

Cemetery B.

Middle Kingdom Nubian (Late C - Group) .

A short report of the work and some archeological characteristics of the period.

The cemetery was situated on the east side of the large New Empire Cemetery, about 25 m far off grave Nr.1 excavated by the American Expedition in 1910. The surface of the cemetery was covered with a cairn of sand, pebbles and loose stones from the superstructures by which the position of the cemetery was easily marked. It was our aim to clear any part of this small cemetery, having neither time nor enough workmen for removing all its surface of blown sand and loose stones; and so, only the northern part of the cemetery was cleared and 32 graves were excavated and recorded, while no attempt was made for searching elder graves.

The graves are scooped out in the sand to a depth of from 70 to 150 cm, ^{ausgehoben} under surface, and are always surrounded by circular rings of stones, of which some are preserved, others not. The high superstructures of large diameters which belong to the C-Group period do not exist here, for the superstructures in this cemetery are of a small diameter, and a height of from 30 to 50 cm is more common. And while those high superstructures may have revealed their position to plunderers, these lower ones were kept undisturbed, for not in one single case the burial was found destroyed or much damaged. Still, the outline of the graves is always not preserved, owing to the fact that the looseness of the gravel soil has, undoubtedly in every instance, ^{verfüllt} masked the shape of the graves.

Then, as regards the position of the burial, the body was generally closely contracted on either the right or the left side with the hands before the face. Still, in two cases (grave 11

and 19) the burial was extended on back, hands crossed on chest. And out of the 30 contracted burials which we had, in 24 cases the contraction was on the right side, while in 6 cases only it was on the left. Again, the orientation was very variable and it seems that the community to which the cemetery belongs has not adopted any organized system for the orientation of its burials. In 18 cases, the direction of the head was eastward, in 9 cases southward and in 5 cases northward. Such variation may have resulted from different causes; at this period, the political condition, as it will be shown afterwards, was very altered owing to the Egyptian influence on the one side and the local which might have not yet died out on the other. And the community itself seems to have suffered great poverty and misery. In the same time, this difference in the position and the orientation of the burial may probably have been due to some religious customs of which we are unaware nowadays. Finally it must be noted that some of the burials were placed on a layer of mud (grave 1, 8, 14, 15, 16 and 28), and I think that this occurs for the first time here; the only explanation which could be suggested is that this mud-layer was used in order to protect the bottom and the lower sides of the grave from the blowing sand. The C-Group custom of wrapping the body in linen and covering it with matting work is still surviving into this later period. In 13 cases traces of linen were found with the skeletons and in 8 cases matting of C-Group pattern occurs.

As for the contents of the graves, I am inclined to separate in my discussion the pottery from the other personal objects and ornaments. Pottery was undoubtedly the great art of the C-Group race, especially the fine incised ware which is considered the most

important characteristic of the Nubian culture. The first thing to note is that at this period to which our cemetery belongs, the custom of placing the funerary pottery outside the grave and the superstructure generally on the east side, seems now to be gradually dying out. With the exception of few instances (grave 2, 5, 6, 9, 12) there is no other trace of the survival of this custom into the Late C-Group period. But it was noticed in many cases (grave 3, 5, 11, 16, 17, 25, 26, 27, 28) that some vessels and potsherds were placed on the grave, that is to say at a little higher level than the body. Again, the custom of depositing small vessels with the body in the grave seems to have been introduced at this period (grave 2, 17, 20, 22, 23, 26, 28). And while pottery occurs at the C-Group period in the utmost abundance, it becomes less in both quantity and quality at this later period, even the red-polished black topped bowls have become a little rough since they were not highly polished. Next, the C-Group large jars of yellow red ware (Zirs) disappear too. Before all, it must be noted that at this period the art of making the finer incised and decorated local pottery has degenerated and declined. Still, the potsherds of red and black incised ware found in some of the graves and the large red polished black topped bowl with ornaments around the rim (Plate.....) found in grave 17, can be taken both as an evidence that this incised and decorated ware had not yet entirely disappeared at this period and as a connection between the early and later pottery. Again, it appears at this later time, a type of red polished black topped pottery* quite different from what has occurred in the earlier period. It is of very thin ware, highly polished, and the black top has carefully outlined the rim. Bowls, beakers and spouted vessels are the only specimens of this type met within this cemetery (Plate.....).

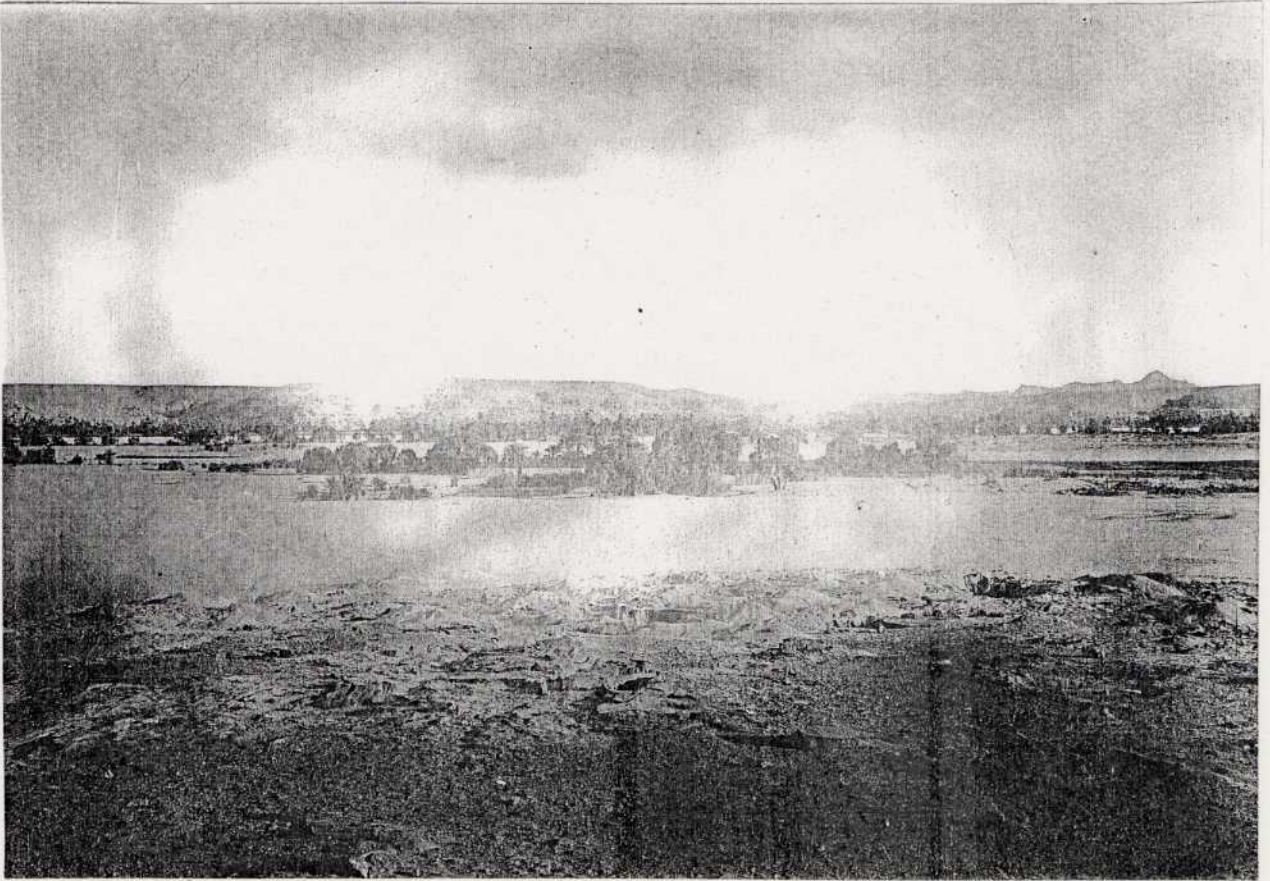
This type occurs in the New Empire too. But, as this type of pottery is not found abundantly and as it appears in the same time when the local pottery has degenerated, and finally as its form and colour are quite different to those of the C-Group, so it is very probable that these vessels are not of local work and were imported from other places, or, on the other hand, the people themselves to whom the cemetery belongs were immigrants. Another form of pottery occurs in abundance in this cemetery. It is of unpolished though red painted ware (Plate.....). Small bowls and jars of this form are generally found with the burials. In one single case, the rim of a deep bowl of this red painted ware was decorated with incised lines and filled in with white pigment. In a word, a short look on the pottery found in this Late C-Group cemetery, helps us to believe that this later pottery, though it is less in quantity and quality than that of the earlier period, yet represents the forms of the Middle Kingdom pottery, and at least some of those of the early New Empire.

The other personal ornaments and objects of the Late C-Group period are poor, compared with those of the earlier part of the period. The complete absence of alabaster, ivory, gold (electrum) and ^{bronze} copper implements may prove the poverty of that generation. Beads are still very common, of green, blue or black glaze, cornelian, stone and bone, and used for necklaces, bracelets and anklets; in one instance (grave 25) a belt of green and blue glaze beads was found around the waist of the skeleton. Also, small green glaze amulets (pendants) occur, though not in abundance. Kohl shells, pendants of bone or stone and bracelets of bone or white shell are very rare. Then, button-seals, scaraboids and scarabs of blue or green glaze and stone are rather numerous, bearing in some cases decorations or designs and in other cases copies of Egyptian symbols;

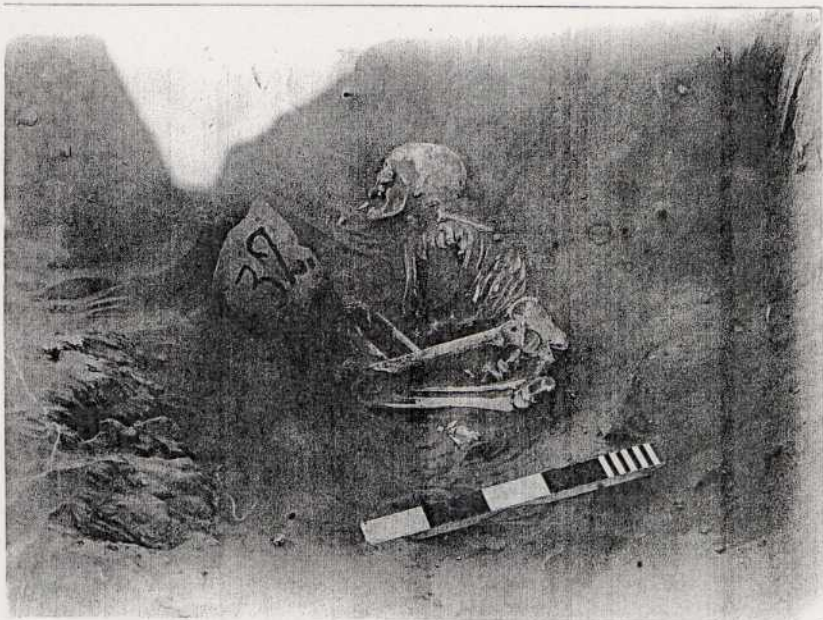
the whole may be dated to the early New Empire. In one instance, a scaraboid, the back of which is carved in the shape of a hedgehog, may be dated to the same period, though it was not found in its original place.

At last, a short look may be devoted to the history of this Late C-Group period, or, in other words, to the history of the period of transition between the Middle Kingdom and the New Empire. For, although Nubia was occupied by Egypt in the 12th dynasty, yet, owing to the bad political circumstances which Egypt has suffered in the Second Intermediate Period, especially under the dominion of the Hyksos, the Egyptian influence was too weak to egyptianize the country. And the result was that Nubia was politically independent, though, the national customs and the local culture had survived probably until the Early New Empire. So, the poverty of the people at this period to which our cemetery belongs may be partly due to this altered political state in both Egypt and Nubia.

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