

The Nubian Publication Project

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The Nubian publication project has had its ups and downs during the past year; in spite of limitations imposed on its director by eyesight problems, the work has gone forward and there has been time to think about its progress. Even more than usual I am indebted to the helpful advice of colleagues and the capable assistance of several volunteers. Mrs. Keith C. Seele has continued to be an enthusiastic and encouraging participant in the project, helping with the registration of photographs and in various other ways. Two volunteers from among the docents have contributed much to the cataloging and sorting out of artifacts recorded in the field register. Mrs. Ida DePencier and Mrs. Calla Burhoe have shown an intense interest in Nubia and have served as human computers in extracting and listing information from the field records.

Consultation with Miss Helene J. Kantor concerning publication procedures has resulted in a whole new approach to our publication. Instead of producing two or three volumes which would cover the scope of Nubian history from A-Group (contemporary with late pre-dynastic through Old Kingdom Egypt) to Christian times, we are proceeding with separate volumes on the various cultural periods, which probably means four or five somewhat smaller volumes. This will make the material more easily accessible to scholars who specialize by periods and will eliminate the necessity of their acquiring all of the books in order to obtain the sections treating their areas of concentration. This procedure will also make our publication correspond to the primary final excavation reports of other expeditions. With this emphasis in mind, increased vigor has been expended on the A-Group culture, with the expectation that the first volume will deal with that period.

Inevitable changes have taken place; we miss Mrs. Ursula Schneider in her role of photographer, but Miss Jean Grant has continued the photography on the same high level and this aspect of the work has moved along at a steady pace.

The washing of the Meroitic and X-Group textiles has gone slowly during the past year but the completion of that process is now in sight.

The cleaning was delayed for a number of weeks while the fine new conservation laboratory was being set up; with the equipment of that lab now installed, the textile conservation can be resumed. Mrs. Christa Mayer-Thurman will then proceed with the work of mounting the specimens and preparing them for exhibit or storage; she will also be engaged with the publication of the textiles, which may comprise a separate volume of the final publication. During the summer she had opportunity to visit Europe and to confer with Miss Ingrid Bergman, who is publishing the textiles found by the Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia.

If I have correctly evaluated it, we have in our museum a most interesting and important piece from the standpoint of the history of ancient Egyptian art: this A-Group object believed to have been a censer, with nicely incised relief, may be the earliest known example of true incised relief from the Nile Valley. The evidence for this conclusion was presented in a paper given at the annual meeting of the



Part of the scene on the decorated censer from A-Group Nubia, on exhibit in the Museum, showing the best preserved boat and the Thoth-baboon. This representation is probably the oldest known incised relief from the Nile Valley. Photo by Ursula Schneider

American Oriental Society at the University of California at Santa Barbara in April, 1974, and will probably appear in the form of an article in the journal of that society. After detailed study of this piece I am more than ever convinced of Mesopotamian influences in its representation, though the full import of this may not be immediately obvious. The object serves as a striking example of the importance of the Oriental Institute Nubian collection, which for its diversity and splendid exemplars from all periods must be one of the finest in America. Several other artifacts or types of objects also point to the significance of our A-Group material; these may be discussed in papers as the A-Group volume takes form.