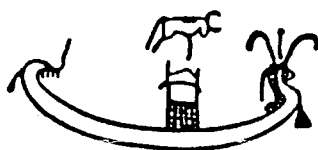


# NEKHEN NEWS

published for the  
THE FRIENDS OF NEKHEN

Vol. III, No. 1

Winter 1986-1987



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**Geological Applications of the Study of Prehistoric Sites in the Eastern Desert of Egypt**

### **A Special Welcome to New Friends of Nekhen**

We are happy to report a substantial growth in membership in **The Friends of Nekhen** since the last newsletter. The staff of the Hierakonpolis Expedition would like to welcome our newest members and thank all of you for the encouragement and support your membership represents.

### **And a Warm "Welcome Back" to Old Friends**

To all of you who have maintained your affiliation with the Expedition by formally renewing your membership in **The Friends of Nekhen** for 1987, our special thanks. Our

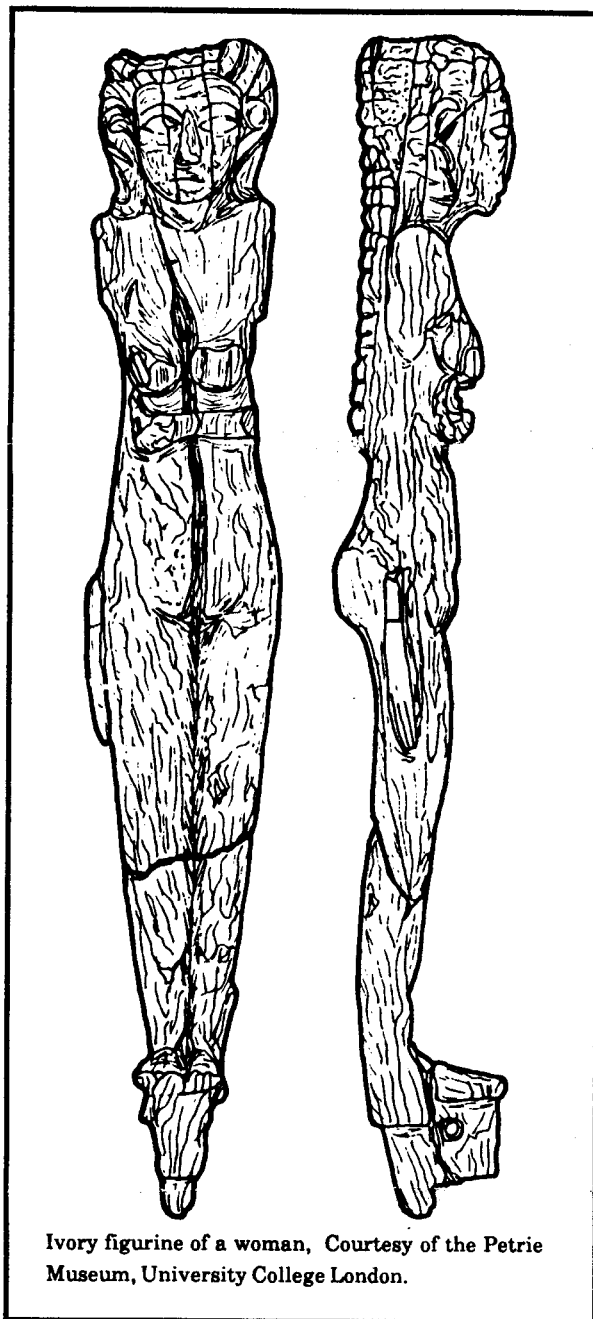
particular thanks to those Lifetime Members who have made additional and generous contributions.

We hope to hear soon from those few who have not yet renewed their memberships for 1987. Your continuing, active support of scientific research and the investigation of Egyptian prehistory is the best possible resolve for the New Year.

### **"THE FIRST EGYPTIANS"**

#### **A Major Museum Exhibition is Planned**

Although familiarity with the culture of pharaonic Egypt has grown rapidly over the last decade, thanks to several spectacular exhibitions that began with the Tutankhamon show,



no comparable attempts have been made to illuminate the world of the first Egyptians – the Predynastic peoples who laid the foundations of one of the world's first and most long-lived civilizations. Today, with new archaeological information accumulating rapidly in technical journals and museum collections, out-of-date

interpretations and misconceptions still dominate both the popular and professional views of Egyptian prehistory. This state of affairs not only deprives the public of the complete record of one of our earliest ancient civilizations, but obscures new discoveries that illuminate some of the most important cultural processes of the human experience – the origins of towns and cities, of centralized states, kingship, monumental architecture, writing, large-scale warfare, and a system of values and beliefs that nourished the roots of Egyptian culture a thousand years before the first pharaoh ascended his throne.

**The First Egyptians** will integrate these new discoveries for the visitor by demonstrating the way in which modern, interdisciplinary research at Hierakonpolis is helping reshape our ideas about the origins of civilization in the Nile Valley in the fourth and early third millennia BC. Hierakonpolis is particularly appropriate as the exhibition focal point both because of its long historic occupation and because of the probable association of the site with the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt and thus due to its political significance as "the city of the first pharaohs." The show's two principal humanities themes, interdisciplinary archaeological research methods and the origins of civilization, will be presented in four modules: *The World of Ancient Egypt*, *The Search for Hierakonpolis*, *From Chiefs to Kings*, and *Capitals of the Two Lands*. Each module is divided, in turn, into a number of stations illustrating important sub-themes, with murals, artifacts, scale models, photographs, line drawings, maps, and video displays.

*The World of Ancient Egypt* acts as a time and space tunnel transporting visitors past large-scale events of ancient Egyptian history and its more familiar personalities – Cleopatra, King Tutankhamon, and Khufu. A time line illustrated with typical artifacts from "The Egypt of the Pharaohs" provides a common background for the visitors entering Module II. *The Search for Hierakonpolis* begins in 1897; it shows some of the excitement of early finds as well as the painstaking research being done today. *From Chiefs to Kings* interprets the artifacts found at Hierakonpolis and comparable sites in terms of important cultural themes such as "Symbols of Power," "Egypt at the Crossroads – Africa and the Middle East," "Farmers, Craftsmen and Traders – The Economic Base,"

"Cities, Towns and Villages – Patterns of Settlement," and "Offerings for the Dead – The Function of Grave Goods." The final module, *Capitals of the Two Lands*, places Hierakonpolis in perspective with other important Egyptian sites. This perspective provides a synthesis of previous sub-themes in light of the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt in 3100 BC.

Most of the 130 artifacts to be shown in the exhibition have never before or only rarely been seen in the United States. These artifacts, chosen to illustrate the cultural themes involved, will be borrowed from several major museums – the Brooklyn Museum, the Oriental Institute (University of Chicago), the Petrie Museum (University College London), the Royal Ontario Museum, and the University Museum (University of Pennsylvania), as well as from other collections including the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford and the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

Among the most spectacular objects in the show are the inscribed golden-handled knife of Pharaoh Djer, a funerary Stela from the Royal Tombs at Abydos (both First Dynasty); a carved diorite stone vase with gold fittings; two funerary masks (one Greco-Roman and the other an 18th Dynasty wooden mask); beautifully decorated whole pots and tomb groups of Predynastic age; and a selection of materials from the "Main Deposit" found at the turn of the century, including an ivory figurine of a woman (illustrated), inscribed calcite bowls, and animal statuettes – all from Hierakonpolis. All of the objects in the show are appearing together for the first time. Pending National Endowment for the Humanities funding, *The First Egyptians* will be organized at the University of South Carolina and it will open at the University's McKissick Museum on April 8, 1988, to run for ten weeks. The exhibition will then go to the Milwaukee Museum for a ten week booking, from mid-July to the end of September, 1988; to the Denver Museum for a double booking, from the last week of October, 1988, through mid-April, 1989; one open booking remains; to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History for ten weeks, from September to mid-November, 1989; and then to its closing venue, the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution, from mid-December of 1989 through March, 1990.

### Excavating Old Archaeologists

by Barbara Adams, Curator  
*The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology*  
University College London

Not all archaeology involves digging in dirt, or sand as the case may be in Egypt. Some of my contributions to the work at Hierakonpolis have meant "digging" in old notes and manuscripts in order to rediscover information that was never properly published. As the years passed, I found I had developed a talent for this kind of research – although I was a reluctant conscript!

It all began in 1971 when I was assigned the task of publishing the objects in the Petrie that had been excavated by J. E. Quibell and F. W. Green in 1897-99 at Hierakonpolis. A proportion of the objects, but not all that they excavated, were published in their reports, *Hierakonpolis I* (1900) and *Hierakonpolis II* (1902). The material was scattered among museums in Egypt, Great Britain, and the USA, for at that time excavations were largely funded by donors who were rewarded with a share of the objects found. Quite soon I discovered that not only did the objects have unintelligible site numbers, but there were manuscript notes at Cambridge University which also needed investigation.

When I began work on Green's notes I found that they contained the key to the site numbers used for find spots in the temple and town area of Nekhen and the graves in the "painted tomb" cemetery south of the Predynastic town, which is now romantically known as Locality 33. This enabled me to assign all the marked objects that I could find in museums back into their correct find spots. The hours of poring over faint pencil entries in the notebooks, many out of order, gave me an intimacy with Green's procedures, and enough re-assembled information was produced to provide a 1974 addendum to my previous publication, the *Supplement to Ancient Hierakonpolis*. This work also gave me such a microcosmic world in which to live that I found I could not even share the experience with other Egyptologists. None that I knew were doing similar work, so I tended to communicate my exasperations and frustrations to Green, sometimes aloud (in other words, I talked to myself).

Since then, I have dabbled with Petrie's notes from various sites in the course of my curatorial work. These are far worse than



Limestone baboon and baby from Hierakonpolis (Main Deposit); Archaic. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum, University College London.

Green's to use and understand because Petrie not only used his pages out of order, but often the other way up — with no particular system. A re-identification of an object in Petrie's manuscripts is a momentous event in the Petrie Museum, an excitement in which we all share. Nowadays, we have all the manuscripts microfiched and I must enforce the discipline of using these copies so that the fragile originals do not get damaged; also, we are now able to make the information they contain more readily available to scholars by selling copies of the fiches.

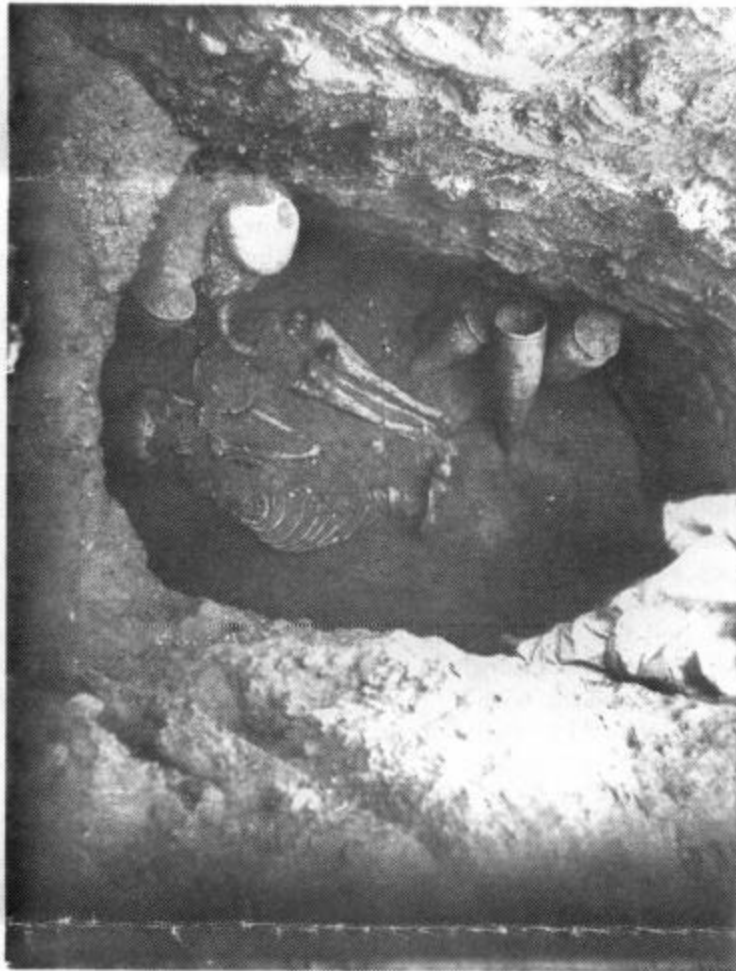
Most recently, I have been working with the manuscripts of J. Garstang at the University of Liverpool. These pertain to part of a Predynastic cemetery beneath the large mudbrick "fort" near the mouth of the Great Wadi at Hierakonpolis, which was excavated in 1905 and never published. The objects have an even wider distribution than those of Quibell and Green (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, Jamaica). I wrote dozens of letters, reassigned hundreds of pots, and was finally able to date a large number of the graves and produce a plan of the cemetery, which shows a shift in use through time in the late Predynastic and Protodynastic periods. Michael Allen Hoffman then contributed an analysis of these results and their relevance to the present work at the site; the whole will be published by Kegan-Paul International this year. Another gap in the publication of excavations at the site is therefore filled within the limitations imposed by the inadequacies and omissions in the record.

Since 1980, I have been able to round out the study of musty notes from the past and to continue my involvement with the site by working in the field with the Hierakonpolis Expedition. This has produced freshly dug pottery sherds (by the hundreds of thousands) and live (mostly) archaeologists to work with, providing an invigorating change. I hope I am diligent in my record-keeping in the field — as our director insists — for I now know very well that some day someone may have to resurrect what I have done!

#### 1986-87 Field Season at Nekhen Just Completed

Dr. Michael Allen Hoffman left for Egypt at the end of November, 1986, to direct and coordinate the twelfth season of the Hierakonpolis Expedition. Two months of research and analysis have just been completed in what was primarily a study season.

This research was supported by funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities and by contributions from the members of **The Friends of Nekhen**. The major purpose of this season's work was to study previously excavated material in preparation for the analyses that necessarily precede and form the basis for comprehensive publication. A secondary goal



Late Predynastic tomb excavated by Garstang in Fort cemetery at Hierakonpolis in 1905. Archival photograph courtesy of the School of Archaeology, University of Liverpool, and Barbara Adams, Curator, Petrie Museum (University College London).

has involved some geoarchaeological surveying in order to more precisely establish the long-term sedimentologic factors affecting human settlement in the Hierakonpolis region.

A considerable amount of outside attention is being focused on the site this winter due to the important nature of last season's discoveries, and the research and analyses of our field staff is perhaps more than usually intense and challenging. We can look forward to the next issue of this newsletter which will contain a report by Dr. Hoffman on the results of this season's investigations.

**Intimations from the Field (1985-86):  
A Mosaic of Images and Impressions**

*by James O. Mills*

Jonathan Elias, René Friedman, and I made our exodus from Cairo at dawn by train (after four days of hectically hunting supplies) into and up the Nile Valley — a verdant ribbon flanked by the rock walls of the desert plateau. A continuous pastoral picture rolled by for ten hours: farmers and donkeys, date trees, kids herding buffalo and sheep, robed and sometimes veiled women with water jugs atop their heads.

*Edfu, East Edfu.* We got the hotel we had hoped for: bathrooms with hot showers, lunch at 3:00 and dinner at 9:00 downstairs with the Bulgarian engineers hired by the Ferrosilicon Company of Egypt whose CEO is interested in and supportive of our work.

My roommates are Ahmed Irawi, our young and enthusiastic Egyptian Antiquities inspector, and Bob Snashell, a lawyer educated at Santa Barbara.

The day after we arrived in Edfu, Jonathan and I went to Aswan to pick up a Land Rover from the archaeologist Boyce Driscoll and his wife Diane. While waiting for Boyce to get back from the desert, Diane told us of their work at a medieval fortress, Kasr Ibrim, on an island up-river. Since the building of the Aswan High Dam, the supply of crocodiles has been cut off from the Nile and the farmers exterminated them. In the reservoir, the deep waters are cool and clear so the crocodiles prefer to stay in Nubia. Recently, however, they have been staging a comeback. For several years, Diane has been bathing and swimming off the island. During half of the year, it's her tub and sink.

But last week it was heard that the natives aren't fishing in their little boats for fear of crocodiles. Somewhere in the reservoir they say that a "monster" was caught, a 15 meter long crocodile. Like most "fish stories," this one is highly exaggerated.

From the balcony I look across the Nile at Edfu. A skiff carries two boys across the shallows in the lee of an island. While one rows the other, standing, raises then slaps a long pole on the water, frightening fish into the net. In the early morning they'll bring their catch to market, sort them according to species, haggle with the gathering crowd, and wrap the bargain sales in newspaper.

Today at Hierakonpolis, on the desert's edge and below the plateau, a herd of thirty camels moved by on their way to market in Esna. Oceans of broken pots, stone tools, and bones outline ancient towns now reclaimed by the sand. The wind scoops out gullies and channels between the armor of artifacts, sculpting fields of standing waves. It's both an archaeologist's dream and nightmare. The first day out, I couldn't believe the sheer mass of stuff ... Aghast. It all has to be accounted for, recorded somehow.

These people were some of the first at a lot of things, like carving and polishing stone vessels. Some beautiful granite and porphyry vase fragments were found today. A remarkably large number of bones was recovered from the first 10 meter square (one freshwater fish vertebrae was the size of an orange). About 11,000 potsherds have also come out of the square thus far (about a fifth of the final total), most of which have been typed, counted, and weighed by pre-established categories such as rims, bodies, or bases.

There are all sorts of methods being worked out to discern the function of pottery, be it utility, aesthetic, ritual, or trade, and to determine its reliability as an indicator of population size, length of occupation and/or re-occupation of a dwelling. And the inferences go on. A lot of guessing, testing, and on-the-spot education is involved. Most important is a willingness to abandon a theory. Next week, a find may disprove or alter what we thought we knew.

So we're having a successful season and generating not only more but better questions.

Most interesting, though, is that we're finding that village life hasn't changed much

over 5,000 years. Our twelve workers are unearthing structures and work areas (later, we discovered it to be a temple) physically not much different from those in their own village. Indeed, they might be digging in the village of their ancestors. Some of these people don't move much — haven't for who knows how long (we're trying to find out). We do know that the nomadic sort came and went up on the gebel (inselbergs) back when the desert was wet some 250,000 years ago. The climate oscillates irregularly from dry cycles to wet. The last wet period peaked an estimated 8,500 years before the present.

Last week, on the day celebrating the Prophet's flight, we toured part of the concession, visiting Locality 6 where we'll later excavate some subsidiary graves as well as looters' back-dirt piles from one of the larger tombs. We also visited a rock shelter with some Protodynastic petroglyphs (an elephant suggests that the area was wet not so long ago), and New Kingdom Hill, a series of decorated tombs chiseled into the mountain's cap between ca. 1500 and 1080 BC — complete with screeching bats. Soon we hope to visit El Kula, one of a series of baby pyramids in Egypt, which is only 5 km to the north.

Four months in the field doesn't seem long enough. Things are fast and furious: up at 6 am, work up til 2 in the afternoon, and spend most of the evening on recording, mapping, and the like. Last Friday, our day off, and this coming Friday, we'll go to Luxor for supplies and study at the Chicago House library. And a little sightseeing if time permits.

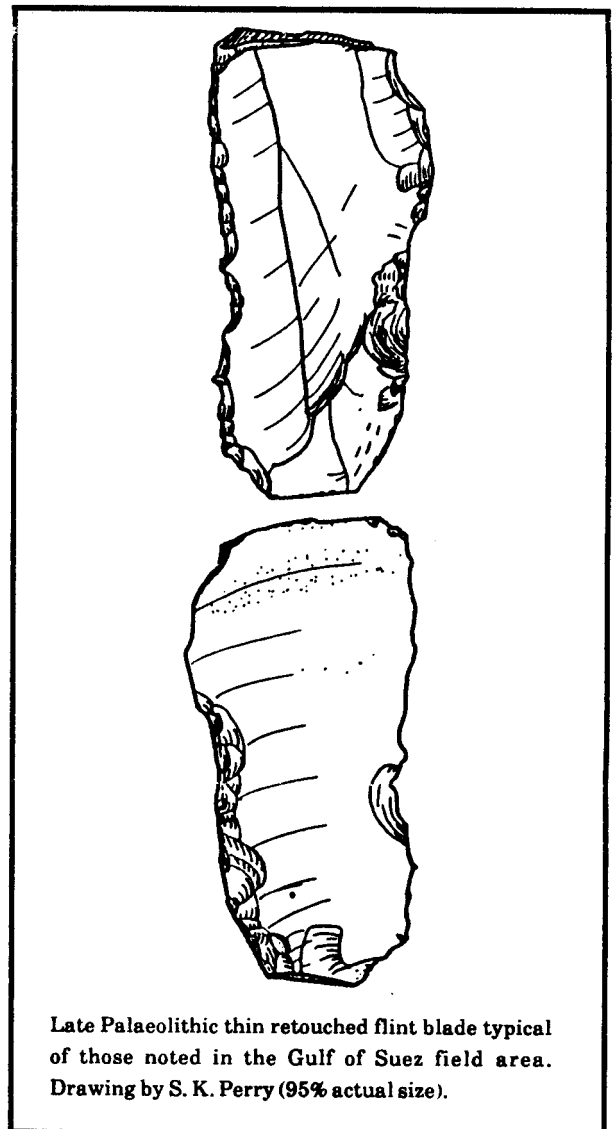
**Geological Applications of the  
Study of Prehistoric Sites in the  
Eastern Desert of Egypt**

*by Susan L. Gawarecki, PhD  
ESRI Research Associate, and  
Geological Consultant to the  
Hierakonpolis Project*

In the spring of 1983, Dr. Michael Allen Hoffman visited my doctoral study area on the west bank of the Gulf of Suez in order to assist with a field survey of Palaeolithic sites previously noted by Dr. Stephen K. Perry and myself; these represent the first prehistoric sites

reported from the region. Diagnostic artifacts found in surface scatters include some Lower Palaeolithic choppers and Acheulean hand axes; Middle Palaeolithic Levallois flakes and points, denticulate scrapers, and a discoidal core; Upper Palaeolithic blades and blade-end scrapers; and a Neolithic tanged point, side-scraper, and chipped axe.

The study area, located about 50 km northwest of Ras Gharib, is an active rift terrain with many Quaternary (less than 1.8 million years old) tectonic features such as fault escarpments, uplifted and tilted relict alluvial



Late Palaeolithic thin retouched flint blade typical of those noted in the Gulf of Suez field area. Drawing by S. K. Perry (95% actual size).

surfaces, drainage diversions, and so forth. The primary goal of my study was to map and analyze such neotectonic features. On-the-spot dating of prehistoric artifacts would aid this by allowing inferences to be made regarding tectonic uplift rates and palaeoclimatic regimes.

Later analysis of our field notes showed that the artifact assemblages had consistent distribution patterns. Lower Palaeolithic sites were found on bedrock outcrops, Middle Palaeolithic sites on high relict alluvial surfaces, Upper Palaeolithic sites on intermediate height alluvial surfaces, and Neolithic sites in modern drainages. Unfortunately, no buried or stratified sites were found in the region. The sites were widely distributed, both vertically and laterally across the study area, although on several discrete structural blocks, two or more sites of differing age were found. It was these groupings which were subjected to comparative analysis based on age and elevation.

Tectonic uplift rates are indicated by the vertical distribution of sites of different ages on individual structural blocks. Surfaces can be no younger than the age of non-transported artifacts typically found on them. From this type of data, tentative maximum late Quaternary uplift rates (with corresponding downcutting by erosion) were calculated to lie between 0.1 and 0.9 meters per 1000 years for most of the western part of the study area where the sites were predominantly located. This is considerably higher than the moderately low uplift rates calculated from other data for the eastern portion of the study area. In addition, two individual structural blocks were inferred to have tilted southward during uplift. These results, although preliminary, are encouraging as they demonstrate that the application of archaeological evidence to geological analysis can yield important information.

Inferences regarding climatic changes can also be made from the ages and relative frequencies of artifact assemblages. The present climate is too arid for low-technology human occupation; therefore, moister and/or cooler conditions must have existed periodically since the Lower Palaeolithic. Sites were probably situated above then-active drainages. Additionally, today's limited rainfall cannot account for the degree of erosion since prehistoric times. At least three pluvials or sub-pluvials, lying within the Lower, Middle, and

Upper Palaeolithic, respectively, are postulated. Neolithic sites, relatively infrequent, are situated in present-day wadis, indicating that the Neolithic period was probably not much moister than it is today. Certainly, one would not locate one's occupation site in an active stream bed; but if the climate were sufficiently arid, then it would not be too surprising to find occupation sites in intermittent wadis (or *arroyos* as we know them from the southwestern United States).

Overall, the inferred climatic pattern is more consistent with the Mediterranean climatic fluctuations as seen in the Levant than with the tropical climatic patterns which influenced Sudan and southern Egypt. Since other palaeoclimate data from the Gulf of Suez region is lacking, the archaeological aspects of this research provide valuable information which may be integrated into continental-scale climate studies. Moreover, the influence of a fluctuating moist-arid climate has important implications for geomorphic studies of erosion cycles in similar arid regions.

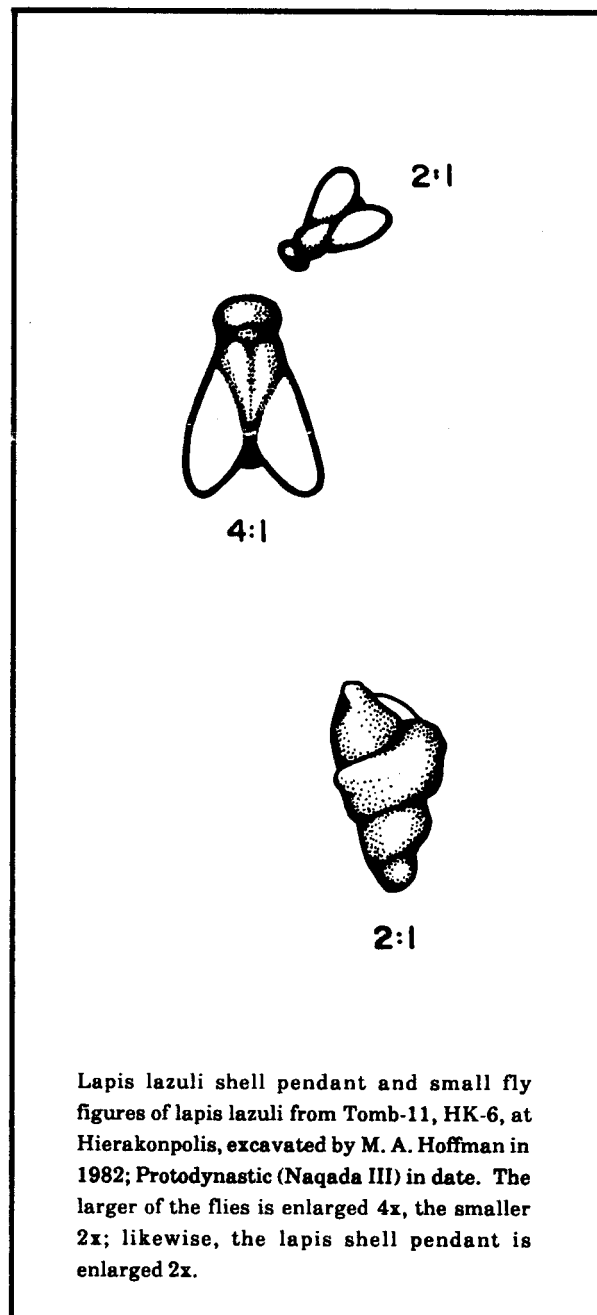


### Predynastic Use of Lapis Lazuli in the Nile Valley

The small and select items illustrated here, two tiny and finely crafted figures of flies and a worked stone shell pendant, are representative examples of the lapis lazuli found at Hierakonpolis. They are among the objects planned for display in our museum exhibition, **The First Egyptians**.

While it has generally been assumed that the lapis lazuli used for choice beads, amulets, and small figures beginning in the Late Pre- or Protodynastic period came from Afghanistan *via* trade with Mesopotamia or southwest Persia, it is now thought possible that some of this lapis was mined in Egypt itself – in the vicinity of the Nile Valley. Unworked pieces brought in for sale from time to time by the *fellahin* (country people), who have invariably refused to divulge the source of the stone, suggest that a mine mentioned by Idrisi in the 12th century AD may yet exist, most likely in the region of the Kharga or Dakhla Oases.

Modern geologists, however, caution that many pieces once identified as lapis may actually be sodalite – a colorful blue mineral known to occur in Egypt's deserts. The search for the ancient sources of lapis lazuli and sodalite is one of many activities in which archaeologists, geologists, and chemists can cooperate.



Lapis lazuli shell pendant and small fly figures of lapis lazuli from Tomb-11, HK-6, at Hierakonpolis, excavated by M. A. Hoffman in 1982; Protodynastic (Naqada III) in date. The larger of the flies is enlarged 4x, the smaller 2x; likewise, the lapis shell pendant is enlarged 2x.

### Membership Cards

For the first time, **The Friends of Nekhen** will receive membership cards as a sign of their active support of the Expedition and its work. The cards are simple yet, we believe, elegant in design, black line on a heavy white stock. They will be back from the printers early in March, and will be sent to you as soon as possible.

### New Look for the NEKHEN NEWS

This issue of **NEKHEN NEWS** marks the Earth Sciences and Research Institute's first publishing effort using its new "desktop publishing system," a computer workstation combined with a laser printer for near typeset quality output. In addition to being able to run most PC-DOS programs, the computer uses its own integrated software for simultaneous document creation and formatting. Moreover, documents created using any of several PC word processing programs can be imported into the system, allowing articles written for publication to be included without retyping.

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