



1. The A-Group Culture (3900-2900 b.c.)

The A-Group is a culture indigenous to Lower Nubia. The A-Group evolved from about 3900 to 2900 b.c., extending from Neolithic into the Early Bronze Age. In its Classic and Terminal phases, which fall within the Early Bronze Age, the A-Group culture reached the peak of its development.

We do not have many settlements of the A-Group people because most of them were built on the fertile land next to the banks of the Nile. Since people lived and farmed continuously, most ancient settlements were destroyed over the passing millennia. But the A-Group people also built cemeteries on the edges of the desert next to the places where they lived. In these cemeteries they buried their dead along with many of their possessions. Articles of A-Group daily life, such as their pottery, jewelry, tools, and weapons, were frequently buried with the dead. Some of the graves are simple, with only a few objects buried alongside the body. Others are large and richly provisioned with goods.



The A-Group people made pottery of very fine quality. Red polished pots with black mouths and eggshell-ware painted pots are the most beautiful of these. They also made stone palettes for grinding pigments or eye paint. Many people were buried with bracelets of bone or ivory. We do not know what their clothing looked like because it has decayed in the 5,000 years since the A-Group people lived.

The A-Group people lived primarily by farming, collecting local plants and animals, and herding cattle. Later on in their development, the A-Group people were able to import large amount of goods from Egypt. We see this in the cemeteries, where many Egyptian objects, especially pottery, were buried among the A-Group objects. The A-Group people got these goods by trading with the Egyptians. Many exotic commodities from the south, such as ivory, animal skins, and special woods, did not exist in Egypt. The A-Group people acted as intermediaries in this trade, and most of the exotic products of Africa traveled through the corridor of Lower Nubia to Egypt.



Studying cemeteries is one important way by which archaeologists are able to understand what life in ancient times was like. From the A-Group cemeteries, we know that early on in the development of the A-Group, the people lived in communities where everyone was buried in almost the same way. But later on, we see in their cemeteries that the A-Group society developed communities headed by more powerful chiefs and rulers. These people were buried in larger and richer tombs. Near the end of the A-Group these rulers were clearly extremely powerful. The cemeteries at Sayala and Qustul are two places where there were probably A-Group kings by 3000 b.c.



In the Classic period of the A-Group, objects of great refinement were produced. The handmade eggshell-ware bowls are good examples of this refinement and show the high standards employed by the artisans of the Classic A-Group culture. Artistic standards were even higher in the Terminal A-Group period. The Terminal A-Group period is both the peak of development of the A-Group and its end.

After about 2900 b.c. the A-Group people abruptly vanished, and for 500 years there seem to have been few people living in Lower Nubia. At this time the power of Egypt, unified under the first

pharaohs, was becoming ever greater. It seems the pharaohs destroyed the A-Group, possibly forcing the inhabitants of Lower Nubia farther south, into Upper Nubia.