

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE NUBIAN EXPEDITION (OINE)

Bruce Williams

Introduction

After a lapse of many years, 2011–2012 saw the restart of the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition publication project with the expressed goal of completing publication of excavations at Serra East, Dorginarti in northern Sudanese Nubia, and Qasr el-Wizz in southern Egyptian Nubia, all excavated between 1961 and 1965 as a part of the High Dam salvage. During the Twelfth International Conference of Nubian Studies in London, September 2010, Artur Obluski of Poland and Alexandros Tsakos of Greece approached me to inquire about the state of publication of Qasr el-Wizz. At the same time, a faculty member at Universität Köln approached Lisa Heidorn about presenting a study of Dorginarti Fortress at a conference in Germany. Finally, in early 2011, while excavating at Tombos in Sudan with Stuart Smith's team from University of California Santa Barbara and Purdue University, I asked Nadejda Reshetnikova, our architect from Moscow, to join the new team to publish Serra East and Dorginarti with a goal of modernizing the publications. Artur and Alexandros were given the responsibility of preparing the publication of Qasr El-Wizz and have begun their work, as told below. Lisa and I were able to assemble a team to publish Serra East and Dorginarti that currently includes Nadejda, Donald Whitcomb, and Carol Meyer of the Oriental Institute, and Deborah Darnell of Yale as well as Alexandros Tsakos. By the end of 2011, the project took shape in four parts, with various interlocking teams to complete them.

For many years before we restarted the project, real research in the collections and records was hardly possible. The museum and archives had been closed for renovation in the 1990s, and the combination of reinstalling the museum, re-housing the artifacts in storage, and housing and organizing the archives took years of time and effort. However, as these things proceeded, many artifacts were registered and their locations recorded, most often with informal digital photographs. The museum archivist and his staff scanned negatives, photographs, field notes of all descriptions, and plans at all stages of completion, making an immense body of data available for organization and research. In 2011, John Sanders made about 100 gigabytes of server space available and, with the help of several volunteers, we built libraries of compacted scanned images and records organized to serve as the primary focus of research on each part of the project.

Projects have expenses and require compensated professional services, so we have so far submitted four grant applications to support the work on Serra East and Dorginarti. Two were awarded this June, one from the Michela Schiff-Giorgini Foundation and the other from the Antiquities Endowment Fund of the American Research Center in Egypt. These significant grants will play an essential role in preparing the publications of Serra East and Dorginarti.

Artur obtained support from the Foundation for Polish Science, and Alexandros Tsakos received two grants from the Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, Norway, to travel to Chicago in 2011 and to Egypt in 2012, which is planned for November. Together, the grants here, in Poland, and in Norway will support launching the project in earnest and help it make important progress.

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The three teams expect ultimately to produce four volumes in the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition series, but there is now an added dimension. We usually refer to major volumes on excavations as final reports, and, where the materials and records are not accessible, they often are. However, vast amounts of objects ranging from sherds to pieces of architecture are housed in the Oriental Institute, and this creates the opportunities for restudy. For example, Dr. Joanna Then-Obluska is now in Chicago examining the vast corpus of beads excavated in Nubia, which have been published but not in detail or in color. While small in size and rarely the focus of much attention, beads actually reveal much about manufacturing and trade, especially in Africa, where they were among the most important trade goods for many centuries.

Serra East

Nadejda Reshetnikova, Alexandros Tsakos, and Bruce Williams

Fortress "Repelling the Medjay"

The fortress of Serra East was built by Senwosret III in the late Twelfth Dynasty, about 1850 BC, intended, according to its name, Khesef-Medjay or Repelling the Medjay, to keep at bay peoples from the Eastern Desert. It continued in active service as an Egyptian fort for rather

more than a century when it was taken over by Kushites and other Nubians, perhaps not peacefully. They may have continued in residence there into the early New Kingdom, because rulers subject to the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty left monuments and buildings also.

As the project took shape in 2011 and 2012 without budget, the major activities centered on scanning and organizing documents and putting them on a server, so they could be accessed anywhere the Internet reaches by members of the team. A key part of this has been digitizing all the plans and architectural sketches originally made by James Knudstad to archival standard, then reducing them for actual use in research. We also entered all of the survey data into spreadsheets to begin the process of conversion from a system of angles and distances to one of Cartesian coordinates.

A major piece of unfinished business at Serra East is a detailed presentation of its architecture, and the grant from the Michela Schiff-Giorgini Foundation is allocated entirely to the structures of Serra East Fortress. The full project had to wait for some budget, but during the year Nadejda and Bruce com-

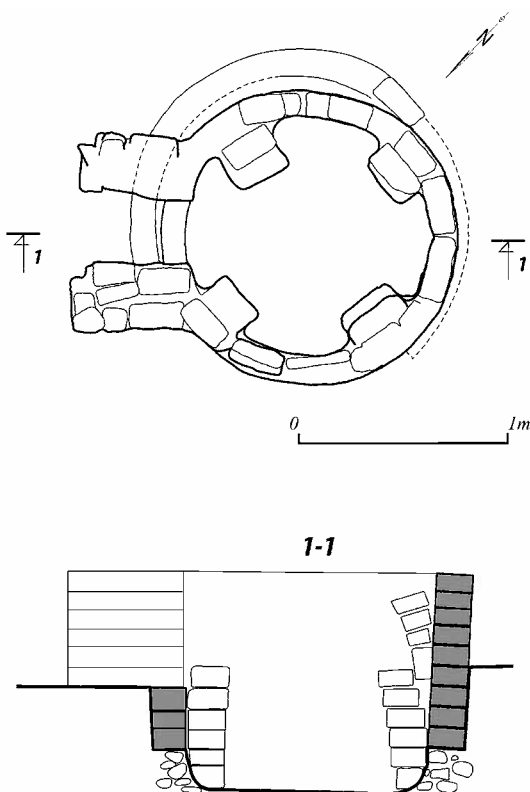


Figure 1. The southern kiln at Serra East showing the V-shaped design that helped to control the flow of gasses and to support the vessels being fired. Drawing by Nadejda Reshetnikova

pleted a pilot project to study a small but significant part of the installation, as a contribution to a conference on Egyptian ceramics in Vienna as well as the Serra Fortress volume. After the fort had been in use for some time, potters set up a workshop almost in its center. The expedition found kilns, but reconstruction was tentative. Our new study shows two phases, each with two kilns, a box kiln, most probably for firing conical bread molds, and larger circular kilns with firing chambers in the shape of inverted cones (figs. 1–2). The shape is well known in Egyptian representations, but is not often recognized in remains

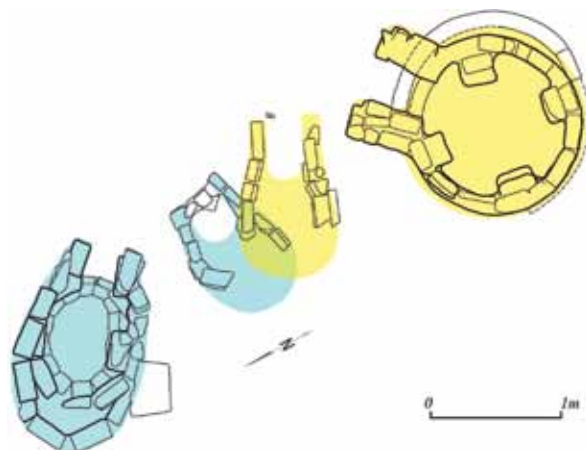


Figure 2. The kilns of Serra East, with the early pair colored in blue, and the later in yellow. Drawing by Nadejda Reshetnikova

of workshops because most kilns are not preserved to much height. Nevertheless, two variants, one X-shaped with a constriction where a grid separates the firebox from the firing chamber, and one simply V-shaped, were present at Serra, designs which improve the flow of hot gasses around the vessels and thus the efficiency of the process in an environment where fuel could be scarce.

The work of organizing the photographs and records according to contexts otherwise occupied much of the year, but one major effort was to transcribe a thick stack of pottery tally sheets for incorporation into a table in the final report. Such tables can be fearsomely difficult reading, but they nevertheless contain information on chronology and the activities that took place in various places that makes them most valuable to researchers. This has taken on new importance, since archaeologists are now beginning to explore two fortresses that remained above water when the Aswan High Dam was built but which were untouched since excavation by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston early in the last century.

Cerre Matto, the Medieval Town

The great kingdom of Makuria, which arose at Old Dongola well before AD 600, acquired its northern province Nobatia with its capital at Faras by the beginning of the century and this city was not only the site of a great cathedral, but also the residence of a ruler subject to Makuria, called an eparch. Some time in the eleventh century, the Nobatians founded a town across the river, nestled into the ruins of Serra Fort, and called it Cerre Matto, which means Serra East in the Old Nubian language. Although they did not rebuild the fortifications, they seem to have adapted them and filled the fort with strong, thick-walled houses that defended not just against raiders from the desert (probably mostly Bedja) but the formidable enemies of wind and heat. These houses were even equipped with indoor privies, small rooms on the second floor with a chamber below that had an opening to the outside for cleaning out, and pottery toilets. They also had foundation deposits below the corners whose mysteries have yet to be unraveled (a deposit could be a bowl with some kind of food, a magical text, or even unfired pottery of high quality). The town had four churches, one to the north (fig. 3), one in the center (fig. 4), and two to the south. Around the southern churches was a churchyard with many dozens of tombs and burials.

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Figure 3. The North Church at Cerra Matto, with Prof. Ronald and Mrs. Vivian Williams of Toronto, who participated in the 1961-1962 season of the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition at Serra East

The town itself, with its solid houses, decorated churches, walls, and burials, is deeply fascinating and it deserves, and will get, a separate study, but there is much, much more. For example, shortly before the end of excavations there, the Nubian Expedition discovered a codex that had been buried below a house. This turned out to be the longest text in Old Nubian, a sermon on the cross attributed pseudo-epigraphically to John Chrysostom. Under the direction of Hughes and Knudstad, the expedition had found a number of other, more

fragmentary manuscripts. But that is not all. Over the decades before the excavation, enterprising looters had gone through the ruins and potted about, finding a number of manuscripts and documents that made Serra East famous. One, for example, British Library Or. 6799, is another sermon on the cross attributed falsely to Cyril of Jerusalem. It names the town Serra as the place of its deposition in the middle of the eleventh century. Two more Old Nubian texts, one in the British Library, the other in the Egyptian Museum at Berlin, are also attributed to Serra, and there appear to be more. When we add to that the stela of the multi-titled Eparch Philoxenos (among his many titles, he was also a nauarch, which is Greek for admiral) from Serra now on display in the Oriental



Figure 5. Pottery sherds in the Oriental Institute Museum with unique images from the Christian period. Above is the crown of an eparch, with cross, horns, and plume. Below, a horse shown galloping in the leaping Dongolowi style also has a cross on its head. OIM E19545 and E19530



Figure 4. Christ in Majesty from the apse of the Central Church. Drawing by J. C. Lorence

Institute Museum (OIM E19780), we get a better picture of a town that contained prosperous houses, with sophisticated sanitation and pottery production. Serra was the apparent seat of an eparch (fig. 5) where important religious and probably other documents were deposited, but most probably also made. The puzzle of literacy in Cerre Matto will be very much helped by the decipherment and interpretation of the several ostraca discovered during the excavations.

The town of Cerre Matto ended about the time of Saladin's attack on Nubia in AD 1173, and the inhabitants seemed to have left, taking what they could and burying the rest, such as the manuscripts to be found later. In the end, they never returned to live there, and the writings they left behind remained to eloquently enlighten our own day.

Dorginarti

Lisa Heidorn

I was quite surprised, after so many years concentrating on other work, to receive an invitation to make Dorginarti one of the centerpieces of an international conference in Cologne on *The Power of Walls: Fortifications in Ancient Northeastern Africa*, in August 2011. The interest in this Second Cataract fortification from the first half of the first millennium BC was aroused when the African Research Unit at the University of Cologne discovered a previously unknown fort, Gala Abu Ahmed, in the Wadi Howar, a desert route located west of the Great Bend of the Nile and south of the Kerma Basin above the Third Cataract.

Pottery, objects, and architectural features from Dorginarti mirrored some of the remains from Gala Abu Ahmed. Of particular interest for the Cologne team, as well as for myself, is the background of the handmade pottery that is common at both Dorginarti and Gala Abu Ahmed and seems to be present at all Nubian sites with remains from the period of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty and its aftermath in Nubia, the Napatan period (700–400 BC). The article resulting from the conference, however, focuses on the architecture and topography of Dorginarti (fig. 6) and will be published later in 2012.

The site of Dorginarti was excavated in 1964 by an Oriental Institute team led by James Knudstad. Most of the small objects and the pottery from the fortress were given to the Oriental Institute Museum, where it is currently housed. Initially, due to the uncertainty of dating late New Kingdom and Third Intermediate pottery and small objects (fig. 7), the fort was variously dated to the Middle Kingdom (by its architecture) or to the late New Kingdom (by the pottery, which is clearly



Figure 6. The east sector of Dorginarti Fortress, showing three of the granaries. Up to five meters across, these granaries could have contained enough grain to feed a force much larger than the garrison

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Figure 7. Three views of a blue faience ring from Dorginarti (OIM E24325). The epithet “Two Lands, Lord of the Sky” is present but the name of the deity invoked on the ring is broken away

different from that of the preceding periods). But over the last twenty years great strides have been made in the dating of post-New Kingdom pottery. Unfortunately, however, independent dating evidence, like inscriptional materials or the *terminus post quem* offered by scarabs with kings’ names, is almost nonexistent. My earlier research found parallels for the Dorginarti material through Egyptian pottery typically dated to the Twenty-fifth or Twenty-sixth Dynasties.

After I completed my dissertation in 1992, I went on to other places and other work, and the site report was never published. Finding myself living in the Chicago region again, Bruce Williams and I set up a “potsherd viewing” schedule on Friday afternoons at the Museum, starting in early 2011. The Museum staff has been particularly helpful in facilitating this work.

We have now gone through every box of potsherds, which has allowed us to study (a re-study for me) the forms, manufacturing technology, and variety of clay fabrics of the corpus. Bruce was interested in learning about Dorginarti’s ceramics because of his current work at Tombos, where they are excavating Kushite-period tombs. The pottery will now be registered, while I draw more sherds and study the rest of the architectural notes and objects in preparation for the final publication in the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition series as volume 13.

I attended another conference at the University of Vienna in May of this year, which was particularly opportune, since it focused on current best practices in working with and publishing ceramic remains from sites throughout Egypt and Sudan. This five-day marathon was entitled Vienna 2: Ancient Egyptian Ceramics in the 21st Century and, since all the experts were gathered in one place, it was a great time to meet up with old and new friends to discuss the origins and use of various clay fabric types, chronological issues, and to visit restaurants and wineries in the Danube’s Wachau Valley!

One of my next tasks is to share materials with colleagues working in Upper Egypt (Elephantine and Luxor) and Sudan (Gala Abu Ahmed and Meroe) to sort out ceramic typologies and dating. Those of us working in Nubia formed a working group in Vienna and plan to meet again at the British Museum in summer 2013. It is hoped that future work further clarifies

the relationship of similarly dated sites in Egypt and Sudan and allows us to further define economic and political relationships between the two regions during the first millennium BC.

Qasr el-Wizz

Artur Obluski and Alexandros Tsakos

The story of the final publication of the Qasr el-Wizz project starts metaphorically with a “Plough.” That is the name of the pub where two Nubiologists approached Bruce Williams during the 12th International Conference for Nubian Studies in London in 2010, and with an “Abbot” in hand asked Bruce if there is any chance to study the monastery of Qasr el-Wizz excavated by the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition in 1965. Since London, things have advanced really fast and as a Christmas gift Artur received a letter from Gil Stein granting him the authorization to lead a project that would see to the final publication of the Qasr el-Wizz excavations. The research team would consist of Artur Obluski, Poland, who took responsibility for the general study and publication of the archaeological record as collected by the excavators, as well as the role of the head of the whole project, and Alexandros Tsakos, Greece, who wished to study the textual finds from Qasr el-Wizz.

Artur has decided to apply a holistic approach to the project and to collect all available data on the Qasr el-Wizz monastery. This meant that the research for the publication could not be limited to the study of only the possessions of the Oriental Institute. Rather, this should contain all available data including the nineteenth- and twentieth-century travelers’ notes and records, as well as any other activities on the site. Such an approach required of course study at the archives of the Griffith Institute (GI) and of the Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford, travel to Rome to work in the Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte, where Ugo Monneret de Villard’s archive is stored, and to be granted access to the Egypt Exploration Society’s (EES) premises in London, where notes and records of the society’s Nubian Survey carried out by Harry Smith are being kept. We are certain that this is the only right way to prepare the publication of the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition of the University of Chicago.

In the past year, Artur received a grant from De Brzezie Lanckoronski Foundation, which allowed him to study the archives of the Egypt Exploration Society and of the University of Oxford. That research took place in March 2012. At the EES premises in London, Artur studied Harry Smith’s records from the EES Nubian Survey. The information they contained complements the work of the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition. Harry Smith excavated what may be considered a monastic cemetery and buildings next to it which were not a focal point of Scanlon’s expedition. Thus Artur Obluski applied to the EES, and via the EES to Harry Smith, for permission to include Smith’s work in the final publication of Qasr el-Wizz. Recently, a very warm and encouraging letter from Harry Smith has arrived stating his permission. Thus we hope that the EES will support the excavator’s decision.

At the Griffith Institute in Oxford, Artur Obluski worked on notes regarding Qasr el-Wizz and other Nubian monasteries left by several scholars such as the founder of the institute himself, Sommers Clarke, Geoffrey Mileham, or — quite unexpectedly — even some notes by Ugo Monneret de Villard. Being in Oxford, Artur could not miss the opportunity to go through the manuscripts by Sir John Gardiner Wilkinson, the “Father of British Egyptology,” which included a short note that may refer to Qasr el-Wizz along with some drawings regarding other Nubian sites that have never been taken in consideration before.

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Figure 8. Qasr el-Wizz excavation team in action discovering wall paintings in the monastic church



Figure 9. Jar bearing a monogram of ΜΙΧΑΗΛ, the most common name in Qasr el-Wizz texts (OIM E42028)

Alexandros has also received two grants (from the Institute for Comparative Studies of Cultures, Norway) to travel to the localities where the textual finds from Qasr el-Wizz are kept. The first grant was used to visit Chicago in September 2011 and the second will hopefully bring Alexandros to Cairo and Aswan, where he will complete the documentation regarding the material that was left in Egypt after the completion of the fieldwork by the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition.

In fact, the visit to Chicago in September 2011 by Alexandros and Artur was the real beginning of the project. We were greeted with a warm welcome by the Oriental Institute Museum staff. Their efforts, especially those of Helen McDonald and Laura D'Alessandro, allowed us to work efficiently during this three-week visit. We even managed to expand the documentation of certain artifacts by making infrared and ultra-violet photos of ostraca as well as of the fragments of wall paintings (fig. 8). Moreover, Miller Prosser of the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project, to whom we are much indebted, prepared polynomial texture maps of worn-off grave stelae enhancing Alexandros' efforts to read and decipher them.

The most intriguing information from the collection of data during this first study visit to Chicago has come from the manuscript fragments that were unearthed at Qasr el-Wizz. They confirm the multilingual character of Christian Nubian literacy given the identification of texts in Coptic (the vast majority), Greek (four fragments of religious texts), and Old Nubian (two documents, most probably letters). The closed context of the monastery at Qasr el-Wizz provides an excellent ground for the improvement of paleographic and codicological datings of Nubian manuscripts in general. Last but not least, their content has already started revealing very interesting aspects of the religious life in Christian Nubia, such as preferences for particular cults (fig. 9), doctrinal preference, monastic affiliations, and the symbolic value of languages.

The implementation of the project is possible thanks to a financial contribution by the Foundation for Polish Science. In the frame of a *nota bene* "Columbus" program, the Foundation sponsored Artur Obluski's current stay in Chicago, where he has the unique opportunity to study the artifacts and records from Qasr el-Wizz in the hospitable premises of the Oriental Institute.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I wish to express my gratitude to Gil Stein for the chance of a lifetime to come here to study the Nubian material and savor the world top-ten academic environment, and to Bruce Williams, without whom the project would never have started and who is still its greatest facilitator. I would also like to thank Chris Naunton, director of the Egypt Exploration Society (EES), and Dr. Joanna Kyffin, who kindly allowed me to study notes and records of the EES Nubian Survey carried out by Harry Smith. I also wish to acknowledge the help provided by Alison Hobby from the Griffith Institute, University of Oxford. I am also indebted to Francesca Zannoni from the Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte in Rome for her hospitality, and Dr. Maria Carmela Gatto from Yale University for facilitating my research there. I would like to express my very great appreciation to Professors Harry Smith and George Scanlon for permission to work on their records and their warm words of encouragement. My special thanks are extended to Professor Włodzimierz Godlewski from the University of Warsaw, who provided the project with important pieces of lost documentation of the OINE excavation at Qasr el-Wizz. Work at the Griffith Institute and the Egypt Exploration Society would not be possible without financial support of the Foundation de Brzezcie Lanckoronski.

“The Unregarded Art” and “Sense of Order” – A Multidimensional Study of Lower Nubian Beads from the Oriental Institute Collection

Joanna Then-Obluska

Nubian beads have never been treated as an autonomous research subject. A study in this matter, entitled “The Code of the Hidden Beads – From the Kerma to the Islamic Period According to the Fourth Cataract Material from the Gdańsk Archaeological Museum Excavations,” was presented by the author during the 12th International Conference for Nubian Studies in London, in August 2010. The paper has revealed a huge research potential hidden in this component of Nubian material culture. A number of scholars excavating in Sudan and Egypt expressed their willingness to cooperate in this effort. The main objective of the project is creating a vast catalog of Lower Nubian beads and decoding the data hidden in them.

Lower Nubia has always been perceived as a junction of many cultures. This phenomenon is clearly visible in the wealth of materials and techniques employed in production of



Figure 10. Parts of the Meroitic necklace B 66A-3 a-d (OIM E22548 A-D). Modern stringing; not to scale

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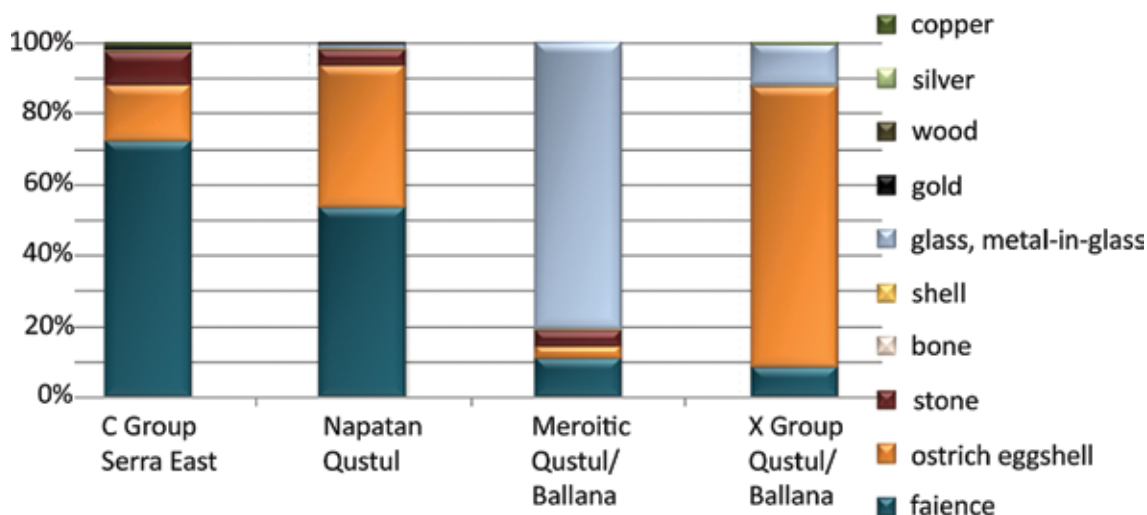


Figure 11. Percentage share of bead materials from the Lower Nubian sites dated to C-Group, Napatan, Meroitic, and X-Group periods

beads, objects that are, next to pottery, the most abundant archaeological find. The Oriental Institute collection of Nubian beads in this study comes from the excavations carried in years 1960–1968 at the sites Adindan, Dorginarti, Bab Kalabsha, Qustul, Ballana, and Serra East and represents material dated from A-Group period until Christian times. The majority of beads were registered and published in Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition series as volumes 2–10.

Since April 2012, I have recorded more than 50,000 beads in a comprehensive database, with general and detailed photographs. At the same time, I analyzed the beads using anthropological and chronological data published by Bruce Williams. In figure 10 there are parts of bead necklace (B 66A-3 a–d), found with a juvenile female individual buried at Ballana cemetery in grave B 66A. The grave was dated to the Meroitic late IIB phase (end of the first century AD; Williams 1991, part 1, pp. 131–32; part 2, p. 195). Small beads were made of drawn and segmented monochrome glass and gold-in-glass as well as carnelian, drilled from one end. It seems they were part of the adornments commonly worn by women in that particular time.

Detailed materials and quantitative analyses of the Oriental Institute’s beads, the largest collection of Lower Nubian beads outside Sudan and Egypt, will contribute to our understanding of social and economic changes in Lower Nubia. The general graph (fig. 11) shows a declining share of faience beads over time, an overwhelming share of glass and gold-in-glass beads in the Meroitic, and of ostrich eggshell beads in the X-Group assemblage.

For comprehensive study many analyses that employ knowledge from other disciplines – anthropology, ethnoarchaeology, history, history of art, decorative art, iconography – will be provided. A preliminary study of Nubian iconography and design art – royal and funerary iconography, gold jewelry, clay figures, and most of all painted pottery – suggests that a simple string of beads was a characteristic motif in Meroitic art.

This is the first attempt at scientific elaboration of this usually “unregarded” category of archaeological material carried out on such a large scale. The cataloging of thousands of beads and multidimensional approach should result in broadening our understanding of both the visual representation as well as the social and economic differentiation of Nubian communities during a period of 4,000 years.

Acknowledgments

Bruce Williams

At such an early stage in the project, it is remarkable how many people have given substantial help. From the Oriental Institute administrative staff, we have benefitted greatly from help by John Sanders, Steve Camp, D'Ann Condes, Mariana Perlinac, and Amy Weber. Helen McDonald, Susan Allison, and John Larson of the Museum have been especially helpful, sometimes with time-consuming tasks. The CAMEL lab has been generous with both equipment and time, advising on technical matters and even spending hours scanning large-format plans; thanks go to Scott Branting, Susan Penacho, Elise MacArthur, and Sami Sweis. In the Publications Office, Tom Urban and Leslie Schramer offered advice, support, and the use of equipment, as did Miller Prosser of the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project. Of very special note are the volunteers who have offered their services, coordinated by Terry Friedman and Catherine Dueñas. Irene Glasner, Gabriele Correa DaSilva, Larry Lissak, Nancy Rose, and Roberta Buchanan have spent many hours scanning, sorting files by context, and transcribing and entering data. None of their tasks have been easy, and some have required very long hours. Without the help of these people, our task would have been very much harder indeed.

Note

¹ Gombrich 1979, p. 116.

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