

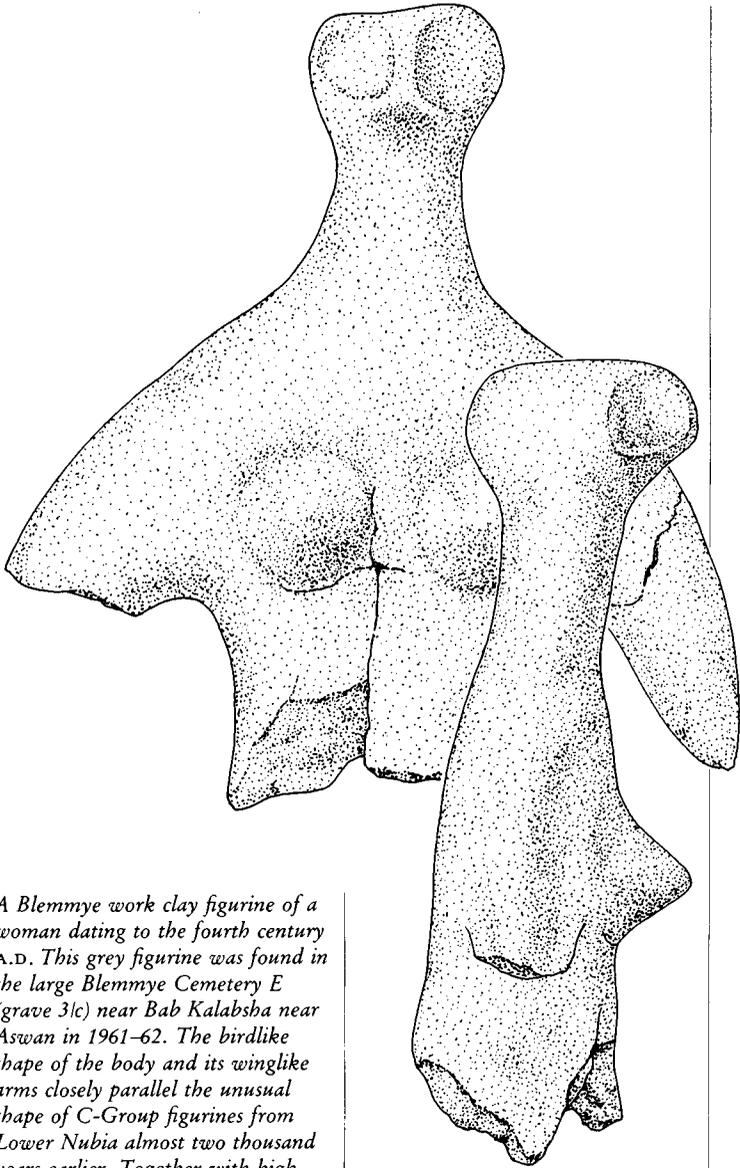
Nubian Publication Project

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One of the major problems and opportunities facing the Nubian Publication Project has been that of relating the materials found during Prof. Keith Seele's salvage operations in the 1960s to those previously known. How will the data now being prepared for publication affect what has been believed about the peoples who occupied ancient Nubia and their relations with those in other regions? As before, the project has been dealing with two of the most important aspects of archaeology in Nubia. The first of these is its episodic nature. Long temporal gaps separate major known phases of occupation in each major region. Secondly, in some of the periods, two or more identifiable archaeological groups or cultures are known to have co-existed in the area simultaneously, although at other times cultural differences are not so easily detectable. In these two regards, the archaeological materials of Lower Nubia are not well understood—in the sense that we understand

such relatively unified archaeologies as those of Egypt. There, large cultural groups occupied much the same territories for millennia without major interruption and left us intimately interlocked bodies of characteristic documents and artifacts which we can recognize as signatures of their culture.

Because of the distinctive nature of many goods from Nubia, assigning most contexts to one or the other of the major phases is not especially difficult. Distinguishing one tradition from another within some phases, and discerning subphases that would clarify relations among the various traditions are, on the other hand, much more complex tasks. Fortunately, a technique for distinguishing chronological phases and cultural traditions, based on changes in distinctive traits in cemeteries, has been introduced in a study of the C-Group, Pan Grave and Kerma cultures (between about 2250 and 1550 B.C.). Some of the distinctions noted in that study can be extended well into the New



A Blemmye work clay figurine of a woman dating to the fourth century A.D. This grey figurine was found in the large Blemmye Cemetery E (grave 3/c) near Bab Kalabsha near Aswan in 1961–62. The birdlike shape of the body and its winglike arms closely parallel the unusual shape of C-Group figurines from Lower Nubia almost two thousand years earlier. Together with high stone circles erected around major Blemmye tombs in the area, this figurine is one of the major links between these two widely spaced periods and it helps to form a major thread of continuity in the archaeol-

ogy of Nubia. Though mentioned in the report, this figure has never been published. (Drawings by Kathryn Cruz-Urbe)

Kingdom. For later phases, however, we are hampered by the episodic nature of archaeological chronology in Nubia.

Apparent hiatuses have been partly due to sharp fluctuations in the ancient population, reflecting Nubia's difficult environment and sometimes tumultuous history. However, they are also due to our strong dependence on burial goods for the archaeology of the area. Phases during which large numbers of easily identified goods were deposited are easily detected, but those in which few or undistinguished goods accompanied the dead could even be missed altogether. For example, most burials of the later New Kingdom have far fewer objects and pottery vessels than were deposited with their counterparts of the early Eighteenth Dynasty, and few sites in Lower Nubia have been assigned dates in this period. However, based partly on evidence excavated by the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition, enough sites can be assigned to this age to close part of the long gap. A second, perhaps even more meaningful, occupation has

emerged to fill part of an empty period, again thanks to evidence found among materials excavated by the Oriental Institute at Qustul. This occupation took place during the great Twenty-fifth Dynasty, when Kushite pharaohs ruled both Nubia and Egypt, and the early Napatan period just afterward (ca. 730 to 600 B.C.). Despite the importance of the period, little if any evidence of settlement had been recognized from Lower Nubia. With our data, it now has been possible to identify other coeval remains among those excavated some time ago. It now seems clear that there was a fairly substantial occupation at the time near the Second Cataract. Thus evidence derived from the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition's rescue effort has helped in the last year to reduce a long chronological gap in the settlement of Lower Nubia.

Lower Nubia was resettled under the control of the Meroitic empire about 100 A.D., and it became the most prosperous part of the kingdom. About 350 A.D., the Meroitic province was taken over by peoples from the des-

erts who radically changed the material culture and defended paganism in Upper Egypt until their conversion to Christianity in the sixth century. Reflecting continued doubt about the origins and unity of the culture, this period is still usually referred to as X-Group.

With the help of a two-year grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded this spring, the Nubian Publication Project has begun intensive work on remains of these later periods from Ballana, Qustul and Adindan, the largest bodies of material excavated by the Oriental Institute in Nubia. Since Ballana and Qustul were the sites of the major royal cemeteries of X-Group times, the large concentrations of Meroitic and X-Group remains there offer special opportunities for a detailed study of the relations between these phases.

Despite the large amount of material known from both periods, major archaeological and historical questions remain to be answered. First is the question of whether the Meroitic inhabitants of Lower Nubia were primarily from the Meroitic heartland,

or whether they belonged originally to some other group and came under Meroitic influence after settling in the valley. Second, we need to know whether the change between Meroitic and X-Group cultural assemblages is relatively sudden or gradual; if the latter, it could help reinforce the belief that the X-Group did not involve a major replacement of population. Finally, it is still unclear whether different cultural traditions can be identified in the Meroitic and X-Group, or whether instead the material culture was unified in both.

For the end product of this phase of the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition's publications, we are hoping to distinguish the different peoples active in late antique Nubia and to link the cultures and traditions of the various phases into coherent sequences. It is hoped that these sequences will help us better understand the development of the traditions, and allow scholars to probe the links between Egypt and the Mediterranean world and peoples to the south in a more meaningful and precise manner.