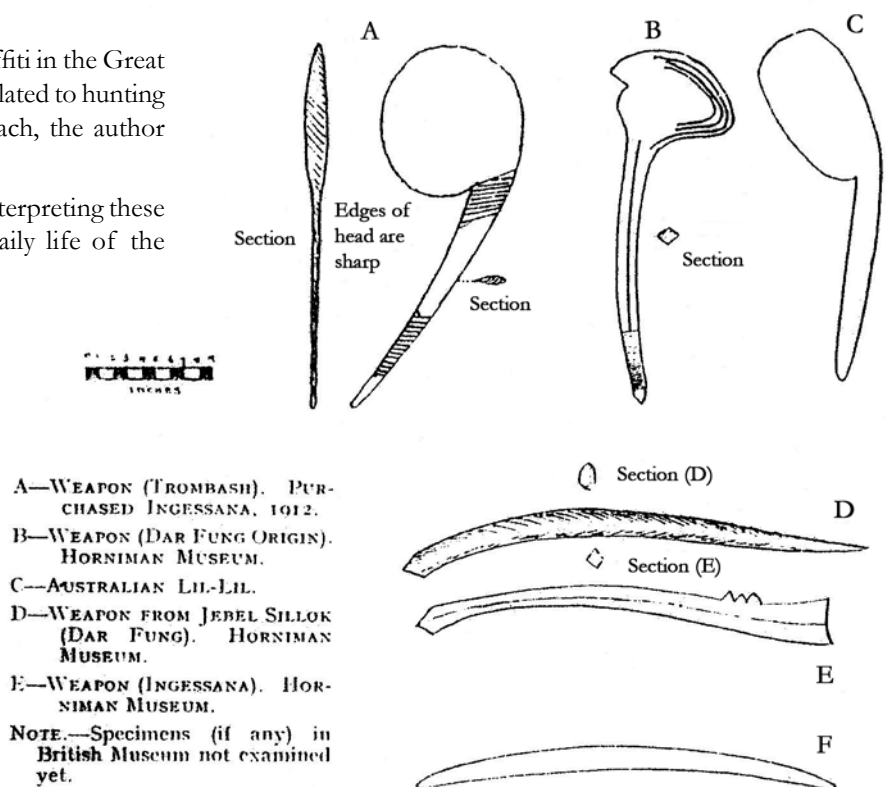


Figure 1. Ingessana throwing sticks (after Nalder 1935).

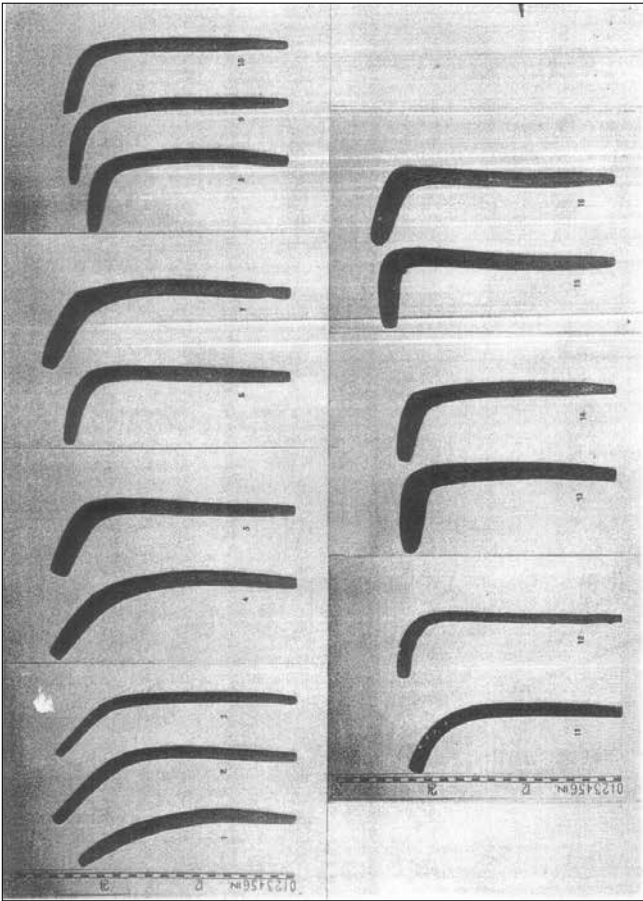


Plate 4. Simple throwing stick (Arkell 1939, pl. I).

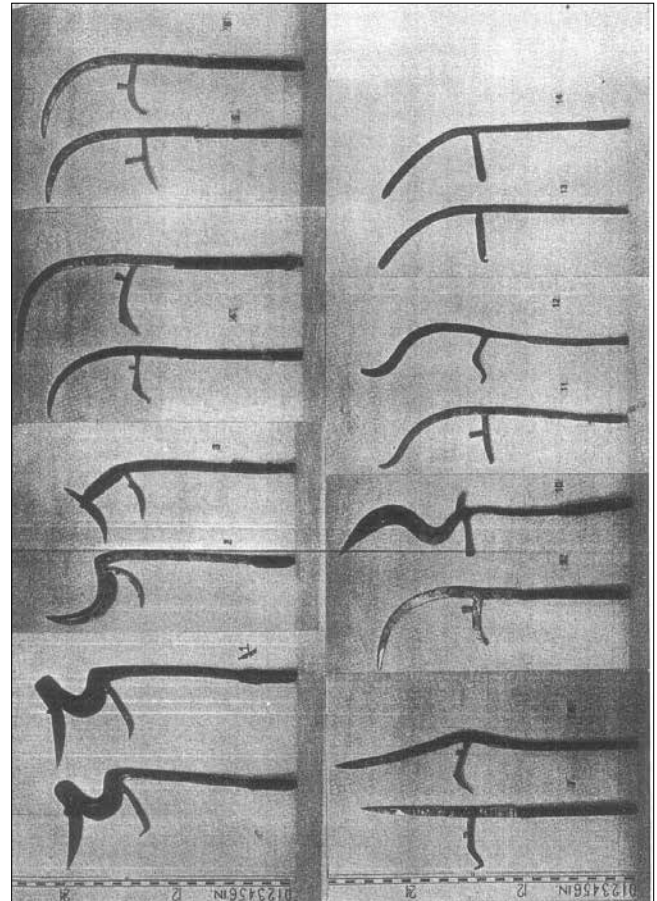


Plate 5. Throwing knives (Arkell 1939, pl. III).

the same length. The main difference was that the throwing knife had a protruding iron spur. This spur was, according to Nadler's description of the same weapon used by Ingessana groups, a means to hang the weapon over the shoulder keeping the hands free (Plate 6; Nalder 1935). Arkell thought that if this was the only purpose for the spur, it could have been made of wood, which led him to think that the iron spur is a modification of a wooden spur. He wondered if this offensive use was developed in order to enable it to be sharpened.

Arkell classified Fur throwing sticks into two types, the simple form and the 'f'-shaped modified form with the spur. He believed that the simple wooden type was the prototype, especially after evidence for its existence in ancient Egypt was discovered. Throwing sticks were the prototype from which, with the arrival of iron, they developed into the throwing knife. This new weapon was then used when attacking enemy horsemen (Arkell 1939).

Throwing sticks are made of strong wood such as *Acacia Mellifera*, *Acacia vereke*, (*Acacia Seyal*), *Zizyphus spina Christi* and *Acacia Arabica*. Only curved green branches were used to make both types of throwing sticks classified by Arkell. They are cut, softened and then the sharp blade is attached. After that, the wooden handle is oiled for preservation. The making of throwing sticks is carefully done since the life of its owner may depend on it in time of war. It is also designed with great care for reasons of vanity and prestige. Of the

Fur groups, the Masalit and Tama are the most famous for using throwing sticks.

El-Tunisi mentioned that three days after circumcision and until the seventh day, the circumcised boy along with his friends take throwing sticks with them and roam their village attacking every chicken they find (التونسي 1965, 224). He also mentioned the *kurbag*, which is the local name of the throwing knife, when describing the customs of the kings of Darfur. He related that: 'After a king is inaugurated he stays at home for seven days, lying down, not doing anything, and he will not come out until the eighth day. On that day, elderly women (*habbobat*) gather along with their leader called the Queen of Elder Women and attend the coming out of the king. When the king comes out they all come towards him each woman carrying two pieces of iron, one in each hand, called the *kurbag*, tapping them against each other' (التونسي 1965, 167-168). The elderly women also tap *kurbag* at the troops' 'parade day' and at the 'renewal of the drum skin day' as is illustrated by el-Tunisi (1965, 176). The *kurbag* described by el-Tunisi was the same as the throwing knife described by Arkell and Nalder.

Kendall noted the graffiti of hunting using throwing sticks in his study of the throwing sticks in ancient Egypt and modern Sudan and he deduced that throwing sticks virtually identical to some of those used in ancient Egypt are still commonly used in Sudan (Kendall 1989).





Plate 6. Carrying throwing knives (derived from Arkell 1939, pl. IV).

### Ethnographic data from the fieldwork Throwing sticks hunting by the Masalit

The Masalit is one of the tribes that live in Darfur; el-Geneina is their main urban centre (Figure 2). Masalit are famous for using the throwing stick and for their skill in using it. They are called *Masalit seiad el-Safareik* (the Masters of the throwing sticks). Masalit use dogs along with the throwing stick during hunting trips. The Masalit have two types of throwing sticks, the first is made of strong tree branches and the other is of light metal. The throwing stick is considered a basic piece of a family's belongings and is always kept in the house of the head of the family. It is used as a weapon of war and of the hunt.

The wooden throwing sticks are made by specialised carpenters, who are usually village elders. One of the Masalit's recent famous throwing-stick makers is Kassarra Douda who is also famous for his hunting skills. When making a throwing stick, whether its owner is right or left-handed will be considered since there is a difference in design. The throwing stick will, after its first kill, be blessed by staining it with the blood of that kill.

The metallic version of the throwing stick is the *kurbag* of which there are two types. The first type, which was described by Arkell and el-Tunisi and the second type, which has the

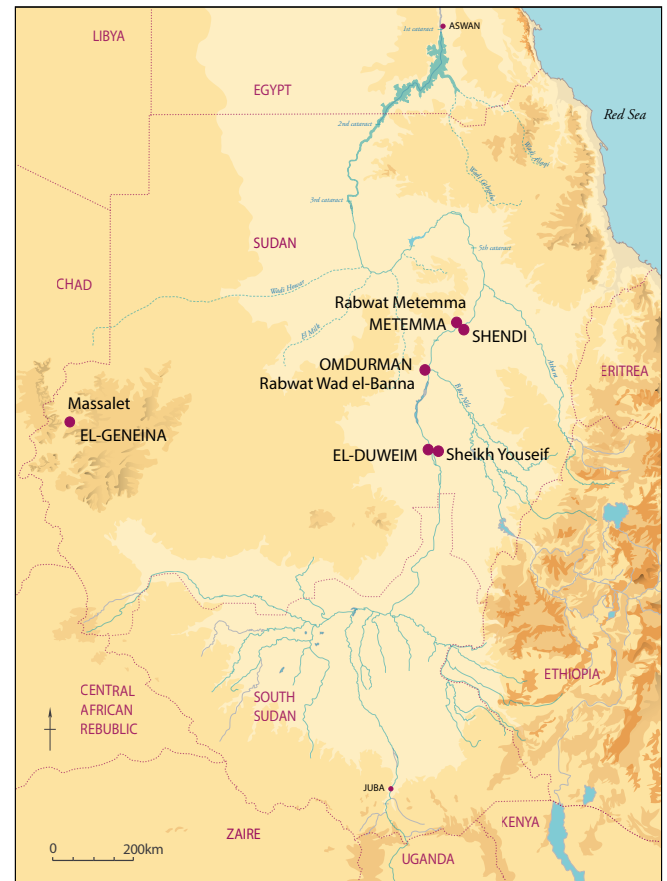


Figure 2. Location of the ethnographic studies.

same shape as the simple curved wooden throwing stick but is made of metal. The *kurbag* is used usually in war and in hunting large animals and it is the traveller's preferred weapon.

The *hanaf* is one type of wooden throwing stick. It is made of ebony with a wider angle than the ordinary throwing stick. The *hanaf* is about 1m long, rather thick at the handle and tapering throughout its length until the tip. The handle of the *hanaf* is pierced by a hole through which a leather strap is tied for carrying. It is carried for show and is used usually by brigands and bandits.

The *hanaf* is used to hunt large monkeys and a type of skunk. Masalit believe this skunk to be mean and malicious. They also believe that feeding its liver to their young will give them courage and strength. Further, a pair of talismans will be made out of the skunk's gall bladder and worn in the belief that it will protect hunters from bullets and weapons.

There are two types of strikes when using the throwing stick; the first is called 'Um Tabalboal strike', which is striking with any of the sides of the throwing stick. This strike does not do much harm to the target. The other strike, which is very harmful, is by attacking with the tip of the throwing stick. The throwing stick (*safarog*) is described by Masalit thus: 'it may be a piece of wood but if it strikes it is a fatal weapon'.

Another type of throwing stick is the 'Sheikh - Sultan Sa-farog', which is made with great care especially for the sheikh (Plate 7). It is polished, waxed and decorated using heat. The



sheikh's throwing stick has a unique protrusion called the 'safariog angara'. The sheikh puts his throwing stick in front of him when seated on a chair or beside him when seated on the floor. Fathers make small throwing sticks for their sons for training in the hunt. Women are forbidden from hunting apart from on rare occasions when a women is of old age.

Throwing sticks are also used in witchcraft, where the holy man called 'kujur' casts his spells on it and then in time of war, the same throwing stick will be thrown in the air where it is believed to cast a spell on all the enemies' weapons. Some amulets may also be tied to the throwing stick and then cast in the air to strike somebody's heart at the same moment, such as a thief or a foe. Throwing sticks also have a role in social ceremonies including weddings and circumcision events. A special throwing stick, decorated with strands of colourful threads, is carried by the groom during his wedding ceremony. This same throwing stick will be presented to his son at his circumcision ceremony. On the morning of the circumcision, drums are beaten and everybody dances. Elderly women who are relatives of the circumcised boy dance to the drum beat wearing men's clothing and hunting amulets and holding throwing sticks. They roam the village's houses in this way followed by drums and drummers emulating the throwing stick hunting activities.

The hunting and ceremonial throwing sticks are kept indoors above the door of the hut to drive away bad spirits. The

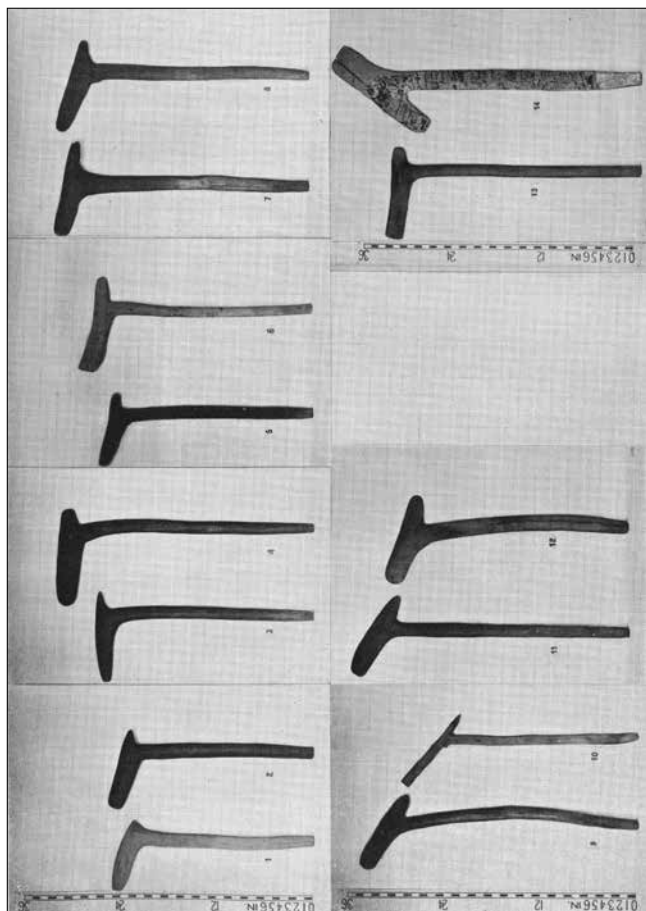


Plate 7. Sultan (Sheikh) throwing sticks (Arkell 1939, pl. II).

*hanaf* and *kurbag* are placed under the owner's bed for defence.

Hunting dogs used by the Masalit are tall and slim at the stomach, with short soft hair. They are usually white or brown in colour. The Masalit regarded black dogs as an evil portent. A hunting dog's talent is noticed soon after birth and, in that case, the hunter will take the puppy and isolate it immediately. Rearing and training starts from the puppy's first days. Nobody is allowed to feed or clean the puppy except the hunter, not even family members. When the puppy is older (a phase known as a big puppy), its owner takes it to the wilderness for training. There, the dog is trained to obey its owner, develop its hunting skill and gains strength. A hunting dog will not be taken on a hunting trip until it is ready and fully trained, for fear of it being attacked by older dogs. The hunting dog will be rewarded for its first kill by feeding it a part of the kill's ear. The hunter will make a ring out of the prey's skin, which will be fixed to the dog's collar as a trophy. The number of rings on a dog's collar indicates the number of the dog's kills. Hunting dogs are tied in front of their owner's barn.

The hunting trip is a highly regarded occasion for the Masalit. It usually takes place on their holidays, which are Wednesdays and Fridays. The trip is planned carefully beforehand by the leader of the village's youth who is called 'the *warnanig*'.

The *warnanig* organizes the trip by choosing the meeting point (usually a nearby village) and the time of departure (usually at dawn). At dawn on the hunting day, the horn is blown for assembly and absentees are identified (Plates 8 and 9). Then hunters divide into small groups each having a leader but the general leadership is reserved for the *warnanig*. The *warnanig* then determines the direction and manner of movement during the trip as well as the drinking stations since they do not carry water with them.

The movement of the hunting groups takes place in the form of semi-circles surrounding water sources or creeks. On the appearance of a prey, the hunter who spots it shouts to his fellows 'afina' which means, 'it is coming'. The prey is then attacked with the throwing sticks and if it falls the dog will bring it alive to its owner who then slaughters, guts and



Plate 8. Sounding the born early on the day of hunting trip.





Plate 9. The gathering point for the hunting trip.

skins it. He then puts it in his leather pouch if it is small, or if it is a deer he ties its four limbs together and carries it hung on a stick over his shoulder. If the prey was a small hare, it will be taken home and reared.

The dog plays an important role in the hunting journey because it helps the hunter in cornering the prey and bringing it to him. The dog runs for short distances stopping at intervals to sniff the air for the prey's scent. If the hunter spots a prey the hunter will point at its direction first, the dog will look in the prey's direction without moving until it is given the order to run. The dog will then run after the prey, followed by the hunter. The hunter will throw his throwing stick taking care not to hit his dog. Usually the prey stops at intervals to determine its escape route before running again and that will be the perfect time for throwing the throwing stick.

Hunters never eat their kills during the hunting trip. They bring food provisions with them carried over their shoulders in special oval-shaped baskets called 'el-omra'. At sunset, the hunters start their return journey. The successful hunter will make a feast at home inviting his fellow hunters to eat his kill. He may also share it with them. At home, the *warnanig* boasts about the trip and the number of kills of each hunter and at night the village girls will then sing songs praising the skilful hunters.

#### *Throwing sticks in the White Nile area*

The use of the throwing sticks in the White Nile area is a long tradition. They are used for hunting rabbit and other small animals. The hunting trip is organised under the supervision of Sheikh Youseif (a holy man) who settled in the village of Megeina Eastern ed-Deweim.

Sheikh Youseif is known amongst his followers as 'The Hunter'. He inherited his hunting skills from his late father Sheikh Dafa'alla, who was also famous for hunting. Sheikh Youseif mentioned that his father on his death bed ordered him to continue to perform hunting and never leave the practice since hunting completes his supplications to God.

They use throwing sticks and dogs in their hunting trips. Their dogs are highly trained and are given distinctive names. The dog has two pieces of rope around its neck, the first one

is called *golada* which means 'necklace'. The hunter ties one end of the other piece of rope around his hand and puts the other end around the *golada* and then holds it. When the hunter wants the dog to catch the prey, which he has hit with the throwing stick, he releases the end of the rope and lets the dog run after the prey. Dogs are always placid until they go out for hunting when they become animated getting ready for the hunt. As with the Masalit the hunter starts training his dog from the puppy's first days. He is the only one who feeds or cleans the puppy and he takes the puppy on hunting trips to train it. Sheikh Youseif selects his dogs and works to develop their offspring.

The hunter carves his own throwing stick from a tree branch that is bent naturally. The bent part of the throwing stick is called *gadown* meaning 'mouth', and the long part is called *el-a'ssa* meaning 'stick'. Sometimes they make their throwing stick of light iron, but with the same shape as the wooden ones. The throwing stick can be of any age, it is replaced when it is broken. To slow down the flight of the throwing stick, it is weighted by a piece of leather cut from an ox tail; this treatment is useful also if the throwing stick splits. Hunters keep their throwing stick on their house roof.

Sheikh Youseif plans the hunting trip and arranges for cars and food. Early on the day of the hunt they sound a gazelle horn, a hereditary possession of the Sheikh's family. After the hunters gather, they begin showing off their skills in hunting and their dogs to each other and then they throw their throwing sticks in the air seeking a good omen: if the throwing stick falls down vertically this is a sign of good luck; but if it falls down horizontally that is a sign of bad luck. The hunting trip is restricted to men and young boys, brought for helping and teaching purposes.

The leader of the hunting group is called *a'geid*. He is chosen on account of his hunting skills. He decides the meeting point and the time of movement. He also determines the direction and manner of movement during the trip as well as the eating stations.

Hunting trips are both a sport and a hobby in the White Nile area and form a special type of prayer or religious journey for Sheikh Youseif. During the hunting trip Sheikh Youseif cares for and treats those who need medical care, both physical and mental (Plate 10). The author had the honour of taking part in a hunting trip organised by Sheikh Youseif on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2003. They blew the horn at dawn in their village market. After the hunters gathered, they drove by car to the hunting area. When they reached the hunting area, *a'geid* divided the hunters into three groups, two wings and the middle. They moved in a semi-circular formation tapping their throwing sticks against each other and stamping their feet. They do this to wake up the hares and drive them out of their burrows. When the hares appear they will be attacked by the throwing sticks. The dog is trained to bring the animal to the nearest hunter even if not his owner (Plates 11 and 12). The hunter who happens to be the first to take the prey from the dog will have the credit of the hunt.



Plate 10. Sheikh Youseif treated the man seated in front.

In the afternoon, hunters gathered again in the departure area for lunch and prayer. After lunch, they sat together around Sheikh Youseif to show off their hunting skills and



Plate 11. The dog takes the hare to the nearest hunter.



Plate 12. The hunter slaughtered the prey.

sing religious songs. Before sunset, they moved towards home. Afterwards, the kills were divided between the hunters. I was given a hare as a compliment, the prey will not be eaten until they reach home.

#### *Throwing sticks hunting by the Rabwatt*

Rabwatt are certain groups or clubs that practice traditional hunting. They have rules and systems that regulate hunting. We had the honour of meeting Hamza Bashir the head of the Metemma Rabwa and Kamal Kardaman, the head of Wad el-Banna Rabwa of Omdurman.

Hamza discussed the duties of the Rabwa's chief, which are collecting subscriptions, renting cars for the trip, and keeping gear and kitchenware. The head of the Rabwa is chosen for his hunting skills and for the number and quality of his dogs. The deputy head of the Rabwa acts during the head's absence and manages the transportation of the hunters to the gathering point. There is also the tracker who traces the prey's footprints, and who must be talented in both hunting and tracking.

Good quality dogs are brought from Dinder, Abu Delig and Dar el-Rayah, then they are mated with local dogs at Metemma. They are slim, long dogs. Dogs are trained from their first weeks of life. They are taken on hunting trips along with older dogs to learn from them. Nowadays, a species of greyhound is brought and bred with their dogs.

The Metemma Rabwa use the throwing sticks, which they call *megdaa*. No firearms are used in hunting because they consider hunting as a sport and it is necessary to acquire stalking skills, patience, endurance and teamwork, virtues related to throwing stick hunting.

When Hamza was asked about rich hunting areas, he mentioned Wadi Kirbikan, Wadi Hasouna, the Wad ban Naqa area and the Butana *nadis* generally.

As for Wad el-Banna Rabwa at Omdurman, we talked to both the chief and deputy chief of this hunting group, Kamal Kardman and Mohammed el-Hassan about the throwing sticks used in hunting, which, they call *mushtar*, *mugnas* or *toronbash*. They said that the city of Omdurman being the historical capital of Sudan during the Mahdiya has combined the various tribes of the Sudan. This intermingling of cultures, which characterized Omdurman, may be noticed in the throwing sticks used for hunting and the variety of their names.

Mohammed el-Hassan has written a book on hunting and hunting literature in which he included a chapter on hunting dogs (الجفر 2005, 39-57). He notes the strong bond of friendship, which ties the members of the Rabwa who are usually not less than ten. Members subscribe monthly and the funds are used to prepare for the trip. The Rabwa group meets frequently and their favourite conversation is about hunting dogs and their breeding.

The Katoia is one of the local breeds of dogs while the *Saluki* (greyhound) is a foreign breed. The *Saluki* is known for its ability to run long distances compared to the local dogs,

which start running with great speed but lose their strength after a short distance. The dogs brought from Dinder (south-eastern Sudan) are one of the best quality breeds in Sudan.

During its growth a dog passes through three main phases. The first phase, which is between 3-7 days, is called *al-gaddi*. The second phase is the *boush* that continues up to three months of age. In this period, the dog loses its baby teeth and it chews everything it finds to ease the itch in its gums. In the period between four to five months, it will be given its first hunting lessons.

Female dogs show signs of puberty in their seventh month; at this time they will be kept away from ordinary dogs to preserve their pedigree. The male dog shows signs of puberty at the *shannag* phase when the dog raises one of its hind legs to urinate. At this phase, it will not be allowed to mate because it is believed that at this age its offspring will not have the qualities of a hunting dog, and they say its offspring will be just barkers. The dog is trained indoors. It will be ordered to catch a rabbit inside the house. After it becomes used to its owner's orders, it will be taken on hunting trips usually at an age of six months for males and seven months for females.

The hunting trips of the Metemma and Wad el-Banna Rabwaat are similar. It starts from early morning when they raid the woods searching for prey until midday when they withdraw under a large tree to rest and eat. Dogs also must rest because of their heat-sensitive paws.

After they say the evening prayer, the evening raid commences. The prey will be slaughtered after freeing it from the dog's mouth, using a local kind of dagger carried by most Sudanese strapped to the upper arm. It is then gutted, but not skinned or butchered on the trip. Prey is prepared and cooked at home with onions and tomatoes. Hunters wear the local long shirt and wide trousers along with strong light sandals that may not be pierced by thorns.

### Conclusions from the ethnographic studies

As a result of our ethnographic studies, we have noticed common features and behaviour in all of the regions studied and in the previous studies which inform us when seeking to interpret the hunting scenes scratched on the walls at Musawwarat. We may conclude with the following:

The hunting trip is an event of great importance to the hunting groups – to Sheikh Youseif, the hunting trip is a sacred event and activity in which he treats his mentally ill followers. The Masalit also consider the hunting trip as a major event. The throwing stick also plays a role in witchcraft and in averting the evil eye.

The hunting trip and associated activities are restricted to men.

There are two main types of throwing sticks. The first type is a simple one used for hunting small animal and birds. This type has two versions, being made either of wood or metal. The other type is the modified throwing knife with the spur. This type is used in war.

The throwing stick also plays a part in social occasions such as weddings and boys' circumcision ceremonies.

In every case examined above, there is a leader who organizes and plans the hunting trip.

The use of throwing sticks has spread through all parts of Sudan, and it is considered to be part of the local traditions of most Sudanese tribes.

### A Proposed Interpretation of the Graffiti at Musawwarat

These graffiti reflect the identities of their makers. They are believed to be mostly Meroitic hunters who are described by Strabo in the early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD

Meroe, a city with the same name as the island.....

The island has many mountains and large forests, and it is populated partly by nomads, partly by hunters, and partly by farmers.

(Eide *et al.* 1998, 815).

Hunters visited Musawwarat annually. In these periods, they were allowed to move around Musawwarat and scribbled their memories on the walls. These graffiti recorded the events of their journey.

The hunting tools used vary from bows and spears to throwing sticks and dogs. The majority of hunting graffiti depict the throwing stick and dogs, especially those that cover the various walls of the Great Enclosure and Temple 300. The prey animals ranged from rabbits to giraffes, gazelles and even rhinoceros and lion.

I would suggest that these hunting trips, in which the throwing sticks and dogs were used, were seasonal trips that took place during the rainy season. In the rainy season, seasonal rivers and streams in the Keraba and Butana become filled with water and pastures grew, which would have attracted different types of animals and birds. Most of these animals then became targets for the hunters, as may be seen drawn on the walls of the Great Enclosure.

Hunters stayed at the Great Enclosure for long enough to enter its various rooms and courtyards, scribbling on its walls to record the aim of their visit or to incise their names or maybe simply to record their visit. The emphasis in showing the dog pouncing on its prey in more than one scene indicates the pride of those hunters in their dogs' skills. This same pride and boasting about their dogs were noticed by the researcher in all the examples of hunting groups known through the ethnographic data collection.

The hunting trips organised at, and originating from, Musawwarat were performed amongst the many religious rituals for which the site was designed. They were under the auspices and direct supervision of the Meroitic king. The first evidence of this ritual, I believe, was related to King Arnekhmani and his son Arqamani (235-200 BC). This is based on the scene of the hunting god Arensnuphis in which he holds his prey, found on the southern outer wall of the Lion Temple (Figure 3).





I also maintain that the king participated in those hunting trips, based on the scene depicting a man wearing a distinctive royal outfit and crown holding a throwing stick, apparently coming out of a temple. Another piece of evidence to prove that King Arqamani was interested in hunting dogs is the scene in his funerary chapel attached to pyramid Beg. N.7, in which the king is depicted sitting on his throne with his dog lying at his feet extending its forelimbs, as if it is a pet as in other pyramid chapels e.g. Beg. N.11 (Figure 4). Women never participated in those ritualistic hunting trips, or in any other religious ritual performed at Musawwarat. There are no graffiti of women on the site except in the love scene.

Arensnuphis is the god of hunting (Plate 13). He is portrayed several times on the internal and external walls of the



Plate 13. Arensnuphis depicted inside the Lion Temple.

Lion Temple, holding a dead animal. Sebiuemeker is the god of Musawwarat

‘Lord of Musawwarat es Sofra, who gives life like sun god forever’

(Shinnie 1967, 144)

There is a relationship between Sebiuemeker and Arensnuphis which is clearly seen as both of them are present as guardians of Temple 300 and both appear together with Amun. Thus, I suggest that Sebiuemeker, the god of Musawwarat, is represented as an elephant and consequently the frequent appearance of elephants’ depictions at the site may be explained. A statue with a human body and elephant head wearing Sebiuemeker’s crown has been found in Wad Ban Naga (الصادق 2002).

Sebiuemeker was honoured by being ranked as the third god after Apedemak and Amun (on the southern wall of the Lion Temple), and bearing in mind that Sebiuemeker is the ‘Giver of life’ according to the Meroites, depicting him as an elephant may be rationalized by the resemblance of the elephant’s trunk to the male penis. This resemblance was apparent in the scene drawn by a Meroitic artist on one of the pillars of the Lion Temple. In this carving he is portrayed riding an elephant, wearing his distinctive double crown. The elephant’s trunk comes between the man’s legs which makes it look like a penis (Figure 5). In similar scenes in the central temple, we can observe Meroitic gods, where the artist tried to show their functions and identities in the Meroitic religion by the same method (Figure 6). An example is the scene that depicts Apedemak with a human body wearing the *hembem* crown, riding a lion and attacking a man, with a winged snake behind Apedemak. In this scene the artist presents Apedemak as a warrior god capturing his enemy. So in my opinion, the scene of the elephant and rider depicts a god (Sebiuemeker) not a king as many scholars have thought.

Following the above argument and bearing in mind that: The hunting trip is an exclusively male activity, so women seldom appear in Musawwarat graffiti. Women did not participate in the religious rituals performed

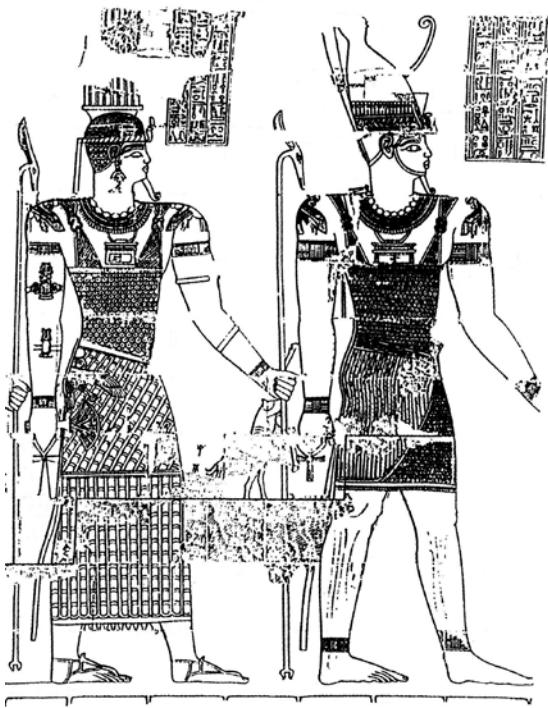


Figure 3. Arensnuphis and Sebiuemeker (after Hintze 1971, Taf. 29).

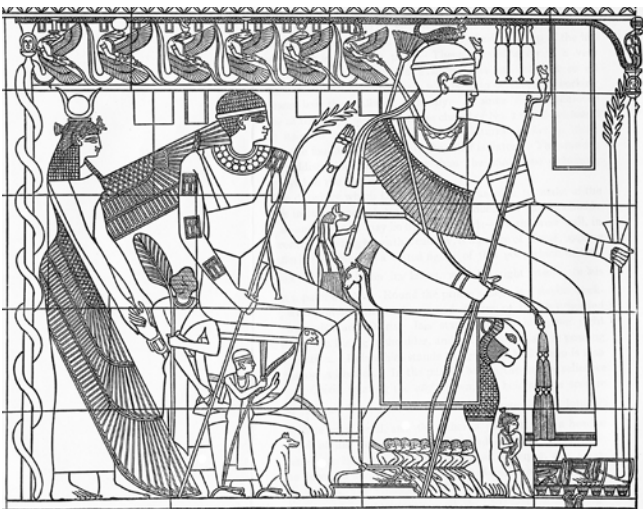


Figure 4. Pyramid Beg. N.11 (after Lepsius 1849-56, Abb. V, Bl. 30).

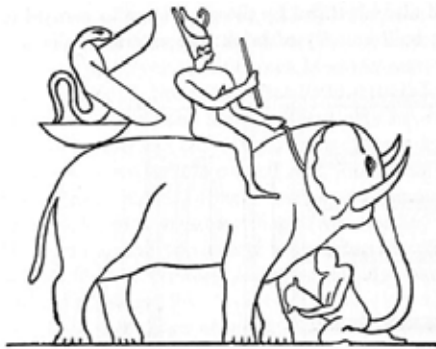


Figure 5.  
Sebiumeker (after  
Budge 1928, I,  
98).



Figure 6. Kushite gods depicted in their animal  
or animal and human forms (after Budge 1928, I, 97-98).

at Musawwarat where the masculine god Sebiumeker was worshipped.

Arensnuphis the hunting god, who is always associated with Sebiumeker, holds a handful of medicinal herbs in one hand along with prey in the other.

We noticed that Sheikh Youseif and his hunting group considered the hunting trip as therapeutic during which he treats impotence among other illnesses.

During the hunting trip hunters used some part of the prey to increase sexual ability in men.

Mohammed el-Hassan mentioned in his interview that it is believed by hunters that if a woman eats the brain of a rabbit before intercourse, she will conceive by God's will.

We may deduce the following:

There existed at Musawwarat ritualistic hunting trips performed under the auspice of Arensnuphis.

The Musawwarat site is a place where hunters / worshippers gathered.

Arensnuphis is to be considered as a god of hunting and of medicine.

The hunting trip may in itself be a therapeutic one.

Hunting is exclusively a male activity.

Women did not participate in the rituals performed at Musawwarat and thus did not frequent the site.

Hunters formed part of Meroe's population and culture.

The graffiti at the site were drawn either to record personal hunting experiences or to boast about hunting skills and hunting equipment including dogs and throwing sticks.

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