

THE NUBIAN PUBLICATION PROJECT

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ARCHAEOLOGY

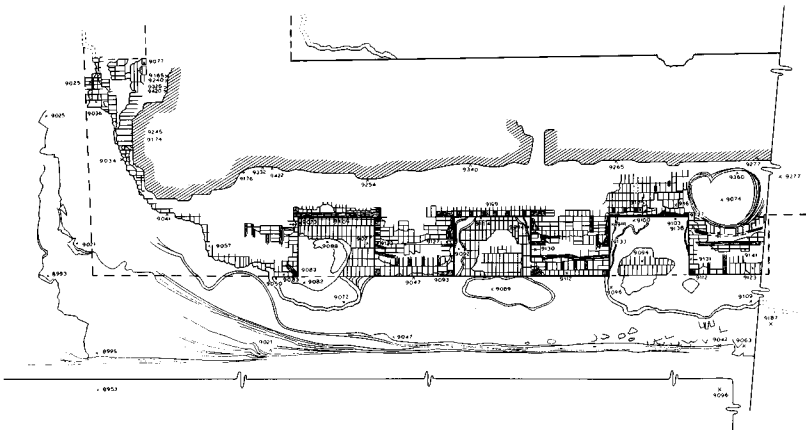
This year, attention was focused on developing the publication of Serra fortress. This installation was established in the late Twelfth Dynasty about 1850 B.C. by Pharaoh Senwosret III, to guard the east bank of the Nile from incursions by the desert-dwelling Medjay. This formidable people frequently served and just as frequently opposed the rulers of the Valley-centered states and principalities down to the present day. To secure his vulnerable southern boundary, Senwosret constructed and reconstructed a vast system of forts stretching from Faras West in the north (the modern Egypto-Sudanese boundary) to Semna, covering about a hundred kilometers of river. The Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition worked at fortresses at either end of the chain, Semna South and Serra East. Although not one of the largest of the chain, the fortress of Serra, whose name was "Repelling the Medjay," played an active role in frontier defense, for a dispatch sent by one of its officers recorded in a unique collection of six "contact reports" tells of tracking a body of 30 Medjay (a significant force) at the desert edge. The fort itself presented a valuable opportunity to study the most important aspect of Egyptian engineering, mud-brick construction. Its walls were preserved to a considerable height, and, unlike

most of the expeditions operating in Nubia, the first season's architect and second season's director, James Knudstad, had spent many years excavating and recording the mud-brick architecture of Mesopotamia. He was able to dissect and record a complex combination of bricks, beams, poles, and mats, that was used to make a structure capable of resisting an organized and well-equipped opponent.

In fact, so much timber was used in the construction that it must have strained available supplies in a wood-starved country. A few photographs from older publications indicate that the same methods were used at other fortresses, but the details were not made clear; it may be that Knudstad's work will have to provide the record of construction technique for the entire Sudan frontier.

With a few interesting exceptions, the internal structures of the fort were demolished almost to the ground, leaving only the bare plan behind. The entire center of the fort was occupied by a broad rectangular ditch. Dominating the fort, this feature has remained to puzzle the excavators and mystify everyone who has looked at the record since. The ditch was lined with mud-brick and faced with stones revetted at a steep angle. Originally, the excavators thought this was a harbor, but there is no outlet to the river. Curiously, the facing resembles no structures as much as the stone-lined ditches that surround the fortresses themselves. The possibility of paradox and contradiction may be dispelled by noting that the structures nearest the basin were obliterated and the fact that images from this period in Nubia often stress the taking of prisoners (see *Oriental Institute Annual Report 1984-1985*, p. 45). A detention area, presumably walled, would certainly fit with the known records.

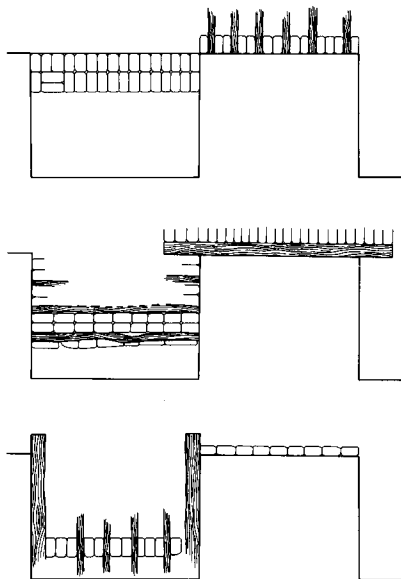
The dispatches mentioned above tell about the routine garrison and patrol activities of the forts and their personnel -- Egyptian cadre and Nubian (Medjay) soldiers. The occupants left other records in hundreds of seal impressions that were made regularly on documents, containers, and



Plan of wood and brick construction of Serra Fortress (southwest corner)

the bolts of doors. The completion of a drawing program of these seals by Carol Abraczinskas represents a milestone in the progress of the project. Apart from a few seals from documents sent by the Pharaoh, the vizier, or a neighboring fortress *Ink-Tawy* (Faras?), most of the sealings belonged to the fort itself, its granary, and the treasury "of the two northern fortresses." Mostly placed on door-bolts, these were often counterstamped with the personal seal of an official. Most of these have designs of types that occur in other forts; some are identical and may represent the transfer of personnel. Inscribed personal seals name mostly an official called the "Retainer," the *smsw*, the very type of officials responsible for the reports we have.

All of the work preliminary to publication was completed this year on *OINE* VIII and IX, which deal with Meroitic and X-Group remains. *OINE* VII, on the Napatan material, was published. All efforts are now directed toward completing *OINE* VI, on New Kingdom remains from Qustul and Adindan, *OINE* X, on funerary remains from Serra East, and *OINE* XI, on Serra fortress.



Detail of wood and brick construction depicted in Figure 1, divided by levels.