From the portrait by Seán O'Sullivan in the Department of Egyptology, University of Liverpool

AYLWARD MANLEY BLACKMAN, 1930

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1883–1956

AYLWARD MANLEY BLACKMAN was born on 30 January 1883 at Dawlish and died at Abergele on 9 March 1956, thus completing a life of seventy-three years, devoted almost entirely to the study of Egyptology.

The foundation of Blackman's interest in ancient civilization was undoubtedly laid by his father, James Henry Blackman, an enthusiastic amateur archaeologist, who was vicar of St. Paul's, Norwich. He was also greatly influenced by his mother, a lady of great character and wide culture, who, living to a great age, died during the Second World War.

Never of robust health, Blackman was educated privately until he was sixteen, when he entered St. Paul's School in 1899. Here he obtained a scholarship to Queen's College, Oxford, where he read Egyptian, Coptic, and Arabic as a pupil of the late Francis Llewellyn Griffith, then Reader in Egyptology. Blackman proved himself a brilliant student and in 1906 he graduated with a First Class in the Final Honour School of Oriental Studies.

In 1907 the Egyptian Government decided to increase the height of the Aswan Dam and in connexion with this project an archaeological survey was organized to excavate and record all the ancient monuments and sites which would be flooded by the new water level. The Archaeological Survey was directed by the late George Andrew Reisner, and Blackman was appointed as one of his assistants. Here in Lower Nubia the young scholar had his first experience of field-work under the guidance of an archaeologist who was a master of his craft. Although Blackman only stayed one season with Reisner, the experience he gained was never forgotten and he remained throughout his life a meticulous recorder in the field, both in epigraphic work and in excavation.

Apart from the Egyptian Government Archaeological Survey, independent foreign expeditions were busy at this time in Nubia, and during 1909–10 Blackman assisted Randall MacIver who was directing the excavations of the University of Pennsylvania at Buhen, opposite Wadi-Halfa. Here he had his first major experience of temple recording, a side of field-work to which his twin qualifications of philology and draughtsmanship were

particularly suited. His admirable translation of the texts on the walls of the temples of Hatshepsut and Amenhotep II were published in the report on the excavations at Buhen in 1911.

On the termination of his work at Buhen, Blackman joined the staff of archaeologists who, under the direction of Maspero, were employed by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities in recording the temples of Nubia, so soon to be submerged by the waters of the new reservoir behind the Aswan Dam. In this work of recording, later to be published in the series *Les Temples immergés de la Nubie*, Blackman was allocated the temples of Dendur, Derr, and Bigeh. This great undertaking he accomplished in the record time of five months, ending the work in the great heat of May 1910. He had also undertaken to record the temple of Gerf Hussein, but was prevented from doing so by ill health. He published the results of his labours in three fine volumes: *The Temple of Dendur* (1911), *The Temple of Derr* (1913), and *The Temple of Bigeh* (1915).

In the autumn of 1910 Blackman joined the staff of the Oxford Expedition to Faras, under the direction of F. Ll. Griffith, having been elected Oxford Nubian Research Fellow. But field excavation did not keep him long and in 1912 Blackman undertook the recording of the Middle Kingdom tombs at Meir in Assiut province, on behalf of the Egypt Exploration Society. The quality of his scholarship was now recognized, and in the same year he was elected Laycock Student of Egyptology at Worcester College, Oxford. His work at Meir continued until 1914 when it was interrupted by the advent of the First World War. By this time three of these important tombs were recorded and were published in the Egypt Exploration Society's series *Rock Tombs of Meir*: Part I, the tomb of Ukh-hotp's son Senbi, in 1914; Part II, the tomb of Senbi's son Ukh-hotp, in 1915, and Part III, the tomb of Ukh-hotp, son of Ukh-hotp and Mersi, in 1915.

Delicate health prevented Blackman from taking an active part in hostilities during the war, but he did what he could in intelligence and office work during the period of national emergency. Between 1918 and 1921, he remained in England, resident at Oxford, where he devoted his time to teaching and to an increased output of articles and reviews in archaeological journals, both British and foreign. It was during this period that Blackman produced what, in the opinion of many, was his most outstanding contribution to Egyptology; this was a series of articles on such subjects as 'Priesthood', 'Purification', 'Righteousness', 'Salvation', 'Sin', &c., which were published in

Hasting's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. In studying this valuable material, one can only regret that he never produced a book on Egyptian religious liturgy and ritual, for this was his greatest interest and his knowledge concerning it was profound.

Early in 1921 Blackman returned to Egypt to continue his work on the rock tombs of Meir, and the records of the Old Kingdom tomb of Pepi' onkh were published in Part IV of the series in 1924. Apart from his labours in Egypt these were busy years; in the intervals of coaching students for the University of Oxford, he continued his steady output of valuable material which was published in articles in various archaeological journals. Blackman also had a gift for popular writing which he showed so well in his book *Luxor and its Temples*, published in 1923. In his own words, he hoped to convince his readers 'that Egyptology was not a dreary study, but full of human interest', and in this small book he indeed proved his point. In 1932 F. Ll. Griffith retired from the Oxford Chair of Egyptology, and Blackman had to face a great disappointment for, contrary to his hopes, his candidature for the post was not accepted. It was a grave blow, but after the first shock he accepted it with courage, although he never forgot it. However, he received a large measure of compensation by his appointment to the Brunner Professorship of Egyptology at the University of Liverpool in 1934, and his inaugural lecture, 'The Value of Egyptology in the Modern World', was an outstanding success of which he was justly proud. But Liverpool was not Oxford, and Blackman considered that the happiest period of his life ended when his association with the university to which he was so deeply attached came to an end.

In 1936 the Egypt Exploration Society obtained permission from the Sudan Government to excavate the site of the ancient Egyptian fortress-town of Sesebi, and having been granted leave of absence from his university, Blackman returned after many years to Nubia and directed the work for the first season. It had been intended that he should direct the field-work of the Society for some years, but his acceptance of an invitation to supervise the studies of the Crown Prince of Ethiopia, then in exile, together with his academic duties at the university, compelled him to resign.

The Prince resided with Blackman at the latter's comfortable home at Sefton Park in Liverpool. Blackman's aged mother and his two sisters, to whom he was devoted, formed the rest of the household, and there is little doubt that, surrounded by his

family and with the company of a young man for whom he had a great liking, Blackman found considerable happiness. But this was not to last, for in 1941 his home and his valuable library were destroyed during one of the devastating air raids on the city of Liverpool. In addition to this, the collection of Egyptian antiquities in the City Museum was almost completely obliterated when the building received a direct hit, and Blackman's quarters at the University, the Institute of Archaeology in Abercromby Square, were so damaged that their contents had to be transferred to very unsatisfactory accommodation under the Cohen Library. These disasters crippled his opportunities for Egyptological research and caused him considerable discouragement; so much so that in the years between the end of the war and his retirement in 1948 his customary energy was noticeably lacking. However, in 1949, in indifferent health, at the age of sixty-six, Blackman returned to Egypt at the request of the Egypt Exploration Society, to complete the recording of the tombs at Meir. Assisted by Michael Apted, the results of this work were published in the two final volumes of the series in 1953. While in Egypt he suffered another disappointment: he had unofficially been offered an appointment as Professor of Egyptology at the, then, Fuad al Awal University in Cairo, and—ever optimistic—he started planning a permanent home on the banks of the Nile. But, as friends had warned him, the rather nebulous offer was withdrawn and Blackman's high hopes were unfulfilled. Ill fortune still dogged his footsteps, and on the sea voyage back to England he fell and broke his hip. He arrived home in this crippled state to undertake the sad task of reorganizing his domestic affairs, for one of his sisters had passed away during his absence, and his other sister, Winifred Blackman, an authority on anthropological research among the Egyptian *fellahin*, died shortly afterwards. Blackman faced these misfortunes with courage, but he never really recovered, and thenceforward he lived in rather secluded retirement at Abergele, taking little part in the progress of Egyptological research. In these last years the one event which gave him great satisfaction was his election in 1952 as a Fellow of the British Academy; this, in his view, was final if belated recognition of his scientific achievements, with which I think he had every reason to be satisfied.

Blackman was a great scholar and his contribution to the advancement of our knowledge of the civilization of the Nile Valley cannot be over-estimated. But what of the man? His was a

most complex character which throughout his life earned him many enemies, but also many friends. One fact apparent to the observer was that his enemies never quite knew what it was they disliked, whereas his friends were well aware of the reasons for their liking and admiration. It would appear that the former, although perhaps acquainted with Blackman for many years, never really knew him. He was a very religious man and his Christian faith was an integral part of his life, giving him his greatest comfort. His charity towards others was complete and he never understood the animosity which his rather pedantic manner aroused in some people. He held the childlike view that because he wanted, and indeed tried, to like everyone, everyone should like him. That this was not the case would sometimes arouse an exasperated outburst. But his rancour was never deep and he never delivered an unjust criticism of the work of an unfriendly colleague just because he considered that colleague to be an enemy.

Above all, Aylward Blackman was kindly and most sincere. No trouble or service was too great to be undertaken on behalf of those he knew to be his friends, and by these friends he will certainly be remembered with esteem and great affection.

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