



News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

Issued confidentially to members and friends

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NUBIAN LEATHER by Carl E. DeVries

Readers who have looked carefully at the exhibit of Nubian material excavated by the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition between 1962-64 are aware of the great diversity of finds which came from southernmost Egypt and cover a span of some five thousand years of Northeast African history. Our museum cases are perhaps a bit overburdened by pottery, but a few kinds of objects of great interest are not currently represented in the Nubian display. For example, no scarabs are on exhibit at present; during much of the summer and early fall of 1974 attention has been focused on the scarabs, which Mr. Reginald H. Coleman, senior artist of the Epigraphic Survey, was engaged to draw. Another category of object not represented in the exhibit is leather goods. The leather generally is so susceptible to damage in the sulphur-dioxide laden Chicago atmosphere that it has been felt best to take the leather objects off exhibit and put them into storage. Now they repose in the isolation of my basement office gently wrapped in acid-free tissue paper awaiting word of some new process or treatment that will enable them again to take their deserved place in the museum halls.

Those of you who have traveled in North Africa and particularly in Egypt are well acquainted with the many leather products which are made both for local use and especially for the tourist trade. A great variety of leather is available, although probably goatskin, sheepskin, cowhide, and camel leather predominate. More exotic skins also are represented in many of the small shops comprising the areas of Mouski or Khan el Khalili in Cairo. Bags and billfolds of crocodile, lizard, and snakeskin from the Sudan often catch the eye of the tourist.

The predecessors of modern leathercraft are well represented in our Nubian collection, with most of the material dating from the Meroitic and X-Group periods, but with considerable evidence also appearing in the earlier C-Group cemeteries.

Dates for the C-Group are being pushed back as more publications relating to that period are appearing as a result of the salvage archeology operations in Egyptian and Sudanese Nubia. The C-Group may now be said to extend from about the end of the Old Kingdom (roughly 2200 B.C.) down to the beginning of the New Kingdom (ca. 1550 B.C.) with a number of phases subdividing that culture. The C-Group people were vitally concerned with the raising of cattle, as is evidenced by the skulls of long-horned cattle found interspersed in the cemeteries, the incised depiction of cows on round-topped limestone stelae, other art forms showing cattle, and the abundant presence of leather garments and sandals. Our two large C-Group cemeteries, K and T, at Adindan, were pretty thoroughly looted, probably in antiquity, but a few graves there were intact burials. In many of those instances leather sandals were found on the feet. The leather was extremely brittle and the attempt to remove the material intact often met with failure. Furthermore, fairly common was a kind of leather skirt, which occasionally was decorated with beaded patterns or with a kind of fringe. These were in extremely poor condition, so that we were able to retrieve only fragments of the leather and some of the original patterning of the beadwork.

Since the Meroitic remains are much more recent (ca. 300 B.C.-A.D. 300), the preservation of the funerary remains is much better. Perhaps the burial practices also contributed somewhat to the better condition of the items most susceptible to decay, for the bodies were usually placed in the grave in an extended position rather than in the flexed pose of C-Group times. Again there were items of personal wear, mostly sandals. The leather garments of earlier times had been replaced by fabrics so that textiles from this period are more abundant. Especially interesting from Meroitic and X-Group times are the quivers which were examples of elaborate leather work. Several specimens which we have are splendid examples of the versatility of the craftsmen. There is evidence for the dyeing of leather, work in appliqué, stamping or embossing with a tool, the use of fringes or braided stuff—quite a variety of techniques and applications.

2 The X-Group cemeteries (ca. A.D. 300-600) appear to have had the best pieces of leatherwork. Most of this material comes from Cemetery Q and was found in the season of 1962-63. There are some very fine quivers and miscellaneous bits of equipment used in horsemanship. There are saddles, parts of bridles, and various other harness fragments. Cemetery Q was the area on the east bank of the river where W. B. Emery found the rich X-Group tumuli which contained the burials of the local rulers. He discovered harness parts which were in such good condition that they are displayed on equine mannequins in the Cairo Museum and probably have been seen by you who have toured that collection of Nubiana. The story of the recovery of those fine objects is graphically related by Emery in his *Nubian Treasure* (1948). Since Oriental Institute Cemetery Q consisted of burials of less exalted personages, the grave contents were also far more humble. Furthermore, much of this kind of object found by our expedition was in very poor condition from the outset.

In connection with the quivers, it may be remarked that we were more fortunate in our findings in the cemeteries of lesser folk than was Emery in his exhumation of the tombs of the nobility. He remarks that in the intact burials they unearthed they found only one good specimen of a quiver, though they found many fragments. In some cases the leatherwork was completely destroyed by moisture and only the presence of the iron arrowheads adhering in the form of a circle confirmed the original existence of a quiver. In this his experience differs from ours, for we found no quivers with arrows or arrowheads in them, although we found numerous arrowheads, particularly in the Meroitic Cemetery B, which was the only site we dug on the west bank of the river. The presence of archery equipment was attested also for the C-Group period; in one grave in Cemetery T we came across a disarticulated scapula in which a neat round hole filled with wood, the remains of an arrow shaft, gave mute testimony to some archer's aim and probable cause of the demise of the decedent.

The physical state of our leather is a cause of much concern to us and the presence of a qualified conservator, Ms. Barbara Hall, and the creation of a conservation laboratory give us some hope for the preservation of our remaining fragile and disintegrating leather objects. Our efforts to locate some leather expert who can tell us how the leather can be softened and laid flat have met with no success. Both the curator, Dr. Gustavus F. Swift, and I have communicated with leather authorities of many laboratories and museums, but all of our inquiries have met with negative results. One of the side objectives of my participation in the Nubian Colloquium in Warsaw, Poland, was to discuss with archeological colleagues and conservation experts the problem of our leather. Mr. A. D. Baynes-Cope of the British Museum laboratory seemed to sound the death knell for our objects when he pronounced that the physical properties of such thoroughly dessicated leather had so much changed from the original form of leather that we can no longer call the substance leather. We have learned that some remarkable results have been achieved with leather from Roman times found in river beds or in extremely moist circumstances in which the wetness has remained constant throughout centuries. We are not yet reduced to the expedient of placing our leather objects in the nearest peat bog or submerging them in the Jackson Park lagoon, but we need desperately to find some solution to the problems centering around the treatment and preservation of our fascinating Nubian leatherwork.

Dr. DeVries is Director of the Nubian Publication Project.



This quiver from Meroitic Cemetery B (grave B-213) at Ballana, Nubia, illustrates the variety of skilled techniques used by ancient Nubian leather craftsmen.



Election Day brought a surprise to the Oriental Institute Museum. That afternoon Mr. Moshe Dayan, former Defense Minister of Israel, paid a return visit, accompanied by Mr. Shaul Ramati, Consul General of Israel. Mr. Dayan was heard to remark that he had so enjoyed his last visit, in the Spring of 1972, that he wanted to come back when he had the opportunity; he was in town for a speaking engagement in Evanston. Mr. Dayan toured the museum with Mrs. Doris S. Shayne of Chicago, a volunteer guide. Mrs. Shayne describes him as charming and very interested in the exhibits, and especially knowledgeable about Egyptian scarabs, which he himself collects. Mr. Dayan also enjoyed the Mesopotamian exhibits, and especially appreciated our collection of Megiddo ivories, of course. At the end of an hour Mr. Dayan regretted that he could not stay any longer, but business called him away.

Moshe Dayan at the Megiddo exhibit

★ Are you having trouble making up your holiday gift list this year? Give your friends and relatives something they will appreciate and enjoy all year, a membership in the Oriental Institute. Gift memberships, like your own, are tax deductible. A special card will announce your gift. Please send your requests to the Membership Office.

★ During the month of December the University of Chicago is commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the birth of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., son of the Founder of the University, and a great and generous benefactor in his own right. Beginning December 11 and for four weeks or more after that, the Oriental Institute will present a temporary exhibition chronicling the friendly and productive collaboration between Mr. Rockefeller and James Henry Breasted, originator of the Institute. The show will include documents from the University and Rockefeller archives, a number of period photographs, and a significant group of archeological objects purchased with funds provided by Mr. Rockefeller and by other generous people of his time, as well as articles from excavations which he supported, and related publications. Some of these objects have not been on public display in a long time; the group has not been considered as a whole before, and the full importance of Mr. Rockefeller's philanthropy may only now become apparent. We urge our members to take advantage of this opportunity to understand a museum in a new way. A catalogue of the exhibit is in preparation, and copies will be made available to Institute members.

★ The annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America and the American Philological Association will be held at the Sheraton-Chicago Hotel on Saturday, December 28 through Monday, December 30, 1974. VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED to help with Registration, Information Booth, Exhibits (books and slides), Placement Service, Slide Projection, direction information, and changing signs outside the rooms in which papers are being read. Volunteers will, of course, be given free admission to the sessions of papers and will be invited to the reception at the Field Museum on Sunday, December 29th at 6:30 P.M. This is an opportunity to meet and talk with the best archeologists and classical philologists in this country and with some from abroad. If you are interested, please write or telephone to Mrs. John Livingood at the Oriental Institute, 753-2491.

TOUR TO TURKEY: There will be a meeting of those who are interested in the tour of Turkey one hour before the lecture on the evening of January 15th. The meeting is scheduled for Room 210 of the Institute. A representative of Travel Plans will be present.

★ The Museum Docents' and Suq Volunteers' Training Course will be given on 10 Mondays (April 14-June 16), 10:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. with a lunch break, in Breasted Hall. All volunteers must be Institute members.

NOTES ON MUSEUM EXHIBITS

by Judith A. Franke

Recently some changes have been made in the Egyptian and Assyrian Galleries of the Museum, and several temporary exhibits are currently being shown.

The Egyptian funerary material in Alcove J has been re-installed, and a new case has been added for the important Old Kingdom group of statuettes from the tomb of Ni-kau-Inpu. Alcoves G and I now house a new exhibit of Egyptian sculpture, in which many of our finest pieces have been remounted in two large cases, and a number of items which have been in our collection for many years are being exhibited for the first time. These new objects include two Old Kingdom pieces: a granite statue of the confectioner Tjementi, and a relief depicting the judge and scribe Tjenti. Two brightly painted stelae of the First Intermediate Period and Twelfth Dynasty are also included. Three fine Old Kingdom pieces from Giza have been borrowed from the University of California at Berkeley: a stela of the Lady Nofer, the statue of a seated scribe, and a reserve head which is exhibited in a separate case. Newly exhibited pieces from the later periods include a Ptolemaic relief sculpture of the head of a goddess or queen, and additional fragments of the well-known Mentuemhet and Nespeqashuti reliefs, which have been finely restored by our Preparator, Mr. Robert Hanson. A number of fine sculptor's models have been added to Alcove G, as well as glazed tiles from our excavations at Medinet Habu depicting foreigners. A case with sculpture of the Amarna Period includes a fine relief of running animals, and a fragment of the head of Queen Tiye, mother of Akhanaten.

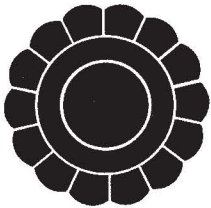
In the Assyrian Hall, the two reliefs from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, which were received a few

months ago through an exchange with the British Museum, have been put up in Alcove M. A special exhibit relating to these reliefs and the history of their excavation in the last century by Austen Henry Layard can also be seen in this area, and the Members' Lecture on January 15th will focus on the same topic.

Although plans are well under way for the complete reinstallation of the Mesopotamian materials in the Babylonian Hall, for which a National Endowment for the Arts grant was received early this year, actual work will not begin until the new year. One important item, though, a unique sculptured stone vessel in the shape of a boat of the Ur III Period, has recently been restored by Mr. Hanson and can be seen in Alcove AB. Meanwhile, the Babylonian Hall is the location of the special exhibit in honor of the centenary of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

Later in December, Chicago will be the scene of the national meetings of the Archaeological Institute of America and the American Philological Association, and at this time many hundreds of their members are expected to tour our museum. In honor of this occasion, a special case will be set up in the lobby on December 28. The focus of that exhibit will be "The Greeks and the Persians," and it will feature some previously unexhibited and newly restored objects from our excavations at Persepolis.

Ms. Franke is Assistant Curator of the Oriental Institute Museum. She is currently preparing her dissertation in the Department of Anthropology, based on her field work as Assistant Director of the Nippur Expedition last year.



The Oriental Institute

The University of Chicago

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