

# NEKHEN NEWS

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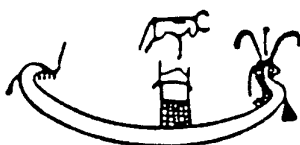
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## ON THE SCENE

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A CAMEL CARAVAN FROM THE SUDAN PASSES THE "FORT" OF KING KHASEKHEMUI AT HIERAKONPOLIS--ONE OF THE OLDEST STANDING RUINS IN THE WORLD, ca. 2750 B.C.



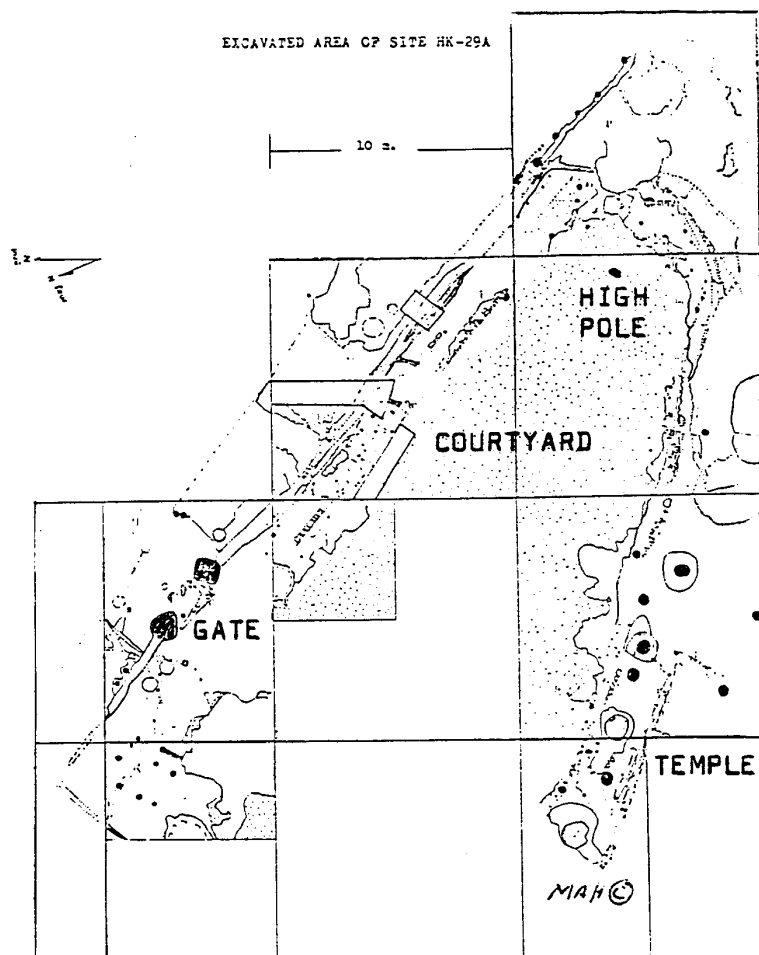
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**THE OLDEST TEMPLE IN EGYPT**

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE OFTEN MISLEADING. In February and March 1985 we cleared a 5 by 10 meter area (half a normal 10 meter square) in the so-called Predynastic Town Site at Hierakonpolis. The site, known as Locality 29A (or HK-29A) is about 200 meters from the edge of the modern cultivation in the low desert. At the time we knew we had found part of a very large building (see p. 3 of Nekhen News I,1), but we still believed we were dealing with ordinary settlement remains.

AFTER CLEARING AN ADDITIONAL 550 SQUARE METERS in the November 1985 - February 1986 season we now realize that we have discovered a huge architectural complex which may take years to uncover fully.



THE COMPLEX consists of a long oval or parabolic courtyard surrounded by a succession of wall trenches, post fences and mudbrick walls, accessed through a substantial gateway. It is flanked on one side by a row of outbuildings and on the opposite side by a large, temple-like ediface.

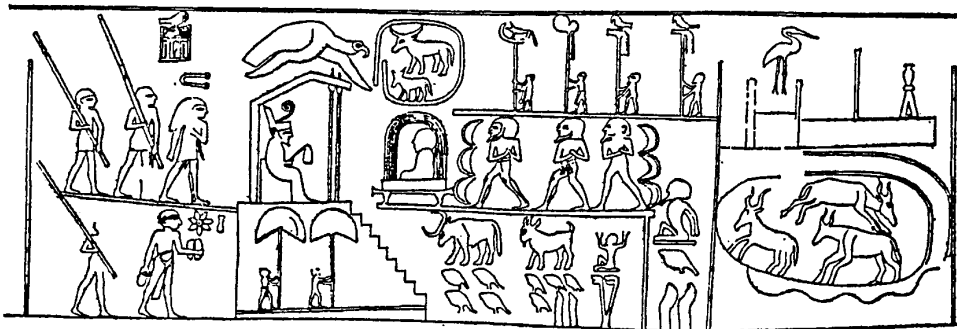
THE COURTYARD is over 32 meters (104 feet) long [one end must still be cleared] and 13 meters (42 feet) wide and slopes uphill at a 9° angle. It was paved by four or five superimposed smoothed clay floors. Imprints of human and animal feet have been found in one floor.

NEAR THE UPHILL APEX of the courtyard is a deep hole with two large boulder size rocks inside. We believe this once supported a tall freestanding pole-- possibly carrying the totem of the god. Similar poles are shown on Protodynastic and early First Dynasty representations dating only a century or two after our complex was abandoned.

THE BUILDING IDENTIFIED AS A TEMPLE is still less than half cleared but enough can be seen to suggest its overall plan and appearance. Four high wooden columns set into huge post holes 1.7 meters (nearly 6 feet) deep fronted the 13 meter (42 feet) wide building facing the courtyard. The interior was subdivided by light screen walls into small compartments, an arrangement which foreshadows the layout of historical Egyptian temples. Based on another set of smaller post holes, the big temple probably had a less impressive predecessor. Like later Egyptian temples, it was constantly being renovated.

UNLIKE LATER TEMPLES IN EGYPT our Gerzean building was not made of stone but fashioned from wood and wattle and daub. Because the post holes are so much bigger than the posts inside them, and in light of historical representations of early temples (especially in the Djoser Step Pyramid complex at Saqqara), we speculate that the high wooden columns might have been sheathed in bundled reeds.

BY A RARE PIECE OF GOOD LUCK the ancient Egyptians left us an important clue indicating what our enigmatic courtyard complex might have looked like. About 100 years after HK-29A was abandoned, a ceremonial macehead was carved for King Narmer, a monarch believed by many to have been the first pharaoh of a united Egypt (ca. 3100 B.C.). The Narmer macehead was found in 1897-98 in Nekhen only about 700 meters from our complex. Onto its pear shaped limestone surface were carved depictions of the king wrapped in a long tight fitting garment, seated atop a stepped platform, overseeing a number of activities. Among the scenes depicted is an oval enclosure with three (apparently) dead gazelles inside. The oval enclosure and the gated structure above it (probably a side view of the same enclosure) bear uncanny resemblance to our Gerzean temple complex.

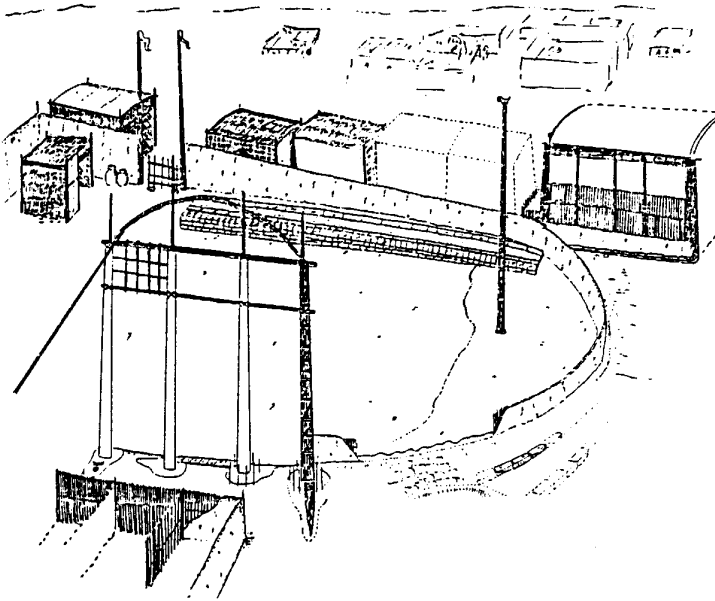


THE NARMER MACEHEAD FROM HIERAKONPOLIS--NOTE ESPECIALLY THE OVAL GAZELLE ENCLOSURE ON THE FAR RIGHT (after Emery, Archaic Egypt, 1961)

THE OVAL ENCLOSURE ON THE NARMER MACEHEAD shares four attributes with our complex at HK-29A: (1) (apparent) oval shape, (2) a curving double (brick) wall on one side of the courtyard, (3) a siniform boundary on the opposite side of the courtyard, and (4) identical placement of the gateway.

THE GATE AND WALLED AREA ABOVE THE OVAL ENCLOSURE also shares some things in common with our complex: (1) a gateway with two high posts, (2) a connected enclosure wall, and (3) a high pole inside the walled area.

THE DATE of our temple complex falls within the Gerzean period (ca. 3500/3400 - 3200 B.C.) and is well established by associated pottery, chipped stone points and knives, groundstone vessels and both horizontal and vertical stratigraphy.



RECONSTRUCTION BY M.A. HOFFMAN OF  
POSSIBLE APPEARANCE OF HK-29A  
GERZEAN TEMPLE COMPLEX

AMONG THE MOST SPECTACULAR FINDS this season were pieces of several beautifully crafted stone vessels found just above and on the courtyard floor. Particularly impressive is the rim of a white marble jar with flaring lips and incised rope decorations. The entire outer surface is highly polished. Other fragments of well made vases in alabaster, diorite and green and white porphyry (the later including a fluted base) were recovered.

BARBARA ADAMS REPORTS that our best stone vases compare favorably with the finest specimens found in the "Great Deposit" at Nekhen by Quibell in 1897-98. The artifacts in the Great Deposit are believed to have been buried in the old temple precinct as sacred trash once they had been broken or become otherwise unsuitable as sacred vessels. The presence of similar vases at HK-29A reinforces the interpretation of that site as a temple complex.



RIM OF WHITE MARBLE VASE FROM HK-29A

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POTSHERDS AND MORE POTSHERDS

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PICKING UP WHERE SHE LEFT OFF in March 1985, Renee Friedman of the Department of Near Eastern Studies, UC Berkeley, continued the grueling work of classifying, counting and analyzing the pottery from HK-29A. Assisted part of the time by staff archaeologist Jay Mills, Renee plowed through mountains of potsherds, recording them on our special Ceramic Analysis Forms and sawing thousands of rims and bases for drawing--an especially muddy job!

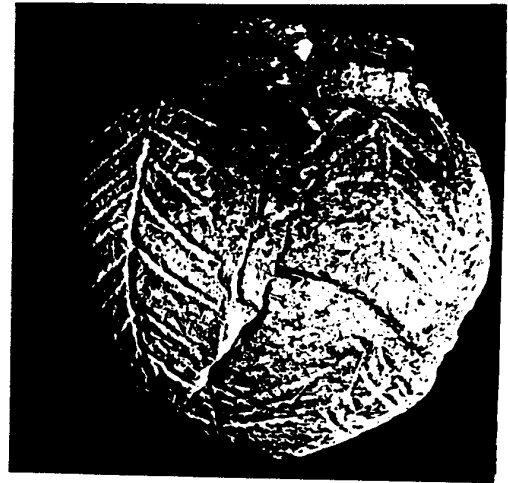


RENEE FRIEDMAN WITH SHERD SAW

OF WHAT USE IS IT? When we began large scale pottery analysis in 1978 visitors often questioned why we counted and weighed everything. Until the completion of this stage of our work in the settlements of Hierakonpolis, most Predynastic pottery systems were based on whole pots derived from cemeteries. Such systems proved inadequate in settlements where most pottery is broken. If we did not wish to simply discard our sherds as earlier excavators usually did, we needed a usable system based on sherds rather than whole pots. Ideally, this system would allow us to seriate or date sites based on changes in style and technology and could be related to the older Petrie Sequence Dating system (based on whole pots from tombs). Additional uses of pottery involve detection of social and economic differences within and between sites and evidence of foreign contacts. This year, for example, we have found small amounts of pottery imported from both Palestine and Nubia.



GERZEAN "BOAT POT" SHERD FROM HK-29A



DESERT OR NUBIAN IMPORT

WITH THE RECOVERY OF A LARGE GERZEAN ASSEMBLAGE this season we now have controlled ceramic collections totalling about three quarters of a million (750,000) sherds from Predynastic settlements in the Hierakonpolis region. These are supplemented by collections from tombs and kilns. This is, by far, the largest sample of its kind ever made and should lay the basis for a regional, settlement-oriented ceramic typology. Once collections from other well dug sites are studied with similar analytical systems, we will have a more precise idea of the nature and extent of local ceramic traditions within the Nile Valley during Predynastic times.

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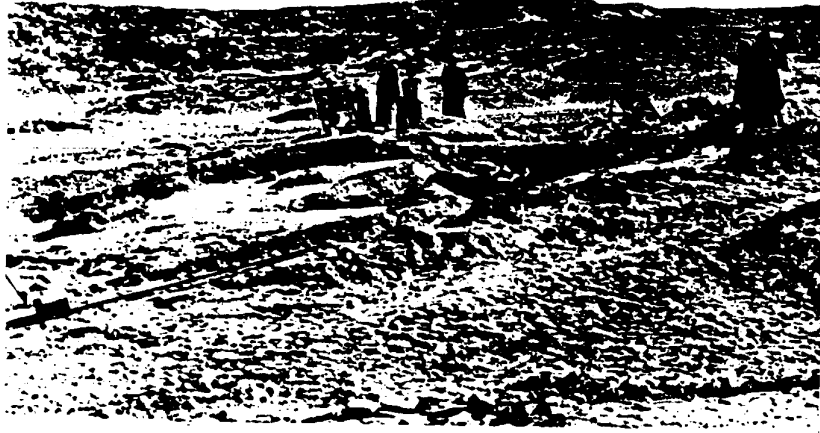
#### NEW SURPRISES AT TOMB -11

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IN 1982 OUR EXCAVATIONS IN TOMB-11 at the Protodynastic royal necropolis of Hierakonpolis (known by the more prosaic archaeological designation "Locality 6" or "HK-6") yielded spectacular artifacts, including: fly and shell shaped beads of lapis lazuli, obsidian sickle blades, carved wooden bed legs, carved bone and ivory inlay, beads of gold, lapis, carnelian, steatite and turquoise and several enigmatic statuettes in pottery and stone.

THIS SEASON WE RETURNED BRIEFLY TO TOMB-11 to complete the study of its superstructure. Our past excavations at Hierakonpolis have produced the first solid evidence of what stood above the earliest royal graves. This year Carter Lupton of the Milwaukee Public Museum, who worked on Tomb-11 in 1982, returned as site supervisor.

WORK THIS DECEMBER confirmed earlier suspicions that Tomb-11, unlike the other royal Protodynastic tombs we have dug so far at HK-6, was covered originally by a low man made mound. Although most of the wooden superstructure was destroyed, enough remained to determine that it had once stood atop the mound and over the brick lined burial chamber.



EXCAVATIONS AT TOMB-11 SHOWING MOUND ABOVE BURIAL CHAMBER

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AMONG THE MOST EXCITING ARTIFACTS FOUND was a sandstone statuette of a lion, probably among the earliest of its kind from Egypt. The statuette is of particular interest to Barbara Adams because of her interest in lion sculpture in early Egyptian art.



SANDSTONE LION FIGURINE FROM TOMB-11

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**NEH GRANT MATCHED SUCCESSFULLY !**

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THANKS TO YOUR SUPPORT through the Friends of Nekhen and tour participation we achieved our 1985-86 funding goals and received full matching of the committed National Endowment for the Humanities grant. WE COULD NOT HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOU -- MANY THANKS.

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**TOURS VISIT EXPEDITION**

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IN NOVEMBER 1985 AND JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1986 two special tours cruised the Nile in their own boats and visited with us for several days at Hierakonpolis.

THIS COMING YEAR we are planning similar small, exclusive tours to other great archaeological areas in the New World including: the MAYA AND THEIR NEIGHBORS, THE ANTIQUITIES OF NORTH AMERICA and THE ARCTIC PEOPLES--PAST AND PRESENT. In each case, we will be getting an insider's view of research, visiting sites and monuments not normally open to visitors, socializing with local archaeologists and taking time to see the natural wonders of the region.

WE PLAN A REPEAT VISIT TO EGYPT IN 1987-88. Future newsletters will contain details of future excursions. Why not tell a few of your select friends and plan now to join us?



**T-SHIRT FEVER STRIKES HIERAKONPOLIS**

(photo courtesy of J. Romeo)



ONE OF OUR MOST IMPORTANT TOOLS for relative dating at Tomb-11 is pottery. Unlike settlement sites like HK-29A where sherds number in the hundreds of thousands, tombs produce totals in the "mere" high hundreds. Since most tomb sherds are large and known to come from a limited number of vessels, mending is practical. Once mended, pots can be correlated with Sir Flinders Petrie's Sequence Dates and thus compared to finds from other areas of Egypt.

Barbara Adams of the Petrie Museum, University College London, was in charge of artifact study at Tomb-11 and supervised mending and analysis of all pottery there as she has done at Hierakonpolis since 1980. She concludes that Tomb-11 should date a generation or so before the time of Narmer and the unification of Egypt (ca. 3100 B.C.).



BARBARA ADAMS AND HER POT MENDING CREW

A FINAL CLUE TO THE IDENTITY OF TOMB-11'S ORIGINAL OCCUPANT is provided by John McArdle of the Humane Society of the U.S., our expedition zoologist, Dr. McArdle reports a leopard claw from among the scant faunal remains from Tomb-11. Ancient Egyptian priests and occasionally kings wore lion and leopard skin robes as part of their ceremonial attire. The Tomb-11 claw reinforces the evidence provided by the other exotic and valuable objects and the tomb architecture that an important person was interred here and suggests at least one of the roles he played in life.

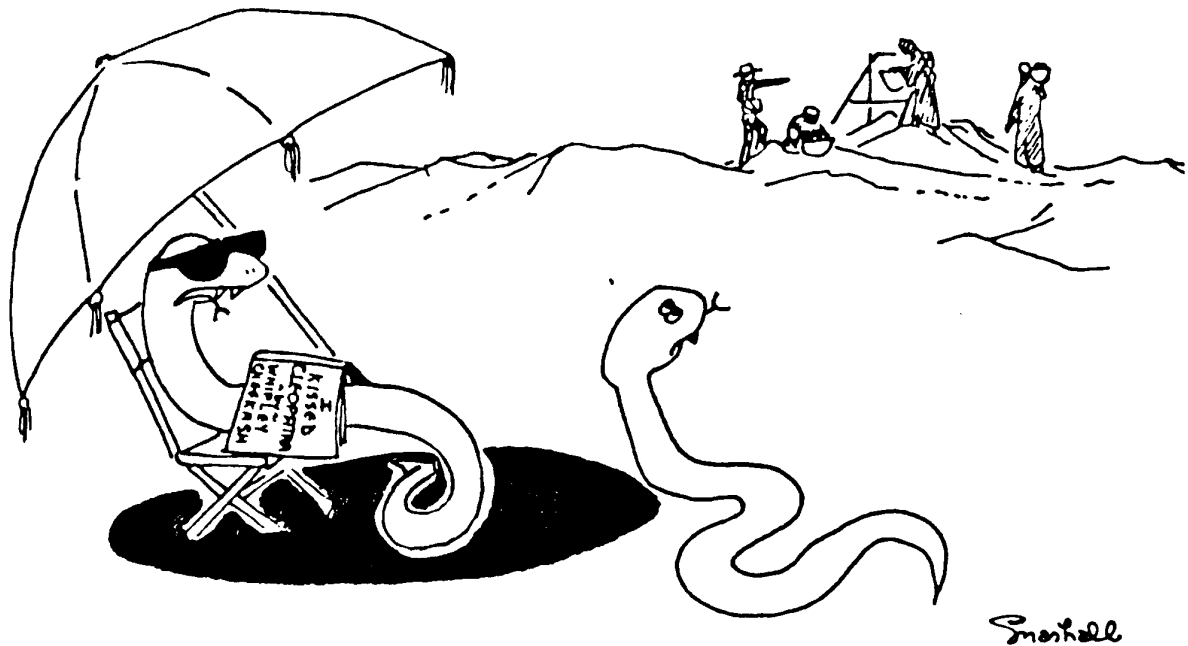
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## AND ON THE LIGHTER SIDE...

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EXPEDITION JOURNAL, 12/7/85: SNAKES STRIKE SITE, OVERRUN SCREEN.



"YOU GO GET 'EM ZACK, I WAS THE CURSE LAST YEAR."

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HIERAKONPOLIS EXPEDITION JOURNAL--ONE MAN'S VIEW

by

BOB SNASHALL

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INTO THE DESERT you arrive on site. It is a moonscape. There is a spurt of activity. Workers in blue gelabias carry to the sifting screens their first basket loads of sand; the theodolite is gingerly erected; the sorters peel off to the sherd yard to proceed with the processing of some 300,000 pieces of pottery. As the sun disc rises, gaining strength, a bucolic rhythm takes hold only to be punctured by the percussive promptings of the (83, or is it 86 year old?) Rais (chief foreman) and the Mudir, fearless expeditionary leader.

BREAKFAST CAME EARLY at 6:00 AM and was minimal, thus the ten o'clock sweet tea is welcome. On those days when the digestive tract grumbles, "Why me?", the halfa bara brew is a boon pacifier. The old Rais signals when it's time for a break and time to resume work. He knows his trade and has been practicing it for over 60 years, since the year Tutankhamon's tomb was discovered, following in his father's footsteps.

SAND AGAIN FLIES up in the air. Commands are barked. Occasionally an excited gaggle converges on the uncovering of a "pretty." Then the Mudir scowls and chases us back to work.

SOON THE METHOD IN THE MADNESS PRODUCES RESULTS. A floor -- smooth, broad and sloping uphill -- is exposed by the nimble use of trowel and brush. Discovery is greeted with, "What is this?" -- a question often voiced, loosening an effluvia of educated replies. During the course of the day there are flash brain storms, data constantly being found and evaluated. We're all in the loop, morning, noon and night; the job isn't left at 5. Answers appear hazily, tauntingly, sometimes to dissipate like a mirage. It helps to illustrate, to map, to study, to consume chocolate Bimbo bars.\* You find yourself appealing to the heavens, wondering if the site has been scrambled by the rancor of ancient gods cast aside.

THE FINDS, labelled and bagged, accumulate. There are mini pyramids of find bags, find envelopes, soil samples, radiocarbon samples, organic samples of all sizes and descriptions from hair balls to seeds to cow jaws pimply the site and piling up in the expedition's magazine -- a holy of holies protecting relics which eclipse the vaulted riches of Scrooge McDuck. A sleek shadow was seen scurrying across the magazine threshold -- a reptilian form. Perhaps, you muse, Jack Benny's fabled crocodile was really the god Sobek standing in as security cop.

OOH BOY, MAYBE THE SUN IS TAKING ITS TOLL. Past high noon it's on beyond hot. Time threatens protraction. Your body has not one drop of liquid left to give.

SUDDENLY SUCH SUPERFICIALITIES EVAPORATE. You're cradling a find of your own! An animal drawn crudely on the base of a red ware pot -- gazelle or locust, why quibble? It's your discovery, crafted by hands thousands of years ago and for the first time in millennia seeing the bright light of day. "This is why we got into archaeology, Indy." Revery takes flight. Then the sobering realization -- map, draw, photograph, fill out half a dozen special forms. Hollywood was never like this.

STILL, a libation and a Bimbo\* wouldn't be bad, you know, to celebrate the gusto.

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\* "Bimbo" -- an Egyptian twinkie, two cookies covered in chocolate. Said to be highly addictive for archaeologists, geologists and all other field types. (ed.)

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 FRIENDS OF NEKHEN T SHIRTS
 

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WE RAN OUT !!! To those of you who were disappointed because we had sold out of our first shipment of the Friends of Nekhen T shirt, there is hope. A new shipment is on its way. ORDER NOW AND BEAT THE RUSH.

SHIRTS ARE AVAILABLE in cotton/polyester blend and feature navy blue "ringer" trim around sleeves and neck and display the FRIENDS OF NEKHEN seal and hieroglyphs silk screened across the front. The shirts themselves are quality Hanes' products and come individually packaged in poly bags. They are made exclusively for the FRIENDS OF NEKHEN by member Don Chappell of Horus Horizon in Sherman Oaks, California.

YOUR SHIRTS MAY BE ORDERED in adult sizes: S, M, L and XL at a cost of \$7.00 per shirt, plus \$1.50 per shipment for handling and mailing. Childrens shirts may be ordered specially, also in S, M, L & XL at a cost of one dollar less than adult sizes.

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 detach here and mail to:

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In the following childrens' sizes: S, M, L, or XL \_\_\_\_\_

\* PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: Michael A. Hoffman, Friends of Nekhen  
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THANKS FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE 1985-86 FIELD STAFF

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 Ms. Renee Friedman  
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