

# Quseir al-Qadim

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The Quseir al-Qadim Project was designed from the beginning as a series of excavations conducted every second year with the intervening years devoted to publication of preliminary reports. This year, therefore, was spent analyzing the immense amount of information obtained during the 1980 season of excavations. As a part of the research preparing the publication, and to plan for the 1982 fieldwork, a brief visit was made to Egypt in December-January. The primary purpose of this trip was to examine the part of the collections that remained in the Egyptian and Islamic Museums in Cairo as the Egyptian portion of the division. While these artifacts had been thoroughly recorded during the excavations, inevitably details needed to be checked, better photographs (particularly of the Islamic glass and Arabic letters) taken, and Cairo Museum accession numbers added to our lists.

It was, of course, impossible to be so close to Quseir and not make even a brief visit to the site. Lanny Bell generously provided the facilities to make this visit, and a small group of the staff of Chicago House accompanied us to the coast. We were somewhat concerned that, with the increasing number of campers and tourists (particularly from the popular Red Sea cruises) stopping by the ruins of Quseir and enjoying its beautiful bay, some damage or vandalism might have occurred. We were pleased to find no evidence of human disruption, but we were alarmed to find that recent heavy rainfall had washed in many trenches. Indeed, some trenches had standing water in them; this is the more surprising in a desert which has an official 4 mm. of rainfall per year. After paying calls on friends in the modern town, we traveled south down the coast as far as Mersa Alam, gaining an impression of the coastline with its numerous bays and drainage patterns (an area described by Karl Butzer in his *Desert and River in Nubia*).

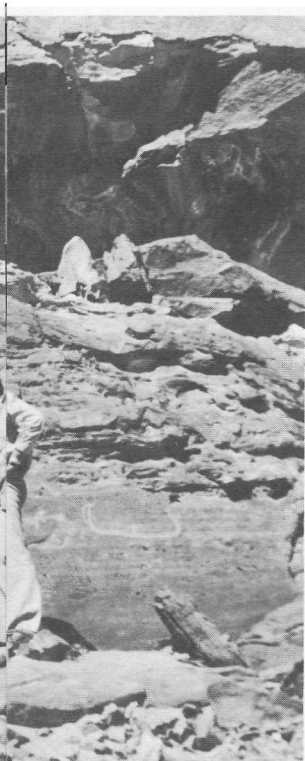
From Mersa Alam we headed inland toward Edfu, passing en route the New Kingdom temple of Seti at Redesiyah. Just inland from the Red Sea coast we noticed a cluster of ruins close by the

*A wall of the temple of Seti, depicting the king presenting an offering to Amun-Re*





side of the road; the layout and architecture of the rubble seemed strikingly familiar. This site proved to be the mining settlement of Sukkari, where gold was mined in the late Ptolemaic or early Roman period. The situation of the ruins was similar to the gold mines of Bir Kareim, which the Quseir Expedition investigated in 1980. The ceramics were identical with those at Bir Kareim and comparable to those from Quseir itself; the clusters of buildings contained numerous grinding stones and pounders as well as the quartz ores from which the gold was obtained. Lanny Bell noticed traces of gold in the sand, perhaps unconsciously considering the finances of Chicago House. The discovery of this mining settlement was for us extremely valuable in helping to understand and evaluate the settlement at Bir Kareim and the possible role ancient Quseir played in these mining enterprises. Before leaving Egypt we also visited the Fayum, where the great cities of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods provided further comparative material for Quseir. In the well-preserved remains of Karanis and Dime we found par-



*Rock carvings along the Edfu Road to Mersa Alam*

allels in construction techniques and ceramic and other artifacts (such as the "Theban mill" of which an example was found at Quseir in 1980).

As we prepare the second preliminary report of our excavations at Quseir al-Qadim, we are conscious of the need to establish a context for the remarkable range of materials which has been discovered in this small port. In both the Roman and Islamic periods Quseir was a peripheral settlement on the littoral of Egypt; its importance as an archeological site is first as a testimony to the great patterns of international trade and, secondly and ironically, as a clear delineation of Egyptian material culture for these two periods. Both of these aims will be pursued in the third season of excavations in 1982.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have so kindly volunteered of their time and interest to help us processing the materials from the 1980 season of excavations: Martha Bays, Lisette Ellis, Sally Zimmerman, and Jean Zuk.