

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE NUBIAN EXPEDITION (OINE)

**Bruce Williams with Katarzyna Danys-Lasek, Lisa Heidorn,
Artur Obluski, Joanna Then-Obluska, Nadejda Reshetnikova,
Alexandros Tsakos, and Dobrochna Zielińska**

Last year, we reported on the revival of the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition publication project with four specific publication objectives: the Middle Kingdom fortress of Serra East (1850–1750 BC), the Napatan-period fortress-town of Dorginarti (720–550 BC), the Early and Classic Christian monastery of Qasr el-Wizz (AD 550–900), and the Late Christian-period town at Cerre Matto (Serra East, AD 1000–1200). There are other pieces being worked on elsewhere, but these tasks make up the major part of the work left outstanding from the great 1960s rescue. With five concessions in two countries and a couple dozen sites, depending on how you count them, this was the largest institutional campaign in Nubia, and it is no surprise that publication requires a major commitment from the participants and will span many volumes. It may come as a surprise to some, however, when they read here the assertion that there is no such thing as a final report. Standards of publication change, as do costs, which in some areas actually go down — making another surprise — and the Internet has revolutionized our opportunities for delivering data. So, this year, we added a fifth objective. For over a year Joanna Then-Obluska has been systematically studying and photographing the beads from the OINE with spectacular results that have inspired us to incorporate her work as volumes in the series. With by far the largest truly archaeological collection on this continent (and possibly any continent) from the 1960s rescue, and the superb curatorial work that has been devoted to it, the Oriental Institute offers a unique opportunity to update, expand, and correct our older publications.

Dorginarti and Serra East

With the award of a grant from the Shelby White and Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publications, we have completed the major part of fund-raising needed to provide services for the project, primarily drafting, architecture, and photography. Work on Serra fortress has been supported by the Michela Schiff Giorgini Foundation, while the White-Levy grant will be joined with a grant awarded last year by the American Research Center in Egypt/Antiquities Endowment Fund to support work on Dorginarti and Cerre Matto. Using these resources, the architect Nadejda Reshetnikova has been joined on the project staff by Carol Meyer and Natasha Ayers, artists, and Elise MacArthur, photographer.

One other task affected both operations. The Sudan National Museum in Khartoum was assigned the objects retained by Sudan during the rescue. Documentation of these in the field was limited, so we had somehow to go there to see what we could find, draw, and photograph. Fortunately, Prof. Stuart Tyson Smith of the University of California Santa Barbara led a field season to Tumbos at the Third Cataract in Sudan with Bruce Williams as a participant, and the architect for the operation (and for OINE), Nadejda Reshetnikova, agreed to travel with Bruce to Khartoum two weeks early for a brief “study season.” Although Nadejda and Bruce

were not able to find many of the objects — some were never registered — they found the ones most critical to the current publication effort, including a remarkable early Christian sculpted door jamb. Earlier, Alexandros Tsakos paid a study visit to the museum, and, after considerable research, he found a number of documents that came from the Christian town of Cerre Matto. The project owes thanks to many in the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan, but especially Director General Dr. Abdelrahman Ali and National Museum Director Dr. Ghalia Gar el-Nabi.

Dorginarti

In addition to working on the pottery fabrics, the ceramic material from the fortress, and the architectural details, Lisa Heidorn studied the pottery fragments that indicate metallurgical activities were taking place during the main Level III and IV activities at the fort. Most of the fragments are crucibles, some with thick deposits on their interiors (fig. 1). There are also remains of various types of slag, tuyeres (fig. 2), and pottery equipment used in melting or smelting processes. It is of great interest, therefore, to study a sample of the Dorginarti crucibles and their interior deposits to analyze the crucible fabric and the interior deposits.

Correspondence with Drs. Edgar Pusch and Thilo Rehren, both of University College London, has led to an interest in their testing some of the crucibles and the most heavily slagged deposits, cutting thin sections to analyze the materials. The issues to be addressed by such testing will establish the nature of the metalworking at the site and the relationship of this small-time metallurgical concern with earlier, contemporary, and later industries in Egypt, Nubia, and the Near East.

The Middle Kingdom Fortress at Serra East (Khesef-Medjay)

The major effort in the publication of Serra East this year has been architecture, reconstructing the survey by James E. Knudstad based on his theodolite data by converting angles and distances to coordinates, then using these to construct a new plan. All published plans for the Nubian forts, as well as other large structures in the ancient world, are summary, leaving



Figure 1. Fragment of a crucible from Dorginarti showing layers of deposit on the interior, from locus D 119 (1)



Figure 2. Fragments of tuyeres from Dorginarti locus D 218 (1). These tubular clay objects would have been attached to pot bellows to force air into a fire

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out details in favor of presenting a pleasing and easy-to-understand picture of a building. An archaeologist who is trying to understand how a building was built, used, repaired, and even reused needs more than that, and text descriptions alone do not solve the problem. For Serra, we have adopted a presentation approach that involves a very large-scale printed plan — over a meter in length — that shows every detail Jim Knudstad so lovingly put on his survey pages so long ago. A second plan the same size will add his explanatory notes and elevations.

Our efforts began with the coordinate conversion, a fairly arduous task undertaken by a devoted volunteer, Lawrence Lissak, as-

sisted by Bruce Williams. The second part, even larger, has been the creation of a new plan using Jim Knudstad's wonderful survey pages, done entirely by Nadejda Reshetnikova, architect for the OINE publication of Serra East and Dorginarti. The draft plan, built in AutoCAD and Adobe Illustrator, is largely finished, and will soon be transferred to a final base plan with annotations. Since the entire plan is vectorized, the online Adobe portable document format (PDF) versions will be scalable by the user in ways not possible for print versions.

A second major effort this year has been a review of the seal impressions. In recent years, the Oriental Institute expedition to Tell Edfu has acquired major experience dealing with late Middle Kingdom sealings and this circumstance provided an invaluable opportunity to cross-check the old identifications, drawings, and classifications. Susan Penacho and Kathryn Bandy have kindly undertaken this work for some months, making a very substantial contribution. In addition, Elise MacArthur is making color photographs of key pieces, which will greatly enhance the publication (fig. 3).

The Late Christian Town of Cerre Matto (Serra East)

We will begin direct preparation of a manuscript for the Christian period at Serra East by the fall. In the meantime, certain events have established an essential foundation, especially in funding. The visit to Khartoum made truly major pieces available for publication. The most important of these is a large sandstone doorjamb of the early Christian period (Khartoum National Museum 14350) found at Serra East north, which was probably intended for use as spolia (reused decorated block) in one of the churches (fig. 4). It now has three panels, originally more, each depicting what is probably a phoenix, wings spread, with a cross on or above its head, which is turned to the side. In front of each bird is a tripod supporting a conical vessel, possibly an incense burner. Adopted as a symbol of Christ and the resurrection, the phoenix appears in Christian art in the Mediterranean, including Egypt as well as Nubia. We have later fragments of phoenix reliefs, actually pierced, from Serra itself and datable to the town, and the motif of the phoenix with wings spread is a significant feature of Christian Nubian art.

Alexandros Tsakos' work in Khartoum recovered manuscripts found at Cerre Matto but registered from Attiri, a site farther upstream. Clarifying the origin of these manuscripts



Figure 3. Seal 137 from Quarry Dump II at Serra East. It shows two impressions made by a scarab-seal carved with two ankh-signs flanking opposed Red Crowns on the nub-sign (gold)

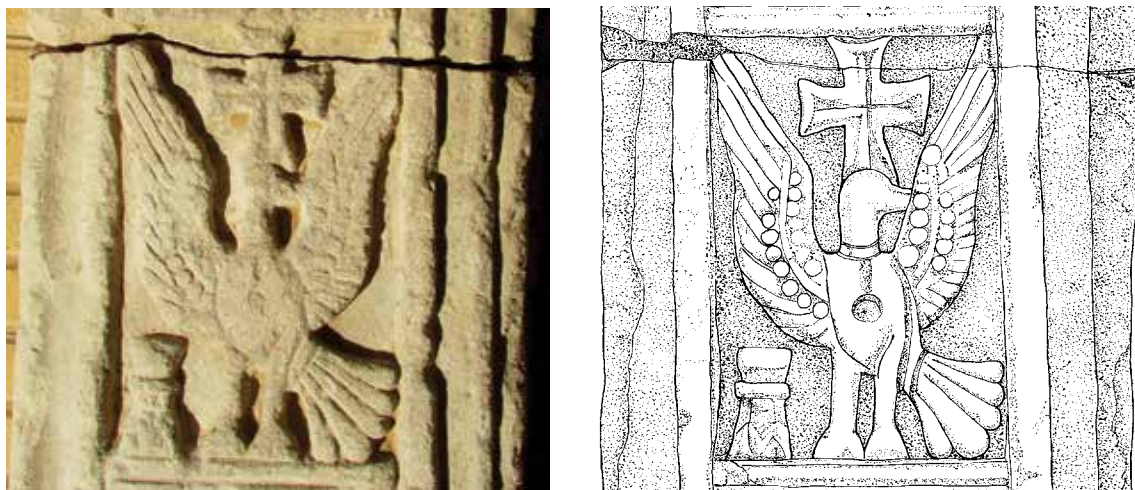


Figure 4. Photograph and drawing of the central panel from the Serra East doorjamb carved with a phoenix in relief in front of a tripod, possibly with an incense burner. The jamb is now in the Khartoum National Museum, Sudan (drawing by Nadejda Reshetnikova)

will not only enhance the OINE publication of a site that was famous for its manuscripts, but the Khartoum museum’s collection.

The architectural work on the building of Serra Fortress has also helped this phase, for important features of the town were reused from the fortress phase and some Christian buildings and features had to be planned because Jim Knudstad used them in his measurements, so we will begin this aspect at a more advanced stage. We have also begun the drawing and

photography — arduous work, but a most essential part of any archaeological report. This is particularly true in Christian-period Nubia, where so much of the pottery had painted decoration that could mix Christian, Byzantine, and African elements, even in the same design (fig. 5).

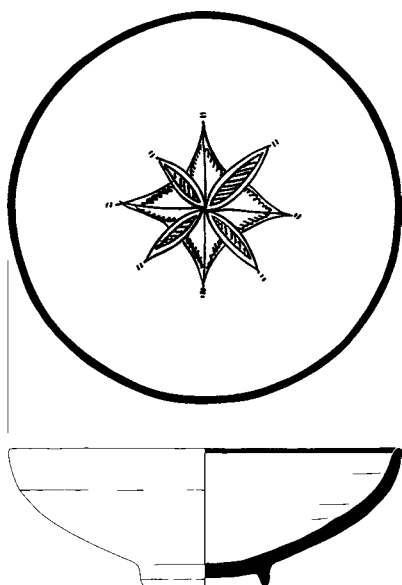


Figure 5. Drawing of bowl OIM 24776 from the late Christian period at Serra East. The bowl, of a fine, deep orange (red) pottery, was decorated with black paint. It was part of a foundation deposit under a house (drawing by Carol Meyer)

Qasr el-Wizz

The year 2012 brought reinforcements to studies on records and artifacts from the Oriental Institute’s excavations at Qasr el-Wizz monastery. Artur Obluski and Alexandros Tsakos were joined by Dobrochna Zielińska (wall paintings) and Katarzyna Danys-Lasek (pottery) in their efforts to publish remains of the sole excavated monastery in Nubia. It allowed expanding analysis to wall paintings and pottery recovered by Harry Smith and George Scanlon in 1961 and 1965 respectively. In the first half of the year, studies on archaeological material recovered from Qasr el-Wizz focused on cemeteries and digital tracing of tomb’s drawings. A preliminary version of the section of the volume on Wizz cemeteries has been produced, including their detailed description and information on

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the artifacts found at the site. It includes a separate chapter on funerary customs at Qasr el-Wizz from the perspective of Christian tradition in Nubia and in other regions of Christian koine in the Mediterranean (fig. 6). The preliminary version also contains some new observations on the distribution of Nubian cemeteries and on possible sources of inspiration for various types of tomb superstructure. While the first seem to derive from certain biblical narratives, which Artur Obluski discusses in a forthcoming work, tomb superstructures seem to be patterned on sacred architecture. Finally, there will be discussions of burials in churches and pilgrimage in medieval Christian Nubia.

The team also started working on the artifacts that were found in the monastery. The dossiers of documentation from the Egypt Exploration Society and the Coptic Museum in Cairo have been compiled and spurred research on the textual finds from Wizz. The identifications of several texts found in the monastery have been improved thanks to photos taken in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. The majority of the preserved texts from Qasr el-Wizz is of literary character. Text 65-11-105 is the only documentary text in Coptic from Wizz. It seems to be a list of the possessions of the monastery, and it can be dated to around the eighth century AD.

Wall paintings in the monastery were preserved very fragmentarily. Both the few fragments of paintings found in situ and the numerous fragments of plaster that were found in the debris were investigated according to their

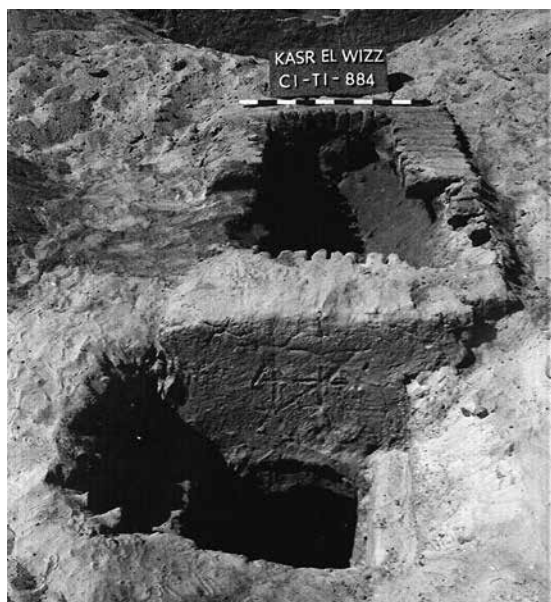


Figure 6. An eight-pointed star used as an apotropaic symbol on a tomb superstructure at Qasr el-Wizz



Figure 7. Floral decoration from the synthronon in the apse of the church at Qasr el-Wizz



Figure 8. Doorway in a monk's cell at Qasr el-Wizz with reconstructed painted decoration

location. On the basis of the analysis of the photos, we will learn more about the decoration of the monastic church, refectory, and gallery. One can find patterns of a highly original character — ones so far not found in other examples of the Nubian wall painting — such as the floral decoration of the *synthronon* (fig. 7). On the other hand, the paintings/compositions in the western part of the church are very close to examples of paintings from the nearby Paulos Cathedral in Faras, showing both a style and iconography typical for the eighth century. The painted decoration in the block of monks' cells includes two examples where the doorway was decorated with shapes that resemble horns bent downward (fig. 8). It could be interpreted as symbolic *akroterion*. Such elements appear also in the decoration on funerary stelae in Nubia and in painted decoration in the niches in the Faras Cathedral.

This year also brought commencement of the studies of about 3,000 pottery sherds and small finds. The vast ceramic assemblage spans a period of almost one thousand years and can be dated between the fourth and thirteenth centuries AD. Some finds may mark the foundation of the monastery (sixth/seventh–eighth centuries; fig. 9). The better part of the collected material was produced between the ninth and the eleventh centuries and is richly painted with splendid decoration (fig. 7). Then there is a decline in the number of pottery finds that may also mark the changes taking place in the monastery (twelfth–beginning of

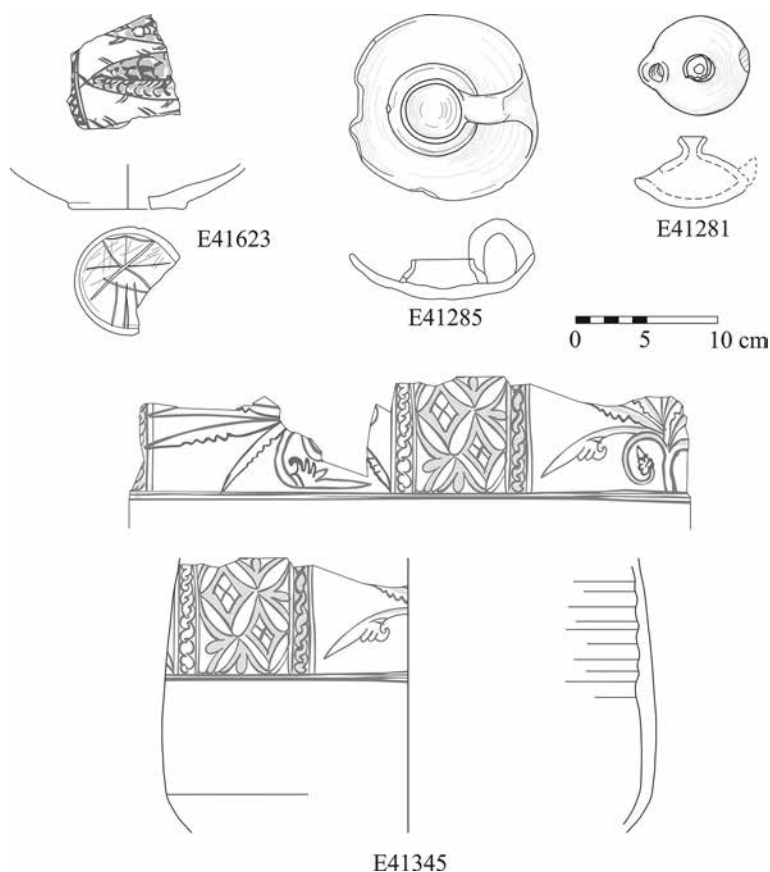


Figure 9. Selected pottery vessels from Qasr el-Wizz monastery: E41623, a plate (eleventh–twelfth centuries AD); E41345, a vase (twelfth century AD); E41285 and E41281, lamps (sixth and seventh centuries AD) (drawings by Katarzyna Danys-Lasek)

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thirteenth century). The pottery collected from the site sheds some light on the movement of bulk goods in the Nile valley. There are objects from workshops all along the Nile valley, from Mareotis, through Fayum, Middle Egypt, Faras, and upriver as far as the kingdom of Alwa (Alodia).

The project has been promoted on three different occasions: in a lecture during the annual General Meeting of the Norwegian Archaeological Society, where the Shenoutian character of the monastery was highlighted on the basis of manuscripts 65-10-62 and 65-11-120 in the Coptic Museum, Cairo; in a contribution to the panel on Old Nubian at the Nilo-Saharan Linguistics Colloquium, where the Nubian linguistic identity of the author of the texts preserved in manuscripts 65-10-59 and 65-11-99 was demonstrated; and in a seminar at the University of Warsaw's Institute of Archaeology.

The implementation of the project so far was possible thanks to the grants from the Foundation for Polish Science, Poland, and the Institute of Comparative Cultural Research in Oslo, Norway. If we find a funding source, mortar, plaster and pigment analyses of the pieces of wall painting collected by Keith Seele and George Scanlon and radiocarbon dating of organic material found in the graves associated with the earliest phase of occupation at the site are scheduled for the next year. They are of crucial importance not only for the history of the site but also for the history of Christianization of Nubia since Qasr el-Wizz church seems to be one of the earliest churches in Nubia, and archaeometric analyses can provide decisive body of evidence.

An Interdisciplinary Study of Beads from the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition

The main objective of the bead publication project is to create a vast, high-quality illustrated corpus of beads found in the Lower Nubia by the OINE. Since April 2012 more than 100,000 beads, covering the period from roughly 3500 BC to AD 1900, have been photographed and recorded in a comprehensive database. Results of interdisciplinary analysis will be published in two separate volumes of Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition series. So far, the preliminary outcome is very promising: Nubian beads seem to reflect the age and gender of individuals, their social status, ethnic and religious identity, as well as ritual behavior. Last but not least, they tell stories of short-distance and overseas trade contacts, whether transit or terminal in character. On the other hand, beads from the OINE collection have already proved to be excellent chronological indicators that can be used in studies on the North-East Africa and its relations with the Indo-Pacific region.
