New Light on the History of Lower Nubia

by BRUCE G. TRIGGER

RÉSUMÉ

Bien que l'histoire de la « Basse-Nubie » ait été traitée par plusieurs auteurs, elle demeure passablement confuse. Cet article veut jeter un peu plus de lumière sur ce problème, tout en ne prétendant pas y apporter une solution définitive.

INTRODUCTION

Lower Nubia is the portion of the Nile Valley located between the First Cataract, near Aswan in Egypt, and the Second Cataract, near Wadi Halfa in the Sudan.[1] It is poorer and more thinly populated than the valley north of Aswan and because of ecological and ethnic differences always has been regarded as distinct from Egypt proper. Unlike the Dongola or Shendi areas farther south, it is not separated from Egypt by any formidable geographical barriers and it has often been subject to Egyptian surveillance and control. The history of Nubia has been determined to a large degree by the foreign policies of its northern and southern neighbours. In spite of this, Lower Nubia historically has been an important meeting place between Egypt and the Sudan and through it people and ideas have moved back and forth between the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa.

Prior to 1907 little was known about the archaeology of Lower Nubia. At that time the Egyptian government sponsored the first Archaeological Survey of Nubia in connection with the heightening of the Aswan Dam, built in 1899. Under the leadership of the famous American Egyptologist, George A. Reisner, and later of C. M. Firth, the northern half of Lower Nubia was surveyed, all

[1] The original version of this paper was read at A *Symposium on Contemporary Nubia*, held in Aswan, Egypt, in January 1964. The present version is based on a lecture sponsored by the Southwest Asia and North Africa Program of the State University of New York at Binghampton, February 11, 1966. The reader's attention is drawn to William Y. Adams' "Continuity and Change in Nubian Culture History" (*Sudan Notes and Records* 48 [1967] 1-32), a synthesis that differs from this one on a number of important points.

known sites except those of the Islamic period were recorded and the most interesting were fully excavated (Reisner 1910; Firth 1912, 1915, 1927). Between 1929 and 1934 this survey was continued south to the Sudanese border by Walter B. Emery and L. P. Kirwan (1935), and many new and important discoveries were made, particularly a series of royal tombs at Qustul and Ballana that date around the middle of the first millennium A.D. (Emery 1938). Other work was done in Lower Nubia in the first half of this century by Ugo Monneret de Villard (1935-57) for the Egyptian Antiquities Service, F. L. Griffith (Liverpool Annals, passim) of Oxford, Sir C. Leonard Woolley and D. Randall-MacIver (1909-11) of the University of Pennsylvania, Hermann Junker (1925, 1926) of the Vienna Academy of Sciences and the Ernst Sieglin Expedition (Steindorff 1935). In 1959 the impending construction of the High Dam south of Aswan prompted Unesco to launch an appeal for further archaeological work in the threatened area. Approximately 25 expeditions from about as many countries responded to this appeal. As a result of this work some old theories about the history of Nubia have had to be revised or discarded and others have been called into question. Much of the evidence remains to be examined and new hypotheses must be tested.

The following is not meant to be a definitive statement of Nubian culture history but a presentation that may stimulate an exchange of ideas and help to clarify issues. It is obvious, however, that some problems of Nubian culture history may never be answered, at least with data from Lower Nubia.

THE LAND

Our discussion must begin with ecology. There appear to have been few ecological changes in Lower Nubia during the past 6,000 years. The riverbed has remained more or less constant and rainfall has been almost nil. As a result there was never within historic times any more rainfall grazing land along the Nile than there is now. During the Neolithic Wet phase, however, which lasted until about 2300 B.C., there was more rainfall in the Sudan and in the Red Sea Hills than at present and because the water table was higher, there were more springs and cases in the Western Desert. During this period there also were higher flood levels in the Nile

Valley, although because of the steep terrain this meant that there was only slightly more inundated land in Lower Nubia than at present. Since that time there have been minor cyclical fluctuations in the average height of the Nile flood but the effect of these changes on life in the region has not as yet been worked out. The increasing aridity of the deserts after the Neolithic Wet Phase seems to have encouraged the accumulation of sand along the west bank of the river, the one facing the prevailing winds (Trigger 1965: 23-24). De Heinzelin's (1964) work at Aksha suggests that much of the sand accumulated after A.D. 1000.

Throughout history arable land has been scarce in Lower Nubia. Because the river cuts easily through the Nubian sandstone, which is found everywhere between the First and Second Cataracts, the valley is narrow and the arid plateau often extends right to the river. As a result, naturally fertile areas are small and separated from one another by strips of desert. In the past, when the Nubians depended more on agriculture, their hamlets tended to cluster around the perimeter of these fertile areas, which we call localities (John Lewis Burckhardt 1819:37). Although the landscape of Lower Nubia was greatly altered by the successive enlargements of the Aswan Reservoir, it is possible to obtain a fairly detailed picture of the distribution of localities prior to the building of the dam from old maps, illustrations and travellers' accounts.

In general, the extreme north of Nubia was a region of small and scattered localities. Between Shellal and the granitic constriction in the river known as the Bab el Kalabsha, patches of fertile soil were found only in the mouths of small wadis. The richest single area was the plain of Tafa, on the east bank just north of the Baba el Kalabsha.

Between Tafa and Gerf Husein the localities were less frequent and the banks of potentially fertile soil often were above the high water level. The two other areas characterized by limited agricultural potential were between Maharraqa and Derr and Arminna and Abu Simbel. The first of these is the section of river that bends through the Korosko Hills.

In the rest of Lower Nubia the fertile areas were larger and closer together and some were substantial plains. Between Gerf

Husein and Qurta there was a series of large fertile plains on both sides of the river. The one on the west bank at Dakka was eight kilometers long and with the aid of wells and water hoists could be cultivated up to 1.5 kilometers from the river. In the last century the region between Derr and Arminna was considered to be the richest part of Lower Nubia and was famous for its date palms. In addition to very productive strips of land along the shore there were also fertile islands in this region. The largest of the plains here was on the west bank at Aniba, opposite the towering cliffs of Qasr Ibrim. There was another moderately fertile region between Abu Simbel and the Second Cataract. The richest locality in that area was Faras West, which although it has been encroached on by sand dunes in recent times, was once a worthy equal of Dakka and Aniba. This natural division of Lower Nubia into three fertile districts was meaningful to the ancient Egyptians. The main fortresses of the Middle Kingdom were built at Dakka, Aniba and Faras and each of these districts was under the patronage of its own royal diety.

The political development of Lower Nubia has been conditioned in part by the ecology of the region. The narrowness of the valley and the frequent projections of rock to the edge of the river have prevented the development of complex irrigation systems or even of basin agriculture. The several thousand acres of land that were irrigated were done so with *saqias* that were individually or family owned. The scarcity of land in Lower Nubia has tended to generate quarrels between families and lineages, and the absence of large centers of population or resources that the local population could effectively exploit has provided no opportunities for the development of a complex economy in Lower Nubia. The regional governments that have controlled Lower Nubia have either been colonial administrations or local ones imposed by force or organized to resist outside pressure. In the early part of the last century, for example, a local warlord used an army of slaves and foreign mercenaries to wring taxes from the local population (Burckhardt 1819). During the infrequent periods when control of trade along the Nile has fallen into local hands it appears to have been controlled by a few villages or by a small local elite much as in other parts of Africa.

The inability of Nubia to support large irrigation works, the maintenance of which requires stable political conditions, has meant that the population of Nubia has been much more stable than that of Egypt. The population of Lower Nubia in 1964 was approximately the same as when John Lewis Burckhardt visited the country in 1813. During the same period the population of Egypt has risen from 2.5 million (a low figure reflecting the political chaos of the day) to about 26 million. The surplus population of Nubia has emigrated to Egypt or the Sudan where Nubian men have found work either as soldiers or domestics. This seems to be a long established pattern. Nubians were recruited for the Egyptian army as early as the Old Kingdom and servants, who may not have been slaves, are already portrayed in Fifth Dynasty tombs at Sakkara.

THE EARLY NUBIAN PERIOD

The first evidence of neolithic (food producing) settlement in Lower Nubia is fairly late and comes from one site only. This is at Khor Bahan, just south of Shellal, and the culture found there is that of Egypt in the late Amratian or early Gerzean periods (Reisner 1910:113-40). While sites containing pottery resembling the pre- and early neolithic pottery in the Khartoum area have been found in the extreme southern part of Lower Nubia (Nordstrom 1962:49; Myers 1960:176) and appear to date around 3000 B.C., there is no evidence whether or not goats and agriculture had managed to diffuse to these indigenous cultures prior to the expansion of Egyptian culture into northern Lower Nubia. During the Gerzean period a culture closely related to that of Upper Egypt spread throughout most of Lower Nubia but seems to have remained concentrated in the north. At the same time this culture began to diverge from the parent culture of Egypt and to develop along its own lines. Most of the native pottery, for example, consists of a distinctive black-lipped ware, while the Gerzean painted pottery found in these sites all appears to be imported (Junker 1919). Because environmental opportunities were limited, Nubian society did not show signs of the social and cultural elaboration that brought the first barbarian states into existence in Gerzean Egypt, led to the unification of the country around 3000 B.C. and then to the flowering of the Old Kingdom a few hundred years later. It is

impossible to determine whether the first neolithic settlements in northern Lower Nubia were those of Egyptian settlers (perhaps refugees) or whether the beginning of the Early Nubian Sequence merely represents the diffusion of elements of Egyptian culture among an indigenous food collecting people. The apparent racial similarities between the Nubians and Egyptians at this time do not prove that they were necessarily linguistically or ethnically the same. In fact ethnic variation would help to explain the growing differences between the material culture of Egypt and Nubia.

The subsistence economy of the Early Nubian cultures has not been well studied, but it was probably similar to that followed by the natives of Lower Nubia until the New Kingdom. This was a mixed farming in which there was a strong emphasis on herding. The flood plain, which was broader in many places than it has been in the recent past as a result of the higher floods that lasted at least from the start of the Early Nubian Sequence until the end of the Middle Kingdom, provided fodder for the cattle and allowed crops to be grown with relatively little effort. A certain amount of agriculture was necessary to feed the herds during the flood season when most grazing land was under water. The produce of flood plain agriculture appears to have been supplemented by fishing, a tradition probably inherited from earlier times. During the Gerzean period the population did not number more than two or three thousand (Trigger 1965:160).

The earliest settlements that have been found are small and lack any indication of permanent house structures. At the campsite at Meris, perhaps the best recorded of the Early Nubian I (Predynastic) period, only sixteen hearths were recovered (Reisner 1910: 215-18). It appears that families lived in shelters made of reeds or mats fastened onto poles. Cemeteries sometimes contained more than 100 graves with multiple burials in many of them. Reisner (1923) later interpreted these multiple burials as evidence of *sati* but in some there is clear evidence that bodies were placed in the graves at different times. This suggests a stability in population that is not evident in the habitation sites. Perhaps a band would occupy a single locality, or several adjacent ones and move around within their territory as they grazed their cattle. Most of the year

their camps were probably on the flood plain near the river and hence are lost to us forever.

During Early Nubian I times the population of Nubia increased and there is evidence of substantial prosperity. The large quantities of Egyptian goods found in Nubian graves suggest that during late predynastic times the Nubians had something to offer the Egyptians in return. Perhaps some of these items came to Nubia as pay received by mercenaries who fought in the armies of the emerging kingdom of Upper Egypt. These would have been the first in a long line of Nubian mercenaries who served in the Egyptian armies. It is also likely that copper was obtained by the Nubians near the Second Cataract and traded with the Egyptians. Although the source of this copper has not yet been tracked down it was worked at Buhen near Wadi Halfa in the Old and New Kingdoms and was probably available in the pre-Cambrian rock formations nearby. The wealth of Gerzean Egypt also stimulated a demand for wood, ivory and other products from central Africa and there might have been trade in these items along the Nile corridor at this time. It has even been suggested that the first neolithic settlements in Nubia were Gerzean trading colonies.

By the beginning of the First Dynasty in Egypt a neolithic culture of Egyptian origin had spread throughout Lower Nubia and absorbed a number of cultural traits from the indigenous mesolithic (?) culture farther south. This gave rise to the Early Nubian II (roughly the A-group) culture. During the latter period the population of Lower Nubia was larger than it either had been before or would be for some time to come. It reached perhaps 7-10,000. More localities were inhabited than before, although these were naturally still the most fertile ones. The indigenous pottery included conical bowls decorated on the outside with geometrical designs in red paint and these appear to be the work of professional potters. As well as this evidence of a more complex division of labour there is also evidence of increasing social differentiation. A small cemetery found near Seyala, for example, is almost certainly that of a Nubian chief and his family. In addition to other fine objects, both native and imported, two magnificent Egyptian maces with elaborately decorated gold handles were recovered from this cemetery (Firth 1927:204-12). Recently a village of this period was excavated near

Afyeh which contained several rectangular houses built of rough slabs of sandstone (Smith 1962:59-61; Lal 1963). Although several villages that resemble this one, but were more poorly preserved, have been recorded in other parts of Lower Nubia, most villages of this period lack evidence of permanent structures. It is possible that the more elaborate villages were the residences of local chiefs. It is also likely that at this time Lower Nubia was divided into a number of small chiefdoms, as documentary evidence indicates that it was later during the Sixth Dynasty.

It used to be believed that the Egyptians had not tried to conquer Lower Nubia or settle there during the Old Kingdom. Now, however, there is growing evidence of Egyptian military activity both in Palestine and in Nubia early in the First Dynasty. A rock carving found in Gebel Shaikh Suleiman just south of Wadi Halfa shows Nubians of two unidentified localities being defeated by the Egyptians in the reign of King Djer (Arkell 1950). At present, however, there is no evidence of any serious attempt to occupy the region prior to the Second Dynasty when the Egyptians may have built their first settlement at Buhen (Emery 1965:112-13). Since copper smelters were found there it appears that the Egyptians had seized the copper mines and probably control of trade with the south as well. The Palermo Stone records a campaign in the reign of Snefru in which several thousand Nubians were carried off as prisoners (Gardiner 1961:78). This suggests that the Egyptians were resorting to mass deportations to pacify the region and perhaps also to secure manpower for their projects in the north.

During the Old Kingdom both the chronology and culture history of Lower Nubia become somewhat obscure. A number of sites have been found in the north that appear to date from this time and they seem to represent an impoverished continuation of the Early Nubian Sequence, characterized mainly by the disappearance of most trade goods and the fine native pottery of the preceding period. Reisner called this the B-Group and I have renamed it Early Nubian III. To date, no Early Nubian III material has been found in a stratified sequence. Moreover, south of Dakka few Early Nubian III sites have been found and none have been found in the Sudan except at Buhen. This has led several scholars to argue that the B-Group is not a distinct culture at all but merely

a selection of poorer material belonging to the Early Nubian II and contemporary with it. If this is correct, Lower Nubia would appear to have been uninhabited from the Early Dynastic period until the beginning of the Middle Nubian Sequence, sometime after the start of the Sixth Dynasty. This would suggest a clear break both in people and culture between the two sequences. It seems possible, however, that Early Nubian III represents an impoverished continuation of the Early Nubian Sequence in northern Lower Nubia, which has gone undetected in the south because of the cursory nature of the work done on early sites there.

Whatever the actual details, it is clear that the reversals suffered by the Nubians at this time led to a collapse of the social and economic structure of Lower Nubia. Whatever population survived was small and impoverished and lived under the constant threat of more Egyptian raids. As a result, the Egyptians were able to pursue their quarrying activities in the desert west of Toshka without hindrance (Simpson 1963:50-53).

THE MIDDLE NUBIAN PERIOD

A revival of culture, or at least a revival of interest in fancy pottery, marks the start of the Middle Nubian period or C-Group. It used to be believed that this tradition began during the First Intermediate Period, but there is now evidence to suggest that it may have begun during the Sixth Dynasty. It is also generally believed that this culture was introduced into Lower Nubia by a migration of tribes out of the adjacent deserts which were drying up about this time (Firth 1915:11, 12; Junker 1919:7-12; Murdock 1959:159; Bates 1914; Emery and Kirwan 1935:4; Arkell 1961: 49-53) and this explanation is likely to hold true if it turns out that there really was a temporal gap between the Early and Middle Nubian Sequences. It is also possible, however, that this culture is merely a continuation of the Early Nubian ones. No migration is required to account for the stylistic changes observed in the archaeological record, although small groups may have joined those already living in the valley and added traits of their own to the general culture. Future information about the cultures of the Eastern and Western Deserts at this time may help to resolve this problem even if the data from Lower Nubia are inadequate.

The revival of local culture at this time seems correlated with the Egyptian withdrawal from Buhen, with the closing down of the Toshka quarries and perhaps the abandonment by the Egyptians of the whole of Lower Nubia. This withdrawal, however, did not bring back the golden age of the Early Nubian II culture. For one thing, trade with Dongola remained in Egyptian hands, although it was now carried on over long overland routes from Upper Egypt, as we know from the inscriptions of Harkhuf, the governor of Elephantine midway through the Sixth Dynasty (Gardiner 1961: 99-101). The power of the Lower Nubian chiefs appears to have increased in the Sixth Dynasty, but on at least one occasion they were prevented from collecting tolls by the armed forces that accompanied the Egyptian expedition back from Dongola. The murder of an Egyptian official late in the Sixth Dynasty also brought military reprisals (Gardiner 1961:99). The collapse of the central government in Egypt during the First Intermediate Period was of little benefit to Nubia since the market for southern goods in Egypt dried up and Egyptian harassment of Lower Nubia appears to have continued.

Early in the Middle Kingdom the Egyptians re-occupied Lower Nubia as far as Semna where there is a natural barrier across the river, and heavily fortified the frontier against the Nubians living to the south. This time, however, there is no hint of mass deportations and presumably the small population of Lower Nubia was not considered a threat to Egyptian ambitions. Instead, large forts were built as control points in the main centers of native population — Dakka, Aniba and Faras. The Egyptians monopolized the trade with the south and trade goods are rare in Nubian graves that date from the Middle Kingdom. This suggests that the lack of any Egyptianizing trends in the culture of Lower Nubia at this time was as much the result of poverty as it was of conscious resistance to the conquerors. Although probably made to pay a cattle tax and to provide occasional corvee labour (Save-Soderbergh 1941:74), the Nubians also benefitted from Egyptian rule as the latter maintained order among the local chiefdoms and also protected the Nubians against attacks from the desert. As a result, the population of Lower Nubia appears to have grown considerably during this period.

Another indication of stability can be seen in the villages themselves. At this time two house types, both involving dry-stone masonry, became common. One was a single room, circular, semi-subterranean house. The lower part was built of large upright slabs of stone, and the upper part consisted of a roof of skins stretched over a complicated framework of wooden beams (Steindorff 1935:201-219). Some of these houses were up to six meters in diameter and had as many as three hearths in a row. The other type of dwelling consisted of several circular or curvilinear rooms and open courts joined together. Inside these houses tethering posts for animals have been found as well as silos for storing grain (Emery and Kirwan 1935:106-08). Nubian villages remained small and houses often were built at considerable distances from each other. No sort of village plan has been observed. At Aniba a village containing both of these kinds of houses was found built over an earlier collection of Middle Nubian tent circles. This change seems to reflect a growing feeling of security and a tendency to settle down.

With the withdrawal or expulsion of Egyptian forces from Lower Nubia during the Second Intermediate Period there seems to have been a marked upsurge in the prosperity of the country and a continued growth in its population. Despite Egypt's difficulties, trading appears to have gone on between the powerful state of Kush in Dongola and the Hyksos kingdom in northern Egypt. It is possible that during this period the rulers of Lower Nubia were able to share in the profits from this trade, either as middlemen or by collecting tolls on goods passing through their territory. In any case a considerable increase in the power and wealth of these rulers is suggested by the size and complexity of their tombs as well as by their adoption of many features of both Egyptian and Kushitic culture. A "castle" apparently built at this time and inhabited as late as the reign of Tutmosis III was found at Er-Riqa. It appears to have been the fortified residence of one of these rulers. Originally it had been surrounded by a rectangular enclosure 80 meters long, 40 meters wide, and two meters thick. The wall was built of rubble faced with large stone slabs in the same style as were the walls of some Middle Nubian houses. At either end of the enclosed area was a rectangular building partly built of mudbrick and divided into a number of rooms and courtyards in a formal

fashion that reflects Egyptian influence (Randall-MacIver and Woolley 1909). Smaller one-room houses that appear to date from this period have been found at Aniba. From the point of view of the native population the period appears to have been one of prosperity, increasing population and heightened social and technological complexity. The rulers of Nubia were once again in a position to begin adopting many elements of Egyptian culture.

It is unclear whether or not the Lower Nubian chiefs were vassals of the king of Kush, but when the Egyptians reconquered Lower Nubia at the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty they did so very easily and dealt leniently with the local princes. The old forts were rebuilt and garrisoned by mixed contingents made up of Egyptians and their allies from the Eastern Desert. The latter Pan Grave people appear to have settled elsewhere in Lower Nubia at this time as well and their graves frequently contain fine daggers of Egyptian origin. Since the Egyptians were determined to press on and conquer Dongola they probably felt it best to encourage the Egyptianizing tendencies of the Lower Nubian chiefs and thus win their cooperation. Hence while they were probably stripped of much real power they were allowed to retain the titles and privileges of office. The sons of these princes were taken to Egypt to be educated at the royal court. There they acquired Egyptian ways and were encouraged to forget their native language, so that when they returned to Nubia they were thoroughly Egyptianized. These princes soon bore Egyptian names and were buried in Egyptian-style tombs (Simpson 1963; Thabit 1957; Save-Soderbergh 1960, 1963b). Their relatives lived in the Egyptian towns that grew up around the Middle Kingdom forts and often worked in the government offices (Save-Soderbergh 1941:184). The example set by the rulers spread to their subjects and Nubian culture as such tended to disappear (Save-Soderbergh 1962:88-89; Smith 1962:49).

The history of Lower Nubia during the New Kingdom is not entirely clear. Many Nubian sites date from the New Kingdom and the combined total of Egyptian and Middle Nubian graves from this period suggests a record population of perhaps 20,000. As one would expect, many small sites are found in the poorer localities that had been avoided prior to this time. The majority

of sites, however, appears to date from the first half of the Eighteenth Dynasty and except in large centers, like Aniba, few graves appear to date from later times.

William Y. Adams (1964b:105-08) has argued that the native population abandoned Lower Nubia part way through the Eighteenth Dynasty and moved south into Dongola, where a culture closely resembling the Middle Nubian one appears to have survived until the Napatan period. He hypothesizes that the great temples of the Nineteenth Dynasty such as Bait el Wali, Wadi es Sebua and Abu Simbel were built as symbols of imperial might in a largely empty land. According to Adams, Lower Nubia was abandoned because of falling river levels and because the Nubians sought to avoid heavy taxation. These reasons are hardly convincing. Egypt ruled Dongola as well as Lower Nubia and falling river levels would have affected both regions adversely. Moreover, Egyptian towns and temples built early in the New Kingdom are close to the river and suggest that waterlevels at that time were already approximately the same as they are now. In addition his reasons do not explain why tombs of officials and records of land sales are found in Lower Nubia during the late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties nor why Lower Nubia or Wawat should have continued to have a deputy viceroy. If Adams has read the archaeological evidence correctly Lower Nubia was probably abandoned for reasons other than the ones he suggests.

It is possible, however, that much of the rural population of Nubia gravitated into the large towns that grew up around the old fortresses during the course of the New Kingdom. Unfortunately none of these large centers has been thoroughly excavated. If there was such a shift in population, it might have been associated with the introduction into Lower Nubia of craft specializations and new forms of land use modelled along Egyptian lines. Most, if not all, of the farming population appears to have worked on land owned by the crown, the local princes, administrative officials, and by the numerous temples that were built throughout Lower Nubia and grew in splendour during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties. Under these conditions there seems to have been a shift away from pastoralism in the direction of more intensive agriculture. The plantation scene in the tomb of Djehuty-hotep at Debeira just north of Wadi Halfa suggests that dates may have been grown for

export and the mention of bee-keepers and wine producers farther south (Save-Soderbergh 1941:199; 1960) suggests that such activities may have been present in Lower Nubia as well. In addition there is some evidence of the manufacture of leather goods for export to Egypt. Basin agriculture, as practised in Egypt was impossible because of the terrain, but the *shaduf*, or manual water hoist, which was introduced to Egypt in the New Kingdom may have helped to compensate for the drop in flood levels that had occurred between the Middle and New Kingdoms. Land may have been more expensive in Lower Nubia than it was in Egypt (Edward Wente, per. comm.).

The administrative centers which were located in the principal localities of Lower Nubia were probably not very different from provincial towns of the period in Egypt proper. They consisted of walled public buildings and elite residential areas set in the midst of fields and peasant villages. A cemetery dotted with the pyramid chapels of the wealthy was located in the desert back of these towns. The Nubian chiefs no doubt had official residences in these regional centers as well as country estates elsewhere (Simpson 1963:27).

Between 1000 and 300 B.C. there is no evidence of any sedentary population in Lower Nubia. There are a few shrines and inscriptions of the Sudanese king Taharka, who ruled both Egypt and the Sudan in the eighth century B.C. A few objects have also been found which seem to belong to the Egyptian garrisons that were stationed in Lower Nubia for a time in the reign of the Egyptian king Psammetik in the seventh century, and Herodotus (1955:112) records that there was a small settlement of Egyptians and Napatans (perhaps traders?) living on the island of Tacompso near the present Maharraqa. The absence of population is certainly noteworthy and requires explanation.

The disappearance of the New Kingdom settlements in Lower Nubia seems to have resulted from political conditions at the end of the New Kingdom. As the central government grew weaker the most important Egyptian enterprises in Lower Nubia were abandoned, particularly the mining of gold in the Eastern Desert. As a result, many officials probably moved back to Egypt taking their serfs and dependents with them. After the collapse of the

Twentieth Dynasty (c. 1087) the Egyptians appear to have withdrawn from Upper Nubia thereby exposing Lower Nubia to attack. In the eighth century B.C. a strong native dynasty rose to power in the Dongola region and managed to rule most of Egypt for almost a century. After this time Egypt and Dongola remained hostile until Ptolemaic times. Although Persian power may have extended into Upper Nubia for a time, Lower Nubia remained a no man's land between the two countries. C. M. Firth's (1927:28) suggestion that Lower Nubia was abandoned because of low water levels is unsubstantiated, since present day conditions were reached before the start of the New Kingdom and flood levels were higher rather than lower than they are today during a good part of the first millennium B.C.

THE LATE NUBIAN PERIOD

In the Ptolemaic period relations between Egypt and the Meroitic kingdom to the south were much improved. Although the Meroites attempted to foment trouble in Upper Egypt and on one occasion invaded it, trade between Egypt and the Sudan appears to have increased considerably. The wealth and stimulation derived from this trade helped to initiate a cultural renaissance in the Meroitic heartland. The border remained near Maharraqa in the middle of Lower Nubia and the cooperation between the two states appears to be symbolized by the temples at Dakka and Philae which contain constructions of Ergamenes and Ptolemy IV (Arkell 1961:158-59). The latter of these places was now becoming an important center for the worship of Isis. During the Ptolemaic period, the Meroites appear to have settled at Faras, at Qasr Ibrim, opposite Aniba, and perhaps also at Gebel Adda. The settlements that date from this period are few in number, however, and for the most part appear to be quite poor (William Adams, per. comm.).

A considerable increase in population appears to have taken place after the introduction of the *saqia* or oxen-driven water wheel sometime in the Roman period. This device permitted agriculture to expand above the existing high water levels on to the fossil alluvium. Crops could thus be grown on the plains that had been dry since flood levels had declined after the Middle Kingdom and also in many hitherto uninhabited localities where there was a

narrow strip of arable land above the old high water level. These changes resulted in a great increase in population and a distribution of settlement resembling that found in Lower Nubia in the last century. The poor areas, where there had been large gaps in the distribution of population, were now filled up so that for the first time there were villages along the entire length of the river. Cemeteries increased in size and the overall population may have risen as high as 60,000.

The Roman portion of Lower Nubia was an important source of gold and building stone as well as a center for trade with the south. We have the names of at least ten Roman settlements that were military camps or garrison towns. Contra-Pselchis at the mouth of the Wadi el Allaqi controlled the route to the gold fields in the Eastern Desert, which were exploited by convict labour during Ptolemaic-Roman times. The small number of sites found on the east bank of the river suggests either that its exposure to raids from the Eastern Desert rendered it unattractive for settlement or else that the Egyptians preferred to let the nomads from the Eastern Desert use that bank to pasture their flocks, as they had prior to the resettlement of Lower Nubia. The temples and stone buildings found at Tafa, just north of the Bab el Kalabsha suggest that the towns in this area were spread out in much the same way that Nubian towns are today (Weigall 1907:64-66). A curious stone building on the hill behind Tafa, that was formerly described as a governor's palace, has recently been identified as a shrine of the goddess Isis, who was the patroness of this area. The great temple of Philae, just south of Aswan, became one of the chief centers for the worship of this goddess. The large number of temples found in this part of Lower Nubia and the obvious respect that the Meroites had for Isis suggest that the Ptolemaic and Roman governments in Egypt may have sought to protect the border and to make traders from upriver feel at ease by putting the entire region under the protection of dieties for whom the Egyptians and Meroites both felt a strong attachment. The Byzantine writer Procopius attributed such a function to Philae, although he wrongly attributed the construction of the site to Diocletian.

Aside from the fortresses atop Qasr Ibrim and Gebel Adda, the Meroitic settlements south of Maharraqa appear to have been

unfortified. Most of these were probably erected subsequently to the establishment of peaceful relations between Roman and Meroe about 23 B.C. The typical Meroitic house was constructed of mud-bricks with a barrel vaulted roof, like those still built by the Kenuzi Nubians. The simplest houses had two rectangular rooms side by side. Other houses consisted of four or more rooms and some were several stories high and built around an open court. Some of the more elaborate houses had foundation courses of dressed stone and were supplied with carved stone lintels and window screens. Presumably some of these large buildings were the houses of the Meroitic elite. The so-called "Western Palace" at Faras had an enclosure wall 38 meters long and 36 meters wide, lined on the inside with a row of small rectangular rooms. The doors of these rooms opened onto a courtyard, in the center of which was a free-standing building 11 meters square (Griffith 1926). The ostraca found in the outer rooms and the general similarity between this complex and some of the fortified Roman caravanserais in the Eastern Desert suggest that it might have been some sort of official warehouse. The Meroitic settlements at Wadi el Arab (Emery and Kirwan 1935:108-22), Er-Riqa, Karanog and Arminna appear to have been straggling collections of houses built along the edge of the flood plain, not unlike Roman Tafa to the north or the villages of modern Nubia.

Adams (1963:26) has suggested that some of the two room Meroitic structures consisted of a small storage room and a larger all-purpose living room. One of the houses excavated at Arminna West had two rooms of equal size, one of which contained two large built-in storage vats. Meroitic houses by and large were not surrounded by any sort of enclosure as are modern Nubian houses and they were also located much closer together than is usual at the present time. At Gumnarti, an island in the second cataract, Adams (1963:24-28) excavated two large structures made up of several two-room units joined together. These seem to have been inhabited either by lineages or by polygynous families and they are different from the sort of houses commonly found farther north.

In an earlier treatment of the growth of Meroitic settlement in Lower Nubia during the Roman period, I suggested that trade was probably one of the principal factors that encouraged this trend.

While the volume of trade may have been greater in the first century A.D. than it was in Ptolemaic times, this does not explain why so many of the Meroitic funerary inscriptions appear to date from the second and third centuries A.D. Adams and others are perhaps correct in suggesting that political disturbances farther south were prompting settlement in the north at this time. These disturbances may have been brought about by the expansion of Nubian speaking tribesmen from Kordofan and Darfur into the Dongola region (Trigger 1966). The frequent references to "envoys to the Romans" (apêteleb arêmelis) in the Meroitic funerary inscriptions suggests that trade still may have been important.

In the third century both Rome and Meroe were weakened and Lower Nubia was exposed to attack by the tribes of the Eastern Desert who had obtained the camel a few centuries earlier and had adapted themselves to a predatory way of life. For several centuries these bedouin, who appear to be the ancestors of the modern Beja peoples, controlled portions of Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia. A cultural decline can be seen in the Ballana or X-Group culture, which seems to have developed out of the Roman and Meroitic cultures of Nubia, with most of the new items being of Egyptian origin. A glottochronological study by Joseph Greenberg supports the theory that the Nubian language was brought into the Nile Valley, probably from Kordofan or Darfur sometime during the Ballana period. The arrival of Nubian speakers in Lower Nubia probably took the form of a slow infiltration after a period of acculturation in the Dongola area. The Ballana culture may have evolved prior to the coming of the Nubians and in any case it was apparently the culture of all the peoples of Lower Nubia, Meroites and Blemmye (Beja) as well as Nubian. The idea that there is a sharp break between the Meroitic and Ballana cultures and that the latter can be associated with either the Blemmyes or the Nubians is a myth that only now is being dispelled (Trigger 1966, 1967). After the political unification of Lower Nubia by kings who had their capital at Faras or Ballana, Nubian probably replaced Meroitic as the dominant language of the region. One of the casualties of this dark age was the Meroitic script, which died out about this time.

The rulers at Ballana, who were not converted to Christianity until A.D. 541, attempted to build a provincial imitation of the vanished Meroitic kingdom. They wore silver crowns modelled on those of the Meroitic royal family and were buried with their wives, prized animals and slaughtered retainers under large tumuli, which seem to have been substitutes for the Meroitic pyramid (Emery 1938). The luxury of the elite cemeteries at Ballana and Qasr Ibrim as compared with cemeteries elsewhere in Lower Nubia shows that marked differences in wealth existed at this period. The government was probably able to wring taxes from the impoverished farmers along the river at this time even more effectively than the *kashef* or local ruler could do at the start of the last century. It was also able to command large work forces for projects such as the construction of royal tombs. On the other hand, there is evidence of a marked decline in population in the Ballana period and most of the villages, which were continuations of ones occupied in Meroitic times, appear to have been sorely impoverished. Many houses were old ones that had been patched up and the new ones often were very poorly built (Adams 1964; Trigger 1965:143).

Although Christians appear to have been living in Lower Nubia during the Ballana period, Nobatia or Lower Nubia was officially converted in 541, about the same time as Mukaria and Alwa, the two Nubian states to the south. There is some debate whether Nobatia was originally Orthodox or Monophysite, but by the eighth century it was wholly the latter. Throughout the Christian period Byzantine influence remained strong at the court and in religious circles. Officials bore titles used at the imperial court and Christian names of Byzantine origin were common. Greek was apparently spoken as late as the twelfth century (Oates 1963).

Life in Lower Nubia appears to have changed little in Early Christian times. A number of fortified towns were built in different parts of the country, apparently under Syrian Christian influence. These were surrounded by stone walls, roughly rectangular in shape with one end narrower than the other. Some of these towns may have been caravan stops on the route north; at least the inscription from about 577 A.D. which says that Ikhmindi was built "for the protection of men and animals" (Donadoni 1959; Stenico 1960) suggests this. Until Adams (1962) published his study of Christian

pottery the chronology of this period was poorly understood, and as yet very little has been published about the development of architecture during this period. Adams' definitive publication of the stratified site at Meinarti should do much to remedy this. The Early Christian village at Arminna West apparently consisted of a warren of poorly constructed houses with irregular walls built of stones laid in mud and only occasionally of mud-brick (Trigger 1966b). Similar villages have been found elsewhere both in Egypt and the Sudan. If these are typical of the Early Christian period it would appear that the small towns at least were as poor as they had been in the Ballana phase.

The Classic Christian period (c. A.D. 850-1050) was apparently prosperous and marked the high point in Nubian cultural development. From the eighth century on, Nobatia was part of the kingdom of Dongola, although its *eparch* or ruler enjoyed a good deal of independence. During this period there was an increase in population and an improvement in the quality of houses which once again were built with thick, mud-brick walls and had four or five rooms although they were apparently inhabited by nuclear families. There was also a tendency for houses to cluster together to form tightly knit settlements. These agglutinated complexes grew by accretion and defence does not appear to have been an important factor in their development. The improved protection this arrangement offered against drifting sand may account for this new layout, although William Adams (per. comm.) has very reasonably suggested that it also may be an expression of a community life that was more integrated than before and perhaps was centered on the parish church, much as the pueblos in the American southwest were centered on their *kivas*. Even small communities had either one or more churches, either within the village or just outside it near the cemetery. These churches were frequently adorned with wall paintings and the ones in the best churches were of high quality. In addition, there were large buildings that we know from historical documents were monasteries. One of these has apparently recently been excavated at Qasr el Wizz near the Sudanese border. The three cathedral towns in Lower Nubia were at Dakka, Qasr Ibrim and Faras, a distribution which testifies to the continuing importance of these localities. The *eparch* lived at Faras. Here the citadel,

located within a quadrilateral enclosure, was adorned with a number of splendid churches and public buildings.

From the ninth century on, Moslems began to buy land south of Shellal and to make local converts. In Late Christian times (A.D. 1050-1250) the Christian population was largely confined to the southern part of Lower Nubia and was drawn together in a small number of large fortified towns (Adams 1964a). This appears to have been a response to the arrival in the Eastern Desert of increasing numbers of bedouin from Central Arabia. The Egyptian invasion of Lower Nubia in 1171 and the bedouin raids thereafter gradually extinguished the Christian culture of Lower Nubia, although Christianity as a religion appears to have lingered on at least as late as 1372 when a new bishop was consecrated for Qasr Ibrim and Faras. The last Christian king of Dongola was deposed in 1315 and the kingdom of Alwa was overrun by Moslems c. 1500. There have been no archaeological studies of Moslem Nubia comparable with those of earlier periods and this hiatus between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries forms a convenient point at which to break off our survey.

CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological work accomplished in Lower Nubia during the present campaign has done much to alter our views of Nubian culture history. New evidence has been found of Egyptian activity in the Old Kingdom, and the Christian period which hitherto was neglected has now been studied in some detail. The finds at Qasr Ibrim have shown that Christianity survived in Lower Nubia considerably longer than was formerly believed. Other problems remain with us, however. There is still no agreement about the nature of the transition between the Early and Middle Nubian Sequences and very little evidence to go on. It is also uncertain whether the Middle Nubian culture was brought into the area by a migration or developed out of the existing cultures in the region. We are also faced with the difficult problem of correlating archaeological, linguistic and ethnic units during the Ballana or X-Group period. The many finds made throughout the country simultaneously and by so many workers have prompted a thorough re-examination of virtually every period in Nubian history and a review of the

cultural relationships between Nubia and surrounding regions. Much more must be known about the history of the Eastern and Western Deserts and the Sudan before all the pieces in the jig-saw puzzle of Lower Nubian culture history can be put in place, and this will no doubt lead to more fieldwork in adjacent regions in the near future. The difficult problem of relating archaeological and documentary evidence also lies ahead of us. Adams has already indicated some of the difficulties for the New Kingdom. The Greco-Roman and Byzantine sources concerning Lower Nubia will also have to be re-examined, and very critically, in the light of archaeological findings. The same is true of the Moslem sources concerning Lower Nubia which paint a very gloomy picture of what appears from the archaeological record to have been a very prosperous period. Did Nubia always look poor to an Egyptian, are we dealing with propaganda, or have we misinterpreted the archaeological record in some way? Only further work may provide satisfactory answers.

Greater interest has been shown in the present campaign in the daily life and cultural development of Ancient Nubia than was shown in earlier campaigns. Attention has been given to determining water-levels throughout the historic period and eventually correlations may be worked out between these water levels and the general prosperity of the region. Already Adams (1964a:245) has shown that the higher water levels around A.D. 950 forced many communities to relocate on higher ground. Studies have also been made of the development of house types, village patterns and Nubian churches. Special books are also appearing on the history of Egyptian activities in Nubia (Emery 1965), on population trends (Trigger 1965) and on the history of the Kushitic empire (Dixon n.d.). At the moment no one has a monopoly on truth, but we all can hope that as more information is published and shared a far more detailed picture of the history and culture of Lower Nubia will emerge than would have been thought possible when the Unesco campaign started.

McGill University

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