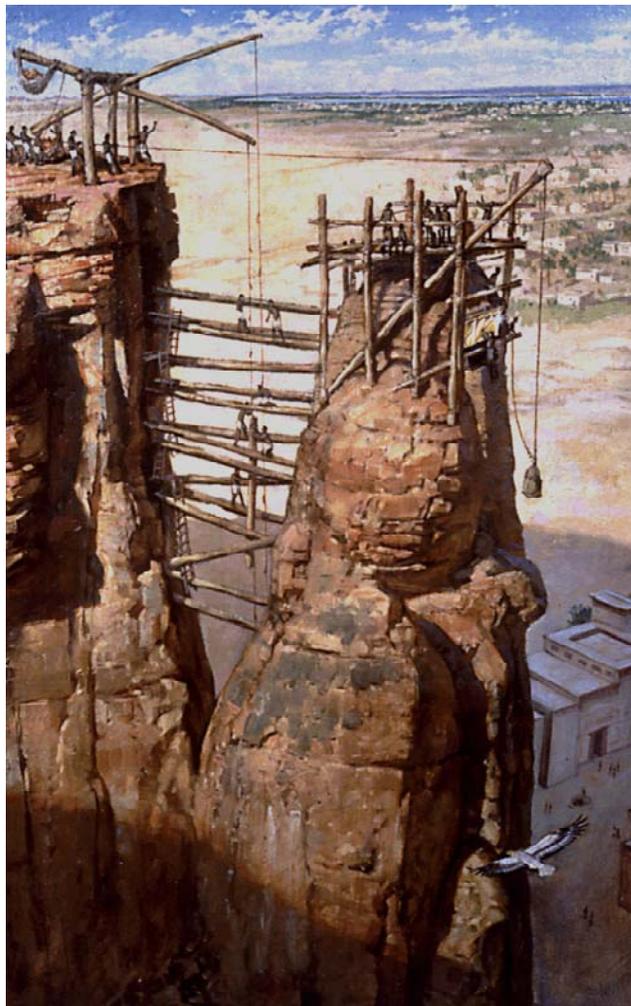


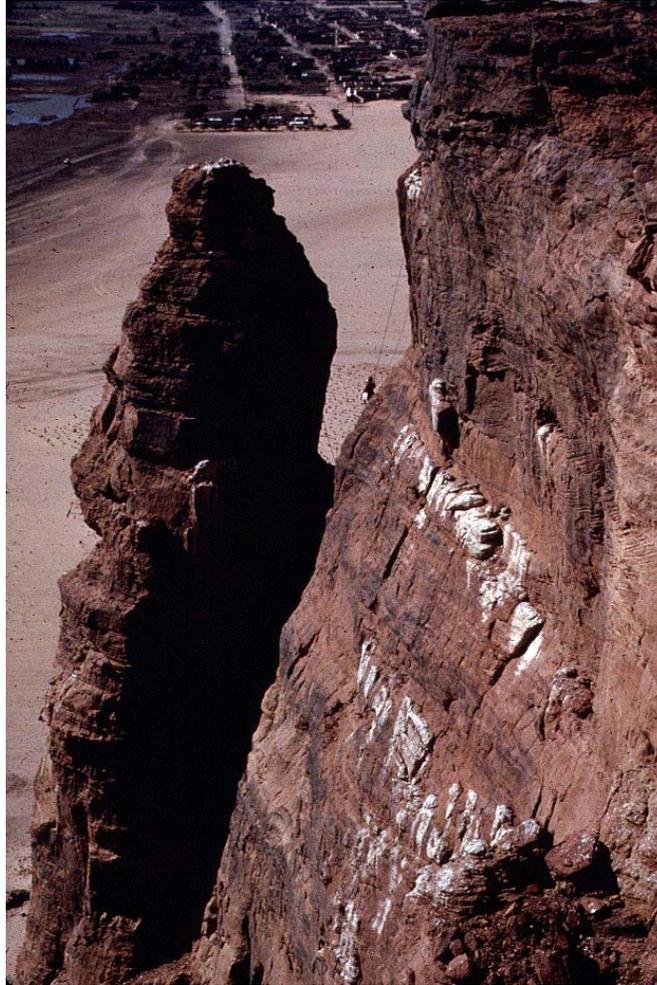
## **B 350: The Pinnacle Monument of Taharqa**

One of the most remarkable monuments at Jebel Barkal was constructed by Taharqa on the virtually inaccessible summit of the pinnacle, 75 m above the temples (**fig. 1**). This included an inscribed panel, 1.20 m x 2.70 m, originally overlain by gold sheet, and a small statue (now lost), probably representing the king, centered in a manmade alcove just beneath the panel and flanked by built stone walls to place it within a recess and to protect it from the incessant wind. The inscription, which commemorated the king's victories east and west, was too high to be read from the ground, but its gold surface would have made it one of the most conspicuous features of the mountain. Today the gold is gone, and the inscribed surface of the panel is badly eroded, but its vertical register lines can still be seen with the naked eye. The statue, too, is lost, but the alcove in which it stood can still clearly be seen from below, as can the white mortar of the stone walls that were once built to flank it.



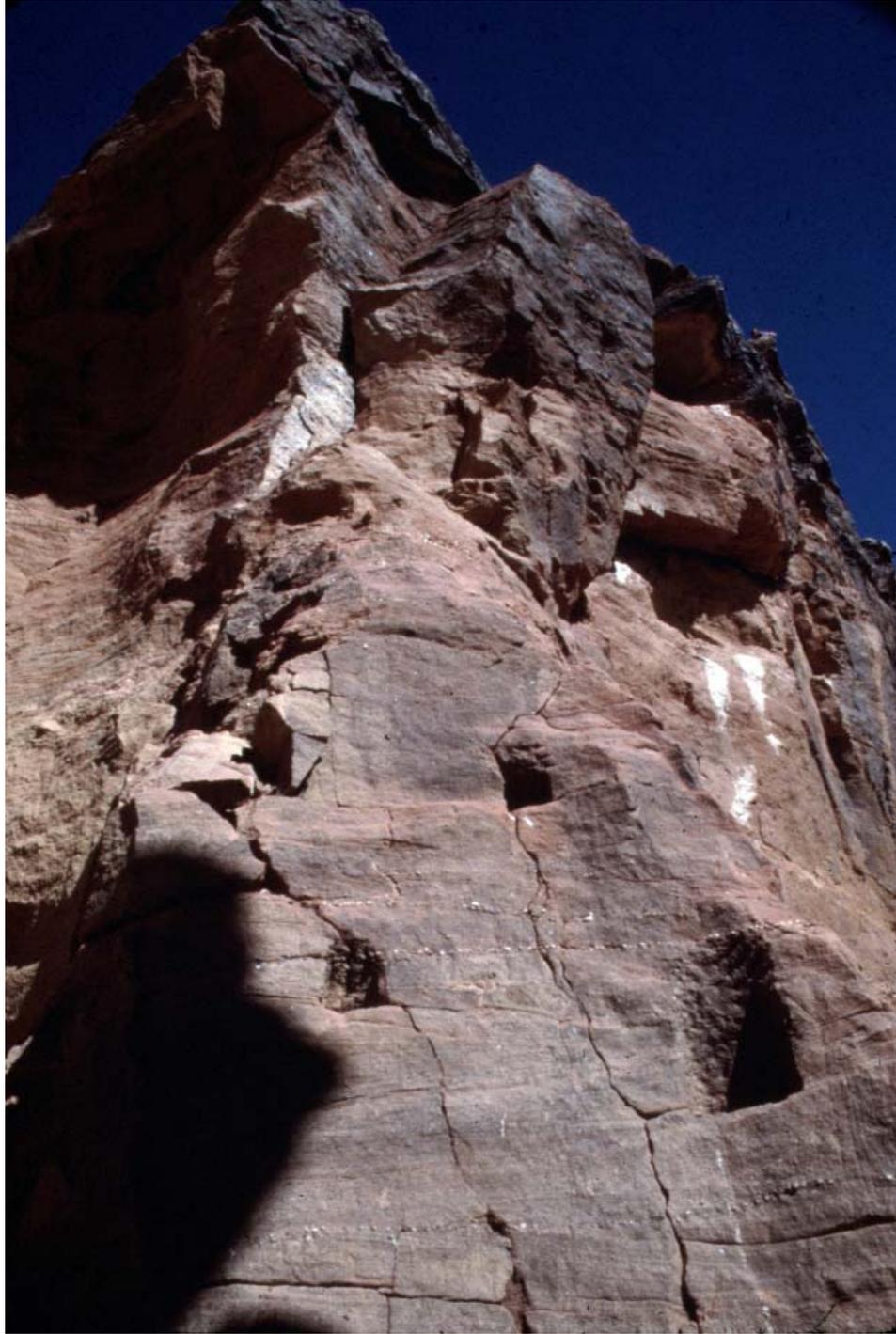
**fig. 1:** *Artist's conception of the pinnacle monument under construction (Painting by James Gurney for National Geographic, Nov. 1990)*

The pinnacle peak, when observed from the top of Jebel Barkal, is 11 m distant from - and 5 m below - the cliff edge across a deep gorge. Under normal conditions the peak is inaccessible. It was first climbed (in modern times), and the Taharqa monument was first examined at close range, in 1987 by this writer (Kendall) with alpinist Paul Duval, using modern climbing apparatus. It was this exploration that revealed how the king's engineers were able to achieve the "impossible" (**fig. 2**).



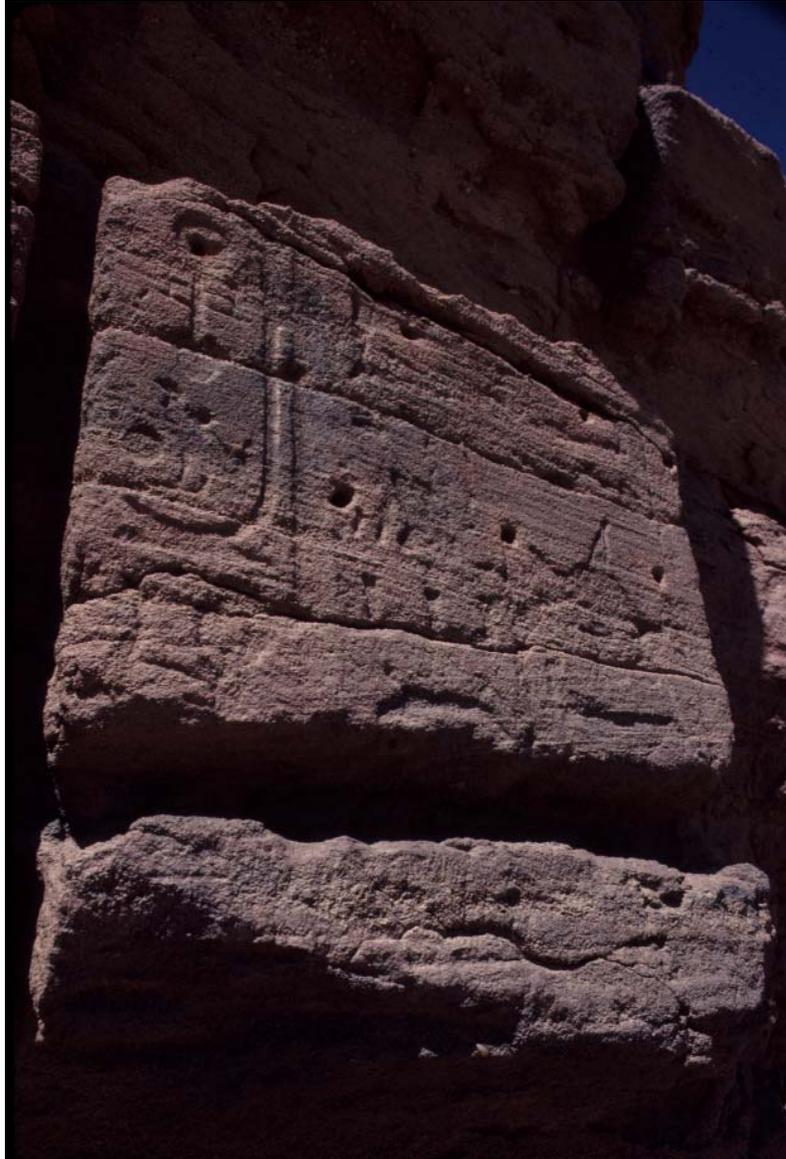
**fig. 2.** *Climber Paul Duval rappels off the Jebel Barkal cliff in February 1987, seeking an ascent route to the top of the pinnacle. (Photo: Cynthia Shartzer)*

On the cliff edge, directly opposite the pinnacle peak, one can see a line of three cut holes, which had supported three vertical wooden posts. These posts had clearly supported a cross-beam, propped at each end and in the middle, which had suspended a pair of hanging *shadufs*: weighted, seesaw-like lifting machines. Between the cliff walls inside the gorge, there are also many pairs of opposing cut holes, which indicate that up to nineteen horizontal beams had been raised by the *shadufs*, working in tandem, and set firmly in the holes between the cliffs (**fig. 2**).

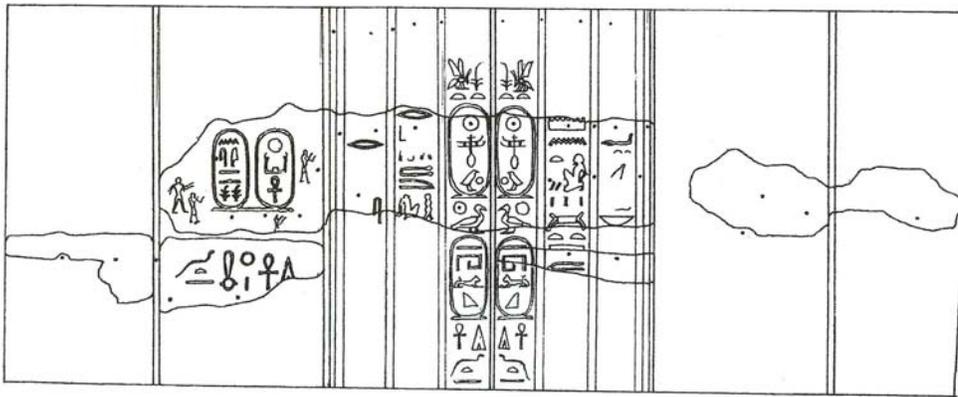


**fig. 3.** *Holes cut on the cliff wall, with opposing holes on the pinnacle shaft, for the insertion of wooden beams raised into the gorge to create stages, allowing for the ascent of the pinnacle by ancient workmen. (Photo: T. Kendall)*

By means of these stages, workmen were able to climb to the pinnacle summit, where they set still more beams into still other chiseled holes or grooves, which encased the summit in a wooden structure, the form and purpose of which today is not entirely clear. The smoothed panel was then prepared, inscribed and covered in gold sheet (as revealed by rows of nail holes still visible in the stone) (**figs. 3, 4**). The text, now very fragmentary, reveals that Taharqa had used the panel to boast of his conquests over his enemies east and west.



**fig. 4.** *Panel with very worn texts of Taharqa, preserving rows of holes for nails, which had fastened gold sheet to the stone (See fig. 4). (Photo: T. Kendall)*



**Fig. 5.** Drawing of the preserved sections of the panel of inscription on the pinnacle summit, revealing mirror-image texts of Taharqa in the central sections, with the panel of Nastasen's name at left, and the rows of holes for bronze nails, used to fasten gold sheet to the stone. In the right (eastern) and left (western) sections Taharqa proclaimed his victories over his eastern and western enemies respectively. (Drawing: T. Kendall)

A diagonal channel cut deeply on the west side of the pinnacle peak was used to support a stout beam that served as a crane arm (with pulley). It was by this means that a small statue, as well as substantial amounts of mortar and stones used in artificial fills on the pinnacle face, had been raised up from the ground - lifted by means of a rope hauled by a gang of men on the cliff top, according to shouted instructions from men stationed on the pinnacle summit (**fig. 1**). When the monument was complete, all the wooden staging would have been removed, rendering the pinnacle again inaccessible - except to birds. It is evident, though, from the appearance of the name of Nastasen (ca. 335-315 BC) on one of Taharqa's panels that this later Napatan king undertook and restored Taharqa's work three centuries later.

The Taharqa monument is so unusual that one might ask what meaning it had for the royal builder or what purpose it might have served. A recent theory (also proposed by this writer) suggests that it had a function closely tied to the king's pyramid at Nuri, which can be seen from the summit of Jebel Barkal on the other side of the Nile at a distance of 9.7 km to the northeast.

Ever since 1917, when the American archaeologist George A. Reisner excavated Taharqa's tomb at Nuri, Egyptologists have wondered why this king's pyramid was built 26 km upstream and on the opposite side of the Nile from el-Kurru, where all the other members of the royal family were buried. When it was built, Taharqa's tomb and pyramid at Nuri stood completely alone. Was he buried there because he was not of the direct royal line of the kings at el-Kurru, as some supposed? Was he relegated to Nuri because of the shame of having lost Egypt to the invading Assyrian armies, as others have suggested? And yet the pyramid itself was the largest ever built in Sudan. It was raised in two or three stages, the last one surely posthumous. It stood 63 m high, and it was double the size of any other royal pyramid, which suggests that Taharqa was actually the most honored of kings. Here was an enduring mystery, without apparent solution -

until one discovers that the pyramid created a solar alignment with the Jebel Barkal pinnacle that, in the ancient mind, would have seemed to guarantee the king's eternal annual resurrection from the dead.

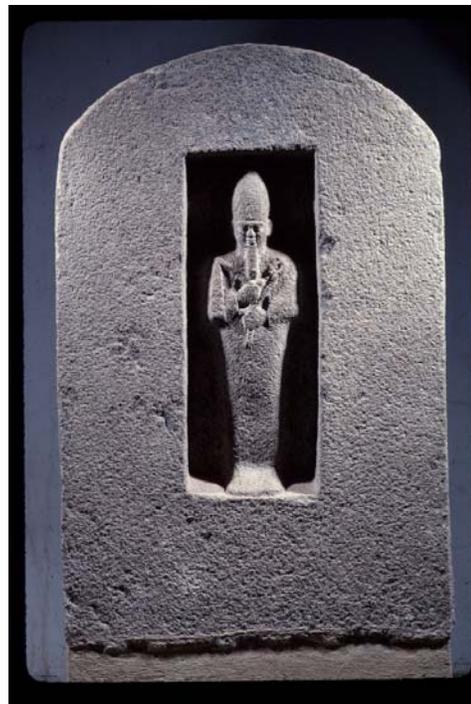


**fig. 6.** *The pyramids of Nuri. Taharqa's ruined pyramid is the very large mound at rear right. (Photo: Enrico Ferorelli)*

In Taharqa's day, as we have seen, the Kushites interpreted the pinnacle on Jebel Barkal as a powerful magical effigy with multiple meanings, depending on the angle from which it was seen. On the one hand, they perceived it as the erect phallus of Amun in his role as Creator, which identified Jebel Barkal as the perennial source of fertility and the place where, at the beginning of time, the god had self-engendered the other gods. Because the Kushites also believed that Amun was the source of divine kingship and the father of every reigning king, they would also have concluded that Jebel Barkal was the place where kingship began. Proof of this in their eyes was the fact that the pinnacle resembled a rearing uraeus, symbol of royal authority, worn on the king's crown. This association drew them to another: that the mountain was itself an effigy of a royal head or crown with its uraeus. But the pinnacle could also be seen as the vague figure of a colossal standing king - in particular, the figure of the mythical first king, Osiris, wearing his typical headgear: the tall, knobbed White Crown, symbolizing a ruler's authority over the South (or "Upper Egypt") (**figs. 7, 8**). All these meanings, and others, seemed to confirm for the Kushites that Jebel Barkal was not only the place where Time began but also the place where kingship had first appeared on earth - a tradition echoed by the Greek historian Diodorus (3.3.1-6), who transmitted the Nubian fable that Osiris was actually a native Kushite, who came from the South to colonize Egypt and brought "Egyptian" civilization with him.



**fig. 7.** *The pinnacle with the vague shape of Osiris, wearing the White Crown.*



**fig. 8.** *Funerary stele of Senkamanisken (ca. 640-620 BC), from his pyramid chapel at Nuri, in which the king is represented as Osiris - a form thought manifested in the Jebel Barkal pinnacle. Sudan National Museum, Khartoum (Photo: Enrico Ferorelli)..*

It has long been noted that Taharqa's subterranean tomb at Nuri has all the characteristics of an "Osireion," that is, the legendary tomb of Osiris - exemplified by its re-creation, built by Seti I at Abydos. This tomb type, unique among all royal tombs in Sudan, apparently allowed Taharqa, in death, literally to merge himself with Osiris, who, after his death, became god of fertility and god of the Underworld. It is also a fact that when one stands on the summit of the pyramid (now a ruined mound) and looks to Jebel Barkal in the southwest, the pinnacle has a distinct resemblance to the profile of Osiris as a mummiform man (or a standing king) wearing his characteristic White Crown.

It is also a fact that between the pinnacle and the pyramid there exists a perfect astronomical relationship, coincident with the official ancient dates for the rising and falling Nile, events which were also thought to mark the supposed annual rebirth and death dates of Osiris!

In death every king was believed literally to become Osiris, just as in life every king was believed literally to be his son Horus. According to legend, Osiris was assassinated by his brother Seth, god of Chaos, and was relegated to rule the Underworld. His death was avenged by Horus, whom the gods mandated to rule the terrestrial world. Due to the prominence of Taharqa's pyramid and its unusual underground tomb, it is perhaps not unreasonable to suspect that this king was more closely identified with Osiris than other kings of his day, for just as Osiris was thought to have been assassinated by Seth and the forces of Chaos, Taharqa had been figuratively "assassinated" by the armies of Assyria, the latter day "forces of Chaos," whose invasions of Egypt were unprecedented in Egyptian history, having almost no parallel except in the Osiris legend. By having himself buried in a tomb simulating that of Osiris, and by merging himself in statue-form with the Jebel Barkal pinnacle (which appeared to be a vague statue of Osiris), the king was probably thought literally to have "become" Osiris, the tragic first king of Egyptian myth. In this role, despite the misfortunes that marked his later reign, he could perhaps anticipate a happy future in which he would be avenged by a new Horus, which would signal the beginning of a new and glorious age - a complete renewal and renaissance of the Egyptian state under Kushite rule.

Aside from being ruler of the Underworld and mythical first king, Osiris was also a god of fertility, who was believed to come back to life every year during the flood season. Every year, thus, he was thought to be reborn on New Year's Day - the day when the Nile began its rise - and to "die" three and half months later at the time of the Khoiak festival, when the Nile began to recede. In the Egyptian civil calendar, New Year's Day was calculated officially as the moment when the bright star Sirius first appeared above the horizon just before dawn in its heliacal rising, when observed at Karnak. In 664 BC, the year of Taharqa's death, this moment occurred on August 7. (Due to a slight wobble in the earth's rotation over the last 2680 years, this moment now occurs on July 31, which can be confirmed by modern astronomical software.) In Taharqa's day, the Khoiak festival, which marked the end of the inundation season and honored Osiris' "death," began about November 23. In our own time this moment has become November 16.

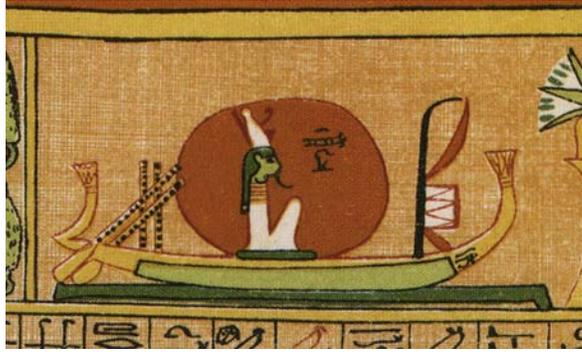
Today if one stands on the summit of Jebel Barkal - on the cliff edge directly opposite the pinnacle - at sunrise on July 31 (the modern astronomical equivalent of the ancient New Year's Day in the ancient Egyptian civil calendar) and looks to the northeast horizon, one will see the sun rise directly over Taharqa's pyramid (**fig. 9**). In the ancient Egyptian mind, this would have been the perfect metaphor for the king's rebirth as Osiris. Conversely, if one stands on the summit of Taharqa's pyramid at sunset on November 16 and looks to Jebel Barkal, he will see the sun set directly behind the Jebel Barkal pinnacle, silhouetting the rock spire, which appears as a figure of the god, wearing his tall knobbed crown (**fig. 10**). The god silhouetted by the setting sun was the normal Egyptian way of representing the "dying" sun god, Atum, with whom Osiris (and the deceased king) were thought to be merged (**fig. 11**).



**fig. 9.** *The sun rising over the Nuri pyramids on August 1, 2015, when viewed from the summit of Jebel Barkal. One day earlier, on July 31, the sun would have risen slightly to the left, directly over Taharqa's pyramid (the large mound at left). This event, coinciding with the heliacal rising of Sirius when viewed at Karnak, marked the start of the Egyptian civil "New Year." The date was celebrated as the birth and rebirth day of Osiris, the god with whom Taharqa was identified. Unfortunately, on July 31, 2015 our efforts to photograph the event were foiled by heavy haze, which obscured the sunrise. (Photo: Bryan Whitney.)*



**fig. 10.** *The sun, when viewed from the summit of Taharqa's pyramid on Nov. 16, sets behind the pinnacle on Jebel Barkal, silhouetting the rock spire like a "dying god" (see fig. 11). The date approximately coincides with the ancient Khoiak festival, which signified the end of the inundation and commemorated the annual "death of fertility" and of Osiris, the god thought to supply it. (Photo: T. Kendall).*



**fig.11.** *The god of the setting sun, Atum, who embodied both Amun (as Re, "Sun") and Osiris, shown in his divine boat passing into the Underworld at sunset, as depicted in the Book of the Dead, Spell 17; Papyrus of Ani, British Museum. (R. O. Faulkner, trans. The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead. New York: 2005, 45). In Spell 163, it is said of Amun and Osiris of Jebel Barkal that "Atum is his real, true name." .*

The temple B 700 (q.v.) at the foot of the Jebel Barkal cliff, just beside the pinnacle, seems to have been a temple to Osiris, built by Atlanersa, Taharqa's presumed son and second successor. Here fragments of an extensive hymn to Osiris (quoted below) were discovered in the sanctuary - a hymn which can be taken to allude to Taharqa both in his tomb and in his pinnacle monument. In both places, the king was thought to be physically merged with Osiris, and, as in the pinnacle text, a destroyer of his enemies. (The text below is especially revealing when we realize that in his tomb Taharqa's mummy and coffins were deliberately laid in a crypt filled with ground water!)

"Greetings to you, Osiris, Lord of Eternity,  
 King of the Two Lands (i.e. Egypt and Kush),  
 Chief of both banks (i.e. Jebel Barkal and Nuri?), ...  
 Youth, King, who took the White Crown for himself ...  
 Who makes himself young again a million times ...  
 What he loves is that every face looks up to him...  
 Lord of life, who drives away his enemies  
 Shining youth, who is in the primordial water,  
 Born on the first of the year ...  
 From the outflow of his limbs both lands drink.  
 Of him it is arranged that the corn springs forth from the water  
 In which he is situated ....  
 Who took away the power of those who rebelled against him  
 Who causes to be established [the years?] of  
 eternity in his name as 'Pillar' (i.e Pinnacle?)"

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