



## Nubian Publication Project

### *Bruce B. Williams*

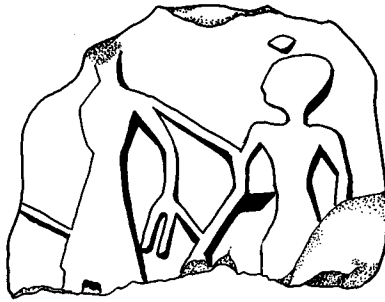
#### SERRA EAST

As we organized manuscripts and illustrations for the volumes of Qustul-Ballana material, work has begun on collections from the third of the Oriental Institute's five concessions in Nubia and the first in Sudan, Serra East. The concession was centered on the Middle Kingdom fortress, which became, in due course, a New Kingdom fort, and finally a Christian town. The area around was dotted with sites and cemeteries and these have much to tell about developments in local culture and relations with the Egyptian rulers.

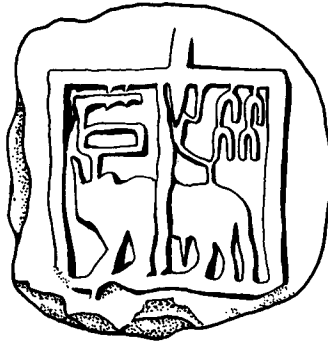
Long before the fortress was ever planned, the area nearby was occupied in the middle of the A-Group, about 3500 B.C.; about 2100 B.C., it was settled by the C-Group. These people left their characteristic circular stone burial tumuli and incised bowls (many published just last year in *Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition, Vol. 5, from Adindan*), but with additional features that indicate an early relationship with the developing culture of Kush at Kerma, far to the south.

This culture disappeared from the immediate area about 1900 B.C. and Serra Fort was built by the pharaohs of the Twelfth Dynasty to contain the activities of another people, who were commemorated in its name "Repelling the Medjay." Almost no burials or settlements of this people (conventionally called "Pan-Graves" by archaeologists) appear in the concession contemporary with the fortress' Middle Kingdom occupation, but the fortress itself contained a good deal of their pottery. After the fortress system fell from Egyptian control in the Second Intermediate Period, graves of Medjay-Pan Grave Culture appear nearby, small groups of five or six. Several of the tombs are exceptionally large and elaborate for this culture, and they may be precursors of an important series in the New Kingdom.

After New Kingdom Egypt extended its conquests southward again, the area just north of the Second Cataract was the seat of a series of client-rulers. Some we know by name, parentage, and career, for they erected large tombs elsewhere in the region whose inscriptions have partly survived. A series of four ruled at Serra, and they left huge tombs there. The first two were round tumuli, outsize versions of Nubian tumuli with brick chapels where only deposits of pottery vessels



*Seals from Serra Fortress under Kushite Rule (Second Intermediate Period, ca. 1700–1550 B.C.)*



*As Lower Nubia fell from Egyptian control during the Second Intermediate Period, the fortress garrisons came under the rule of Kush, a powerful kingdom in Nubia centered above the Third Cataract. This kingdom developed its own style in seals, of bold simple figures with few additional elements. The example above on the left shows a bound prisoner held by a soldier, a common subject on these seals. Drawings by Carlene Friedman.*

had been commonly placed before. These tumuli covered deep vertical shafts with multiple chambers, cut into the rock in typical Egyptian fashion. Instead of tumuli, the second two tombs were given solid rectangular structures with a small chamber and a chapel in front, structures that surely must have been the bases of pyramids. Erected in the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, these must be among the earliest pyramids erected away from the Egyptian capitals, and the presence of rock-cut tombs for the well-to-do in a wadi just below carries the pharaonic parallel further.

Documenting the vicissitudes of settlement and the local equivalence of tumulus and pyramid is an important part of preparing final reports on Serra East. Detailing the archaeology of the fortress itself is the next step.

This winter, we obtained the help of three students for a semester from the Art Institute of Chicago as a part of that institution's cooperative education program. The work of Carlene Friedman, Kristina Jones, and Demetrius Betinis substantially advanced the publication of the Serra East Cemeteries and it is gratefully acknowledged, along with the continuing work and support of the Art Institute's program coordinator, Susan Collister.

At this point it is also appropriate to acknowledge the indispensable contribution of student workers and volunteer-interns to the Meroitic and X-Group phase of the Qustul-Ballana publication. Artists Lisa Heidorn and Kathy Cruz-Uribe, photographers Carlos Cabasos and Jennifer Christiano, recording-assistant Karen Bradley, and archaeological interns John Robb and Patrick Zak. Stephanie Goldberg, a graduating Laboratory School senior, did her May Project sorting and repackaging sealings from Serra East.