The Rosette in Nubian cultures (Danièle Michaux-Colombot)

The Rosette in Nubian art is an arch old religious symbol, hitherto overlooked for lack of understanding the religious significance of a seemingly banal motif. Iconographic occurrences span from A-Group Qustul to Meroitic Qustul and right up to Medieval Christian church art. Inherited from late Naqada repertoires on ceramics and ceremonial pallets and mace heads, it is a recurrent theme in C-Group, Kerma, Napata and Meroitic iconography, found on pottery, plaques, seals, amulets, jewellery, caskets, libation basins, thrones, funerary or cult items such as cylinder sheaths (Nuri and Meroe), menat counterpoises and late architectural compositions lintels, capitals and pyramids. Mica (Kerma), faïence or metallic Rosettes were sewn on garments. Kushite chieftains and Meroitic kings are depicted in Egyptian reliefs and at Naga, clad in sashes and aprons adorned with Rosettes. The ornamentation is later transferred to the Virgin Mary’s cloak on frescoes from Faras. In Egypt, the Rosette theme is linked with rejuvenating Šed festival rites and the primitive goddess Seshat, whose over head symbol is a seven-petalled Rosette. Seshat grants the king Sed-Festivals and marks his life-period and fate in the Ished, Sacred tree, through which Hathor breast feeds the king. Hathor’s ritual instrument for divine feeding is the menat necklace. A collection of menat-counterpoises have been retrieved from the royal cemeteries of El Kurru and Nuri, invariably rosette-based. The symbol has a strong maternal connection with life, rebirth and divine feeding. It was passed on to Isis-Lactans, often associated with an erect cobra. Many Isis-Lactans emerge from an acanthus as does the lion god Apedemak at Naga. Some are enthroned over a winged sphinx with a Rosette. On the stele of Amaniikhahale, the mother goddess Mut sits over a similar winged sphinx. She is backed against Amun enthroned over a pattern of Rosettes. Motif and context remain abstruse till they are seen in the light of Medieval Indian Tantric teachings on self development. Our Sacred Tree is composed of seven chakras or wheels of energy, shown as Rosettes. Theses are linked to a central canal, up which surges Kundalini the Serpent Power, from spine base to cranium top. Chakras-Rosettes and Kundalini-uraeus are part of a mechanism named rebirth in sun theologies. The engendered process stimulates energizing saps of saliva, assimilated to divine milk. Rosettes are the key to seer sun cult that developed in Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Indus and Egypt in IVth-IIIrd millennia, a philosophia perenis of high degree of perception which founded and legitimized leadership in Antiquity. In Sumer, Rosette was Inanna/Ishtar’s sacred symbol, read DINGIR, ‘god’. Kushite and Meroitic Rosettes would be Egyptian repertoire remakes, except that emphasis on the symbol seems to the advantage of Nubia, where sun cult is said to have originated.