

Gebel Barkal (Sudan)

No 1073

1. BASIC DATA

State Party : Republic of Sudan
Name of property: Gebel Barkal and the Sites of the Napatan Region
Location: Northern state, province of Meroe
Date received: 28 June 2001
Category of property:

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, these are *sites*. It is a serial nomination.

Brief description:

Several archaeological sites covering an area of more than 60 km of length, in the Nile valley. All sites are of the Napatan (900 to 270 BC) and Meroitic (270 BC to 350 AD) cultures, of the second kingdom of Kush. The sites include tombs, with and without pyramids, temples, living complexes and palaces.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The sites are on both sides of the Nile, in an arid area, considered as part of Nubia.

Gebel Barkal: A natural hill 100 m above the plain surrounding it, 300 m long and 250 m wide. Since antiquity until these days, the hill played always a special role in the religious life and folklore of the people of the region. Though a natural feature, due to its cultural significance is considered as cultural heritage. The excavations and surveys of the hill and its surroundings revealed several temples, palaces, administrative structures, pyramids and other kind of tombs. 9 temples are known, all at the foot of the hill and facing the Nile. The biggest of the temples is number B500, dedicated to the god Amon, measuring 46 by 160 m. Many of the temples are decorated and have carved hieroglyphic inscriptions.

Several palaces, houses and palatial complexes were excavated. Unlike the temples which are built of stone, many of the palaces were made of earthen, sun dried bricks.

The necropolis – the field of pyramids – is part of the royal Napatan-Meroitic cemetery. Many differences exist between these pyramids and their more famous Egyptian models. The Napatan-Meroitic pyramids reach the maximum height of 30 m and have a different construction and stone finishing technique. The most important difference is their function. Unlike the Egyptian pyramids which were built to enclose and hide the burial chamber, the Napatan ones are commemorative monuments to the

deceased, buried in a hypogeum underneath. In front of the pyramid a small temple was built, for offerings.

In the cemetery of Gebel Barkal there are 30 explored tombs, most of them by G. A. Reisner and 5 recently by a Spanish archaeological mission.

The tombs are accessible by stairs and most of them are decorated, whether with paintings or engravings.

Gebel Barkal site has still vast unexcavated nor studied, archaeological areas.

El-Kurru; This Napatan cemetery is situated at a distance of 20 km from Gebel Barkal. It includes several royal tombs and royal family members burials. The cemetery was in use between the end of the 9th and the 7th centuries BC. There are different types of tombs in the cemetery, from the most simple, covered with a small tumulus, to the most elaborate with a pyramid on top.

34 tombs were excavated by Reisner between 1916 and 1918.

Nuri: This cemetery contains 82 tombs, all excavated by Reisner. Most of the tombs have pyramidal superstructures. The first burial in Nuri is from the year 664 BC and the last from around 310 BC.

The tombs contain one, two or more burial chambers, some decorated others plain.

Other structures at Nuri include funerary chapels, a church and houses.

Sanam: Situated in the modern town of Meroe. The site includes residential area which was never excavated and a vast 'popular' cemetery with more than 1,500 burials. A large temple, measuring 41.5 by 61.5 m has been excavated and studied. An enigmatic structure, called 'the treasure' because of some finds, measuring 45 by 256 m is the largest structure on the site. Its function is unknown.

Zuma: A vast burial field, not explored yet, covered with small tumuli. Represents the period between the end of the Meroitic culture in the 4th century AD and the arrival of Christianity to Nubia in the 6th century.

History

Archaeological excavations at Gebel Barkal have not reached yet the earliest strata. In the vicinity of the site, excavations revealed human activity from the 3rd millennium BC. For the Egyptians of the New Empire, Gebel Barkal was a holy place and they made it a religious center and probably an administrative one as well.

The best represented period in the region is the Napatan-Meroitic. Napata or Gebel Barkal, was the capital of the Kushite kingdom, probably already at the end of the 9th century BC, and kept its religious and administrative role until the 4th century. Kurru and Nuri are the two royal cemeteries and Sanam has a Napatan cemetery and a big, not yet excavated, town.

Remains from the post Meroitic period are found El Kurru, Zumma and other sites. Christian period remains are found in the whole region.

History of excavations starts with 1842-45 exploration and documentation by Prussian expedition headed by Karl

Richard Lepsius. In 1912-13 an expedition from the Oxford University, directed by F. L. Griffith, excavated at Sanam. The most important archaeologist for the archaeology of Sudan was George Andrew Reisner who excavated on behalf of the Harvard University and the Boston Fine Art Museum, from 1907 till 1932.

Recently excavations are being carried out by different local and foreign expeditions.

Management regime

Legal provision:

The main protective law is the Antiquities Protection Ordinance 1999.

Management structure:

Cultural Heritage is managed by central, governmental authority: NCAM (National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums), which is under the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

Resources:

Government budget, foreign expeditions, tourism.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

Criterion i: The rock-cut burials and temples, together with the pyramids and funerary chapels represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.

Criterion ii: The Amun temple at Gabel Barkal is a main center of once an almost universal religion and together with the other sites represents the revival of Egyptian religious values.

Criterion iii: Gebel Barkal and the other sites bear an exceptional testimony of the Napatan, meroitic and Kushite civilizations, that existed along the Nile between 900 BC and 600 AD.

Criterion iv: The tombs, pyramids and temples are special and outstanding examples of architectural ensembles.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS mission visited the sites in September 2002.

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Management.

Conservation

Conservation history:

The sites do not have a long history of conservation and only in recent years some repair works are being implemented. Other activities include mainly fencing and planting around the sites.

State of conservation:

As indicated by all, deterioration is evident, mainly as result of exposure to difficult environmental conditions. The foreign expeditions are implementing conservation measures.

Management:

A management programme, rather than plan, is suggested by the government. Certain activities, such as site guards and managers, exist. Others are in a declaration or intention phase.

Risk analysis:

Main risk comes from environmental factors, such as wind with sand and floods. Others are neglect, agricultural and urban encroachment and vandalism.

The management programme is addressing them but full management is not in place yet.

Authenticity and integrity

The sites kept full authenticity.

Urban encroachment might compromise the integrity of some areas.

Comparative evaluation

This culture did not exist anywhere else and its remains are unique.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

This property is of extremely high significances as remains of a culture unique to this region, but with strong links to the Northern Pharaonic and other African cultures.

The site meets the requirement of outstanding universal value. It represents through exceptional remains a very important culture.

Evaluation of criteria:

The Gebel Barkal sites meet ***criteria i, ii iii*** and ***iv***.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

Active conservation programme should be prepared with priorities, budget, proper staff and timelines.

The management intentions should become a plan with government commitment.

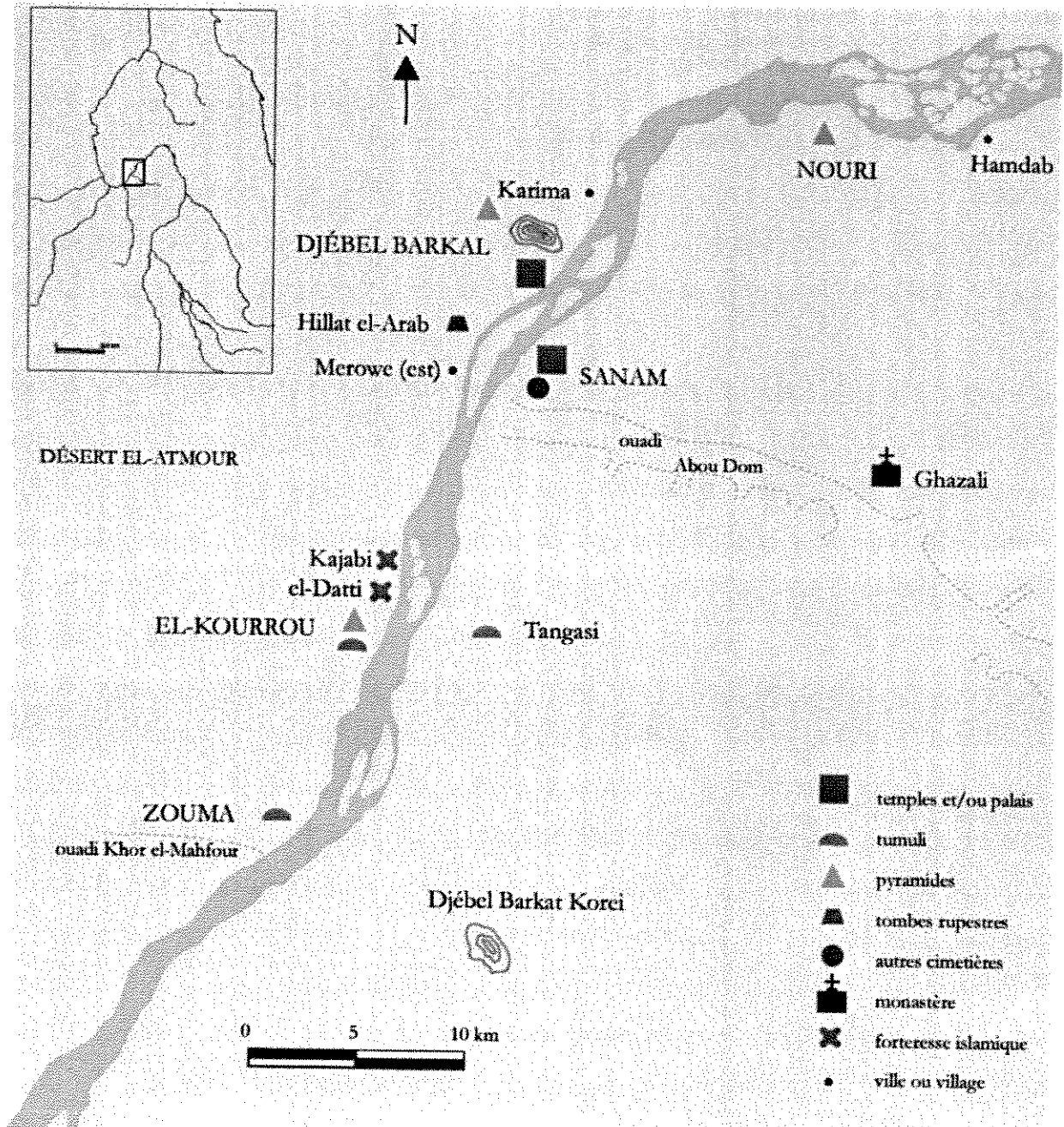
Close monitoring, mainly of the implementation of the management system, is strongly recommended.

Recommendation with respect to inscription

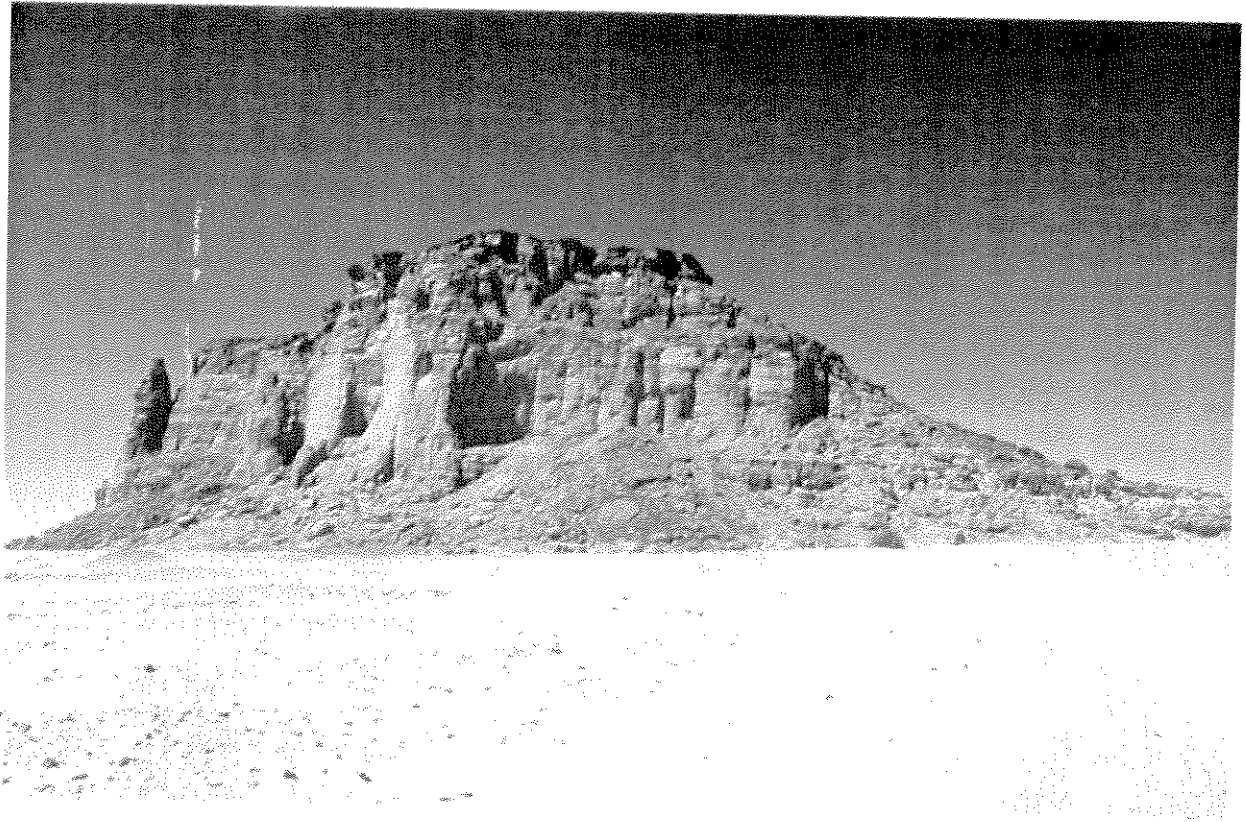
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, iii* and *iv*:

The nominated pyramids and tombs, being also part of the special desert border landscape, on the banks of the Nile, are unique in their typology and technique. The nominated remains are the testimony to an ancient important culture which existed and flourished in this region only.

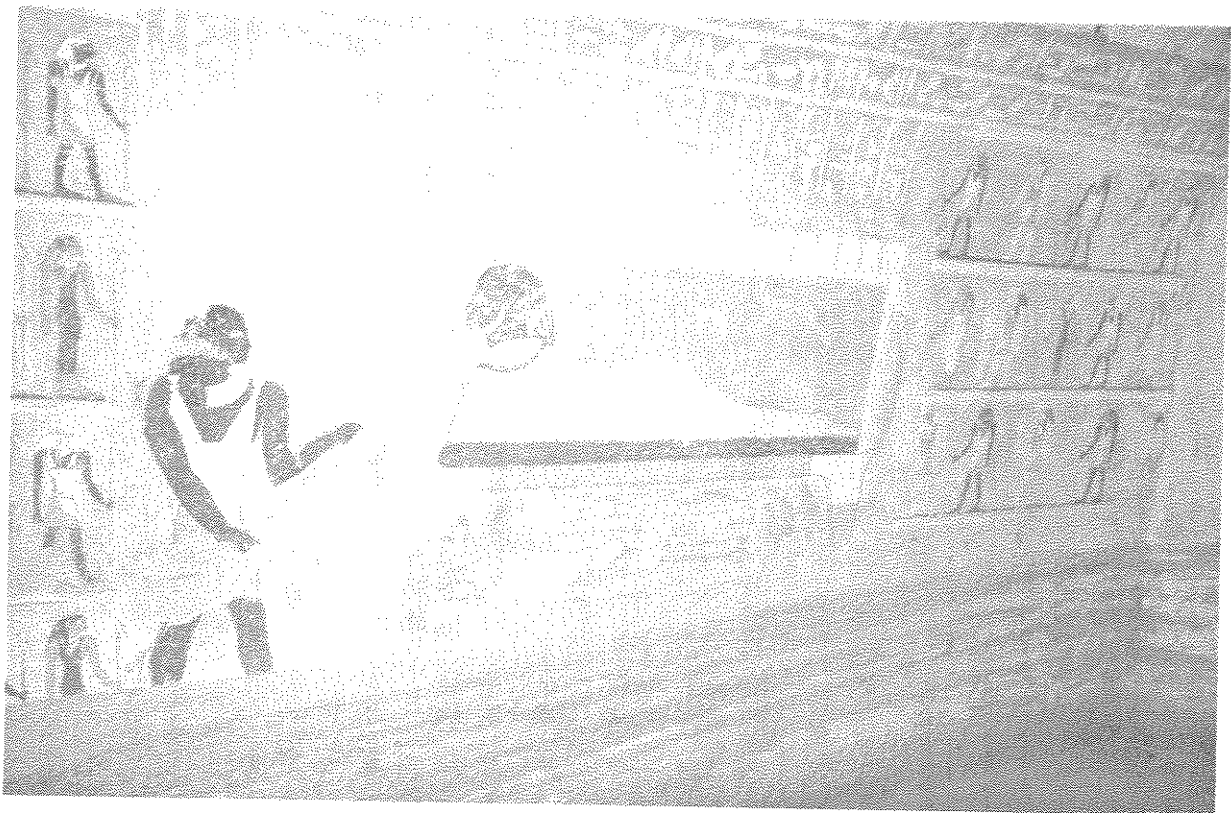
ICOMOS, March 2003



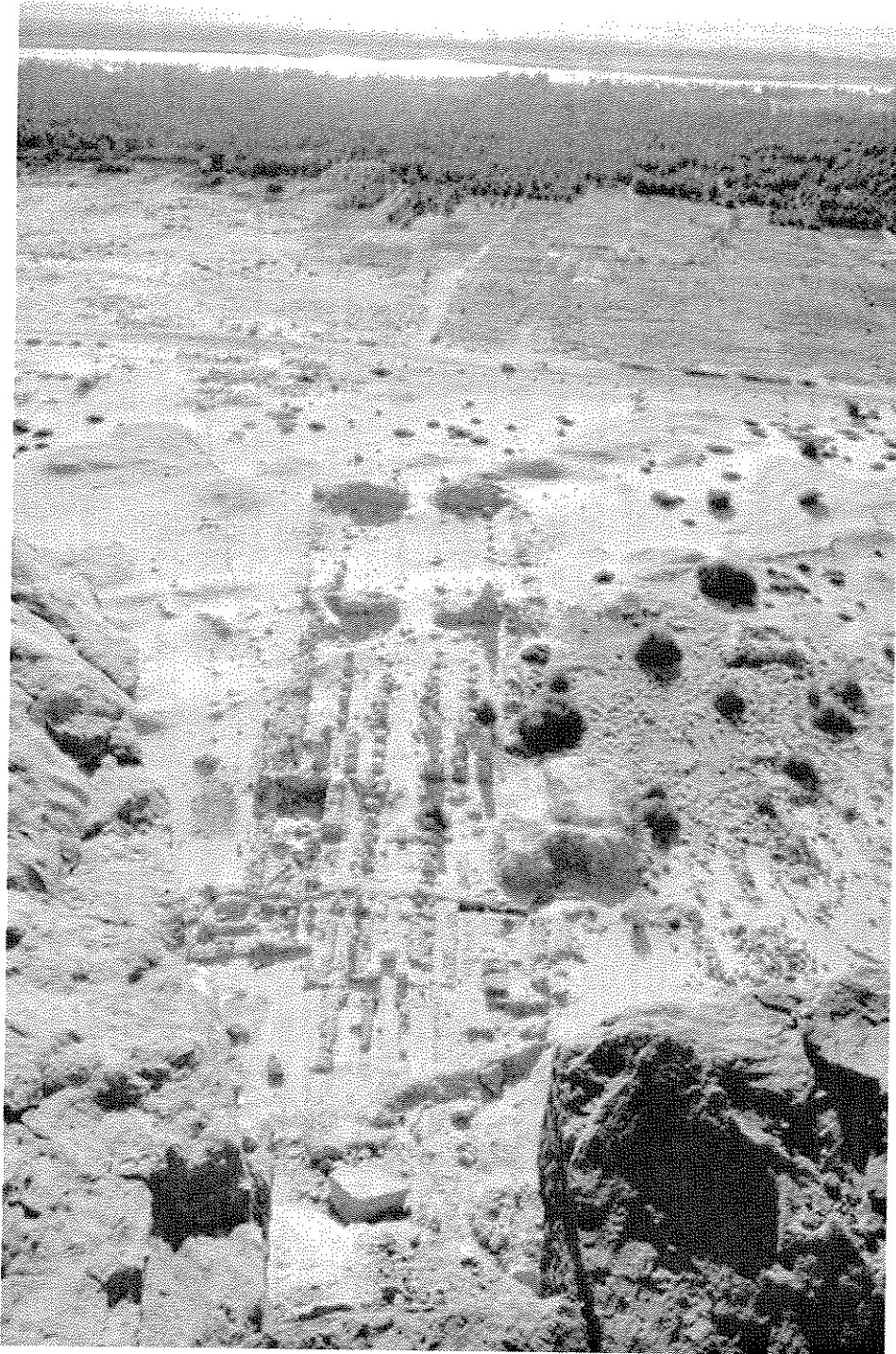
Monumental sites of the Napatan Region
Sites monumentaux de la région napatéenne



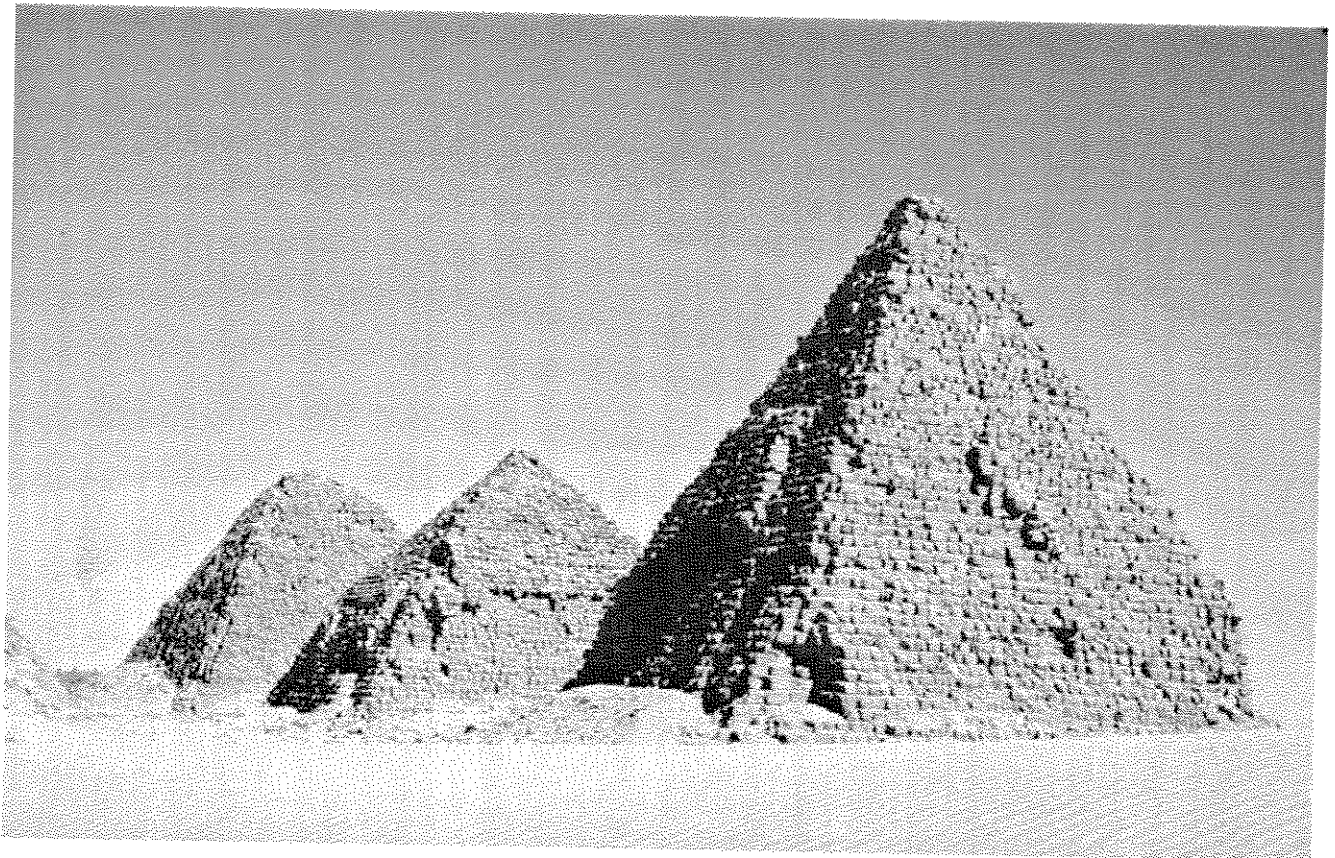
The sacred Mountain – Gebel Barkal
La montagne sacrée – Gebel Barkal



Wall paintings in the Tomb of Tanoutamon in El Kurru
Peintures de la tombe de Tanoutamon à El-Kurru



B 500 Temple - Gebel Barkal
Le temple B 500 - Gebel Barkal



Pyramids of Nuri / Les pyramides de Nuri