
Nubian Publication Project

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Exploring the charming and colorful remains of Meroitic Lower Nubia in 1983 was certainly a major but pleasant task. However, just as, about 300 A.D., the Meroitic culture was replaced by the so-called X-Group in one of the most remarkable archaeological transitions in the ancient world, so the Nubian Publication Project has now moved on to consider this transition, which has been much discussed. Some believe it was the work of people already resident in Lower Nubia while others believe that a new group, the Noubades (Nubians), were responsible. The remains explored by Dr. Seele at Qustul were uniquely placed to explore the transitional period, for they include some of the latest Meroitic and some of the earliest X-Group in the region. These remains were in the tombs and chapels of courtiers associated with the great royal tumuli explored by the Egyptian Antiquities Service in the 1930's and again in the late 1950's. Heretofore, the great tumuli and their rich contents floated almost like rafts on a chronological sea, without any clearly detectable order. However, Dr. Seele found that they were large complexes, with long rows of chapels associated with the most important, and the location and arrangements of these complexes indicated an order for the cemetery. This order established a relation with other sites in the region and we were able to construct a chronology and relate it to the dated materials of the Late Roman and Byzantine world.

Unfortunately for the belief in direct continuity between the two phases, no remains in Lower Nubia south of the old Roman frontier could be dated to the first three quarters of the fourth century. Whether this lacuna in evidence reflects a corresponding one in settlement cannot be determined, but the belief that the X-Group represented a major change in the culture of the population is much strengthened.

The great complexes at Qustul as found by the Oriental Institute did not just show changes. In some ways, their designs had antecedents thousands of years before in Nubia. For example, the long rows of chapels each facing southward, opening onto the main east-west approach to the tumulus, occurred some two thousand years earlier in the cemetery of the Rulers of Kush at Kerma, the allies of the Hyksos at the end of the Second Intermediate period. These rows and other distinctive features made up a culture of burial that alternated with the Egyptian style in Nubia. This alternation makes up one of the most interesting themes in the history of the country, and it challenges us to seek out relationships in this part of Africa.

The major work of the project is not the pursuit of grand historical themes, however. The daily routine of disentangling the complexities of pottery made in different traditions and styles and of various materials, and relating the various fragments of objects to one another to understand their original structure and use, is the main task.

This, too, has its surprises and rewards. For example, some oddly twisted pieces of leather turned out to be parts of an unusual composite bow. Made on a fibrous core, the two halves of the bow were first wrapped in a textile, then with a broad strip of leather. Two narrow strips of horn were lashed (and glued?) to the backs of the halves and the parts then were joined at the grip. The bow was of the

saddle was secured to the animal by quarter straps, probably held in the slotted pommel and cantle, and which passed through eyes in a wooden bar that held the cinch. Although it appears outlandish to modern eyes, this saddle represents one of the earliest stages in the direct line of developments in military saddles that continued to the end of cavalry's use as a military arm. Drawings by Lisa Heidorn.

Among the earliest known constructed saddles were those of Fourth Century X-Group Nubia, which were once thought to have had rigid frames or trees. However, remains of saddles found at Qustul with sacrificed horses could be combined to reconstruct wooden and leather parts of a sophisticated, flexible, and relatively humane saddle. The



