

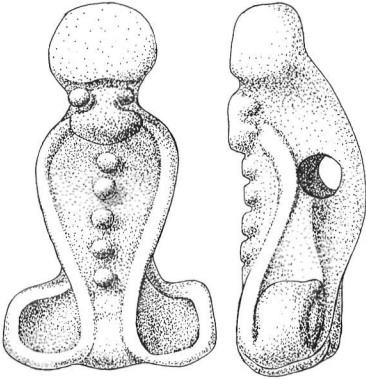


## Nubian Publication Project

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**I**n preparing the publication of the Nubian Expedition's work at Ballana, Qustul, and Adindan, the unexpected has become almost routine at every stage. Although every phase generally recognized in the area has been present, often in almost burdensome abundance and variety, every period or group of materials has been marked by some special aspect that requires a reevaluation of current opinion. We even have remains from periods when little or no settlement has been supposed to exist, such as the equivalent of the Archaic Period in Egypt, the later New Kingdom, and the Twenty-fifth Dynasty.

This year, we embarked on the study of the largest body of material, the Meroitic, and as fortune would have it, we came across evidence of yet another phase considered missing in the archaeology of Lower Nubia. It comes from the records of the Qustul Meroitic cemetery that preceded the great tumuli of X-Group times. There, we have been studying the distribution of objects and burial customs in the cemetery in order to transform the masses of tombs and objects into a series of archaeological groups and phases. Ironically, the most interesting of these groups was the poorest. It consisted of a large number of end-chamber tombs with coffins, shrouds, a few leaves, and occasionally a crude offering table, but no other deposit. This kind of



*As in Egypt, the uraeus-serpent was one of the most important images in Meroitic religious art. This remarkable green and yellow amulet was found on the surface of the Ballana Meroitic cemetery. It dates to the second or early third century A.D.*

burial is not characteristic of Lower Nubia, but it does occur far to the south, among the later burials in a cemetery near the Third Cataract that was used during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty and later. By their very nature, these burials did not contain evidence to link them closely to history, but they clearly preceded the well-known phases of the Meroitic occupation of Lower Nubia. The tomb structures also parallel those found in Ptolemaic cemeteries to the north. This newly found phase, extending from perhaps 100 B.C. to 100 A.D., covers an eventful period in the relations between Egypt and Nubia, and its failure to appear in the known archaeological materials had cast a shadow on the credibility of historical records that mention settlements in the area at this time. Its appearance in the Qustul cemetery will substantially reconcile regional history and archaeology in this period.

To obtain these results, the work of the project is largely concerned with the day-to-day tasks of preparing classifications, registers, and manuscript copy. But even in this routine process, aspects cut across the usual categorizations common in archaeological presentation to reveal exciting new relationships. This year, one of the most interesting problems concerned Nubia's most approachable product, the Meroitic painted pottery. Here, we were able to view the paintings not as a collection of unconnected borrowed motifs, but as two or three major coherent groups that contain meaningful, if not always translatable, expressions.

Approaching the completion of another draft manuscript is thus not just a matter of preparing lists and typing descriptions. It involves active exploration, making life in an office sometimes an authentic adventure. The exploration is also a reminder that no archaeological enterprise is complete until it is published.