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Front cover. Block 1000.0049 from Naga (photograph courtesy Karla Kroper).

Above. Pottery jar with decoration of sorghum heads from BMC 60, Berber (photograph courtesy Mahmoud Suliman Bashir).

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Following the footprints of a jackal from Meroe to London. The origin of British Museum EA68502

Michael H. Zach



Figure 1. EA68502 (reproduced © The Trustees of the British Museum).

The British Museum houses a splendid piece of Meroitic jewellery: a gold pendant in the form of a jackal standing on a horizontal base with four suspension loops attached to its left side (EA68502; Figure 1). This object has aroused attention since the 1970s, as according to documentation in the museum's records it originated from modern-day Libyan Cyrene and has therefore been the subject of speculation regarding Meroe's role in foreign trade and its impact on neighbouring regions (Wenig 1978, 247 cat. 176; Taylor 1991, 56, ill. 73).

However, at the same time attribution of the find spot to Cyrene has been questioned (e.g., Andrews 1990, 180; Taylor 1993, 30ff.), since four comparable objects were part of the treasure looted by the Italian adventurer Giuseppe Ferlini after demolishing pyramid Begrawiya North 6 of the Meroitic queen Amanishakheto (c. end of the 1st century BC/beginning of the 1st century AD) in 1834 (Figures 2 and 3).

In his report, Ferlini (1837, 12 and fig. 10) mentions only two pendants and published a drawing of one of them, correctly identifying them as jackals. Three years after his return to Europe, he put his finds on display, where they became the subject of considerable controversy, since they were widely pronounced as forgeries because they did not resemble Egyptian objects and African societies were considered incapable of elaborate handicraft production. However, a small part of the treasure was purchased by King Ludwig I of Bavaria and the Berlin based Egyptologist Carl Richard Lepsius (conducting an expedition to Egypt, the Sudan and the Middle East in the years 1842-1845) persuaded the Berlin Museum to buy the remaining bulk of the hoard in 1844, as he was convinced of its authenticity (Markowitz and Lacovara 1996, 2f).

Lepsius (1859, Bl. 52, 20-23) published all four jackal pendants in Volume X of his monumental *Denkmaeler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien* for the first time and in colour. He comments only very briefly on the objects in general ('Ferlinischer Goldschmuck') and equates Amanishakheto tentatively with the 'queen' known from Naga and Wad Ben Naga (Naville 1913, 306), which in fact is the *kandake* Amanitore (c. mid-1st century AD). About fifty years later, Heinrich Schäfer in his comprehensive study of the Berlin pieces, adding their museum's inventory numbers, erroneously identified the pendants as 'wolves'. Identical to EA68502, Berlin 1657 and 1660 stand on a simple flat base, whereas Berlin 1658 and 1659 have an additional uraeus rising in front of them (Schäfer 1910, 153f. and pl. 30, 241-244) (Figure 4).



Figure 2. Pyramid Beg. N. 6 as seen in 1821 (Cailliaud 1823, pl. XLI).



Figure 3. Pyramid Beg. N. 6 in its present state including restoration of the pylon (photograph by E. Cerny).

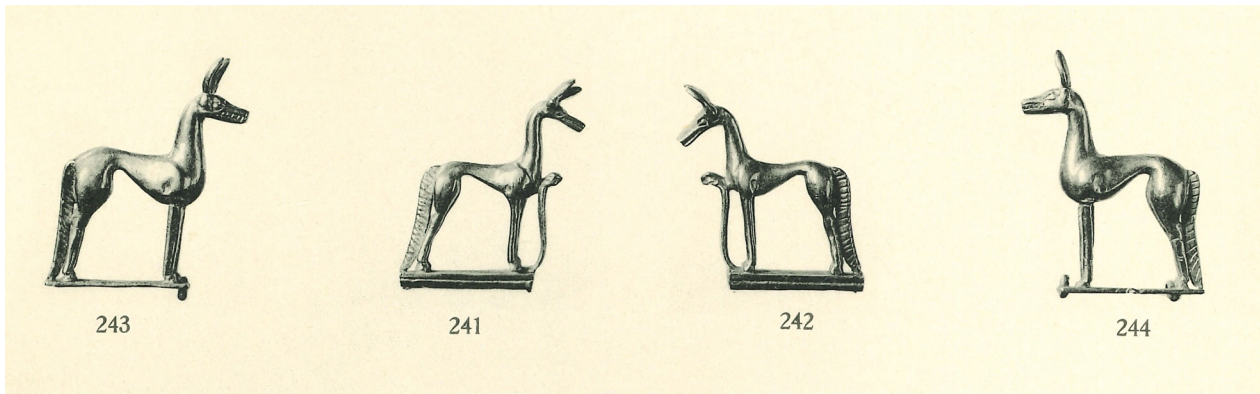


Figure 4. The four jackals Berlin 1657-1660 (Schäfer 1910, pl. 30, 241-244).

Unfortunately, only Berlin 1659 survived World War II, as it was given to Munich in exchange for objects from the same find in 1929 (now Ant. 2497; Wenig 1978, 245 cat. 174; Priese 1992, 23 Abb. 14; see also Scharff 1930, 119ff) (Figure 5). However, it is possible that the other pendants still exist, as one of the other 'lost' objects from the treasure, a bracelet, appeared on the art market in 1965 and was bought back by the Berlin museum (Priese 1992, 15).

As pointed out by Taylor (1993, 32), the alleged provenance of the London piece relies only on a handwritten note in the British Museum's acquisition register, reading 'stated to have been found near Cyrene'. He also noted that it is impossible to determine where this information came from or how accurate it is, since such notes in 19th century registers are often unreliable and cannot serve as proof of provenance.

So none of these publications gives a clue as to the true origin of EA68502, but only presents current assumptions without discerning the way that the jackal got to London. However, it was overlooked that an explanation can be found in a letter written by John Gage Rokewode (Director of the Society of Antiquaries of London from 1829 until 1842 and Fellow of the Royal Society since 1824) to the Society's Secretary, Sir Henry Ellis, dated 30th April 1840 on the occasion of an exhibition of some gold ornaments found at Meroe. The complete letter was published by Rokewode (1840, 386f.), and also referred to in his obituary (Lucas 1842, 660). The relevant extracts read:



Figure 5. Ant. 2497 (© Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, München, photograph by M. Franke).



Figure 6. Arrangement of Ant. 2497 in the Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, München (photograph by M. H. Zach).

The gold Ethiopian objects which I have the honour to exhibit to the society, consisting of a scarabaeus, two links of a tau necklace, a jackal or Nubian dog, and a bell, were bequeathed to me, with other things, by a lamented friend, who died, in 1835, at Kunio, in Asia Minor, on his return to England from travels in Egypt. These objects were purchased by him from Signor Ferlini, a stranger, coming back from Nubia, whom my friend, and another English gentlemen, travelling together, met in December 1834, at Korrosko, the place where the caravans from Sennaar make the Nile.

This Ferlini, who was accompanied by an Albanian merchant, ... produced an extraordinary collection of Ethiopian antiquities, acquired by excavations, which he represented to have been recently made, chiefly in the ancient city of Meroé. ...

In 1837 Ferlini printed, at Bologna, an account of his excavations in Nubia, with a catalogue of his various singular objects found by him. ... According to his memoir, the gold objects exhibited, and others of a similar nature, were found, with a variety of precious ornaments, within a cist in the apex of a considerable pyramid at Meroe.

Whereas Ferlini's companion can be identified with the Khartoum based Albanian merchant Antonio Stefani, it is unclear, who this British traveller was, to whom he sold the objects in Korosko (Egyptian Nubia) and who died the next year in 'Kunio', which seems to be a corruption of the name of the major city and provincial capital Konya located in south-central Anatolia. However, it is therefore evident that while the bulk of the treasure was sold by Ferlini to the Berlin and Munich museums, some other objects were acquired by private collectors.

But how did the jackal get to the British Museum? Taylor (1993, 27 and 32) pointed out that the figurine was purchased in 1859 (which corresponds to its registration number 1859,1222.2) along with other objects from Frederick Robert Paul Bööcke, an Estonian born goldsmith and antiquities dealer in London. Since we cannot believe that another jackal from the Amanishakheto treasure was available in the United Kingdom at that time, it makes sense to conclude that pendant EA68502 is the object sold by Ferlini to a British traveller and via Bööcke finally found its way to the British Museum. Therefore, it is also clear that it does not originate from Cyrene, but can definitely be attributed to the Meroitic queen's treasure.

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