

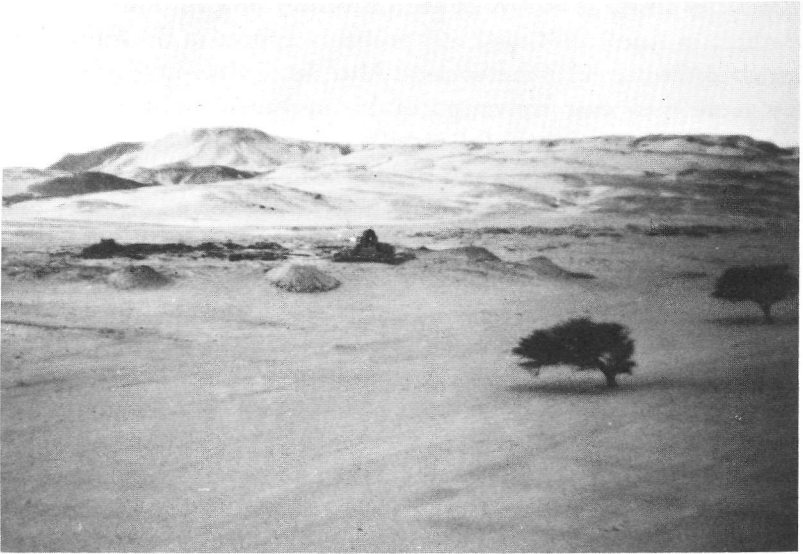
The Semna South Project

Louis V. Žabkar

For those who have never visited the area of southern Egypt and northern Sudan submerged by the waters of the new Assuan High Dam, and who perhaps find it difficult to visualize what the "lake" created by the new Dam looks like, we include in this report two photographs which show the drastic geographic change which occurred in a particular sector of the Nile Valley in the region of the Second Cataract.

Before the flooding one could see the Twelfth Dynasty fortress; and, next to it, at the right, an extensive predominantly Meroitic and X-Group cemetery; the characteristic landmark of Semna South, the "Kenissa," or "Church," with its domed roof, built later on within the walls of the pharaonic fortress; the massive mud-brick walls of the fortress; and four large dumps left by the excavators—all this can be seen in the photo taken at the end of our excavations in April, 1968.

On our visit there in April, 1971, the fortress was completely submerged, the mud-brick "Kenissa" with its dome having collapsed soon after the waters began pounding against its walls. One can see black spots in the midst of the waters off the center which are the stones on the top of the submerged outer wall of the fortress. The vast cemetery is completely under water. In the distance, to the north, one can clearly see the fortress of Semna West, the glaxis of which is also sub-



The area of Semna South included in our concession



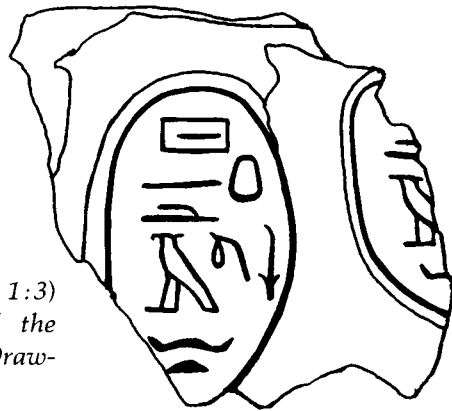
The Semna South concession submerged by the waters of the "lake "

merged, and the brick walls of which may soon collapse through the action of the risen waters. On the opposite side of the Nile, the Kumma fortress has also disappeared; soon after the waters covered the rocks on which the fortress stood, the mud-brick walls collapsed.

The finds brought home from this now fully vanished site are the object of our continued systematic study.

Thus far, the most representative seal impressions from the quarry-dump near the fortress have been drawn by Janice Yellin, doctoral candidate, with the help of the camera copier. Her work is now concentrated on copying the private seal impressions of various officials of the fortress.

The readers will recall that the study of the seal impressions revealed the hitherto unknown name of the Semna South fortress known to the ancient Egyptians as "The Subduer of the Setiu-Nubians." If there were any doubt about this identification of the most southern of the Second Cataract fortresses with which the damaged Ramesseum Onomasticon must have begun, that doubt has now been dispelled by the further study of the sealings: a considerable number of them, including some letter sealings, refer to the fortress at Semna South as "Southern fortress: The Subduer of the Setiu-Nubians."



Copy of a sealing (scale 1:3) which gives the name of the fortress at Semna South. Drawing by Janice Yellin

Once again it has been proved that such pieces of insignificant material value as these mud-sealings can be of a greater archeological and historical significance than the "treasures" of which some excavators dream, or used to dream.

Susan Doll and Eugene Welch, doctoral candidates, are continuing their work on the field notes of the expedition, in preparation for the publication tentatively scheduled for 1976. The study of the graves of the first season is now being completed, and the work on the field notes of the second season is in an advanced stage. A more detailed typology of Meroitic graves has been established which will serve as a pattern for the description of the excavation of the entire cemetery.

Through the kind cooperation of Mr. Gustavus Swift the sherds which we brought from the Sudan and which represent all cultures at Semna South (Egyptian Middle Kingdom, Meroitic, X-Group, and Christian) have been brought to our archeological laboratory, where they are now being studied and drawn by Mr. Dennis Bryson, a young archeologist who recently joined the team of young scholars working on the Semna South project.

The analysis of the textiles (Meroitic and X-Group) is being completed in the archeological laboratory of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and Ms. Joan Brandford of the Harvard Peabody Museum at the end of the summer will have finished her study of the weaving techniques of all the main types of the Meroitic and X-Group textiles represented in our excavation.

The large collection of Meroitic and X-Group human remains, which through the initiative and endeavor of Mrs. Joan J. Žabkar were brought to this country, are now at the Department of Anthropology of the State University of Arizona, where they are being studied by Mr. Charles Merbs and a small team of his graduate students.

Mr. E. Strouhal of the Museum of the Asian, African, and American cultures in Prague has had an opportunity during a brief visit to the U.S. to study some of the human remains from Semna South cemetery and has now completed a preliminary study on the racial aspects of these African populations. It is hoped that Mr. Strouhal will be able to return to this country and engage in further study of this problem, the results of which will be included in our publication.

As for the preliminary publications by the writer, a comprehensive article on the excavations at Semna South is to be found in Volume XVI of *Kush*, which, after a long delay, will soon be out. A longer article, a part of which discusses an important find from Semna South, will soon be published in *Aegypten und Kush*, Festschrift for

Prof. Dr. Fritz Hintze of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, one of the outstanding Meroitic scholars. A book *Apedemak, Lion-god of Meroe: A Study of the Egyptian-Meroitic Syncretism* is in press and will appear in early 1975. An article discussing a new Egyptian administrative title of the Second Cataract forts, as well as some geographic localities in ancient Nubia, which was read at the last meeting of the International Congress of Orientalists in Paris, July, 1973, will appear in the 1975 issue of the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*.

As so often happens, our project gradually expanded beyond the limits envisioned at the beginning. We had to enlist more scholars as collaborators, and provide new funds to finance their studies. The work on the project, however, is progressing systematically. We were able to engage the services of a group of young scholars, graduate students trained in Egyptology and Meroitic studies, whose experience can now be put to good use in this project as well as in future ones.

Again we wish to express our thanks to Sayed Nigm Ed Din Mohammed Sherif, commissioner for archeology, in Khartoum, who, with his well known kindness and scholarly competence has always been of great help to us on our yearly visits to various Sudanese sites and in our work in the new Sudanese National Museum.

With the collaboration of all these scholars we hope to produce an archeological memoir of the Semna South excavations which will adequately describe the importance of this vanished site and meet the expectations of the devoted friends of antiquity.