

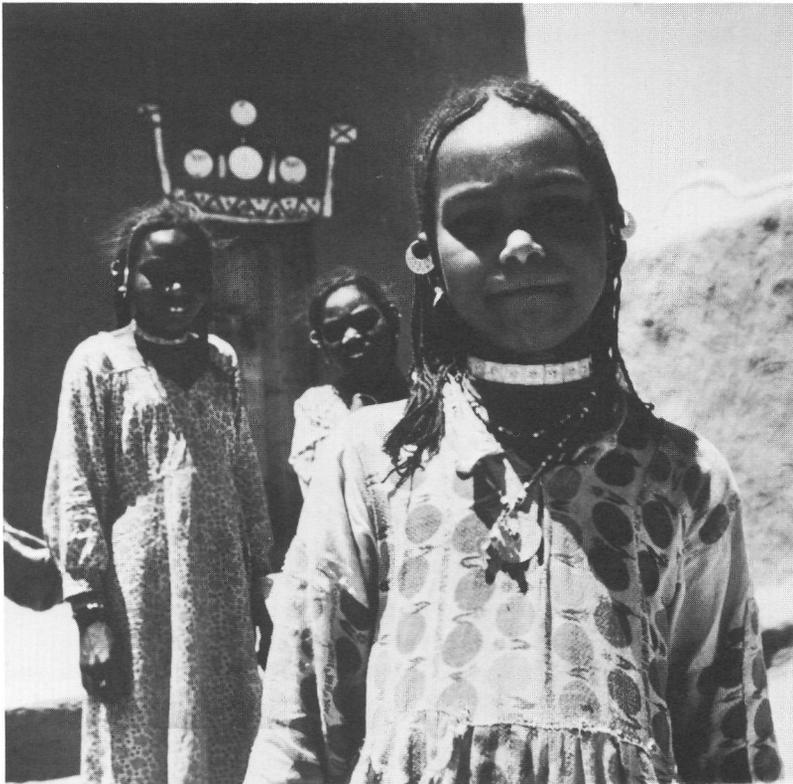
The Semna South Project

Louis V. Žabkar

As our previous reports indicated, the work on the Semna South Project has been developing in a number of areas of research: drawing of the seal impressions found in the quarry-dump near the Twelfth Dynasty fortress, analysis of the textiles being done at the laboratories of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Harvard Peabody Museum, study of the architecture of the fortress, drawing of the beads and pottery sherds, study of the human remains, and the like.

The preparation of the manuscript, describing the structures and the finds of the Meroitic and X-Group cemetery at Semna South, has also occupied our attention this year, and a great deal of time has been devoted to this task. But we think that readers, while waiting for

the publication that will give a general description of all the material pertaining to the excavation, would appreciate it if in this report, as in the previous one, we discuss briefly some particular feature of our work.





An interesting observation made while excavating the Meroitic and X-Group graves at Semna South was that the burials of infants and children were often made with great care, and fortunately most of them were found intact, spared by the ubiquitous grave-robber.

It will be recalled that even in Athens of the classical period, the father of a family had the right to decide whether to keep a new-born child or to expose it and let it perish. In Sparta, even harsher practices prevailed, since it was a group of citizens who, without asking the father's advice, would decide whether the infant seemed fit enough to be allowed to grow up or whether it should be exposed.

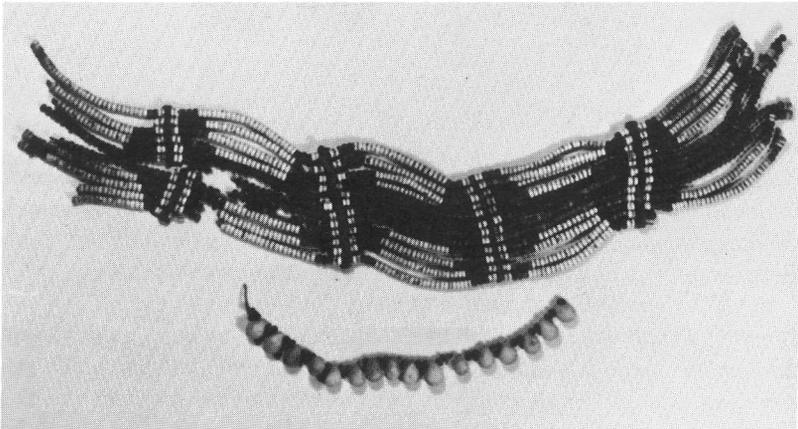
By contrast, the situation in Egypt, and at least in the northern Meroitic communities, was quite different. No practice of abandonment of infants is attested. On the contrary, the excavations of the Meroitic and X-Group cemeteries revealed the great care with which infants and children were buried, regardless of their physical condition. We found, for example, the intact body of a young girl about six or seven years old. Her earrings, a somewhat simplified form of the golden earrings worn by the Meroitic queens, were still clinging to the well-preserved lobes of the ears, and around her neck was a necklace composed of many strings of multicolored beads. A Nubian girl of about the same age (or somewhat older) from the now submerged village of Qustul, in the company of two other girls, all of them adorned with jewelry, indicates that, now as then, love of jewelry develops early in the life of a Nubian girl.

Four small cups, so-called feeding cups, of varying quality and manufacture were also found. Such cups were frequently placed in the graves of the infants, sometimes near their mouths, as if to be immediately accessible to them in the afterlife.

Some strands of complex multicolored beadwork of a remarkable craftsmanship covered almost the entire body of an infant before it

was wrapped in a shroud; a small double string of beads was also attached to the hair of the infant, and another was placed around his neck.

Beads, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, cups, and other funerary gifts were found even in modest and poor burials, and in some other graves a profusion of such objects. All this reveals not only the care, but even



the devotion with which these infants and children were treated, the respect for their humanity even in death.

Perhaps some day it will be possible to explain different attitudes and behavior among different cultures. For the time being, suffice it to say that the care and respect for their young dead on the part of the more primitive Meroites and the X-Group people contrasts sharply with the lack of that attitude among the peoples of some highly developed cultures.