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On a Possible Meroitic Origin of the Old Nubian Titles

CAHET and CAHETICO

Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei – Gilda Ferrandino

In his discussion of the kinship and relationship between Nubians and Meroites, Rilly (2011, 2014) makes the claim that contrary to previous suggestions of Priese (1973), Behrens (1981; 1984/85), and Bechhaus-Gerst (1984/85; 1989a; 1989b; 1996), the Nubians were relatively late at arriving in the Middle Nile Valley, namely around the 4th century CE, when the Meroitic kingdom was already in decline. The Nubians subsequently established three kingdoms in the former Meroitic territory: Alwa, Makuria, and Nobadia.

As Rilly (2010, 285–88; 2011, 221–22) indicates, Old Nubian shows the presence of two substrate languages, Meroitic and a possibly Nara-related language, from which a number of lexemes were borrowed. Besides words from the semantic fields of warfare, natural phenomena, and the body and domestic life (Van Gerven Oei 2021, §1.3.1) that can with more or less certainty attributed to this substrate complex, there are also multiple titles of offices which appear not to be of a Nubian origin, such as CAHET, CAHETICO, ελκαρφ/εκαρφ, γογκαρφ, ζοντε, and several titles with the suffix -ΨΗΛ: εικωηλ, κοιλεκωηλ, δοκηκωηλ, and εμποριλ. Because of the paucity of cognates in other Nubian languages, it may be hypothesized that some of these also belong to the substrate complex, borrowed from Meroitic as the Nubians migrated to the Middle Nile Valley and established their new states.

The present paper looks at two Old Nubian titles: CAHET/CAHET and CAHETICO. Whereas the former is thought to be the Nubian parallel of Greek δομήστικος, no satisfactory parallel has been found so far for the latter. We will argue that the two Old Nubian titles can be considered loans from Meroitic smt and smt lh respectively, and that CAHETICO should therefore be equated to the Greek title πρωτοδομήστικος, for which no Old Nubian parallel had yet been established. This would then in turn clarify the meaning of the heretofore untranslated Meroitic title smt. If this is indeed the case, these Meroitic

1For a full list of attested titles, see http://www.medievalnubia.info/dev/index.php/Offices_and_Titles.

10.32060/Orientalia.1.2022.118-133

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loans into Old Nubian provide further evidence that the Nubians settled in the Middle Nile Valley relatively late, confirming Rilly’s hypothesis.

1. The Old Nubian Titles $\text{samet}$ and $\text{samet}$

No clear etymology for the Old Nubian title $\text{samet}$/$\text{samet}$ has yet been proposed. One indication that we are dealing with a loanword is the orthographical alternation $\text{e}/\text{a}$, which is not regularly attested with native Nubian words. There is also a phonologically reduced variant $\text{sam}$, which sometimes appears in combination with the conjunction $-\text{denoy}$.

$\text{samet}$ is quite possibly the earliest Nubian word recorded in writing, appearing in a Coptic foundation inscription from Dendur (DBMNT 517) dated to the second half of the 6th century CE (Ochala 2014, 8). In the inscription, a certain $\text{-epēfanios $\text{pamata}$ “Epephanios the samat”}$ is mentioned (FHN III, 1194–95, no. 330). We will return to the final $-\text{a}$ of $\text{pamata}$ below. Besides this one very early attestation, all other instances of this title are found in the documentary texts from Qasr Ibrim published by Browne (1991) and Ruffini (2014), dating to the 12th and 13th century CE. In the protocols of land sales and other legal documents, this title is usually associated with the place name Faras, although there is one attestation with Tafa:

- P.QI 3 33.4–5 ṭⲧⲉⲧ ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲛ ⲥⲁⲙⲧⲁ $\text{samet}$ $\text{einh}$ “while Onnon is samet of Faras”
- P.QI 3 38.11 $\text{manwawyla}$ $\text{takàn}$ samet $\text{einh}$ “while Maššouda is samet of Tafa”

The title $\text{samet}$ is frequently combined with the title of $\text{soŋoj}$ (usually translated as “eparch”) of Nobadia:

- P.QI 3 39.7–8 ḏāam $\text{mīt}$ $\text{soŋoa}$ $\text{paran}$ samata $\text{soŋoa}$ “while Adama is soŋoj of Nobadia and samat of Faras”
- P.QI 3 37.9–10 $\text{mīt}$ $\text{goula}$ ḏāam $\text{soŋoa}$ $\text{gērak}$ $\text{paran}$ samet $\text{einh}$ “while in the land of the Nobadians Adama is soŋoj and also samet of Faras”
- P.QI 3 32.8–12 $\text{mīt}$ $\text{goula}$ $\text{gabrlinkoud}$ $\text{eiko}$ $\text{samet}$ $\text{samat}$ $\text{soŋoa}$ $\text{gottamet}$ “while in the land of the Nobadians, Gabrilinkoud(a) eikšil of Doug(si), is soŋoj of Nobadia, sam(e)t of Faras, and gottamet, and in the land of the Nobadians all power being tied to him”
- sale 4–5 $\text{orounkoud}$ $\text{mīt}$ $\text{soŋoa}$ $\text{soŋoa}$ $\text{par}$ $\text{samet}$ $\text{einh}$ “while Orounkoud is soŋ(oj) of Nobadia and samet of Faras” (Browne 1992)
- P.QI 4 69.5 ḏạym $\text{soŋoa}$ $\text{eikšil}$ $\text{eikšil}$ $\text{eikšil}$ $\text{soŋoa}$ $\text{samet}$ $\text{einh}$ “while Gourēsē is deputy soŋoj, deputy wiou(?), sammat of Faras”
The *samet* could in turn also have officials attached to them. In particular, they were sometimes assisted by a *ŋešš*, e.g., P.QI 3 30.13 ṣerḳol ᵄᵐⲃⲥⲒⲁⲧⲓι “while Serkol is *ŋešš* of the *sam(e)t*”2. The *samet* could also own or manage land, as attested by land sale P.QI 3 40, a land sale of *soŋoj* and *samet* Adama (also mentioned in P.QI 3 36, 38, and 39), which starts as follows:

P.QI 3 40.11–15 αἱ ᾽Αdana ἡγιττι ὁγοιν ὑγεικρᾶ παρὰ ὁμεταλὲναλλό νογ ὅγεκανεκον δογιάλ τούγκο εὖει κέκεια θρόν Αὐίπλα ἄγουκα δᾶ να ἄι ᾽ὀλλο γοφα πάρρε καποπὶ δᾶπα δᾶσσε ἐιρ αὐλα πᾶ ὑγειδία ταυ ὕκα τούγκο εὖει ὑγεικρᾶ.

I, Adama the *soŋoj* of the land of the Nobadians and also the *samet* of Faras and also holding the office of the scribe, sell the land in the settlement of Ibrim to the Church of the Holy Trinity, establish (it) in my piety (?), and place the land that Kapopi has sold to me, lying within (my) power, lying in Lower Oudji, in (the possession of the Church of) the Holy Trinity.

There is also another land sale involving a *samet*, this time concerning a sale to deputy *soŋoj* and *samet* Gourresē mentioned in P.QI 4 69 (Ruffini 2014, 15–18). The sale also mentions that a plot of land can be named after the office:

P.QI 4 64.4–5 αἱ ιvrieria δᾶπικ ἀράπικ γαβριὰ παρρεὰ πακκατικα γουγρεζ뇌 δᾶα τέεελο ᾧεν τογρι δᾶαδ гαλαγακφυίο τέεεν (…) 6–7 αἱ ιvrieriaγον τατένογον : ἀλεγον ᾧεν τογρι κέκα δᾶκ παρρε κυνὶ ἐγεταρδ ᾧικ σαμεταί οκτακίλα πακ ’κατικα γουγρεζ뇌 δᾶα τιρδουγεῖεο.

I Iōošša, the Arab of (?) the settlement, sold Gourresē a share in the plot of Gabriēl when the children of Ane sold it to me without denial. (…) And I, Iōošša, both today (?) and forever (?), separated the one coming (from) the children of Ane and sold Gourresē the share from the plot held nearby (?) called Apil *sameti*3.

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2See also P.QI 3 31.7; 33.5; 34.17; 35.12; 36.1.9; 38.9; 40.7.

3There are still many uncertainties with this translation, which is adapted from Ruffini (2014, 64). We propose that Δᾶκ is a converb of a verb attested in Nobin as ἀκ ὁταν “trennen; ziehen (einen Scheitel); entwöhnen (Säugling)” (Khalil 1991, 17) rather than a numeral Δ with accusative -κα. Δῆν τογρι κέκα then becomes the object of Δᾶκ, referring to the plot in the
Note that the final iota of ṣamet- appears to be part of the root, which suggests that the title has turned into a proper name. The land owned or managed by the samet could include a water-wheel, as suggested by P.QI 3 60, a list of the Nobadian properties held by the Jesus Church of Dongola:

P.QI 3 60

On Tamit ḫaṭ’ takkā kalā oc’x’ ḫalo’ kal’x’ sey’ʌ’ parān sāmattād’ dōynha’ ‘irāēn aṣṭānād’ kien paqy’ oc’x’ xalo’

And Tamit East, 1 water-wheel to the north of it: the boundary of the north (is the land of) the asti of Tamit, the boundary of the south (is the land) of Silmakki, taking up the samet-hood of Faras on the downstream part of the island in Arminna, up to (the land) of the asti of Iraei. There is 1 water-wheel.

P.QI 3 60 also shows that the derived abstract noun ṣamet-t, also found in P.QI 3 36, does not mean “office of the samet” as proposed by Browne (1996, 156) but rather “samet-hood”, the territory and holdings managed by a particular samet. Finally, there is an unfortunately badly damaged letter from Qasr Ibrim, apparently relating to the appointment of a certain Datti as samat:

P.QI 4 108.re.6–8 sāmattī enkānēka paqykon éiroq nourtōd[ . ] gen kockā wika dēnnaēco

Wield you the highness and power of the samat and rule for me the good and bad!4

From the above examples we can deduce that a samet was frequently included in the protocols of land sales, and that the person holding this office could also own land (P.QI 3 40), could manage land on behalf of a church (P.QI 3 60), had land named after them (P.QI 4 64), and that their power could be used to ordain others (P.QI 4 108).

4 Again this fragment is not entirely clear while its context is unfortunately heavily damaged. The word dēnnaēco is a curious combination of a standard 2/3sg present tense form dēnna followed by a 2sg imperative ending -e and command marker -co. As a result, the verbal ending of nourtōd[ . ] cannot be reconstructed with any certainty. The meaning of this passage is, however, clear.
Browne (1991, xi) suggests that the title ⲥⲁⲙⲉⲧ/ⲥⲁⲙⲁⲧ derives from the word ⲥⲁⲙ “court”, based on translation of Ps 83:3 found in P.QI 1 2.i. 24: εἰρήν σαμωγύττας εὐδαι[μ] “for your courts [ἀὐλὰς], Lord” (Plumley–Browne 1989, 11). Nobini has retained this root, provided by Khalil et al. (1991, 98) as ⲥⲁⲙ “Hof, Einfriedung”, who relates it to the Beja word ⲥⲁⲙ “1) mauer, wand, 2) hof, hofraum” (Reinisch 1895, 201). Both meanings appear to match Old Nubian ⲥⲁⲙ for Greek αὐλά, but it is unlikely that Old Nubian borrowed the word from Beja, as Beja loans in Old Nubian are rare (Van Gerven Oei 2021, §1.3.3). If ⲥⲁⲙ and ⲥⲁⲙⲉⲧ/ⲥⲁⲙⲁⲧ are indeed etymologically related, the latter is certainly not an Old Nubian derivation, as there are no other words with an alternating suffix -ⲧ/ⲧ. This suggests they are both loans from a third language, which is possibly the source of the word ⲥⲧⲁ in Beja as well. A similar, and possibly related root is ⲥⲧⲧⲧ, ⲥⲧⲧⲧ, which we find in Reinisch (1879, 141): Mattokki–Andaandi ⲥⲧⲧⲧ, ⲥⲧⲧⲧ “schech, dorfischulze; s. górti Massenbach (1933, 207): Mattokki ⲥⲧⲧⲧ, ⲥⲧⲧⲧ “Oberhaupt; (under dem ’omda; nach N. hat er jetzt keine amtlichen Geschäfte wie ‘omda und ⲥⲧⲧⲧ el-beled) Armbruster (1965, 172): Andaandi ⲥⲧⲧⲧ “chief of the village or district, sheikh and Khalil et al. (1991, 98): Nobini ⲥⲧⲧⲧ “Scheikh, Oberhaupt, Ältester”. This overview suggests that ⲥⲧⲧⲧ, ⲥⲧⲧⲧ was a rather low-ranking office, similar to górti, below the ’omda, and, at least in the early twentieth century, without official tasks. This possibly explains why this particular title is not recorded in any of the extant Old Nubian land sales.

Following his translation of P.QI 1 2, Browne proposes to identify ⲥⲁⲙⲉⲧ with the Greek title of δομήστικος. There is one attestation of the title domestikos in a Coptic legal document from the 8th century ce.: CPR IV 28.4 ἡδομεςτικος “domestikos”. Furthermore, there are several attestations of “domestikos of Faras” in Greek, Coptic, and Old Nubian records:

- I.Khartoum Greek 5.6–11 ἰηογιείκογκα (…) δομιστικος : Παχωρας : ναπάρχ(ος) Νο(βάδων) “Iēsousinkouda, (…) domestikos of Faras, nauar-chos of the Nobadians” (1102 ce)
- P.QI 2 26.ve.1 ἰς[α]δω[ν]’ παχωρ’ “I(sra)el, dom(estikos) of Faras”

¹Available online at http://papyri.info/ddbdp/cpr;4;28.
No other offices in Old Nubian, Greek, or Coptic are frequently associated with Faras. Thus it is plausible to identify Old Nubian पारव सामेट with Greek δομήστικος Παχωρας and Coptic δομηστικος ἡπάχωρς. Furthermore, there is concrete evidence that the office of samet persisted after the disappearance of the Makuritan state. The office of samata was known in the Kingdom of Kokka, a successor state of Makuria (Osman 1982), while Armbruster (1965, 172) lists sāmed “director of cultivation of irrigable estate”, also recorded as samad. In an article from 1918, W. Nicholls observes:

For cultivation purposes every sakia [water-wheel] must have a samad or overseer […]. This samad may or may not have any share in the ownership of the land. In many cases, especially where the owners of the land do not themselves work it, a suitable man is put in to act as samad and receives a fixed share of the crop as his remuneration. […] The samad is responsible for (a) the working of the water-wheel (b) the making of the ḥedan (plural of ḥōḍ) or small basins into which the land to be cultivated is divided up for the purpose of watering it and (c) the sowing of the seeds. (Nicholls 1918, 21)

This continued use of the title samet should not surprise us, considering that water management and irrigation are a perennial and vital task in the Nile Valley, and not one that depends on the particularities of a bureaucracy. A parallel could be found in the Dutch waterschappen, the water management boards that are the oldest, continuously operating democratic institutions in the country, which have persisted since at least the 13th century under various forms of government.

The particularities of another title that is clearly related to samet, namely sametingo, are less clear. Also this title is attested several times in the protocols of land sales:
• P.QI 3 40.5 τεβίτα σαμετιγόοι εινή· “while Teeita is sametingo”

The title sametio (also sameto) always precedes samet in the protocol, suggesting it was a higher position:
• P.QI 3 34 9–10 παπαννι τσαμετιγοοι εινηι· (…) 16 φιρεφι π’λα’ρα σαμετα· εινη “while Papanni is sametingo, (…) while Širefi is samet of Faras”
• P.QI 3 38.4 τεβίτα σαμετιγοοι εινηι· ἅδανα μιττί γούιν σοιοδαμενοι

The authors thank Adam Łajtar for providing the references to Osman (1982) and Nicholls (1918).
While Teeita is *sametingo*, while Adama is *soyoj* of the land of the Nobadians and *samat* of Faras

P.QI 36.1.6 Δαρμε σορτο Δαυις γαλ σαμετ’его εινυ’ (…) 7–8 Δαμαν ηετειν γους’ κοσοδ’ παραν σαμεττ’адαλ’ ουετρα’ θουνυ’ “While Darme, son of the Great Priest, is *sametingo* (…) while Adamë, *soyoj* of the land of the Nobadians also holds the *samat*-hood of Faras”

P.QI 3 30.7 Δοσεφ’*ς σαμτιεσ’ οδν’ора’ εινυ’ (…) 8 Δαρμε ηετειν’ κοσοδ’ σαμεττ’адено’ γι’ εινυ’ “While lòsephë is *samtingo* and *odñor* (…) while Darme is the *soyoj* of Nobadia and *samt* of Faras”

Browne (1991, 79) proposes an analysis of P.Q.I 3 30.7 *σαμετιεσ’* as *σαμετ-ιε-ολ-ν* *samat*-INCH-PST1-GEN, thus “of the *samat*-elect”. This is questionable for several reasons: 1) It is unlikely that the final -ν of *σαμετιεσ’* belongs to a genitive. An analysis as *σαμετιεσ’* < *σαμετιεσ’* on would make more sense, as it would be curious for the “*odñor* of the *samtingo*” to be mentioned, but not the *samtingo* themself; 2) If indeed *σαμετιεσ’* < *σαμετ-ιε-ολ-ν*, then we would expect the form *σαμετιεσ’-ολ*, which has not been attested, instead of *σαμετιεσ’-ολ* for predicate-marked forms; 3) Finally, if *σαμετιεσ’* indeed means “*samat*-elect”, we would expect -εσ to be a productive morpheme like ουετρα’ (vel sim.) for “deputy”, and we would not expect an official that remains to be confirmed to be mentioned early in the protocol, consistently above the *σαμετ* they are supposed to replace. Therefore, in our view, the translation of *σαμετιεσ’* as “domestikos-elect” should be discarded.

This then leaves us with the two following issues: the etymology and origin of *σαμετ* and *σαμετιεσ’*, as well as the meaning of *σαμετιεσ’*.

2. Meroitic *smt* and *smt lh*

The word *smt* has been identified in the Meroitic funerary texts⁷: REM 0071, 0131, 0252, 0371, 0518, and 0521. It is combined with the adjective *lh* “great” in the following inscriptions: REM 0131, 0252, 0518, and 0521. According to Török (2009, 491), the Meroitic funerary texts, especially from Lower Nubia, perpetuated the personal identities of deceased by way of formulas, giving detailed descriptions of the place in society, connections and career of the deceased, and presenting in this way a view of the Lower Nubia administration.

⁷ Abbreviations of grammatical terms: ADJ = adjective; COP = copula; DET = determinate; EMP = emphatic; GEN = genitive; LOC = locative; PL = plural.
REM 0071 is a funerary inscription from Meroe, engraved on the wall of the chapel of Beg N.41, a funerary pyramid belonged to an unknown king dated at the first half of the 2nd century CE:

\[1\text{rtek}\text{plịqede\text{lome}\text{tewtṭ\ emwt\ s}\text{mtli}\ hekttndo}\]

\[1\text{rtek}\text{plịqede\text{l}\text{o}}
\]

\[1\text{rtek}\text{plịqede\text{l}\text{o}}
\]

The text, transcribed by Lepsius (VI, n. 43), was engraved among figures of attendees in the funerary procession (Lepsius, V, 319), as a legend of part of the scene. Probably \text{smt} indicates the title of a dignitary who took part in the procession. In this text, which is difficult to read because of the state of preservation, it is also possible to distinguish the term \text{kttr}, probably a title as well. Moreover, if one interprets the signs \text{rtek}\text{ese}, it could also include a priestly title. Unfortunately, it is not possible to add more information to these nor to determine whether the titles refer to the same dignitary.

REM 0371 is a funerary stele from the tomb 14 at Shablul (Randall-McIver–Wooley–Griffith 1909, 26, 32). The text includes the description of the deceased’s career, by way of five nonverbal clauses.

\text{si\remro\ krorolowi\ sm\krorolowi\ sobxe\ krorolowi\ wleke\ krorolowi\ a\pote\ qoretowi}

\text{si\remro\ kroro\l\o\wi\ sm\kro\l\o\wi}

\text{siremro\ ADJ\DET-COP-EMP\ sm\ ADJ\DET-COP-EMP}

\text{sobxe\ kroro\l\o\wi\ wleke\ kroro\l\o\wi}

\text{sobxe\ ADJ\DET-COP-EMP\ wleke\ ADJ\DET-COP-EMP}

\text{a\pote\ qore\l\o\wi\ envo\y\ king\DET-GEN-COP-EMP}

\footnote{The word appears as \text{ktt} in an inscription, REM 0058 C, realized on the wall of the royal chapel Beg. N.28.}

\footnote{In the Meroitic Chamber at Philae, each person represented as an attendee of a religious ceremony was described by a brief Meroitic text indicating the titles and names.}
The titles *siremroke*, *smt*, *sobxe*, and *wleke* are followed by the word *kroro*, which is considered a noun, “prince (?)” when it is attested on its own (Rilly–De Voogt 2012, 146). However, here the juxtaposition of the titles *siremroke kroro*, *smt kroro*, *sobxe kroro* and *wleke kroro*, cannot be considered as a coordination of the nouns because usually in the funerary texts, different titles are systematically the objects of separated predications and because here there is a repetition of *kroro* in each nonverbal clause (Rilly–De Voogt 2012, 146; Rilly 2007, 517). Moreover, the grammatical construction includes only one determinant, marking the couples as a single noun phrase. Thus, *kroro* seems to behave as an adjective of the titles that follow. Following Rilly’s interpretation of the noun phrase *qorene kroro* “first royal scribe (?)”, here it might be possible to suggest the following translation:

“He is the first (?) *siremroke*. He is the first (?) *smt*. He is the first (?) *sobxe*. He is the first (?) *wleke*. He is the envoy of the king.”

In this text, the deceased is also described as the envoy of the king, indicating the diplomatic role held. While the title *apote* can be translated, there is no clear meaning for the others. Probably they were related to administrative roles. The title *siremroke* is attested in a few funerary inscriptions from Lower Nubia and on a block of Beg. N 36 at Meroe. REM 0131 is a funerary stele preserved in the Pushkin Museum of Moscow. The text, dedicated to two deceased called Yerekinemrmli and Bekelhli, indicates the title *smt lh* in the filiation section. In several inscriptions, the title *smt* is combined with the adjective *lh* “great.”

`smtlh: qrki5li: terikeli: terikele6 bkwi`

`smt-lh: qrki5li: terike-li: `

`smt-great Qrkili child begotten-DET`

`terike-le6b-kwi`

child begotten-DET.PL-COP.PL

“They are the children begotten of the child begotten (?) of the great *smt* Qrkili.”

---

10 The block includes the representation of a female dignitary, probably part of the funerary procession, and a brief inscription giving her name and the title of *siremroke*. 
The nonverbal clause refers to the grandfather of the two, “the great smt Qarakili.” Unfortunately, no other information is possible to derive from the inscription because of the unknown archaeological context.

REM 0252 is an offering table from Karanog, dedicated to Pedemoke, an officer known because his mde-relative\(^{11}\) was the famous peseto “viceroy” Abratoye (3\(^{rd}\) century CE). As in the case of REM 0131, here the title refers to the deceased’s father.

\[
\text{smtlh}^5: \text{sxloye: terikelo}^6\text{wi}
\]

\[
\text{smt-lh}^5: \text{sxloye: terike-l-o}^6\text{-wi}
\]

\[
\text{smt}\text{-great}: \text{Sxloye child begotten-DET-COP-EMP}
\]

“He is the child begotten of the great smt Sxloye.”

REM 0518 is a funerary stele from Faras, presenting the career of another smt lh, with name Axmnkror. This inscription also includes the title siremroke that we encountered in REM 0371.

\[
\text{smtlhlowi: } x^7\text{lbine}: \text{dkteleto}^4\text{wi}: \text{ssor: mene}^2\text{telowi}: \text{mselh}^6\text{selowi}: \text{sire}^7\text{mrokekelowi:}
\]

\[
\text{smt-lh-l-o-wi: } x^7\text{lbine:}
\]

\[
\text{smt-great-DET-COP-EMP } x^7\text{lbine}
\]

\[
\text{dk-te-li-se-l-o}^4\text{-wi :}
\text{Dk-LOC-DET-GEN-DET-COP-EMP}
\]

\[
\text{ssor: } \text{mene}^2\text{-te-l-o-wi}: \text{mselh}^6\text{se-l-o-wi:}
\]

\[
\text{scribe Mene-LOC-DET-COP-EMP mselhse-DET-COP-EMP}
\]

\[
\text{sire}^7\text{mroke-l-o-wi:}
\text{siremroke-DET-COP-EMP}
\]

“He is the great smt. He is the xlbine\(^{12}\) of the one (who is) at Dk. He is the ssor at Mene. He is the mselhse. He is the siremroke.”

\(^{11}\) The noun mde describe a kind of kinship.

\(^{12}\) Maybe it refers to a priestly title because it is followed by the construction bedewi-te-li-se, which is usually used for a divine hypostasis. In this case the name of the divinity is understood. It may derive from the noun xlb “bull” (Rilly–De Voogt 2012, 93).
REM 0521 is an offering table from Faras, dedicated to the viceroy at Akine, Hllxror, who was, with Tasemerese, one of the earlier known pesetos, and who was the earliest “peseto at Akine.” The text presents the cursus honorum of the dead in form of an extensive list of titles, attesting that Hllxror had roles associated with cults, temples and administration of their estates.

“He is the great smt. He is the great royal scribe (?). He is the priest of Amanapa, the one (who is) at Meroe. He is the viceroy at Akine. He is the wyeki[2] at Amod (Qustul?), he is wyekitewitkw the scribe at Dlitwketei”.

Hllxror was a civil administrator and a priest, but these titles are secondary in importance to the role of peseto of Meroitic Lower Nubia. The text clearly shows the offices held subsequently before moving higher in the elite hierarchy, occupying the post of peseto. On paleographical grounds, Rilly dated the text to the 1st century CE, while Török suggested the first half of the 1st century BCE (Török 2009, 414).

According to the analysis of these Meroitic texts, it is possible to affirm that the title smt was used from the 1st century CE to the 3rd century CE and is mainly attested in Lower Nubia, with the qualification lh and (once) kroro, while it appears at Meroe followed only by the determinant, without an adjective. No place names are associated with the title, unlike in the case of ssor and xlbine in REM 0518, followed by the locative -te that emphasizes the close ties with the territories which were the traditional seat. Thus, a first question could be addressed. Might the title be used in all the districts from the North to the South of the kingdom?
According to the archaeological contexts, the office of *smt* was surely exercised in the area between Faras and Shablul. Despite the absence of direct evidence of officers buried in the south of the country, and therefore not being able to adduce any funerary texts to attest to that title so far, one can suppose that the office of *smt* was probably exercised in Lower Nubia. As for the only evidence at Meroe, the *smt* may be interpreted as a dignitary who came to participate in the funerary procession of the king, an event that perhaps involved the highest echelon of the kingdom. The presence of the *smt* at the funerary procession could indicate the importance of the representative office, as well as the title *siremroke*, which also occurred in the royal procession and in one case was associated with *smt*.

The difference between *smt* and *smt lh* or *smt kroro* is interesting to investigate. The fact that the title *smt lh* was important is attested by the inscription of Hllxror, who is known to have been a viceroy at Akine. In the texts from the Lower Nubia, the title is always qualified by *lh* or *kroro*, while in the text from Meroe, *smt* is attested on its own. Maybe this means that *smt kroro* and *smt lh* indicate a higher rank than *smt*. A comparison could be made with *ant* “priest” and *ant lh* “great priest.” According to this observation, one may also suggest that the first qualified titles are attested to have been active in Lower Nubia and connected with a specific management activity with the territory, while *smt* is limited to Upper Nubia. However, the textual evidence is not enough to confirm the absence of *smt lh* and *smt kroro* in the south of the kingdom.

### 3. Meroitic *smt* and *smt lh* as origin of Old Nubian ṣamet and ṣametico

Considering the data presented above, it is an attractive solution to relate Old Nubian ṣamet/ṣamet/ṣamt “director of cultivation” to Meroitic *smt*, with the variable vowel in the Old Nubian second syllable suggesting a stressed first syllable /ˈsa.ma.ta/. The loss of final /-a/ in Old Nubian could be either attributed to phonological reduction or a reanalysis of the vowel as predicate marker, similar to Greek θάλασσα > ON ḫalka “sea.” The final -a in ṣamat from DBMNT 517 should then be analyzed as the Nubian predicate marker interpreted by the Coptic scribe as part of the lexeme. In our view, Old Nubian ṣamet/ṣamet/ṣamt can thus be considered a Meroitic loanword, which in turn gives us a tentative translation of Meroitic *smt* as *domestikos* or “director of cultivation.” In terms of semantic category, it is not unlikely that ṣamet was a loanword. As Nubians migrated into the Middle Nile Valley, pushed on by worsening climatic conditions in the region around the Wadi el-Howar, they were not only confronted with an advanced state bureaucracy but also the
necessity to provide capable management for the limited farmland throughout the Nile flooding cycle. Not previously having faced the need to have a specific official dedicated to this task, it is highly probably they borrowed the title of the smt together with the responsibilities that the office entailed.

The data, albeit limited, appear to suggest that smt lh was a higher rank than smt. In REM 0521, smt lh is included as the first title in a cursus honorum including peseto “viceroy”, and similarly in REM 0518, where it is likewise in the first position of the enumeration. In REM 0131 and 0152, smt lh is used as the only qualification of the grandfather and father, respectively. In REM 0071 and 0371, smt, without lh, does not occur in this first position.

Would it then be possible to extend our parallel and relate Old Nubian Ⲱⲥⲧⲁⲡⲟ to Meroitic smt lh? First we should recall that Rilly has recently provided evidence that Meroitic h was pronounced [ŋʷ] in native words (Rilly 2017, 29). A phonetic realization of -h /-ŋʷa/ as [-ŋo], with the labialization of the velar nasal rounding the subsequent vowel would not be at all uncommon, similar, for example, to vowel coloring after labialized consonants in Abkhaz (Chirikba 2003, 21). This then corresponds remarkably well to the Old Nubian -ʔə, which is otherwise unanalyzable as a separate morpheme. The phonological reduction of the sequence /-ala-/ to /-i-/ with the complete disappearance of Meroitic intervocalic l, may be explained by assimilation brought about under influence of stress patterns. From the borrowing of smt we already deduced that the word received initial stress /ˈsa.ma.ta/. This may have already led to phonological reduction of the unstressed vowels /ˈsa.ma.ta/ or even apocope /ˈsa.mət/. For smt lh we would therefore arrive at something like /ˈsa.mə.tə la.ŋʷa/ or /ˈsa.mə.tə la.ŋʷa/. From Griffith’s Law (se + lo > to), we already know that a sequence of dental + lateral undergoes assimilation that is also reflected in the orthography. Rilly (2007, 417) provides another, similar example with lh: womnise lh > womnith. If we assume that orthography is usually conservative, while also noting that Nubian languages tend to exhibit widespread assimilation patterns, a development /ˈsa.mə.tə la.ŋʷa/ > /ˈsa.mə.tə.ŋʷa/, eventually borrowed as Ⲱⲥⲧⲁⲡⲉ into Old Nubian is not as unlikely as it may initially seem. Alternatively, the assimilation may have taken place after the word was borrowed into Old Nubian around the 4th century CE and before the first textual attestations in the 12th and 13th century CE with a possible development /sametliŋo/ > /sametiŋo/.

4. Conclusion

If our proposal to link Meroitic smt and smt lh with Old Nubian Ⲱⲥⲧⲁⲡ and Ⲱⲥⲧⲁⲡⲟ holds, this provides additional evidence for the precedence of
the Ραμετιος over the Ραμετ in the Makuritan bureaucracy. This then would suggest that while Old Nubian Ραμετ should be identified with the Greek official title δομηστικος, Ραμετιος is the Old Nubian title for πρωτοδομηστικος, which Łajtar (2019, 158) suggests was “an official of the central administration who organised and watched over the work of domestikoi in the entire Kingdom of Makuria.” The pair Ραμετ/Ραμετιος may thus have formed a structural analog to other pairs of official titles, such as Σοφις/Σοφις Διεν “scribe/great scribe” and πρ(εκκυτερος)/πρ(εκκυτερος) Διεν “priest/great priest.” Whether these different offices also had a territorial distribution similar to Ραμετ/Ραμετιος, i.e. local government in the eparchate of Nobadia vs. central government in Makuria, remains to be investigated. Finally, by linking the Meroitic administrative titles smt and smt lh to Old Nubian Ραμετ and Ραμετιος respectively, we also propose a translation of these heretofore untranslated terms, analogously to their Old Nubian (and Andaandi) meanings, as follows:

We can summarize our findings as follows:

- Mer. smt, borrowed as ON Ραμετ/Ραμετ > Andaandi samed/samad “director of cultivation” = Gr. δομηστικος
- Mer. smt lh, borrowed as ON Ραμετιος “minister of cultivation” = Gr. πρωτοδομηστικος

We are thus faced with the extraordinary situation in which a single state office can be followed from its appearance in Meroitic documents in the 1st–3rd century CE, through the beginnings of Nubian state formation witnessed by the Coptic foundation inscription from Dendur (6th century CE) to Old Nubian official documents from 12/13th century and the successor state of the Kingdom of Kokka, up to the present-day in the Andaandi-speaking region around Dongola in present-day Sudan, where the samed continues to be responsible for water management and cultivation.

Abbreviations

CPR  
Corpus Papyrorum Raineri  

DBMNT  
Database of Medieval Nubian Texts  
http://www.dbmnt.uw.edu.pl/database.htm

FHN  
Fontes Historiae Nubiorum  
https://digitalt.uib.no/handle/1956.2/3083

I.Faras Copt  
Jakobielski (1972)

I.Khartoum Copt  
Łajtar (2004)

P.QI 1  
Plumley–Browne (1988)
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