



# HANS ÅKE NORDSTRÖM

1933 – 2022

The archaeologist Hans Åke Nordström, Saltsjö-Boo, Stockholm, died at the age of 88. He leaves behind his wife Lena, his brother Jan, and his children Mikael, David and Pernille with their respective families. Hans Åke was an important figure in the field of Nubiology, whose research remains influential, and who, whilst being a valued colleague was also often counted as a friend. He set the standards for pottery analysis in Nubia and his work on the A-Group continues to be seminal to all who study that culture.

Hans Åke was educated at Uppsala University and earned a bachelor of art in North-European archaeology (major), Classical archaeology and History of art in 1959. Although he started his career in Nordic archaeology, his main life's work was the study of ancient Nubia. At the age of 26, he started work in the Sudan as an archaeological expert for UNESCO stationed in Wadi Halfa, in connection with the construction of the Aswan High Dam. From there, he assisted in the coordination of field work in the Nubian rescue campaign, under the direction of Dr. William Y. Adams. In parallel, he also conducted field investigations for the Sudan Antiquities Service on the west bank of the Nile, from the border to Egypt in the North, up until the second cataract in the South.

After four years in Sudan as UNESCO programme assistant and one year as assistant archaeologist at the University of California Los Angeles, planning and teaching field archaeology, Hans Åke returned to Uppsala University in 1966. There, at the

Institute of Egyptology, he had the task of processing and analysing the finds from the Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia (SJE) as well as acting as co-editor of the SJE publication project<sup>1</sup>, under the direction of Professor Torgny Säve-Söderbergh. Hans Åke's own analyses of prehistoric and A-Group

pottery led to a doctoral thesis in 1973<sup>2</sup> and in 1977 he was appointed Associate Professor of archaeology at the Uppsala University.

From 1975 to the beginning of the 1990s, Hans Åke was mainly active in Nordic archaeology, and held several leading positions at the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm. He was director of the conservation institute, director of the Stone and

Bronze Age department and director of the Exhibition department. It was in that latter role he was rewarded the National Order of Merit of Ecuador in conjunction with a touring exhibition hosted by the museum. However, his research in Nile Valley archaeology never ceased. He was a key contributor involved in developing the so-called Vienna system<sup>3</sup>, a method for the classification and analysis of ancient



1 Säve-Söderbergh, Torgny (ed.) (1970-1996). The Scandinavian joint expedition to Sudanese Nubia: publications.

2 Nordström, Hans-Åke (1972). Cultural ecology and ceramic technology: early Nubian cultures from the fifth and the fourth millennia B.C. Stockholm : Univ.

3 Nordström, Hans-Åke and Janine Bourriau (1993) 'Ceramic Technology: Clays and Fabrics. In: Arnold, Dorothea. and Janine Bourriau (eds). An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Pottery, Fasc. 2, 143-190.



ceramics which is used as a standard in Egyptian archaeology today. In 1975, He was a member of a group of Swedish and American scholars visiting the Nag Hammadi area in Upper Egypt, where Hans Åke worked with documenting tombs of the Old Kingdom in the Gebel Tarif<sup>4</sup>.

In 1994, Hans Åke returned to Uppsala once again, this time employed by the Swedish National Heritage Board with responsibility for the management of the SJE collections kept at the university. In 1998 he formally retired, but his commitment to Nubian archeology continued. He participated as an expert in several foreign expeditions in Sudan and Egypt at places such as Sai Island and Kom Ombo-Aswan, and as late as 2009 he taught at a field school at Giza. After retirement, Hans Åke was also able to resume work with the material that he collected in Nubia at the beginning of his career. In 2014, he published the results of the west bank survey in book form<sup>5</sup> for the Sudan Archaeological Research Society.

Hans Åke's engagement with the Nubian material lasted until his very last days. He participated in a series of meetings with researchers from the Nordic countries as part of a project entitled 'Reinvigorating African Archaeology in the Nordic countries'. In 2019, Hans Åke was reunited with two colleagues, Pontus Hellström and Peter Freudenthal who were part of the Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia team. In conversation with Professor Per Ditlef Fredriksen of the University of Oslo and Dr David Edwards of the University of Leicester, they shared their reflections on the impressions and experiences of their time in Nubia. Hans Åke was keen to support new research initiatives and was committed to the issue of the future of the Nubian collections.

Hans Åke's interest in public engagement was expressed, among other things, through the Egyptological Society in Stockholm (EFIS), where he was an honorary member. Over the years he presented several highly appreciated talks and arranged museum collection visits for members. He was also a frequent visitor to the society's events and was always available for a friendly chat. He was well-loved by colleagues and friends for his distinct warmth and friendliness, often with a tinge of good humour. Hans Åke generously shared his knowledge not only of ancient Nubia, his personal stories and memories

have also been very valuable for the study of the more recent history of archaeology.

Hans Åke was also an extremely collaborative and encouraging colleague, particularly with young scholars who went to Uppsala to study the collection there. He was the one taking care of us from getting us at the airport, hosting us at his home with his family, bringing us to the store facility in Uppsala and helping us with the actual scientific work. He was an enthusiastic provider of coffee and cinnamon buns. Hans Åke has left a legacy that goes beyond the Scandinavian countries because all of us, scholars from Italy, Australia, Germany and other places around the world think of him as a key mentor in our careers and later as a dear colleague.

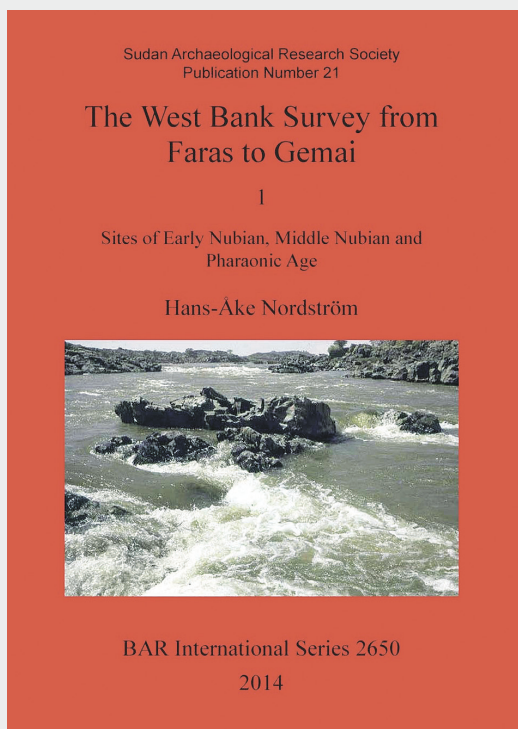
Carolyn Johansson, Rachael J Dann, Maria Gatto

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Hans-Åke Nordström

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