

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE NUBIAN EXPEDITION (OINE) PUBLICATION PROJECT

**Bruce B. Williams, Lisa Heidorn, Alexandros Tsakos,
and Joanna Then-Obłuska**

Introduction. *Bruce Williams*

This year, the publication project largely shifted its emphasis from assembling teams, raising resources, and research to the preparation of manuscripts, which entails research as much as before. All parts of the project have made strides toward publication, but not all have news. In one remarkable event, the Oriental Institute received permission from the United States government to take a long-term renewable loan of antiquities from its work as part of the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project in the Fourth Cataract during 2007 and 2008. In January, I presented a contract from the University of Chicago to Dr. Abd el-Rahman Ali Mohamed, the director general of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, which he readily signed. In early March, I retrieved a lorry load of boxes of antiquities from the Khalifa House Museum with the kind help of the curator, Mrs. Sabah el-Sirag and her staff (see *News & Notes* 219, pp. 8–9 with fig. 5). A few weeks later, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Abd el-Rahman and our inspector from the field, Dr. Mahmud Suleiman el-Beshir, thirty-six metal boxes of antiquities and samples weighing 776 kilograms arrived in Chicago, a most unusual event in these times. Last September, I visited Jim Knudstad and Rosa in Cornwall to talk about the dig and he kindly arranged to have over 300 of his excellent personal slides from the period scanned. Unfaded, these slides not only enhance the publication of Serra East (fig. 1) and Dorginarti, they vividly document a Nubia that is now lost (fig. 2).



Figure 1. View inside Serra East town during excavation from the southeast with a train entering the enclosure from the north (photo: James E. Knudstad)



Figure 2. View of an Ottoman period fortification in the Second Cataract. Forts and fortified houses were common in the Second and Third Cataract areas between 1500 and 1820 because this region was an active frontier area between the Funj and Ottoman empires (photo: James E. Knudstad)

Dorginarti. Lisa Heidorn

The excavation at Dorginarti lasted for five and a half months in 1964. It was a huge undertaking made only slightly easier because the flood swept center on its west had no remains (fig. 3). To fully excavate this site would have entailed a multi-year project. Under the direction of James E. Knudstad, the supervisor of the excavation from January to April was Richard H. Pierce. When the project was extended beyond its allotted time, James Knudstad and a team of archaeologists kept working until the rising waters, behind the Aswan High Dam, caused the work to halt on June 8.

The extent of the site measured approximately 160 × 65 meters maximum, requiring between 52 and 130 workmen for every day of excavation. The external walls of the 33 × 33 meter Level II citadel atop the bedrock heights in the Central Sector were left unexcavated, but the lower official residences were centered in the middle of the later citadel walls and could be cleared. The test pits excavated below the Level IV residence found no earlier levels, and came upon a sterile sand foundation layer.

The circuit of the fortified enclosure was fully traced and its glacis construction explored, and a huge amount of clearance along the north and south walls around and within the fort's circumference was accomplished. A coherent plan for the lower level of structures, which went under at least one of fort's main walls, was not obtained due to the time constraints.

Clearance of the Central Sector remains had taken precedence at the beginning of the excavation, but attention was soon directed at the debris-covered surface of the West Sec-

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tor (fig. 4). The ruins were only preserved along the north and south walls and consisted of thin-walled houses, official buildings, silos, and ovens, all indicating a constant state of flux, because of sporadic occupation or the frequent arrivals of troop replacements. Like any small village in use over time, earlier walls were reused or dismantled, areas blocked off with short partitions, and any space available was fixed to suit the needs of the soldiers, support staff, and their families.

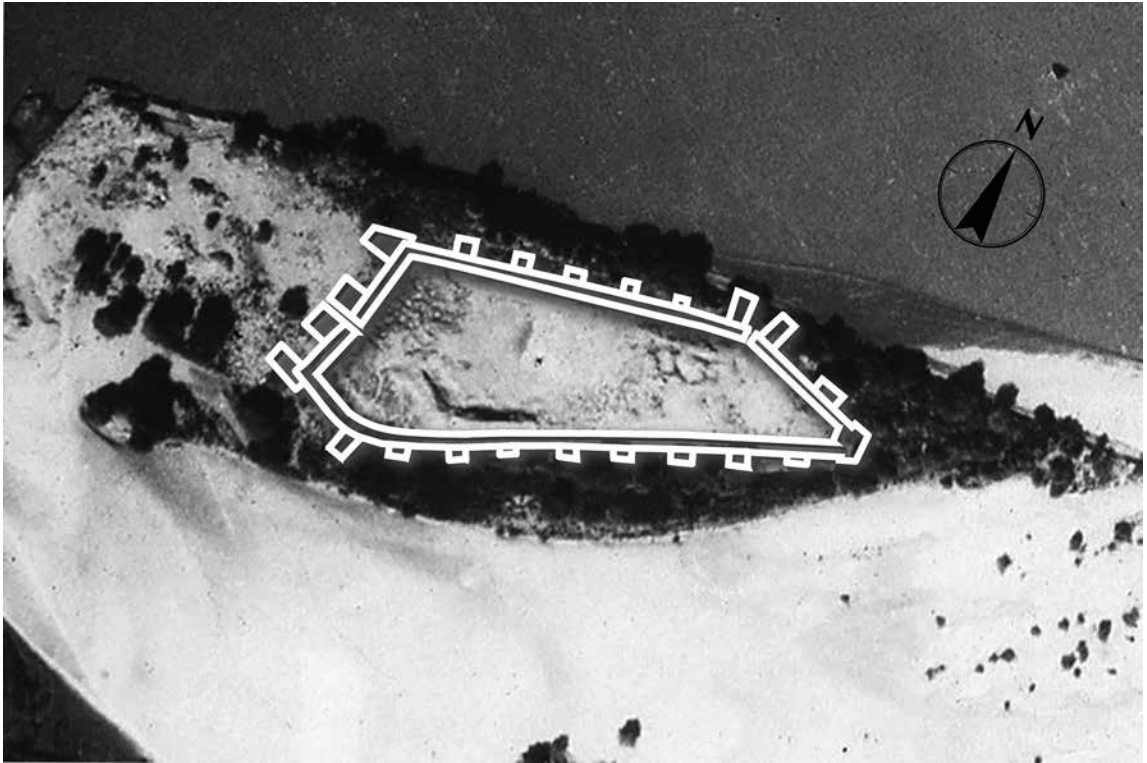


Figure 3. Aerial view of Dorginarti before excavation with the fortress wall outlined



Figure 4. View of the West Sector of the fort from the southwest, Central Sector in the background with the height of Abd el-Qadir in the distance. Panorama from photographs by James E. Knudstad



Figure 5. View of the northwest corner buildings of Level III from the south (photo: James E. Knudstad)



Figure 6. Detail of northwest corner housing in Level III, with some Level IV walls. Preliminary plan by Nadejda Reshetnikova

The deterioration of the enclosure walls of the fortress from floodwaters also brought about changes. The thick relining added to the interior of the main walls covered over houses beneath it and walls to the south were then reconfigured to make new accommodations.

The buildings shown in the final plan were a maze of informal, often improvised, buildings and the remnants of crooked lanes (fig. 5). The rooms of the houses and workrooms measured at most no more than 3–4 meters per side and there were usually no more than two rooms per house (fig. 6).

The use of brick support pilasters along the interior of the thin walls was common, and walls were typically placed on a sand surface or an earlier wall. Staircases were uncommon

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and appear only in public areas. Large silos 4 meters in circumference characterize a later Level III phase, showing the importance of a large amount of grain storage for personnel working in the desert and along the river for whoever controlled the trade and traffic at the Second Cataract.

The northern half of the Level III settlement encompassed residential buildings and domestic space, interspersed unevenly with small ovens, bins, and hearths. Many wheelmade sherds of Egyptian storage, food preparation, and eating vessels were found here, along with numerous handmade bread plates for baking dough, and Nubian handmade pottery for eating and cooking (fig. 7). The bread plates were often found around silos and ovens. Grinding stones and pounders were also frequent and represent other common activities in the residential areas. A number of stone net weights attest to fishing activity, and the stone arrowheads distributed thinly throughout the fort indicate the presence of archers.

The southern part of the West Sector accommodated small workrooms, large silos, bins, ovens, a few possible houses, and two larger buildings that were clearly official in nature. Unfortunately, objects that might indicate their function were not common in the buildings along the southern wall, and the preservation was especially poor along the southern wall of the fortress.

The pottery assemblage throughout all levels dates to sometime within the eighth century BC, though none of the published parallels from Nubia or Egypt are well dated by independent epigraphic materials. The pottery from the royal tombs of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty at Napata and the private cemetery at Sanam tombs were sometimes dated by associated royal names, and there are some similarities to Dorginarti pots. But the fort has none of the latest eighth and seventh centuries BC Upper Egyptian marl jar types, produced around Thebes, found in the royal tombs. The historical context of the site, that is, who built, maintained, and manned the fort remains uncertain.

The current work is focused on editing and finalizing the plans produced by our talented architect, Nadejda Reshetnikova, one of whose illustrations is shown here. Reviewing the plans as they arrive has provided an opportunity to verify the phasing of the site and the architectural details. As the publication of OINE 14 draws near, the operation of finalizing its details is heartening. After such a long time waiting, the important finds from Dorginarti will shed light on a period of history and a region that is still poorly known.

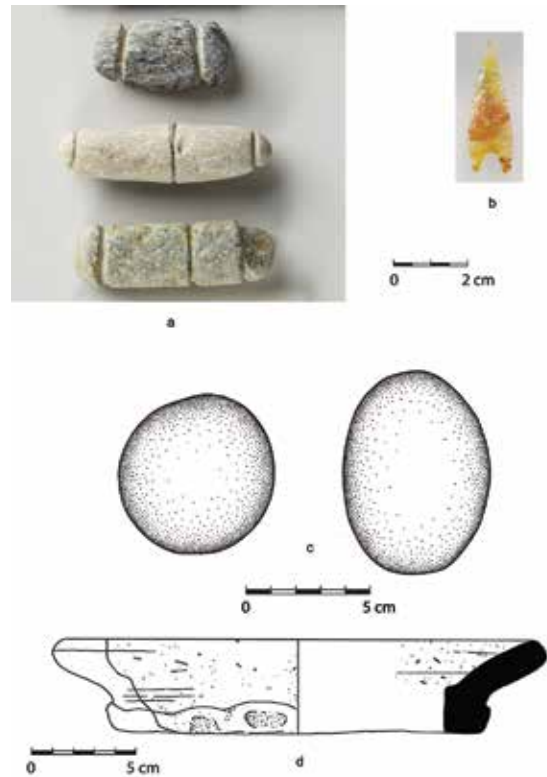


Figure 7. Objects of daily life from West Sector buildings: (a) Soapstone and talc net weights, OIM E24331, E24328, and E24349; (b) Agate arrowhead OIM E24349E; (c) Soapstone and quartz pounders; (d) Pottery bread plate (photos: Austin Kramer, drawings: Carol Abraczinskas and Lisa Heidorn)

Cerre Matto, the Christian Town at Serra East. *Bruce Williams*

“... and Serra Mattu was a drowned city”¹

The complex work is now in two parts, one on the town’s buildings, and one on the finds. A manuscript nears completion on the town, and another is in progress for the finds. This year, as part of the publication program Dr. Alexandros Tsakos visited Chicago to review and collate the known inscriptions and look at some magical signs and symbols found on the pottery.

Serra was not a large town, but with more than twenty-five buildings and a cemetery of more than 100 graves in an area of about 160 × 80 meters, it is a large site. Planning it originally by James Knudstad was challenging, but reconstructing his survey to extract information to present it in three dimensions was a challenge renewed. Using coordinates calculated by volunteer Larry Lissak and me, the architect Nadejda Reshetnikova has completed a ground plan for the entire site in the Christian Period. As with the plan of the fortress discussed last year, one version includes descriptive notes and comments Knudstad put on his plans, and the other omits them.

In the earlier twentieth-century, work on Serra East’s Christian period concentrated on the churches, to the neglect of the other structures — until many of them were destroyed for the mud in their bricks. James Knudstad, on the other hand, painstakingly recorded them all, often with details overlooked elsewhere. The houses, booths, and workshops were in fact quite complex and differed from each other even more than the churches. The houses (figs. 3, 8) were mostly of two, and a few, perhaps, of three stories. They were slightly oblong, almost square and very solidly built, with walls 53 or more centimeters thick, or a brick length and width or even wider. The ground floors had vaulted rooms and corridors, the vaults made with leaning rings of brick without centering. To continue walls to an upper floor, the masons completed the vaults for the first floor, resting them on an upper or spring course. Outer walls could be continued upward, but inner partitions were built by simply inserting a new wall between the vaults of the ground floor. Rooms and corridors in the upper floors were vaulted, but open space was created over two rooms or more which was then covered with a flat roof, and most indoor living must have taken place there. The ground-floor rooms had only tiny slits for windows and must have been quite dark. Their doors were also tiny, as small as 65 × 45 centimeters, barely enough for a child to squeeze through today. Where preserved, some houses had entry doors on the ground floor, but none had a stairway. A few of the vaults preserve square holes or hatches about half a meter on the side with wear that shows they were used for access, presumably using a ladder or notched log. Although this improved security, and saved space, another feature did not. Most houses with upper floors had a privy, reached at the end of a long, L-shaped corridor (briefly mentioned in *Oriental Institute 2011–2012 Annual Report*, p. 133). It dropped through a hole into a small, blind chamber below with a stone-lined clean out window to the outside; the chamber had a brick ventilation flue that went to the roof. Although none were found complete at Serra East, and none have been found in place, the privy apparently had a ceramic toilet, with seat, receptacle, and drain. This concern for privacy and sanitation in the twelfth century is arresting, the more so because many of our grandparents were raised without such amenities! Passages between some of the houses were covered by vaults, as seen earlier in Nubia, but also today in some of the towns of the oases.

The houses and churches were professionally built, but each unique, often even in orientation, but with few right angles; the Central Church needed a thick buttress to keep it

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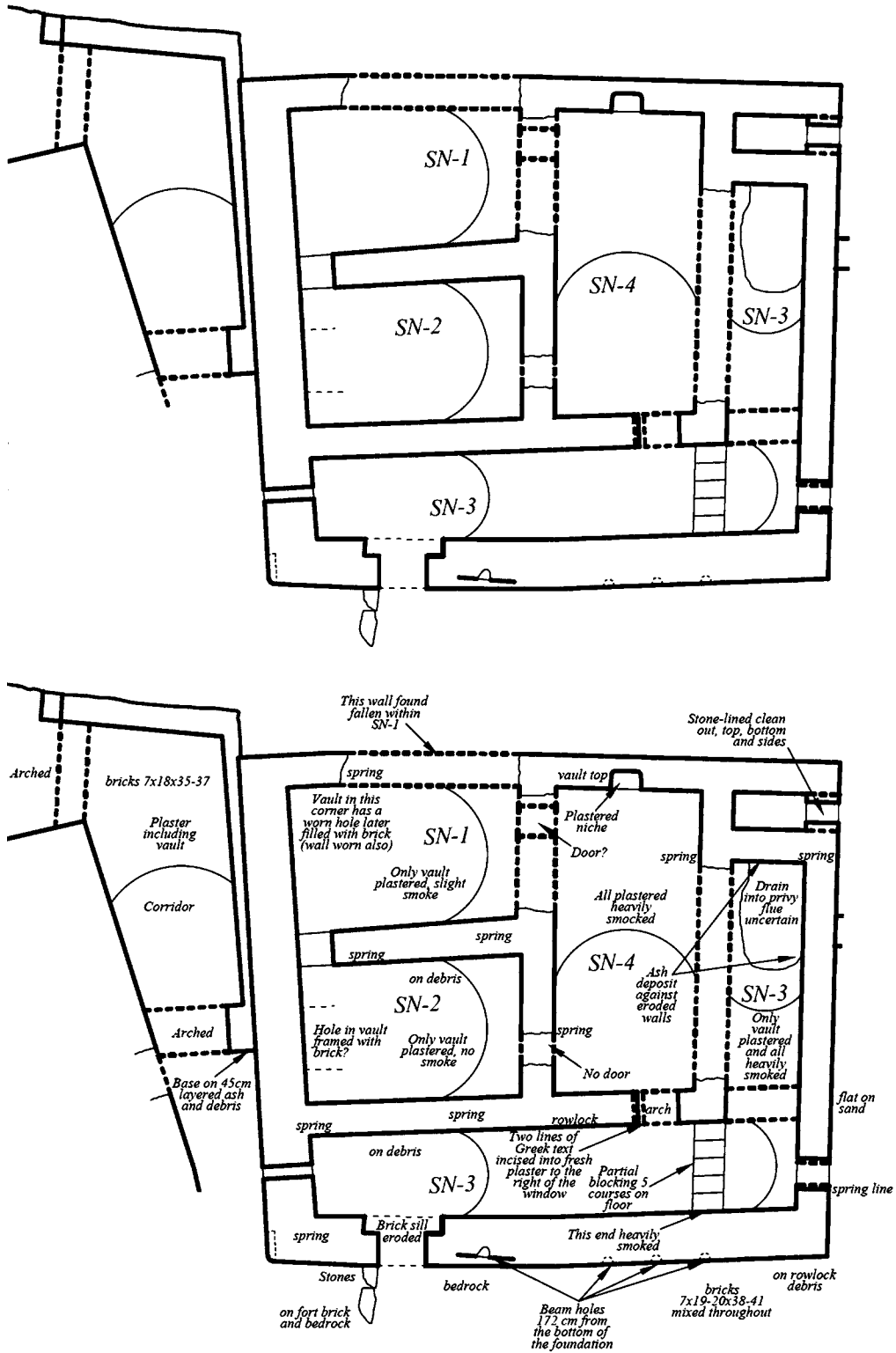


Figure 8. Ground plan of house SN inside the north wall of Medieval Cerre Matto (extracted from the base plan by Nadejda Reshetnikova)

from falling over. They are somewhere between a fully formal planned architecture and the work of a village builder. Other structures, booths and workshops, were much more casual, and could be quite complicated, being built and rebuilt. Sometimes the builders used stones, sometimes bricks and mixes of brick, brickbats, and mud, as now done for animal pens. They were located away from the houses by a space, in the lower part of the old fort. Here, there were kilns and ovens, and deposits of ash (figs. 9 and 4). Not only baking, but probably slaughtering and cooking took place here.

A high point in this year's activity was a study trip to the Oriental Institute by Dr. Alex-andros Tsakos of Bergen (Norway). In addition to his knowledge of languages and epigraphy, he came bearing an unexpected gift. In the days before even very reliable copy machines, it was a practice to transfer records to remote scholars for study, with the assumption that they would sooner or later return; in the field some even made private notes that offer new knowledge. Often, these lay unseen after a while, left in the huge piles of pages and files kept by most academics. It happened that Dr. Tsakos has been curating the papers of Prof. Richard Pierce at the University of Bergen, who worked at Serra East in 1963-64 and was primary supervisor for Dorginarti in 1964 for most of the excavation. When corresponding with Dr. Tsakos about his visit, I mentioned some records we did not have, especially Polaroid views

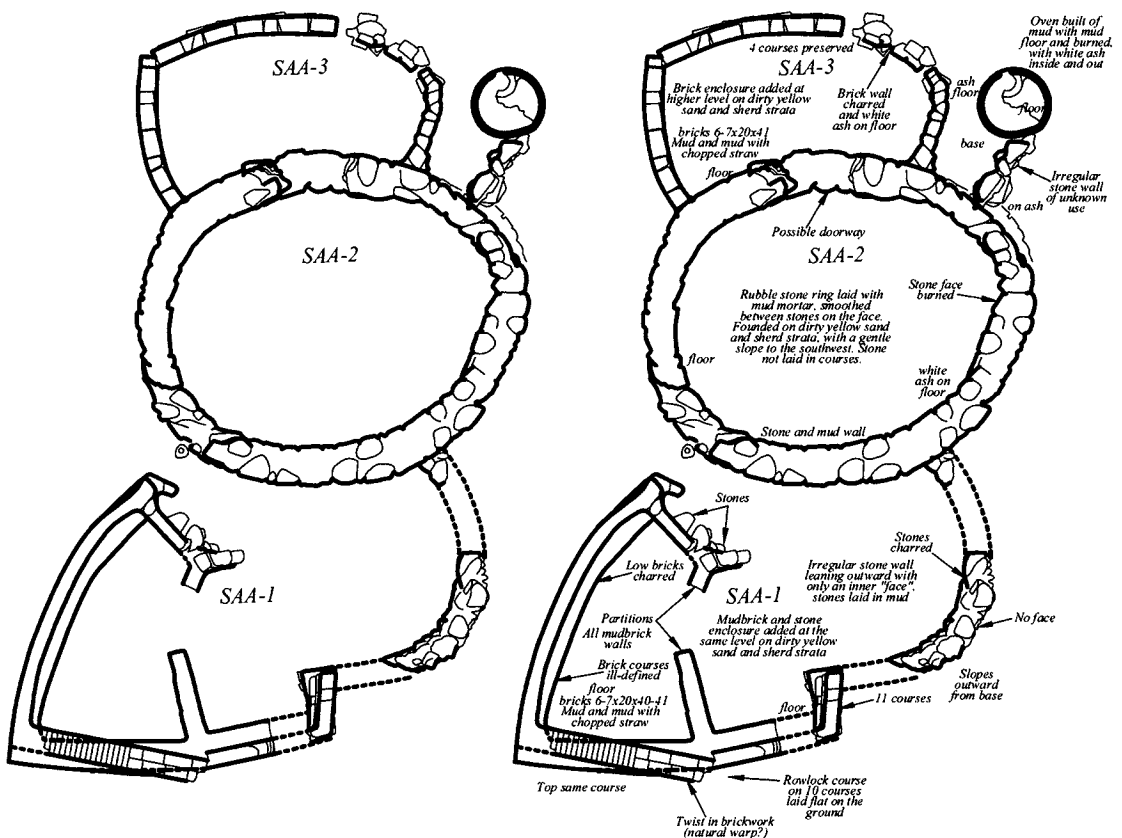


Figure 9. Ground plan of complex SAA in the lower town. Built in several stages, it was used for baking and probably cooking (extracted from the base plan by Nadejda Reshetnikova)

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for which there were no other records. He went through the papers and found not only the photos, but other papers and diaries which will be valuable for both Serra East and Dorgin-arti, and he brought them home to the Oriental Institute.

Cerre Matto, Serra East Epigraphy. *Alexandros Tsakos*

During my stay in Chicago between the 15th and the 28th of June, I managed with the help of Bruce Williams to confirm the identification of the inscribed objects found at Serra East, to improve or to correct object descriptions and text readings by inspecting the original, and to gain priceless insights by intense discussions about the way the textual finds can be contextualized against the archaeological record and the overall understanding of the site's medieval history.

As highlights from my stay, I wish to mention the progress made with the reading of monumental epigraphy (partly thanks to autoptic examination, see fig. 10, and partly thanks to new help offered by Miller Prosser who returned for a moment to his old occupation of photographing Oriental Institute objects with polynomial texture mapping); the apprehension of the role of magic texts/texts of ritual power in the form of Christian cult practiced at Cerre Matto; and the launching of an investigation of the meaning behind non-letter carvings on the surfaces of pots (our material covers ceramic finds ranging from simple body sherds to qadus knobs, fig. 11).



Figure 10. Two fragments of a stela from different parts of Serra Town (OIM E19567 and E19832). They were found to join during Alexandros Tsakos' visit (photos: Austin Kramer)



Figure 11. Qadus knob (from the bottom of jar attached to a saqiya or water-wheel) incised with a pentagram and crosses or X's within a circle. Many knobs have magical symbols, but the purpose remains unknown (OIM E32611)

Cerre Matto, Material Culture. *Bruce Williams*

The medieval town did not end with a catastrophe, which would have left much in the way of property under the rubble of violence, but was deserted, after being systematically emptied of its valuables, except some left underground. Most were groups of pots, but one, the Old Nubian Serra East Codex, was verification that some highly important texts from this period in Berlin and London originated at Serra East (see *News & Notes* 214, p. 9). Our remains are mostly fragments of pottery. The material is quite rich, however, and its variation will be reflected in a publication that will systematically use color photographs in its presentation, even when depicting thumbnail samples of decoration. This has proved appropriate in the study of glazed ceramics, where broad brush strokes and varied glazes make drawing alone an inadequate approach to conveying reality. We have here an advantage of a site that existed for a limited time, a number of whose buildings have foundation deposits of diagnostic pottery (fig. 12). These may be connected by chains of reasoning to two documents connected to Serra East including the stela of Eparch and Nauarch Philoxenos in the Oriental Institute Museum (AD 1025) that are clearly dated in the first half of the eleventh century AD. Other deposits were made in the houses at a much later date (fig. 13).



Figure 12. Bowl from a foundation deposit below the corner of a house. A drawing was published in the Oriental Institute 2012-2013 Annual Report (OIM E24776; photo: Bruce Williams)



*Figure 13. Fine painted jar from a deposit made below the floor of a house (OIM E24649, on display in the Oriental Institute). It was found with several other vessels including a glazed jug now in Khartoum with an exact parallel found at Fustat in Egypt and now in the Oriental Institute (see *News & Notes* 219, p. 8, figs. 1-2) (photo: Austin Kramer)*

Beads from Nubia and Quseir. *Joanna Then-Obłuska*

The project established in 2012 (Then-Obłuska 2012) aims to restudy and color catalog the vast bead collection from OINE excavations and has generated some results for publication. The first volume will publish almost 360 numbered bead and pendant objects from Early Nubian, Middle Nubian, and New Kingdom sites. The Early Nubian part includes beads from A-Group (Qustul, Adindan, Serra East) (fig. 14) and post A-Group sites (Serra East). C-Group sites (Adindan, Serra East), including P-Type (Serra East) (fig. 15) and N-Type (Serra East), and in addition to Pan-Grave (Qustul, Serra East) (fig. 16) provide the Middle Nubian collection. Although some Middle Nubian graves are contemporary with the New Kingdom period, well defined Egyptian New Kingdom tombs are treated separately (Qustul, Adindan, Serra East) (fig. 17).

Although a subsequent volume providing the beads and pendants of the Napatan, Meroitic, post-Meroitic, Christian, Islamic, and modern date is under construction, some results have already contributed in comparative bead studies for assemblages from the Red Sea and the Nile Valley sites (Then-Obłuska in press a, b; forthcoming a, b). Among other, the Indo-Pacific glass beads coming from Nobadian and Blemmyan graves (fig. 18) were presented during the 13th International Conference for Nubian Studies in Neuchâtel (Switzerland) and during the Seventh International Conference on the Peoples of the Red Sea Region and Their Environment in Naples-Procida, Italy (Then-Obłuska forthcoming c, d).

The restudy of Quseir glass beads from the OIM collection provided the first laboratory confirmed evidence of broad overseas contacts of the Red Sea ports in both Early Roman and Late Ayyubid/Mamluk periods of occupation (Then-Obłuska and Dussubieux forthcoming). The results inspired a new project that looks for trade contacts of Meroitic and post-Meroitic Nubia. It uses macroscopic and chemical compositional analysis of glass beads from Nubian collections in Europe and Sudan. The ongoing project has been granted by the NSC, Poland (UMO-2013/09/D/HS3/04508). Similar work is planned to be proposed for glass beads which will be published in the second volume of the OINE assemblages.

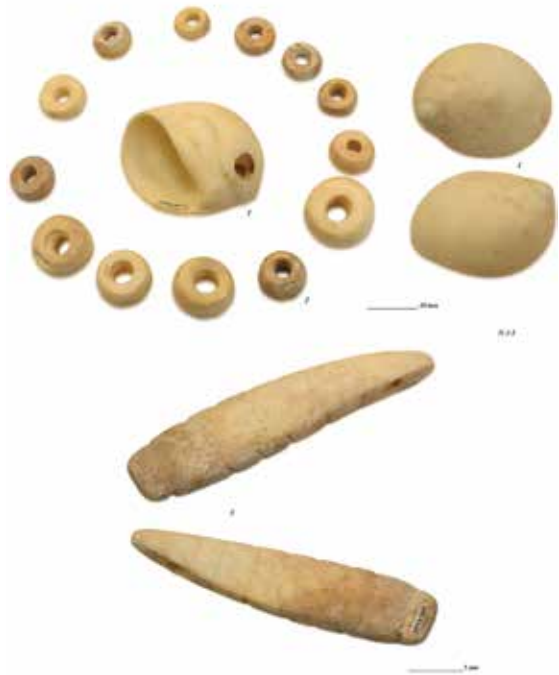


Figure 14. The Red Sea mollusk shell beads and pendants (cat. no. 11) from A-Group Qustul grave L 17 (OIM E23718) (photos: Joanna Then-Obłuska)

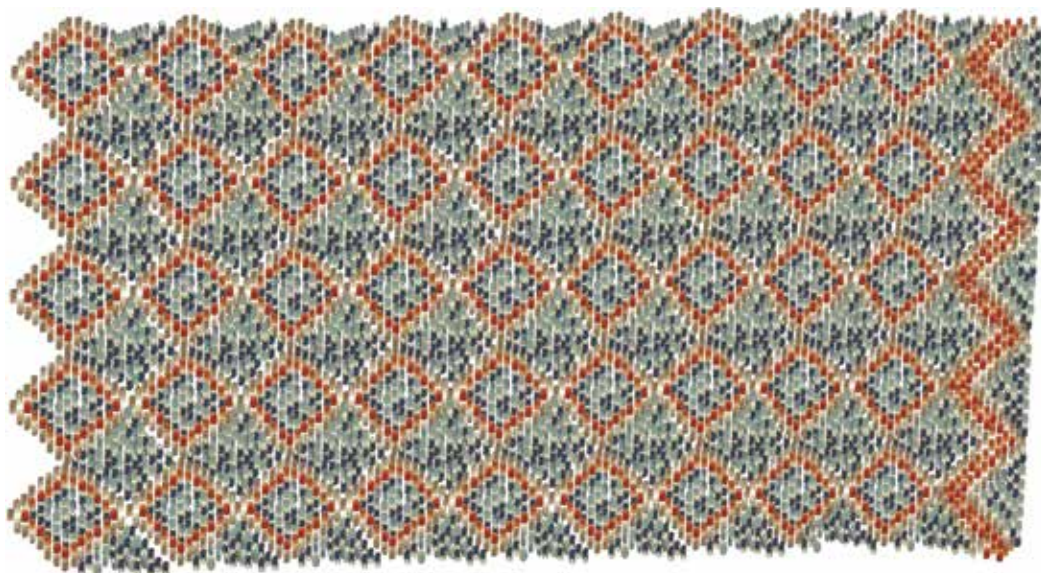


Figure 15. Reconstruction of faience, carnelian, and ostrich eggshell bead pattern of a leather kilt (cat. no. 259) based on a drawing given in the excavation sheet of Serra East grave B 73 (OIM E19582A-G) (photos and processing: Joanna Then-Obłuska)



Figure 16. Wristlet (cat. no. 273) and *Conus* sp. pendants (cat. no. 274) from Pan-Grave burial K 95 at Adindan (OIM E23911B, C) (photos: Joanna. Then-Obłuska)

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Figure 17. Necklace (cat. no. 315) from New Kingdom grave R 45 at Qustul (OIM E21310) (photos: Joanna Then-Obluska)



Figure 18. Indo-Pacific drawn and rounded glass beads from Qustul grave Q 41; original stringing fragments (OIM E20058) (photo: Joanna Then-Obluska)

Note

¹ "The Solemn Moans," in *Morning in Serra Mattu, a Nubian Ode*, by Arif Gamal, pp. 136–37 (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2014).

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