

The Oriental Institute

News & Notes

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A LOST KINGDOM IN NUBIA AT THE DAWN OF HISTORY

By Bruce Williams

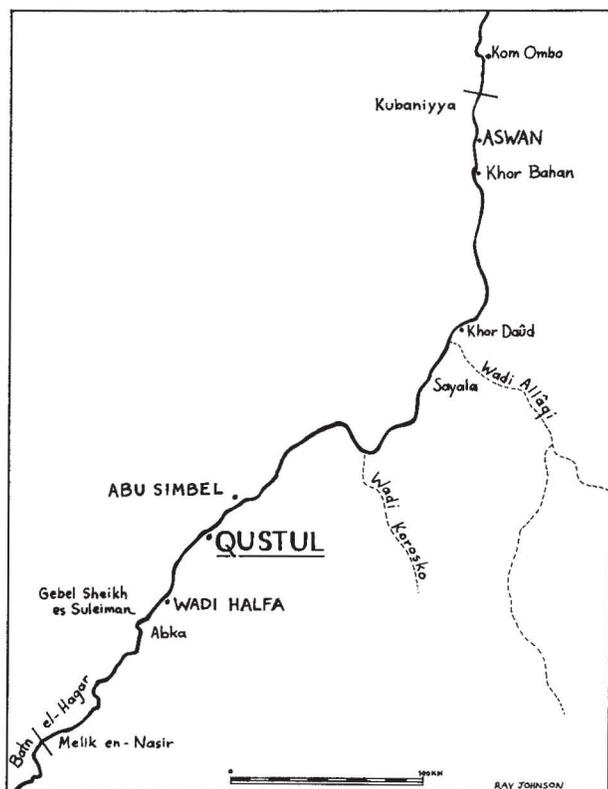


Fig. 1. Lower Nubia. The probable extent of the Kingdom of Lower Nubia in late A-Group times is marked across the Nile Valley near Kubaniyya in the north and near Melik en-Nasir in the Second Cataract to the south.

HERETOFORE NUBIA in the time of the Pharaohs has been considered a political backwater. Most scholars believe that during most of the historic ages the inhabitants of Nubia were loosely grouped into tribes or clans, occasionally under a more or less powerful regional chief. True, in the Second Intermediate Period (1700-1650 B.C.), a mighty prince arose in Kush (near modern Kerma) who disputed the Nile Valley with the Seventeenth Dynasty of Egypt. But it is a matter of general consensus that the first Nubian dynasty to call itself kings was that which became the Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt under King Pi (Piankhy) in about 718 B.C. Now new evidence has come to light from the materials excavated by Professor Keith C. Seele in the hurried effort to rescue materials from the rising waters of Lake Nasser. This evidence indicates that the first rise of a centralized kingdom in

Nubia was much earlier.

Late in the 1963-64 season of the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition, Prof. Seele discovered an unusual A-Group cemetery (a Nubian culture dated to the late Predynastic Period and First Dynasty in Egypt) on the East Bank at Qustul, just north of the Sudan Frontier. He labeled it Cemetery L. In addition to graves of normal size, he discovered a number of graves of sacrificed cattle and some thirteen tombs of unusual shape, eight of which were much larger than any A-Group tombs discovered before. These consisted of a long trench, up to ten meters by two meters which was stepped down to a large burial chamber dug toward the end of one side (see fig. 2). Because of their size and the wealth of their contents, they were quickly recognized as the graves of chiefs or kinglets.

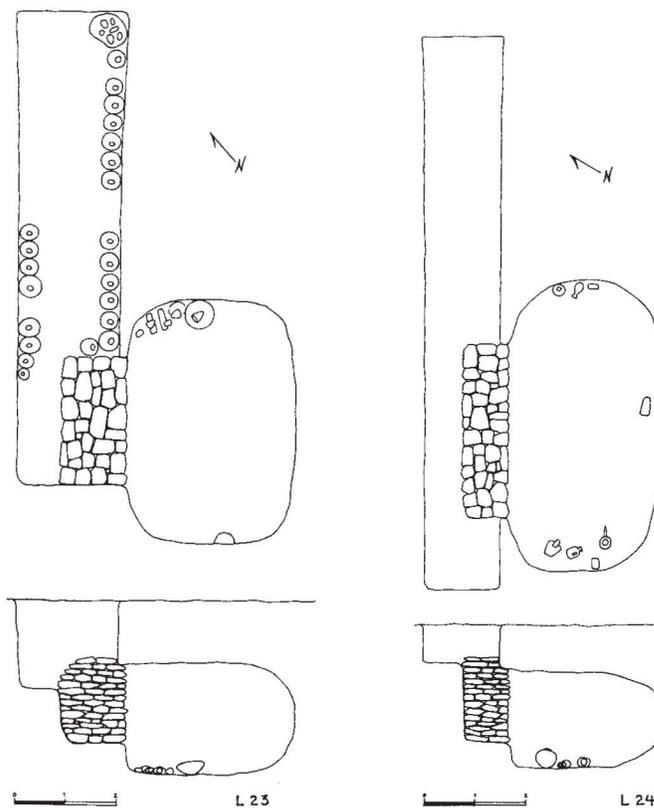


Fig. 2. Tomb L 23 contained long rows of imported Egyptian storage jars. It was partially restored in the Oriental Institute and was a popular exhibit until dismantled this year. Tomb L 24 contained the Qustul Incense Burner.

The full extent of this wealth was not yet realized, however. The chief object was tantalizingly enigmatic. This was a broken cylindrical stone carved with sunk relief (see fig. 3). The major decoration was a palace facade (*serekh*), an important symbol of royalty



Fig. 3. A group of incense burners from Cemetery L at Qustul; the ceremonial incense burner is in the center.

in the First Dynasty, and three boats with high prows and sterns, one carrying a carnivorous animal, the other with uncertain passengers. The clear connection of the boats with Egypt and, perhaps ultimately, with Mesopotamia was quickly realized, but the animal passenger had undetermined significance, and the other boats' occupants remained mysterious. We thus had what were well known to be important tombs with the most important object to come out of Nubia, but their full significance together remained unrealized.

Some thirteen years after the discovery of the tombs and as the first stage of the publication project, *The Middle Nubian Remains*, was nearing completion, this writer asked Mrs. Elizabeth Tiekens to help review her previous work on the large group of important painted pottery sherds to try to combine them into whole, restorable or at least associated pots (see fig. 4). I believed at that time that there could only be a few of these in each tomb; the number of painted bowls of this type was normally not more than five per burial. At the same time, Barbara Hall, the museum conservator and Richard Jaeschke, the conservation intern, undertook to restore some piles of stone vessel fragments into recognizable objects. Again, since imported Egyptian stone vessels are considered rare in A-Group, it was expected that they would yield a few complete vessels in addition to the rather remarkably large number already found in Cemetery L. In a few weeks all hope of making a few painted bowls evapo-

rated; we did not have many sherds of a few vessels but a few of many. The stone vessels were in like condition. While many could be partly restored, fragments of many more could not be combined (see fig. 4). Aside from the large group of Egyptian imported pottery, the fragmentary wealth (especially in jewelry) left by the thorough plundering included parts of over eight hundred different painted A-Group bowls, several dozen stone vessels, some pathetic fragments of superbly made tomb furnishings, carved wood and ivory including part of a casket leg and possibly a flail. There were also the tombs themselves, of such size that they would just fit into the substructures of the Royal Tombs of the Egyptian First Dynasty at Abydos and Saqqara. No A-Group tombs elsewhere (save one) equalled one-fifth their size or wealth; no Nubian tomb could compete with them until the time of the Princes of Kush in the Second Intermediate Period who built the tumuli of Kerma. It became clear that we were dealing not with chiefs or kinglets but with true *princes* or *kings*.

Yet there was more information; the elaborately carved stone cylinder was only one of many similar but simpler A-Group objects usually called incense burners because of the signs of burning on the tops and blackening and cracking in the center (see fig. 5). Some of these were also decorated. This dec-



Fig. 4. Local and imported finery from Cemetery L. The fine painted pottery on the left is local; the pottery bowl in the center, the stone jars and bowl on the right were imported from Egypt. Strings of beads of carnelian, amethyst, faience, and crystal in the foreground were at least partly manufactured in Egypt, but from Nubian stone.



Fig. 5. Photograph of the Qustul Incense Burner and negative of a latex impression.

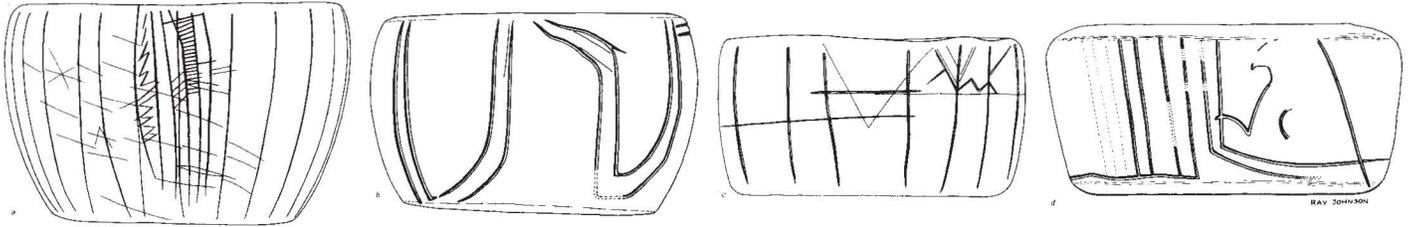


Fig. 6. Incised incense burners from Cemetery L. a-c have palace facades and boats. d, from L 11 has both, with the archaic Horus on the boat.

oration is confined, away from Qustul, to geometric incisions and a little painting. The examples from Qustul included the simpler decoration, but some also had simple incisions that resembled the ships and palace facade of the Qustul Incense Burner (see fig. 6a-d). It is hardly surprising that objects should be marked with royal insignia in royal tombs, but the palace facade belonged at this period only to Egyptian royalty. At this point the Qustul Incense Burner was itself reexamined (see fig. 7). The ship opposite the palace facade, in the center of the procession, could be restored, but in a manner hardly suspected; it contained a King—of Egypt. The tell-tale curved shape of the White Crown was preceded by the tell-tale archaic shape of the falcon god, Horus. In front was a crossed group of arrows or staves. The King with Horus (presumably on a *serekh*) with a god's standard before is one of the stock arrangements of Early Dynastic Period art.

The standard was not so easy to recognize; it seemed to have four crossed staves or arrows (in-

stead of the usual two). The best guess seems that it represents a modified version of the standard of Neith, later the goddess of Sais in the Delta, earlier perhaps a more potent deity of the whole land important to kingship.

The main occupant of the third ship seems to be kneeling on a sledge or carrying chair. He seems clearly to be the bound prisoner or *tekenu* shown on archaic ivory plaques, here apparently guarded by a man holding a weapon and a cord that binds the victim's wrist. In the prisoner's lap is what appears to be the flap of the penis-sheath characteristic of Nubians and Libyans in Egyptian art.

The animal on the first boat, with its pointed ears, slim tail, and claws seems clearly to be a feline. The standard behind regrettably cannot yet be deciphered. At this point a possible guess as to her identity would be that she is Mafdet, unimportant later, but in the First Dynasty an important deity and again associated with kingship.

The Qustul Incense Burner, with no sign that it was ever used, can be compared to other ceremonial objects

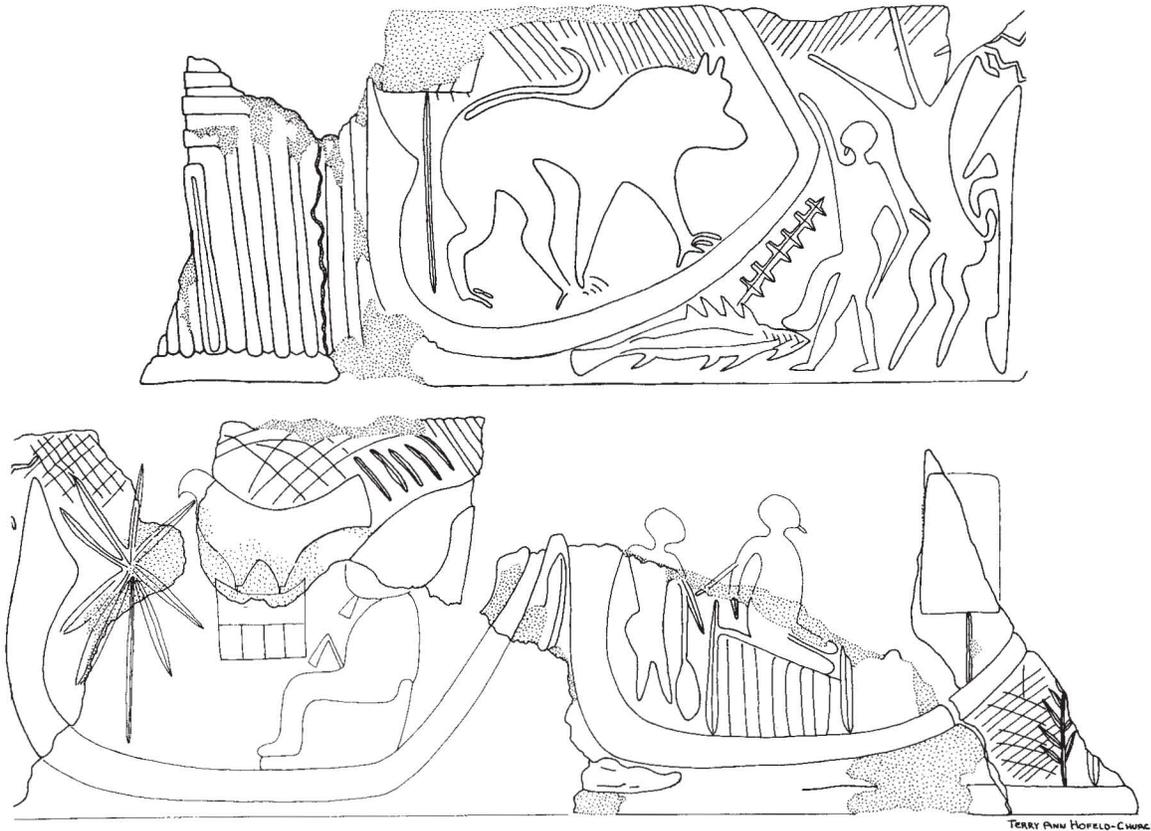


Fig. 7. The Qustul Incense Burner; restored drawing. Dotted areas are broken. All lines drawn adjacent to dotted areas are actually present; those drawn through dotted areas and beyond the breaks are restored.

of its kind from Egypt, most notably the ceremonial slate palettes and monumental maceheads, of which the Narmer Palette and Scorpion Macehead are most famous.

Yet the great incense burner was not the only one to conceal a surprise. One of the others, crudely incised with boat and palace facade, was crumbling so badly that it needed consolidation; the sides had suffered greatly in the fire set in Tomb L 11 where it was found. Nevertheless, since it contained both the palace facade and the boat, it was chosen for drawing as a supporting piece here. When Ray Johnson drew the boat, he found some clear incised lines that do not normally belong on such a vessel. As we examined it more closely near the top, it could be seen that the crumbling had occurred further along the incision making an image more vivid, although the incised lines already sufficed for a restoration. The boat carried the archaic shape of Horus wrapped as though he were dead, a form of the god shown on the King's macehead of this period from Hierakonpolis.

We have royal tombs, and we have kings that date to 3,000 B.C. This is remarkable because Nubia is thought not to have contained kings of its own until the Eighth Century B.C. and even more remarkable because they claim that they are kings of Upper Egypt. It appears that the Nile Valley at the dawn of the historic age was occupied not by two related kingdoms but by *three*: Lower Egypt, Upper Egypt, and Lower Nubia. This raises many historical and cultural questions of which we can only hope to answer a few.

The kings appear to be native to the A-Group. Save for the size and elaboration of their tombs and the trappings of royalty, they are as close to the A-Group as the First Dynasty tombs of the Kings were to Egypt.

Culturally, the A-Group seems to have had its origin in a later Amratian period (i.e., early Egyptian Predynastic) settlement near Aswan (at Khor Bahan) and later in the more hospitable area of Lower Nubia near the Wadi Allaqi (see map). Although the A-Group diverged from the Egyptian Predynastic cultures in the succeeding Gerzean period, the A-Group inhabitants remained in close trading contact with Upper Egypt. Over half of the graves in Lower Nubia contained some object of Egyptian origin, and almost all of the vessels intended for storage and carrying were imported from Egypt. During this period, the A-Group shared Nubia with various offshoots of the Khartoum Neolithic, i.e., the major group of prehistoric cultures in the Sudan. One of these, the Abkan, occupied the region of the Second Cataract. Contacts between the Abkan and A-Group remain relatively unimportant until the A-Group moved southward to the Second Cataract region in later Gerzean times. At this time, we see the first adoption of such Upper Nubian characteristics as overall impressed or incised decoration on pottery. And at Sayala, near the Wadi Allaqi, we see some germ of social distinctions in the wealthy tomb of an A-Group notable, made sometime toward the end of the Gerzean period or the start of the First Dynasty.

Cemetery L must represent the rise of kingship from these local power concentrations, and, if the synchronisms are correct, this took place just as the First Dynasty was forming in Egypt. If the occurrence of A-Group remains is any indication, the

Dynasty ruled at least from the Batn el Hajar, (*belly of stones*), in the Second Cataract area to north of Kubaniyya *in Egypt*. It must also be remembered that the name of this southernmost nome of Egypt was the same as the word for Nubia, *Ta-seti*. This early Nubian kingdom, then, stretched into Egyptian territory.

As yet, we know little of the history of this Dynasty. From the continued use of such diffuse cache areas as at Khor Daud and some in Professor Seele's Cemetery Q, we infer that trade remained substantially in private hands. The continued wealth of private tombs confirms that the Nubian Dynasty was not too oppressive. We may learn something of their triumphs and perhaps the proximate cause of their downfall from an important scene carved as a graffito at Gebel Sheikh Suleiman and now in Khartoum. In this representation a *serekh* (not of the Egyptian King *Djer*) surmounted by Horus presides over a scene of bound and slain enemies, one tied to a ship like those on the Qustul Incense Burner. One prisoner seems to be bound with the very sign for Nubia, the *sty* or bow. He and the other men bear none of the marks the Egyptians gave to foreigners from the South or North; they appear to be Egyptians. Two town signs, surmounted by familiar Egyptian symbols, the hawk and placenta, seen often on First Dynasty representations, appear to be added at a later date. Further, they seem to be labeling the slain; the graffito would thus show a Nubian campaign against Egyptian forces with the added town signs, an indication that the victory was repeated or recon-firmed.

Whether the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman graffito represents a Nubian victory or not, to claim kingship so close to the dynamic First Dynasty would be dangerous business. The largest tomb was L 24, which contained the Qustul Incense Burner along with grave goods of the First Dynasty. If the placement, size, and shape of the tombs in Cemetery L is any guide, they lasted some three or four generations, with up to ten or more kings in the Dynasty. The tombs were thoroughly pillaged and some, at least, were burned, reminiscent perhaps of the treatment given the tombs of the First Dynasty themselves. The Qustul Incense Burner was broken up, though made of harder stone than most others. Thereafter, Lower Nubia was left to a few nomads and Egyptian miners and smelters for some 800 years. Lower Nubia had no kings of its own until the coming of the X-Group, whose rulers built their tombs nearby some 3300 years later; Nubia as a whole saw no independent kings again for over 2000 years.

Yet the sudden end of this first kingship south of Aswan may not have been in vain. Certain features, such as animal sacrifice and the very unusual trench and chamber design of the tombs may be seen in the burials of Kushite Princes at Kerma, far to the south. The burial on a bed, so characteristic of Kerma burials, may also be present in some A-Group burials at Qustul. It appears that the first southward penetration in Africa of ideas of god-kingship was much earlier than we had supposed.

GUTERBOCK HONORED BY UPPSALA UNIVERSITY

Hans G. Guterbock, the Tiffany and Margaret Blake Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in the Oriental Institute, was honored last September by being given an honorary doctorate from the University of Uppsala, Sweden. Professor Guterbock and his wife, Frances, journeyed to Sweden directly from their summer work in Turkey. Here is the Guterbocks' description of the events and festivities held at the university.

TWENTY-NINE YEARS AGO, the trip from Istanbul to Sweden on a Swedish freighter took five weeks with Frances nursing three-month-old Tom despite her sea sickness. We were accepting the invitation of the late Professor Axel Persson to give guest lectures at Uppsala University; after one year there I came to the Oriental Institute.

Now, one year after my retirement from teaching at the University of Chicago, Uppsala University, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of its founding, had offered me an honorary degree together with 101 other professors from all over the world. Once again we went there from Istanbul—this time by plane in one day. This was Tuesday, September 27th.

The program of celebration covered three days, the first of which was reserved for lectures by the prospective honorary doctors. In the morning we listened to Lévi-Strauss and Margaret Mead who spoke in the *Aula*, the Assembly Hall, which, for Miss Mead, was filled to capacity. Lunch was served to those connected with the Faculty of Arts in the *Värmlands Nation*. At this university the students coming from the same province form a fraternity-like group called a *nation* (pronounced *nashoon*). The host at our table was Nils Simonsson, professor of Sanskrit and Indo-European philology. Others at the table were a Professor Hogan from Dublin and a young professor of Old Irish. My own lecture was held at 4:00 p.m. in the Linguistics Institute before some thirty to thirty-five persons, some of whom said that they had taken my Hittite course in 1948/49. In the evening a buffet dinner was served in the university building.

Unfortunately I had brought along from Turkey a bad cold which made me quite miserable by the end of the Wednesday dinner. In order to get back into shape for the third day, the day of the conferment of degrees, I stayed in the hotel room (partly in bed) through most of the day, and Frances faithfully stayed with me. Thus we missed two formal anniversary celebrations which were attended by the King and Queen of Sweden. What we missed were speeches, mostly in Swedish, and congratulations by foreign representatives. But we did attend the formal banquet that evening. Since the *Rikssal*, the State Hall of historic Uppsala Castle, would not hold that many people, the banquet was given in a modern gymnasium. The King sat at the head of the table, flanked by Margaret Mead in a long dress and a bony English baroness. All the toasts were in Swedish, so we understood almost nothing, except a few jokes. The Rector, Professor Torgny Segerstedt, addressing His Majesty, expressed hope that the newly born royal princess would study at the university, and the King told the anecdote of the American who did not know the existence of Uppsala University, only to be told by his Swedish host that, "Our university was founded sixteen years before your continent was discovered!" After the banquet most of the people were taken by busses to the castle where there was dancing. Frances and I went and enjoyed it; we had attended a similar post-graduation ball in the same hall in June of 1949.

On the third day, September 30th, we were awakened at an unearthly hour by cannon shots, one for each guest to be honored. The ceremony started with a procession indoors because of bad weather. Many people wore academic garb, the French and the Italians the most picturesque, but others, including myself, wore formal dress, i.e. white tie and tails, which is the normal academic dress in Sweden. We were seated on the podium, behind the King and other guests of honor.

The degrees were conferred by Faculty ("division" in Chicago). In each Faculty a professor designated *Promotor* conducted the ceremony. First came the Jubilee Doctors whose degrees were renewed fifty years after they had received them. These had shown their age as they were called to receive the honors; one even forgot to bow to the King. After them came the honorary doctors. With the exception of the *Promotor* of the Medical Faculty, who spoke in English, the formulae were spoken in Latin. The *Promotor* introduced himself in a short speech; at the words "et ipse doctor," "and myself a Ph.D.," he donned his doctor's laurel wreath or in some Faculties, a doctor's hat, accompanied by two shots of the cannon outside (everyone else only got one cannon shot). After a short introduction each of us stepped up to him at the lectern, and he said:

"*Salve, vir illustrissime,*" "Welcome, most illustrious man."

In the case of the few ladies, the Latin required a shuffling of endings:

"*Salve, illustrissima domina,*" "Welcome, most illustrious lady."

This was not always successful. One of the *Promotors* left a most illustrious Italian lady standing in mid-air while checking on his list for the right words.

"*Accipe coronam (or pilleum),*" "Receive the wreath (or hat)."

As he put it on our heads, one cannon shot was heard.

"*Accipe anulum,*" "Receive the ring,"

(we were already wearing it),

"*Accipe diploma*," "Receive the diploma,"

and with a handshake unmistakably directing us away,

"*Vale, doctor honorari Upsaliensis*," "Farewell, honorary doctor of Uppsala."

We then had to walk around to where the King sat, bow to His Majesty, and return to our seats. Four students were responsible for giving out the diplomas and hats or wreaths and for pressing a button at the right time to coordinate the shooting of the cannon on the castle ramparts with the placing of the laurel wreaths on the heads of the recipients.

Between the ceremonies of the various Faculties, movements of a cantata commissioned for the occasion were performed. It was based on a selection of beautiful and meaningful texts, but much too loud and cacaphonic—earsplitting twelve-tone music reinforced by a choir of 100 voices and one soprano! The entire ceremony lasted some four hours.

That evening the student *nations* hosted celebrations and balls. Since our *mentor*, Simonsson, belongs to it, we were invited by the *Norrlands Nation*, the largest, whose *Inspector* or supervising faculty is Rector Segerstedt.

Thus ended the three days' celebration. We stayed on for three more days, seeing friends and looking around Uppsala. Then we left for the summer place of some friends on the Swedish west coast, where we got a taste of country life on a Swedish fjord. After a few more restful days in Oslo and Drammen we returned home to Chicago.

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES

FROM TIME TO TIME the Museum Office or the Volunteer Office receive letters of thanks from some of the school children who visit the Museum. Some of them are saved and are worth repeating. Here is a selection from a group of sixth graders.

Dear Mrs. Guide,

It was nice going to see all the things in the museum, especially the ladies (I mean the dead ones.) Our teacher said she thinks you were a very good guide. She says you gave all the details and stayed at one project long enough so we could see it. Thanks alot.

Your Friend,
S. W.

Dear Madam Dosent,

Thank you for showing us around the Oriental Institute, my friends and I really enjoyed the spectacular siches (of your body) and the amazing artifacts. The most things I enjoyed the best was about the artifacts and the Assyrian wall carving. The mummy's and the ancient temples were very nice. I hope we could come to the Oriental Institute again thank you for being are wonderful guide.

Yours truly,
K. B.

Dear Docent,

Thank you for showing us around. I liked the bird with the gold crown and peak. I think the mommys were the koollest they had fancy legs. I liked you becaus you told us more about the mommys and everything else.

Thank you
D. M. the one with the big mouth!

Dear Ladies: I love to look at mummies even if they are nothing but bones! I even wrote a report on mummies in school and made a miniature mummy out of cloth!

Dear Docent,

We were there today and when I told my teacher about the guy that ate the hearts she did not even see it. She said that you were the best guide. all the boys thank you.

Sincerely yours,
S. R.

LOOKING FOR AN INTERESTING AVOCATION? Come to the Oriental Institute Volunteer Office to find out about volunteer work in a fascinating place as a museum docent or as sales help in the Suq, the Institute's gift and bookshop. Get in touch with Mrs. David Maher (phone 753-2573 or 753-2471), or write her at the Institute.



The great pyramids on the Giza Plateau; from left to right, the pyramids of Menkaure, Khafre, and Khufu. The town of Giza is spread at the lower end of the plateau.

JAPANESE TO BUILD NEW PYRAMID IN EGYPT

A TEAM OF JAPANESE ARCHEOLOGISTS from Waseda University have announced plans to build a new pyramid in the land of the pharaohs. Sakuji Yoshimura, chief archeologist for the expedition, announced the project early in October. The Japanese will supervise the construction, which will require almost 10,000 workers and take 2 1/2 months to complete. The structure will stand 65 feet high and measure 96 feet along the base. Upon its completion it will be one-seventh the size of Khufu's Great Pyramid at Giza.

So what does the Egyptian government think of all of this? Strange to say, it has agreed in principle to the project--but within certain limitations. Ahmed Kadry, Director of the Egyptian Department of Antiquities, spelled these out. First, the pyramid may not be built on the horizon as seen from the Giza Plateau,

and it will have to be at least three miles from the Great Pyramid. Secondly, it will have to be taken down as soon as it is built and photographed.

The entire project is being sponsored and financed by the Nippon Television Network Corporation for the whole sum of one million dollars. What does the network get out of it? Two ninety-minute television specials have been planned to cover the entire undertaking.

Mr. Yoshimura was insistent about the seriousness of this project. He felt that "the only way to find out how it was done is to build one." Another spokesman said, "Maybe it won't work; maybe we will encounter some problem that we can't surmount, but that's okay, too, because we will have learned something anyway."

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING ORIENTAL INSTITUTE MEMBERSHIP LECTURES

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Jan. 17 | "Architecture and Environment in the Near East"
John Carswell, Curator, the Oriental Institute Museum |
| Feb. 20 | "New Excavations in Iraq"
McGuire Gibson, the Oriental Institute |
| May 22 | "Mummies and Magic: An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Funerary Beliefs and Practices"
Lanny D. Bell, Director, Chicago House |

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

cordially invites you to attend an illustrated lecture:

"Petra: City Carved in Rock"

by Peter J. Parr
The University of London

Tuesday, December 6, 1977

8:00 p.m.

Mandel Hall
University Avenue at 57th Street

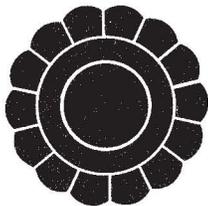
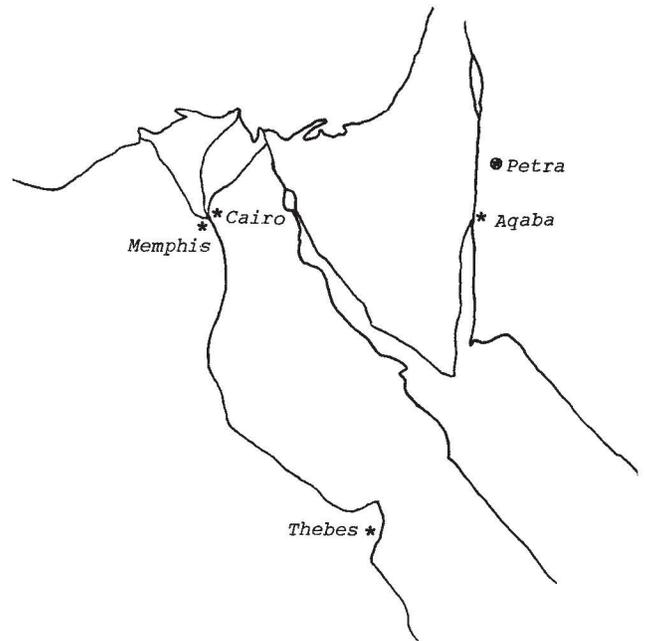
(The Quadrangle Club, 1155 East 57th Street, will be open to Oriental Institute members who wish to make dinner reservations. Please call Mrs. Schlender, 493-8601. Please remember that the privilege of the use of the dining room at the Quadrangle Club is a courtesy extended to members of the Oriental Institute only on nights when there is an Oriental Institute lecture.)

* * *

Members are also invited to attend a faculty-student seminar conducted by Mr. Peter Parr, entitled:

"Excavations at Tell Nebi Mend (Ancient Qadesh)"

on Wednesday, Dec. 7, 1977, at 3:30 p.m. in Breasted Hall.
Please be aware that this will be a very technical discussion.



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