

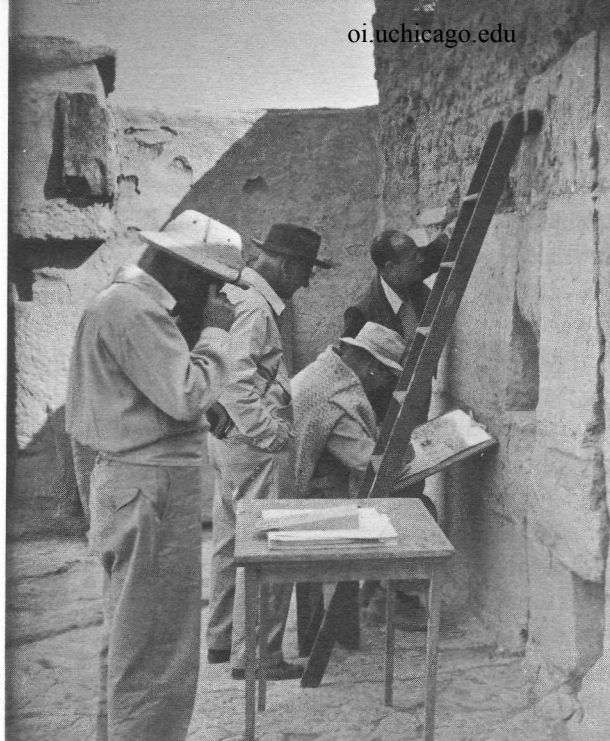
*THE EXPEDITION TO NUBIA*

The Oriental Institute Egyptian Assuan High Dam Program is an emergency salvage operation. Its effort is one of several active this year in the Nubian area which will be submerged by the enormous lake behind the new High Dam under construction south of Assuan. The Institute has the honor of being the first organization working in Nubia to complete a major program in the season of 1960/61.

We offered to excavate a twelve-mile area on both sides of the Nile between Dehmit and Kalabsha, beginning about twenty miles south

*Beit el Wali: Entrance to the Temple*





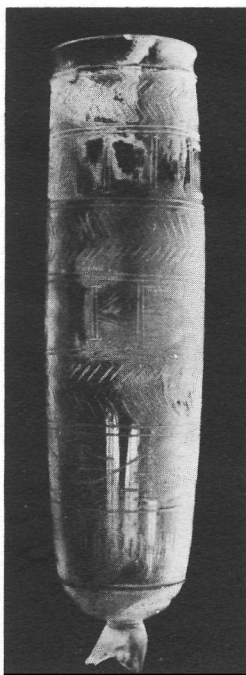
*Copying the Temple of Beit el Wali*

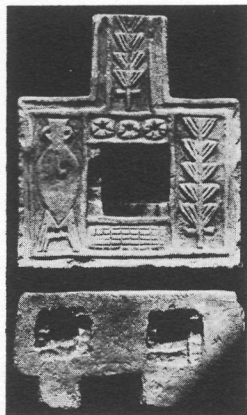
of the present Assuan Dam, and to copy for publication a complete temple in the same region. Both of these objectives have been achieved. The twelve-mile area has been thoroughly explored and excavated. The rock temple of Ramesses II at Beit el Wali has been completely copied in accordance with the high standards for which the Oriental Institute is famous. A volume of our Oriental Institute Publications will eventually be devoted to each of the two projects.

Our season lasted approximately six months. Unfortunately, nearly two months at the beginning were consumed in the acquisition of boats and in the preparations for work in the field. This period was described by the director of the program in a field newsletter distributed in February. Because the expedition was strictly a salvage effort, we had selected a region in which we could be certain of epigraphic success even if the excavations should turn out to be disappointing. Accordingly, we worked out from the site known as Beit el Wali, while our able epigraphic staff concentrated on the copying of the exquisite little temple of Ramesses II with its important historical reliefs and painted religious scenes.

The desert which borders the Nile between Kalabsha and Dehmit consists of the most forbidding formations of sandstone and granite. There is no sand whatever, and the alluvium which alone was capable of supporting life now lies under the water, already submerged by previous raisings of the Assuan Dam. Here lay the ancient settlements and nearly all their cemeteries. They have been explored and excavated by previous archeological surveys and were beyond the scope of our program. Our work extended to the higher levels, farther from the original course of the Nile, on the mere fringes of ancient habitation. We found several cemeteries on the west bank near Kalabsha and Beit el Wali and lesser ones farther north and on the east bank. There were two distinct types of cemeteries, but it was exceedingly difficult to study them with confidence or satisfaction, as every single grave had been thoroughly plundered in antiquity—probably by persons familiar with the contents of the burial—and little but broken pottery rewarded our investigation of more than four hundred graves. The sherds pointed consistently to the later Roman period as the date of these cemeteries. They may in all probability be attributed to the Blemmyes and the Nobatae, pagan enemy tribes inhabiting the country simultaneously during portions of the third to sixth centuries of the Christian Era. Near but not actually within or belonging to one of the largest graves investigated we made our best discovery of the season: a remarkable glass “chalice,” almost intact, containing two incised lines of Greek. It was found quite by accident by one of

*Glass chalice with Greek inscription,  
the most important find of the season*





*Offering tablet in form of a Sacred Lake*

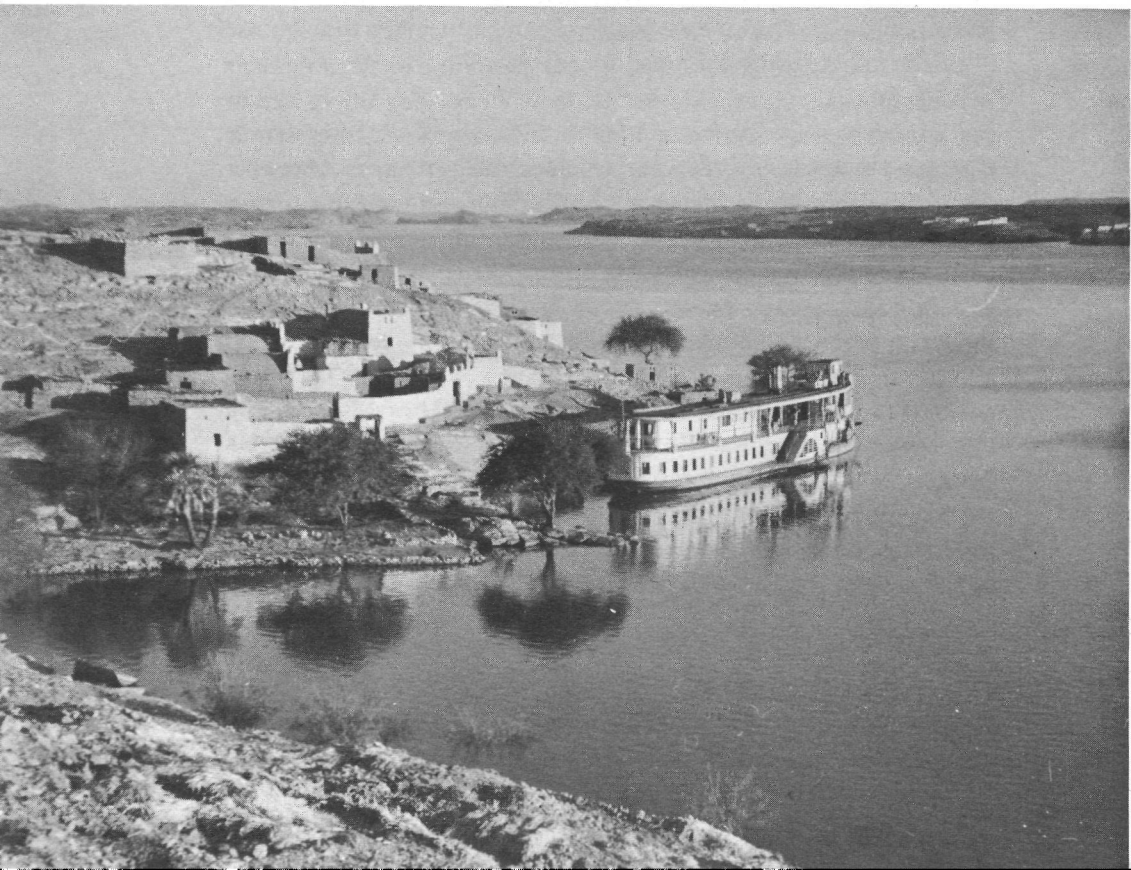
our workers when he happened to overturn one of the thousands of heavy stones strewn over the ground. The chalice was plunderer's loot, concealed under the stone by a thief whose unknown fate prevented later recovery of his prize. It was retained by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities as unique and essential for the national collection. We had at least the glory of saving it from the coming flood.

Our most extensive excavations took place near Tapha, among granite boulders on the dizzy heights of the Bab Kalabsha. Here we investigated a group of buildings—mud brick on a carefully laid foundation of sandstone blocks clamped together with bronze dovetails (all carefully extracted by the indefatigable plunderers)—never before excavated. They appear to be of late Roman or Byzantine date, but at the present writing we have not as yet been able to determine their purpose. Extensive stone remains were recovered beneath the fallen vaults of the mud-brick roofs. Among these were some of our most interesting finds, chief of which were several stone elements containing, carved in miniature, ceremonial “sacred lakes” with tiny staircases descending on all four sides to the “depths” below and provided with dummy spouts which proved them to be but a degenerate, misunderstood version of some earlier type of libation tablet. The best examples were awarded to the Oriental Institute in the division of the antiquities and will come to our museum. If these “sacred lakes” are cult objects, they point to a religious purpose for the buildings even though their elevated situation seems more appropriate for a stronghold. One is reminded of Notre Dame de la Garde at Marseilles.

Tapha was an important religious center in the Roman period; it possessed several small temples, one of which was dismantled and removed for safety in the summer of 1960. Not far distant from its site we located the traces of a curious bipartite shrine hewn in opposite facing sides of an irregular wadi. A crude stairway had been cut into the sloping south approach, as if to provide a processional way down to the shrine. In a nearby pit we uncovered numerous broken pots in a heavy bed of ashes, as if burned offerings had been customary at the shrine. Was it the goal of a privileged procession bearing the borrowed statute of Philae's Isis, permitted to tribes of the Blemmyes or Nobatae after their defeat by the legions of Rome? We have no evidence to prove it; our finds at this shrine were confined to a few architectural elements, the broken pottery, and fragments of a horned altar.

Each time we were ready to excavate a new site, we moved our floating headquarters, the steamship "Memnon," by tug to the new location. We could not afford to maintain a full crew and purchase

*The steamer Memnon, headquarters of the Expedition*





*Members of the Oriental Institute–Swiss Institute Expedition to Nubia*

the oil to keep up steam permanently, but this makeshift type of locomotion served our purpose, even though we were deprived of electricity and hot water in our attractive cabins. Our final move for excavations took us from Tapha to Dar Mus in the midst of the Bab Kalabsha, where we excavated a deplorable ruin on a tiny island in the grandest scenic beauty of Nubia. The scenery was almost our sole reward. Our efforts yielded scarcely more than an imperfect ground plan, two Islamic coins, and a Coptic cross of bronze—rather contradictory evidence for determining the function of the ruined conglomeration of mud-brick and granite walls. We had the satisfaction, at least, of realizing that our expedition had salvaged what there was before the brickwork melted and the granite disappeared beneath the rising waters of the coming lake.

The expedition enjoyed the brief presence of two visitors during the season. The first was our Oriental Institute Director, Dr. John A. Wilson; the second was Mr. William R. Boyd, of Lake Wales, Florida, donor of our indispensable motor cruiser, the “Barbara,” which was our sole link with civilization and our source of supply at Assuan. Mr. Boyd made a special trip to Nubia to visit the expedition

and to accompany the director of the program on an inspection survey of the site in the Sudan where we plan to excavate during some part of the season of 1961/62. The remainder of next season will be spent in Egyptian Nubia, just north of the international boundary.

This season's excavations were carried on under the immediate supervision of Dr. Herbert Ricke, Scientific Director of the Swiss Institute in Cairo, who had brought his organization into our program as a joint expedition. The copying of the Beit el Wali temple was directed by Dr. George R. Hughes, of our Epigraphic Survey in Luxor, most of whose staff had been loaned to the Nubian program for the season. The director of the program is deeply grateful to these two able collaborators and all their staff members for a season of work well done and for a historical achievement in the program to save the monuments of Nubia.

KEITH C. SEELE

*Director*

*Oriental Institute Egyptian  
Assuan High Dam Program*