

The Semna South Project

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Those who in previous years have followed the reports on our work in Sudanese Nubia will be interested to know what has been and is being accomplished in the preparation of the publication of the expedition results. The more so since the issue of *Kush*, the Journal of the Sudan Antiquities Service, which contains a longer article describing the excavations at Semna South, has been delayed in coming out. On our last journey to Khartoum, in February, we were informed by the new Commissioner for Archaeology Sayed Nigm Ed Din Mohammed Sherif that the financial problems causing this delay have been satisfactorily solved and that both *Kush* XV and XVI will soon be out.

It will be remembered that the expedition excavated an Egyptian Twelfth Dynasty fortress, and a large Meroitic and X-Group cemetery adjacent to it. Consequently our research is concentrated in two areas of study: one deals with the pharaonic fortress and the finds connected with it, the other with the objects that came from the cemetery.

A description of the excavation conducted within the fort and in the quarry dump, which yielded a large collection of seal impressions, will be found in the forthcoming issue of *Kush* XVI. After the completion of our excavations in 1968, the writer has had an opportunity to return to the site of the excavations on two occasions to gather as

much information as could be obtained regarding the possibility of the existence of a dam built by the ancient Egyptians during the Twelfth Dynasty in the river basin delimited by the Semna South, Semna West, and Semna East fortresses. The excavations of the fort as well as the information gained from the study of the seal impressions will cast light on this much discussed problem.

On our last trip to Khartoum, we were able to continue the study of the expedition finds now housed in the new Sudan National Museum. And on our return we spent ten days in Cairo discussing some problems pertaining to the publication with Dr. Gerhard Haeny, the new director of the Schweizerisches Institut für Aegyptische Bauforschung und Altertumskunde in Kairo, who is preparing the final drawings of the fort and a description of some important architectural details.

The drawing of the seal impressions found in the quarry dump near the fortress is advancing systematically. One of our graduate students in Egyptology will continue this summer with the drawing of the sealings with the help of a camera copier. An archaeological photographer will photograph the sealings which are being drawn, and thus with the cooperation of these young scholars we hope to draw and photograph, if not all, certainly those most representative seal impressions which will figure in the publication.

The study of the seal impressions progresses parallel with their drawing. This study will contribute some new information about the administrative structure of the Second Cataract fortresses and of their relations with the First Cataract forts.

Thus far we were able to establish the name of the Semna South fortress which occurs on numerous sealings in connection with several departments of the fort. At the International Congress of Orientalists to be held in Paris in July, the writer will read a paper which will reveal a new administrative title occurring on many sealings, a title previously unknown from any other source.

As for the finds which came from the Meroitic and X-Group cemetery, we wish to mention that all of the complete pottery has been drawn by Mr. C. H. Joslin. With his well known precision and a sound artistic sense he was able to reproduce remarkably the naturalistic floral and animal motifs of a number of Meroitic vases which represent some of the rarest specimens of the Meroitic decorated pottery. The drawing of the metal vessels has also been completed, as well as that of the Roman ointment jar, together with a representative collection of beads and other smaller objects.

The Meroitic and the X-Group textiles, smaller specimens, are being studied in the research laboratory of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts under the guidance of its director Mr. William Young and his technical assistant Miss Florence Whitmore.

The human remains of the Meroitic and X-Group cemetery are the object of research directed by Dr. Charles Merbs in the Department of Anthropology of the University of Chicago; the main aspects of this research are briefly described in the article in *Kush* XVI.

This year we were able to organize a small team of our graduate students engaged in Egyptological and Meroitic studies to contribute to our project. With their help we hope to produce this summer the first draft of a manuscript which will incorporate the archaeological and anthropological grave-by-grave record of the cemetery and will include the description of the finds pertaining to each grave.

Some of the more important objects found in the quarry dump and the cemetery have been individually studied, and a brief summary of these studies is also to be found in *Kush* XVI. The Twelfth Dynasty copper axe found in the quarry dump and spectrochemically analyzed and preserved in the research laboratory of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Roman ointment jar, and several other objects are now on permanent exhibit in the new National Museum in Khartoum.

Furthermore, the fragmentary remains of a decorated garment found in a Meroitic grave, on which the image of the Meroitic god Apedemak is represented, served as a starting point for a monograph dealing with Apedemak, Lion-god of Meroe. The manuscript has now been completed and will shortly be in the hands of the publisher. In this manuscript a number of new facts pertaining to Meroitic religious and cultural history have been established; a portion of this manuscript will be read at the Meroitic conference to be held in connection with the International Congress in Paris in July.

We also wish to mention that two doctoral dissertations in the field of Meroitic studies are being written under our directorship, one of them based substantially and the other partly on the study of the Semna South expedition material.

The Sudanese Antiquities Service and the Ministry of Culture have repeatedly indicated their great interest in and appreciation of the work done by the Oriental Institute expeditions in the Sudan. Now they expect to see the publication of the results of these expeditions. We are doing our best to meet their expectation in a not too distant future.