Enlarged Detail from a Chinese Painting

Ross Collection

Early Sung Dynasty (960-1279)
Harvard-Boston Expedition in the Sudan, 1930-1931

I. Inscription of Senwesert III

Last winter the Harvard-Boston Expedition recorded at Uronarti a short dated inscription of Senwesert III (Sesostris III, about 2000 B.C.), the conqueror of Nubia. The brief five lines throw an unexpected light on a journey of this king up the Nile to the land of “miserable Kush” in the nineteenth year of his reign. The only previous evidence of this journey was to be found in the stela of Sisatet, who was sent as assistant to his kinsman Ikhenofret by the king to restore the temple of Osiris at Abydos with gold brought from Nubia. Ikhenofret and Sisatet both left stelae, that of the former relating to his work at Abydos, the stela of Sisatet, which was found at Abydos and is now in Geneva, is translated in Breasted’s Ancient Records of Egypt, Vol. I, par. 672. Sisatet says:—“I came to Abydos, together with the chief treasurer Ikhenofret, to carve (a statue of) Osiris, Lord of Abydos, when the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Khakawra (Senwesert III), ‘living forever’, journeyed while overthrowing ‘wretched Kush’, in the year 19.”

There came to light during the Expedition’s work this season a contemporary inscription of this same nineteenth-year campaign, cut on the stone face of a landing quay on the island of Uronarti, thirty-five miles south of Wady Halfa on the Nile. The inscription is dated very precisely “year 19, month 4, Akhet season, day 2, under the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Khakawra (Senwesert III) ‘living for ever to eternity’.” The date gives us the time of year when the expedition passed by Uronarti on its way back to Egypt, which was approximately March 15th-16th. At this time of year the Nile was low and still falling, as it was in the middle of March 1931 when we found the inscription; in fact the level of the inscribed quay was only some couple of meters above the river level when we found it,—and the Nile is exceptionally low this year.

The record goes on to give a very vivid picture of the difficulties of such an undertaking in those days, which a familiarity with the cataracts of this part of the Nile certainly bears out. One has only to read the account of the recent expedition against the Mahdi through this region with gun-boats, given in Royle’s Egyptian Campaigns, to realize that the Nile in these parts has changed but little. It would seem that the problems encountered by the Canadian “voyageurs” and Indians in the more recent campaign differed not much from those met with by Senwesert’s boatmen, though the former had modern equipment, ropes, winches, and steam power.

The Uronarti inscription continues, after the King’s name and titles, in substance:—

“The King proceeded, ‘living, healthy, and well’, in going north from the overthrowing of ‘miserable Kush’. One had to find navigable water for getting past Yashemuk and hauling the boats, as the season demanded; every shoal likewise. As for the shoal of . . . . (an illegible place name), it was bad; it was far from easy to get through by hauling the boats over it, on account of the time of year”.

The inscription is fairly well cut on a block of very hard granitic rock forming part of the outer face of a quay which lies at the foot of a long stairway and tunnel, leading from the fort down to the river’s edge.

II. The Fortress of Shallak

During this past season the Harvard-Boston Expedition has excavated the small Middle Kingdom
Shalfak Fort, seen from the east bank of the Nile

The quay at Uronarti, with the inscription of Senwesert III

Inscription of Senwesert III at Uronarti
Interior of Shalfak Fort, after excavating, looking southwest

Street in Shalfak Fort, showing tiles laid down the center
fort of Shalfak at Sarras, some miles north of Uronarti, which is much smaller than the Uronarti fort but similarly situated on the crest of a rock cliff overlooking the Nile, in this case on the west bank of the river instead of on an island. Work was commenced on February 20 and finished on March 21, during which time we excavated the eighty-three interior rooms of the fort, the outside of the fort including four exterior rooms, and the small cemetery which lay in a sandy plain west of the fort.

The main fort is roughly rectangular, but, as at Semna and Uronarti, additional wings run out to the west, east, and north, along ridges of rock which require covering protection. The River Stairway descends by a winding and precipitous route on the east side of the fort down to the river, making use of a tongue of rock which runs out into the water at this point. Along the remainder of the east side of the fort the cliff descends very steeply, in some places overhanging the waters of the Nile. The construction of the fort itself resembles that in the other forts hitherto excavated in this region. It is of mud-brick throughout, in horizontal courses, reinforced by a considerable quantity of timber. The timber consists of tree trunks from which the bark has not been stripped. The outside of the main walls on the west and south, where the approach is steep and difficult, but possible, presents a continuous series of rectangular buttresses added to the outer face. Inside the fort there are seven blocks of rooms separated by streets. Block 1, comprising nine rooms, forms a large building at the south end of the fort; block 2, of nine rooms, includes two stairways leading up toward the north; blocks 3, 4, 5, and 6 are smaller blocks in the western part of the fort; block 3 of five rooms, block 4 of ten rooms, block 5 of six rooms, block 6 of five rooms; block 7 is a large block of eight three-room apartments, filling the north part of the fort.

A street, "Wall Street," encircles the whole fort inside the main wall, and was probably crossed by a bridge from one of the stairways mentioned above. South Cross Street, running east and west, separates block 1 from blocks 2, 3, and 4; Middle Cross Street separates blocks 3 and 4 from blocks 5 and 6; North Cross Street separates blocks 2, 5, and 6 from block 7. Middle Street, running north and south, separates block 2 from blocks 3 and 5; and another street separates blocks 4 and 6.

Block 1 is in two parts, bonded together. The smaller part, consisting of three rooms, may have been a chapel or small temple; and it is not connected internally with the rest of the block. One of its rooms has a sandstone column base in it and a sandstone basin with a dedicatory inscription around the rim set in the northeast corner of the room. The other part of block 1, of six rooms, has no exterior doorway on the floor level and must therefore have been in the nature of cellar rooms. They appear to have formed the cellar of a building of the same plan, with its floor at the roof level of the cellar, and probably at about the roof level of the "chapel" part of the block. These cellar rooms have intermediate doors, and their walls are still standing to a height of one and one-half meters. The entrance could have been only from the floor above by means of a ladder, stairway, or trapdoor with rope. Such cellars could have been used either as prisons or store-rooms. Their form is clearly adapted to storage purposes, and a second story of this building would most probably have served as a magazine for the men guarding the ramparts.

Block 2 is the next in size and importance. From the arrangement of its rooms and the fact that two stairways go up from it, it would appear to have been an administrative building. One of the stairways probably led to the roof of the rooms of this block, the other to the top of the fort walls forming the main line of defence. From the measurements of the remaining parts of these two stairways we have estimated the height of the first story of this block to have been about three meters and the ramparts of the main fort walls about nine meters. The main part of block 1 certainly had a story resting on the three meter level, with an estimated height also of three meters, making a total height of about six meters. It is obvious that the access to the second story of block 1 could easily have been by means of the stairway already mentioned and through the second story of block 2. It may be presumed that there was access at the second story level to the second and longer stairway leading to the ramparts to enable the garrison to reach them from this floor without descending to the lower level. Through this doorway on the second story level munitions could have been brought to the ramparts from block 1. Blocks 3 to 6 were probably officers' quarters, administrative offices, and shops, although the exact purpose of each block is difficult to determine. Block 7 clearly formed the barracks for the men, with its three-room apartments, and these rooms give us some idea of the size of the garrison. The outer room of each apartment was presumably the living court where cooking and eating took place, and may not have been roofed over. The two inner rooms are probably sleeping quarters where the men would keep their personal belongings in chests or sacks. Such a room would accommodate from two to five men, indicating a total of from thirty-two to eighty men for the whole block.

Of the fort gateways the main entrance was on the south as at Uronarti. It is a plain doorway blocked by two heavy wooden doors of which the sills remain. Outside the doorway a massive construction adds a gate-room and a second narrow entrance, of similar form to that at Semna. This external structure was built on a steep slope inclined to the south which descends irregularly as far as the river itself. The gateway could thus have been
approached from the plain west of the fort or from 
the water; in fact, during the excavations, we used 
this latter route to and from the fort. The water-
gate, to the north, was also a plain, straight gateway 
with two wooden doors giving access to a street 
which skirted the outer walls of the fort on the 
north and east. To the north this street ran to the 
end of the rocky ridge on which the fort was built, 
to which point the long north wing wall of the fort 
also extended. To the east the street followed a 
similar but shorter east wing to the edge of the 
cliff, whence the steep and precipitous river stairs 
descended to the water level.

It is possible that the ramparts of Uronarti were 
originally visible from the tops of the Shalfak walls, 
but they are not so today. There is high land and 
a bend in the Nile between the two forts, but it 
seems reasonable to assume that the two garrisons 
were originally within visual signalling distance of 
one another, as were the forts of the Semna-
Uronarti group. Two other sites, much destroyed 
and rebuilt, respectively five and ten miles north 
of Shalfak, appear to carry the line of visual 
signalling almost down to the forts on the Second 
Cataract.

The streets in the fort are mostly paved with 
irregular stone slabs of granitic rock, but in some of 
them a single strip of burnt brick tiles serves the 
purpose of “duck-boards” down the centre. The 
walls of the rooms are still standing in some places 
to a height of four meters above the floors, but in 
the more weathered portions of the fort they are 
won down to the rock level.

In a preliminary search for the site of the ceme-
tery, graves were discovered in widely separated 
positions over a flat plain a quarter of a mile wide, 
but when we came to excavate the cemetery it 
was found that the areas used were not extensive. 
The graves were shallow trenches in the sand, 
apparently untouched by plunderers, but containing 
very little in the way of objects beyond pottery. 
Some twenty graves were all that were found, two 
of them being cut in the rock slope at the foot of 
the fort walls on the west.

The fort seems to have been in military occupa-
tion only during the Middle Kingdom. It is 
mentioned in the Hieratic list of forts found in the 
Ramesseum (see Bulletin No. 163, p. 64), under 
the name of Wa’al-Khasut, “Overcoming the 
Foreign Lands”, and was probably built by Sen-
wesert III. Later there was a short and unimpor-
tant occupation in the Meroitic period.

The objects recovered included none of excep-
tional interest,—an inscribed stone basin, a broken 
private offering stela, a decorated faience bowl, and 
the usual common objects of daily life. The most 
important objects were several seal impressions 
made by the seal of “the granary of Wa’al-
Khasut”, which identifies definitely Shalfak as the 
fort called “Overcoming the Foreign Lands”.

N. F. WHEELER.

Two Examples of Muhammadan 
Metal Work

ALTHOUGH the Museum collections are 
singularly poor in important examples of 
Muhammadan metal work, the two examples now 
to be described are of outstanding interest. The 
first is a brass bowl, richly decorated with geomet-
rical designs, inscription, and armorial medallions, 
in gold, silver, and copper overlay, made for an 
official of the Egyptian Mamlik Sultan, and no 
doubt of middle fourteenth century date. This 
piece, measuring 0.61 m. in height and 1.42 m. in 
greatest diameter (at the shoulder), is registered as 
M. F. A. 21.2547, and was given to the Museum 
by the late William Sturgis Bigelow.

The thuluth inscription, occupying four separated 
sections of the shoulder band, reads:

\[ \text{Minnā 'umīla bi-rasmi al-janāb al-'a} \]
\[ \text{li is-saifi Timūr ras nūd b-al-maqqar a-} \]
\[ \text{l-ashrāf is-saifi l'Ibbugha amir al-} \]
\[ \text{majlis al-Malikh an-Nāsir} \]

“Of what was made by order of the 
excellency Timur, Captain of the Guard of 
the exalted al-Ashraf is-Saif IYal-
bugha, the President of Council of Our 
Lord an-Nāsir.”

The last title refers to the then regnant Mamlik 
Sultan of Egypt, probably an-Nāṣir Nāṣiru-Dīn 
al-Hasan b. an-Nāṣir, r. 1347/1348—1351/ 
1352. Ibbugha can also be read Yalbugha, and 
must be the man who was Governor of Aleppo 
1345/1346—1349/1350, and received the title of 
Amir al-Majlis (found in the present inscription) 
from the Sultan an-Nāṣir above mentioned. Yal-
bugha, also known as Tankizbugha, died in 
1358/1359, before which time the bowl must 
have been made. Yalbugha was a great official, 
third in rank at the Mamlik court. His tomb 
was near Cairo was completed in 1362.\(^2\) I have not 
been able to trace his Captain, Timur (or possibly 
Azmūr).\(^3\)

In each of the eight small medallions on the 
same zone, roughly scratched on the metal, and 
only visible where the gold overlay has disappeared, 
there is the inscription “izz li ma‘ulātna (as-)sulṭān,
“Glory to Our Lord the Sultan.”

The armorial bearing (renk) forming each of 
these medallions consists of a circular shield, divided 
broad fess or (gold, covering the last-men-
tioned inscription), the chief gules (overlay of 
copper), base with hacher sable (black wax 
overlay), charge a cup reserved in silver outline. 
From this bearing it may subsequently be possible 
to identify the Sultan more exactly. According to 
Lance-Poole,\(^4\) the cup is the most frequently met 
with of all the Mamlik charges, and it indicates 
that the user held the important post of cup-bearer 
to the King; but in the present case this can scarcely

\(^2\)Zambou, Manuel de Genealogie et de Chronologie pour l'Histoire 
de l'Islam, pp. 34, 101; van Berchem, Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum, 

\(^3\) Loc. cit., p. 272.