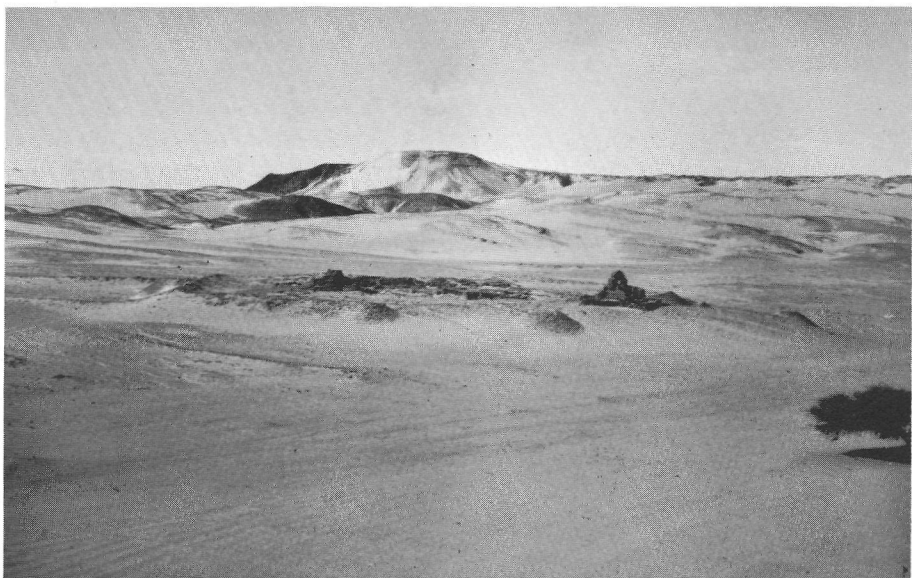


FORTRESS AT SEMNA SOUTH IN NUBIA

Louis V. Žabkar

Arrangements have been made for the Oriental Institute to conduct two final expeditions during the period 1966–68 in that area of Nubia soon to be flooded by the waters of the new Assuan High Dam. An international team of scholars, directed by Dr. Louis V. Žabkar, will excavate the last unexplored fortress built by the Egyptian pharaohs in a strategic area through which passed military and commercial routes to northern and central Sudan. In this area, where the Nile is forced through a narrow channel, three fortresses, known as Semna East, Semna West, and Semna South, were built. Semna East and Semna West were excavated by the Harvard University–Museum of Fine Arts (Boston) Expedition under the direction of Professor George A. Reisner in 1924–28.

The expedition at Semna South hopes to find some information bearing on the question why this fortress was built on flat ground, less than a mile from Semna East and Semna West, which enjoyed the defensive advantage of having been built on granite rocks overlooking the Nile. A preliminary survey of the site made by Dr. Žabkar in January confirmed some unique features of the construction of Semna South, such as the unusually wide ditch around the walls and a second ditch surrounding the glacis as well as a stairway tunneled beneath the glacis toward the Nile. While the exact purpose and function of the fortress is uncertain,



Semna South, site of the proposed campaign in Nubia during 1966-68

its location and the nature of its structures could be interpreted as indicating that it was a dependency of the other two fortresses or even that it was a caravan base.

Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, christianized Nubians moved within the walls of the fortress and built some houses and a community church within the enclosure. A small Christian cemetery and a small apsidal church have been found outside the southern wall of the fortress.

To the north of the fortress is an extensive cemetery which contains burials of Meroitic and X-group cultures and, very likely, some burials of the New Kingdom.

It is anticipated that the excavation of Semna South and its surrounding cemeteries will add to the knowledge of the political and cultural interchange between Egyptian and African civilizations and that a study of the remains from the cemeteries will provide some information on the problem of the racial relationship between Meroitic and X-group people.