

## *Salvage Operations in Sudanese Nubia*

In November 1963 the Oriental Institute returned to Serra East, on the east bank of the Nile near the Egyptian-Sudanese border. Since the 1961/62 expedition had excavated a cemetery and cleared most of the fortress, the second expedition expected only the routine task of clearing and mapping those portions of the site that had not been finished during the first season. The clearing of the fortress interior to bedrock was continued, and only in the area of the "harbor," where the Sudan Railways line still operated, were investigations hampered. In the area surrounding the fortress additional grave clusters were found. The most extensive was just south of the fortress and contained nearly a hundred Christian burials. This new cemetery supplemented our picture of the Christian community which was established at Serra East during the twelfth century.

The finding of objects of historical significance was far from routine. In two ancient dumps behind the fortress both whole and fragmented stamp seal impressions on clay were discovered. Including the few impressions found within the fortress, over a thousand such sealings were recovered. All are probably of Middle Kingdom date. Impressions bearing the Horus names of Amenemhet III and IV were identified. The name of Sesostri III also appeared. Some three hundred impressions contained the name Kheseḫ-Medjay ("repulsing the Medjay-Nubians"). The name is known from a papyrus which lists Middle Kingdom forts in this area of Nubia, and the number of Kheseḫ-Medjay impressions found at Serra East convincingly establishes this as the Middle Kingdom name of the fortress.

A large and finely executed doorjamb bearing the name of Sesostri III was found within the fortress. He was probably the pharaoh who initiated the building of Kheseḫ-Medjay. The

doorjamb, together with the seal impressions and the potsherds found during excavation, points to the fortress as having been in use only during the first half of the Eighteenth Dynasty, although the site was briefly occupied again by Christians during the twelfth century.

In a pit associated with one of the houses of the Christian settlement was found a small leather-bound book containing more than a dozen parchment leaves. The book is written in Old Nubian and is complete from cover to cover, although somewhat damaged by termites. Its importance lies in the fact that it is, by far, the longest known text in this obscure language.

A few miles south of Serra East, at the northernmost point of the Second Cataract, lies the island of Dorginarti, which the Oriental Institute had also agreed to investigate. An intended three-month season stretched into five and a half months before work could be halted in mid-June 1964.

The ruins found on Dorginarti consisted chiefly of an Egyptian New Kingdom fortress, roughly boat-shaped and some fifty by a hundred meters in area. The fort was built along the north side of the island and could, from this vantage, control the passing river traffic. It was protected by thick, high mud-brick walls, which were buttressed at various points along the outer faces. Local cataract rock was used as foundation and also to form an impressive glacis that extended along the north and south. On the north side a long flight of stone stairs led from the shore up into the fort. Within the gateway at the top of this stairway, two small stairways built into the inclosure wall gave access to the battlements. At one point the inclosure wall was preserved to its original height and revealed the style of crenellation used.

The interior of the fort was divided into



*Stairway leading to fort at Dorginarti  
in Sudanese Nubia.*

three areas by a large building in the center. This “official” part was twice rebuilt, each time undergoing extensive changes in plan but not in over-all size. Several Ramessid stones that were reused in the doorways of the first rebuilding could not be fitted into the plan of the original building and probably came from another site.

The interior of the fort east of the central building was devoted to storage bins and magazines. The interior west of the central building was the largest of the three areas. Here were found garrison rooms, kitchens, and storage bins. There was no regularity of plan, but three architectural levels could be distinguished. The fort’s second major gateway led into this area from the west.

A few intrusive Meroitic burials were found within the fort, and in the eighth century a Christian complex was built in the central area. But the reused Ramessid stones and the great wealth of potsherds show that the fort itself was used exclusively during the late New

Kingdom. Very few other objects were found. Finely flaked arrowheads and stray beads account for nearly half the registered finds. Hundreds of sherds from small food bowls were excavated, and several dozen bowls could be reconstructed. The presence of so many utilitarian bowls and the paucity of other objects strongly underline the provincial character of the fortress.

The expeditions to Serra and Dorginarti were directed by James E. Knudstad, who at this writing still has not returned to the United States. The members of his staff were Dr. Richard H. Pierce (Egyptologist and epigrapher) and his wife, Dr. Bruce G. Trigger and Alfred J. Hoerth (archeologists), Rudolph H. Dornemann, Otto J. Schaden, and Melburn D. Thurman (archeological field assistants), John C. Lorence (artist), Mrs. Louise Storts (photographer), and Miss Sylvia Ericson (field assistant).

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