

Imagining the Meroitic world: new work on the pictorial graffiti of Musawwarat es Sufra
(Cornelia Kleinitz)

At Musawwarat es Sufra thousands of depictions of human and/or superhuman figures and animals – sometimes arranged in scenes – of objects and architectural features, as well as geometric motifs, were incised into the smooth sandstone walls of the Great Enclosure. Although these graffiti have not hitherto undergone a detailed discussion and publication, they have often been named in support of one or another interpretation of this well-known but enigmatic complex of temples and other buildings, corridors, ramps and courtyards, or of parts thereof. Here, some of the hypotheses and conclusions proposed in the past are re-evaluated in the light of new fieldwork undertaken in spring 2008 and – where appropriate – alternative views will be presented. The project introduced here represents a new attempt at the comprehensive documentation, analysis and publication of the invaluable corpus of pictorial graffiti of the Great Enclosure, building on research undertaken in the 1960s and 1990s but also including a significant fieldwork component. A thorough investigation of the graffiti of Musawwarat es Sufra, of which a large percentage is argued to date to the Meroitic period, can aid not only in furthering our understanding of the site itself but also in gaining insights into various aspects of the Meroitic world, including popular religious concerns and practices.