



NEKHEN NEWS

Published for
The Friends of Nekhen

Volume 31

Fall 2019



It's Only a Matter of Size

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Egypt's Heartland

Image © 2019 Maxar Technologies
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Time Line	
Period	Date BC
Badarian	4400–4000
Naqada I	4000–3800
Naqada II	3800–3300
Naqada IIIAB	3300–3050
Unification/Narmer	3050
Dynasty 1	3000–2890
Dynasty 2	2890–2686
Old Kingdom	2686–2160
First Intermediate	2160–2055
Middle Kingdom	2055–1650
Second Intermediate	1650–1550
New Kingdom	1550–1069
Third Intermediate	1069–656
Late period	664–332
Ptolemaic	332–30
Roman	30–AD 395

Cover: Ivory statuettes from Hierakonpolis compared with diminutive versions from Tell el-Farkha hint at a shared tradition. See page 15. Images © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford and Polish Expedition to Tell el-Farkha.

Thanks for Your Support

Thanks to all our Friends of Nekhen for your sustained backing over the years. Special thanks are due to Tom & Linda Heagy, our major benefactors, whose generous support is deeply appreciated; Cindy Farrington, Geoff Phillipson, Bonnie Sampsell, Patricia Perry, Crenan Ray, Dolores Schiffert, Dagmar Bird, Mike Stammers, John Wall, Mel & Joann Hunt, David Aid, Fred Botha, Richard Fazzini & Mary McKercher, Mark Gajewski, Matthew J. Adams, Leanna Gaskins, Tracy Gill, Eileen Nash, Nicoletta Pirazzoli, Lyn Stagg, Ulla Søhuus, Rose Halsall, John & Sue Robinson, Joe Smolik, Johannes Jeppesen, Allan Gluck, Dave Counsell, Barry Fitzpatrick, Angie Gillespie, Richard Grant, Alan Lloyd, Roz Park, Jennifer Quinn, Andrew & Elizabeth Beeston, Tinne & Preben Mogensen and Hans Øvliisen. We are also grateful for the generosity of the Corporation of the Fine Arts Museums, San Francisco, and Noel Sweitzer and the Egypt Exploration Organization of Southern California.

A grant from the Michela Schiff Giorgini Foundation to Xavier Droux made possible the excavations around HK6. Funds from the University of Liverpool and the Andrew Sherratt Fund of the University of Sheffield allowed Alistair Dickey to undertake his textile research.

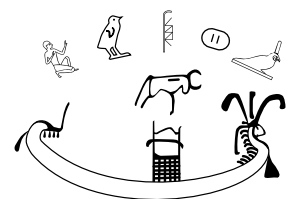
Nekhen News is published for The Friends of Nekhen

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Hierakonpolis in 2019: A Wider View

— Renée Friedman, Director, Hierakonpolis Expedition

The decade ended in a year of ups and downs at Hierakonpolis and, it seems, around the globe. Anxious as we were to continue our explorations after the remarkable discoveries of last season (see *Nekhen News* 30), our permissions for 2019 were severely delayed. After 23 seasons of continuous fieldwork (thanks to the support of the Friends of Nekhen), this has been the first hiatus (and the first February I've spent entirely in the UK — definitely not a high point). Luckily we were able to squeeze in a brief campaign in November–December 2018, during which Xavier Droux examined the farther reaches of the cemeteries in the Wadi Abu Sufian (page 4). As cultivation intensifies and traffic increases in the wadi, the landscape is changing rapidly and we wanted to get a wider view of burial activities around HK6 before it was too late. The excavations revealed some intriguing new aspects in tomb construction and we hope to resume exploration here in the future. The late 2018 campaign also allowed Alistair Dickey to continue his study of the copious amount of textile recovered over the years (page 6). Perhaps the largest collection of predynastic textiles extant, detailed examination is transforming our view of this important industry.

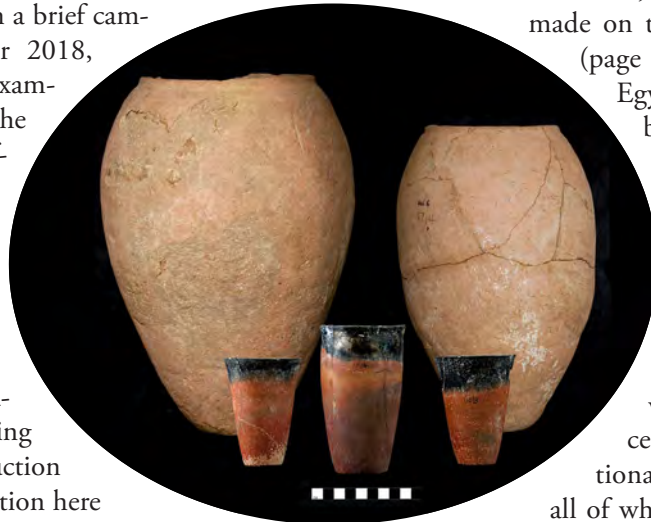
Pottery is another object category of which we have no shortage. New analytical techniques are augmenting our understanding of its function and use (see page 7) as well as supporting some long held assumptions. In fact, one of the most exciting discoveries of 2019 was the confirmation that the straw-tempered flat-based roll rim jars that we are in the habit of calling 'beer jars' actually did contain beer — Phew! Applying new residue extraction methods to jar sherds from HK11C (Test A midden) legally exported in 1980, Jiajing Wang and Li Liu of Stanford University have detected the starch signature of a fermented cereal-based beverage (beer). Further study of the beer jars themselves reveals that they come in two sizes: a large version ranging in volume from 5 to 6 litres and a smaller one of roughly

3 litres, giving some indication of what was considered an appropriate (and it seems rather generous) portion at this time. As an added bonus, further residue analysis on small black-topped beakers suggests these elegant vessels were used to serve and imbibe the brew in more refined amounts, perhaps together making a beer drinking kit.

Just because we couldn't work in Egypt, doesn't mean we didn't work, and substantial progress was made on the Painted Tomb conservation (page 12). And if we couldn't go to Egypt, the next best thing was to bring Egypt to us. The highlight of the year, in July researchers working at Hierakonpolis, Elkab, Edfu and its necropolis at Hagr Edfu, met in Oxford for a stimulating colloquium to exchange the latest news from around the region. This was accompanied by a jolly reception and a selection of additional activities, further details about all of which can be found beginning on page 14. Spanning from the Predynastic to the Ptolemaic, the presentations provided such fascinating insights on this triad of extraordinary sites, we decided to dedicate the second half of this extended edition of the *Nekhen News* to sharing them with you.

Each one helps to place Hierakonpolis within its wider regional framework, and serves to emphasize what a special place it truly is and how lucky we have been, with your support, to have been allowed to explore and unearth its many rare and remarkable treasures.

Finally, as the decade draws to a close, we say goodbye to some colleagues, long-time supporters and dear friends. In 2019, Alain Anselin, Professor at Université des Antilles and founder of *Cahiers caribéens d'égyptologie*, and the irrepressible Nicoletta Pirazzoli, self-described Egypt junkie, both lost their battles with cancer far too soon. We also mourn the passing of Günter Dreyer, excavator of early Abydos, and William Y. Adams, esteemed Nubologist and anthropologist. Their contributions and enthusiasm will be sorely missed and we will always remember their lives and salute their accomplishments. 🐦



Beer drinking kit?



Nicoletta Pirazzoli

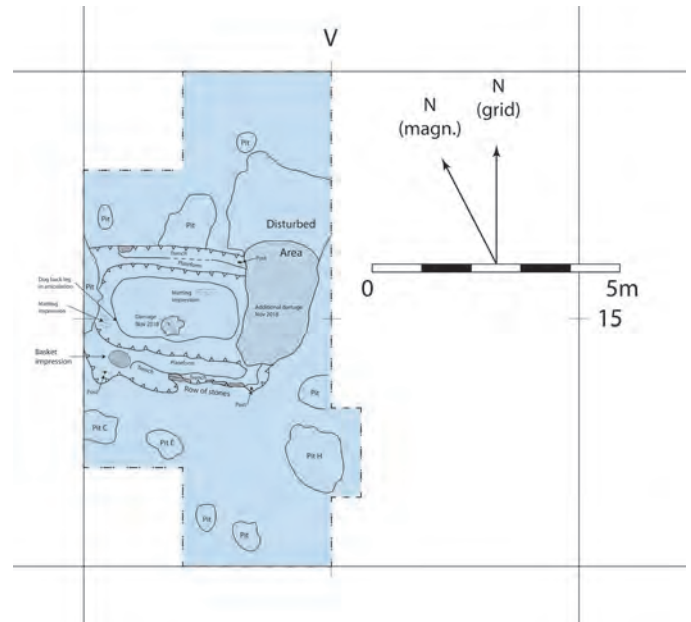
Photo: R. Marzini

A Foray to the Other Side: How Big was HK6?

— Xavier Droux, Hierakonpolis Expedition

Thanks to a generous grant from the Schiff Giorgini Foundation, in November 2018 we initiated research in a new part of Wadi Abu Suffian's cemeteries. Located on the east side of the wadi (HK6 grid square V15), this area had previously been surveyed in 1978 by Michael Hoffman, who noted the presence of a slab-lined tomb, which he suggested was of Proto-dynastic date, and ceramic fragments from earlier times. In order to learn more, we selected an area exhibiting several depressions, which we thought might be small plundered tombs, and a flatter area that we hoped would contain more intact burials.

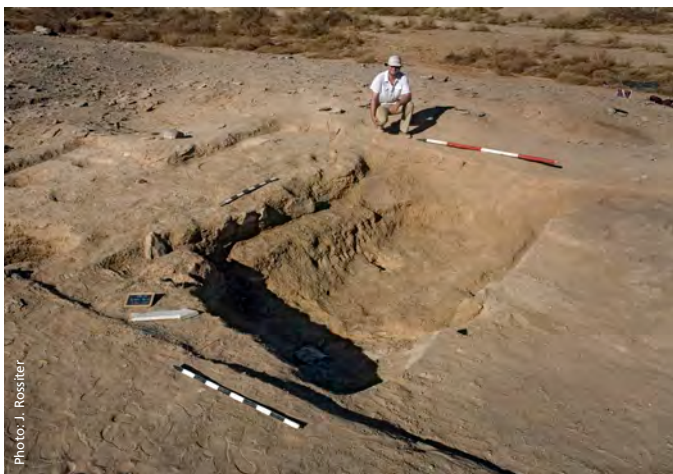
Of course, we should have expected the unexpected. The flat area is most likely the edge of a settlement, while the numerous small depressions turned out to be the creations of recent episodes of plundering. Beneath them we were delighted to find a single large tomb. Its east and west ends were damaged, so the original length along its upper edges cannot be determined. The floor, however, was well-preserved and measured 2.40m east-west by 1.20m north-south. Perhaps not the biggest tomb in the cemetery, but its main interest resides in its manner of construction, hitherto unattested at HK6. It seems that the tomb's builders struggled with the half-meter-thick natural deposit of loose gravels they had to dig through before reaching a very hard layer of compacted sand into which they could excavate the tomb floor. In order to prevent the loose gravels from sliding into the tomb during construction, they cleared away the gravel layer over a wide area. Into the hard layer below, they dug two narrow trenches into which they inserted a row of flat stones set vertically along what became the northern and southern sides of the tomb. The slabs along the south side were better preserved, but it is most likely that a number of the flat stones noted on the surface derive from the north edge. This slab-lined tomb may well be the one noted by Hoffman in 1978 when it was still partly exposed. We found it completely filled with wind-blown sand.



Plan of Tomb V15-1.

Our excavations suggest that the architecture of the tomb may have involved more than just a slab lining. Three wooden posts were discovered behind the stone slabs, but it remains unclear whether they served some purpose during the digging of the tomb, or if they are remnants of an above-ground structure. The latter seems most likely since the posts were found at the corners, the one at the north-east measuring 8cm in diameter, which is certainly large enough to have formed part of a superstructure.

Given the tomb's disturbed state, we were surprised to find some of the original contents still in situ and that much of the ceramic assemblage could be reconstructed from sherds scattered over a relatively restricted area. In the south-west corner, we uncovered the impression of a round basket — possibly a



Something different: Tomb V15-1, Wadi Abu Suffian, east side.



Basket impression from inside the tomb.



Pottery from in and around the tomb.

lid or a tray — which consisted of a spirally coiled foundation at least 45cm in diameter with a warp that was approximately 8–9mm wide. Since no organic matter actually survives, only the silica skeleton, determining the precise plant used for the basket's fibre is impossible. Predynastic Egyptians are known to have used species such as *Juncus* sp., *Phragmites australis* (the so-called common reed), and *Cyperus alopecuroides* (sedge) for their coiled basketry. The latter was used for a basket from Tomb 3 at HK6. Fibres from the date and dom palm were also reported for baskets recovered by Hoffman at HK6 (Tombs 3 and 6), but this has not been confirmed.

In the same corner as the basket, but closer to the tomb floor, we found part of the articulated back leg of a dog, the claws still connected to the extremities of the phalanges. Although no other element of the dog's skeleton remained in position, we could determine that the animal was originally deposited on its left flank, with its back along the west edge of the tomb. The remains of the dog's masters survived less well. Human bones, all in a very poor state of preservation, were found scattered around the tomb. All we can say is that at least two adults of undetermined sex were buried here. The



Unearthing the secret of the other side.

scant remnants of a younger individual may also originate from this tomb or from another one nearby. Interestingly, some bones showed traces of red ochre, a feature already observed at HK6, for example, in Tombs 57, 47 and 76. It seems that this red powder was sprinkled on the bodies either as part of the funerary ritual or during their preparation before burial. Several layers of textile had also been applied over at least one body or parts of it. A very fine linen (S-plyed, tabby weave) had been chosen for this purpose.

To our satisfaction, a fair part of the original ceramic assemblage could be pieced back together, including two slender black-topped beakers and an ovoid beaker of the same class, as well as several rough-ware storage jars and narrow-necked bottles. Together they suggest a Naqada IIB–C date for the tomb. More puzzling is the presence of two black-polished egg-shaped jars. Although these vessels have been found with some regularity at HK6, they usually come from ritual structures, such as the pillared hall E8 and Structure 07. Could a similar structure have been located close by? We hope that future exploration will clarify the nature of this eastern area and help us understand just who was buried on the other side. 📖

New for Your Bookshelf

New Horizons: The Pan-Grave Ceramic Tradition in Context.

By Aaron de Souza

Golden House Publications. London 2019

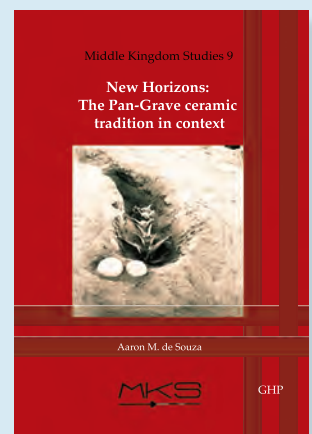
With over 700 individual objects from 86 cemeteries and settlements spanning the Nile Valley from the Mediterranean coast to the Fourth Cataract as well as into the Eastern Desert regions, *New Horizons* is the most extensive analysis of Pan-Grave pottery currently available. Hierakonpolis features prominently, including new data from the 2017 excavations on the intriguing and informative Pan-Grave cemeteries at HK47 and HK21a (see *Nekhen News* 29).

The volume presents a new framework for identifying, describing and classifying Pan-Grave pottery, an extensive gazetteer of sites, and proposes a new paradigm for understanding the Pan-Grave tradition and its interactions with Egyptians and other Nubian groups. The 'new horizons' of the title refer to the author's conclusion that the Pan-Grave tradition should be perceived as a cultural horizon, which more accurately reflects the broad variation within the Pan-Grave cultural practices.

Available at:

oxbowbooks.com/dbbc/new-horizons.html

Paperback; 280 pp; 100 figures; 8 colour plates



A Splice In the Tale: Textile Technology at Hierakonpolis

— Alistair Dickey, University of Liverpool

For an archaeologist there are some sites that arouse the senses, such as Troy, Knossos and Çatalhöyük. For me, Hierakonpolis is one amongst them due to the important and often unique treasures that it has yielded over the years. In 2018, I had the privilege to study some of its cultural riches. Over an eight-week period, I examined the textiles from the cemeteries of the elite at HK6 and the working-class at HK43 as part of my doctoral research at the University of Liverpool. Specifically, I am investigating the technology, production and societal use of textiles during the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods. The finds from Hierakonpolis offer an extraordinary opportunity to study textiles of both the elite and non-elite populations during the Egyptian Predynastic.

At HK6, textile remains were found in 35 of the 82 excavated tombs. It is highly likely that most — if not all — originally contained textiles, but these unfortunately have not survived over the millennia. At HK43, almost every one of the 453 graves had some evidence of textiles, admittedly some more useful than others. Organic materials are usually the first things lost in the archaeological record due to preservation conditions and the passage of time. As previous studies have shown (see *Nekhen News* 14: 13), the survival of 5,500 year-old textiles makes Hierakonpolis an incredibly important site for reconstructing the use, value and production of textiles in early Egypt.

Following established field-based methodologies, technical analysis was carried out using traditional textile tools, such as thread counters and loupes. The condition, dimensions, colour, weave, warp and weft details, selvages and borders, faults, decoration and any evidence of use were recorded. Further information was gathered with the help of a hand-held digital microscope producing calibrated images that allow measurements of threads and fibres to be carried out using computer software.

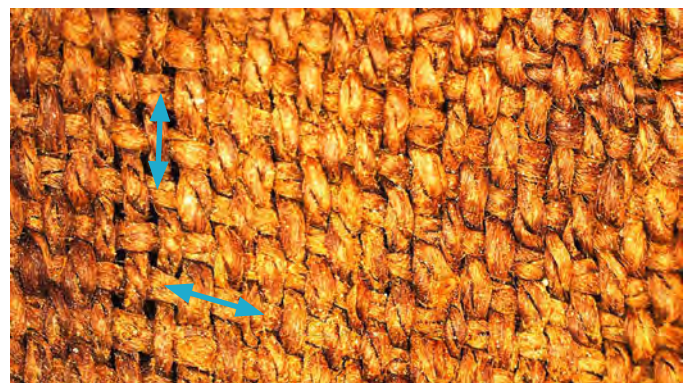
Amongst textiles, the most basic weave structure, where the weft thread passes over then under the warp threads, is known as plain or tabby weave. Preliminary analysis suggests that this weave accounts for all of the early material at Hierakonpolis (with a few possible variations). Surviving selvages (the edges of a woven cloth) and borders (where the warp threads start and finish at the two ends of the horizontal loom) were very few in number. The material in the elite cemetery at Hierakonpolis is of a higher quality compared to that from HK43. Quality can be assessed by the number of threads per cm, thread diameter, and the regularity and evenness of the threads and weave. There were significant amounts of open weave textiles made from fine threads in the elite cemetery, while coarser threads were less frequently observed. Some of the pieces had been carbonized, giving the appearance of having ultra-fine



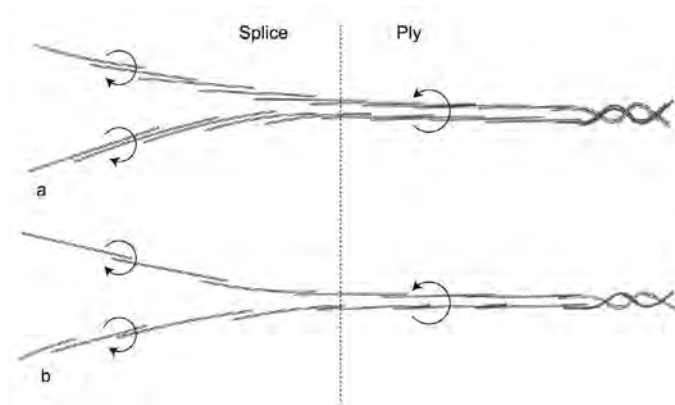
Alistair examining 5,500 year-old textiles with the aid of the digital microscope.

threads, but ‘shrinkage’ due to the burning has to be taken into consideration.

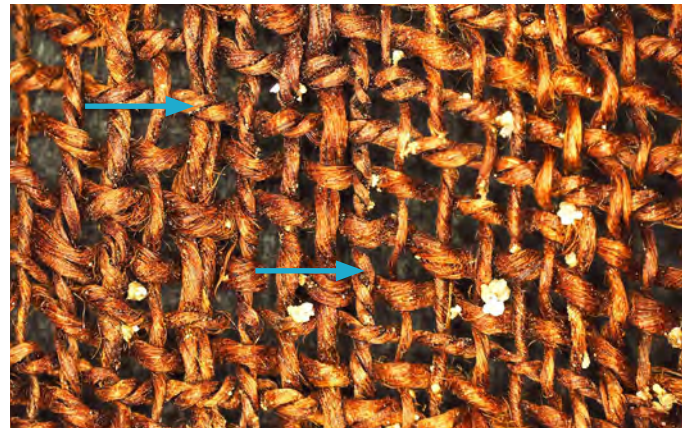
During the analysis it became evident that the well-preserved textiles especially from HK6 displayed many characteristics of a thread production technique known as ‘splicing’. In contrast to continuous (or ‘draft’) spinning, splicing involves joining bundles or strips of fibre ultimately together to make thread. These bundles or strips are often taken directly from the plant stalk, having undergone little or no processing or cleaning so that the natural juices helped hold the joined fibres together. Spliced threads are made in two main ways. Fibre bundles are put together either by adding on strips gradually and continuously along the thread length or by joining the bundles together end-to-end with the help of a twist or twist and turning back. Since threads made in this way are inherently weak, to give extra strength, two spliced threads are then plied (twisted) together, sometimes giving the impression that they were spun.



Example of tabby weave from Tomb 53 at HK6. The arrows indicate the vertical warp threads and the horizontal threads of the weft.



Ways of splicing: a) 'continuous' and b) 'end-to-end'. The arrows indicate the splice/twist area. (From Gleba & Harris, *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences*, 2018).



Example of enhanced plying giving the impression of over-twisted threads, from Tomb 34 at HK6.

Recently, researchers have set out five criteria for identifying splicing in textiles. These include: 1) the use of plying—including enhanced plying where the threads look like they are over twisted; 2) variation in thread diameters within a textile; 3) no obvious twist or minimal twist in the single thread elements of plied threads; 4) smooth fibres; and 5) less thorough retting and processing. The last two are only observable under high magnification unavailable in the field, but the material from HK6 displays the first three characteristics and this suggests that end-to-end splicing was the technique employed.

A 2006 experimental study concluded that for making thread, draft spinning would have been faster than splicing. Nevertheless, the spinning technique does not appear to be

present in Egypt until around 600 BC, and was perhaps adopted in response to a greater demand for textiles at that time.

The use of splicing at Hierakonpolis has important implications for our view of the early textiles at the site and particularly for estimations of work hours and production modes. Further study of the textile corpus from Hierakonpolis should lead to a better understanding of the *chaîne opératoire* (operational sequence) as well as the tools and technology used to produce the early textiles that were employed by both the rich and the poor. 🏺

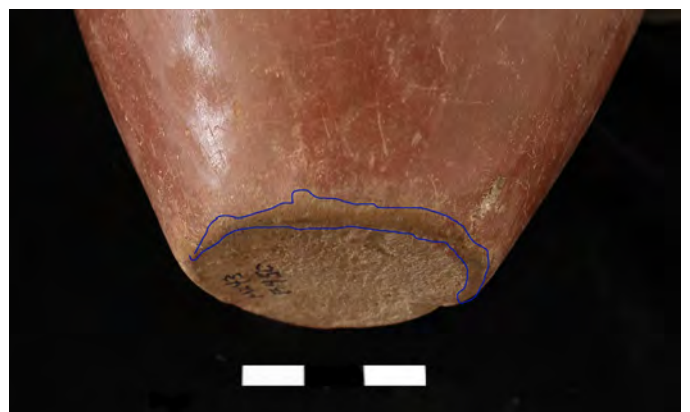
My thanks go to The University of Liverpool and the Andrew Sherratt Fund (University of Sheffield) for the financial assistance that is enabling me to carry out this research.



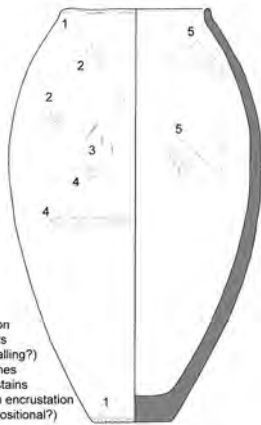
Tracking the Traces: Investigating Predynastic Vessel Function

— Grazia DiPietro, Oriental Museum 'Umberto Scerrato', Naples, Italy

Predynastic pottery has long been the focus of intensive research and has provided invaluable information on many aspects of early Egyptian society, economy, daily life and funerary rituals, yet the function and use of many types of ceramic vessels still elude us. Inferences about a plausible primary function for the main Predynastic shape classes have generally been based on indirect evidence, such as find context, vessel morphology, and technological properties (i.e., attributes suitable for performing particular activities). In contrast, direct evidence of use has more rarely been the subject of systematic research, due in part to the often fragmentary state of the material or the difficulties of performing advanced scientific analyses.



Abrasion on the base (outlined in blue) indicates use and movement.



- 1: Abrasion
- 2: Tiny pits (from spalling?)
- 3: Scratches
- 4: Black stains
- 5: Whitish encrustation (post-depositional?)

The record of use-alteration traces on a pot from B450 at HK43.

Investigative procedures, known as ‘use-alteration analysis’, have been successfully employed within the studies of other regions and material types (e.g., lithics; see *Nekhen News* 26: 16–17), and may also prove useful for elucidating Predynastic pottery consumption. In order to assess the utility and feasibility of applying use-alteration analysis to the Predynastic ceramic record, a pilot study was carried out over the past few seasons at Hierakonpolis.

A total of 27 whole or almost complete vessels, mainly from the HK43 cemetery, were closely examined by eye and under 10x magnification, and indications of use-alteration were recorded with drawings, photography and a dedicated project database. No less than 185 traces, at least some of which may be related to ancient vessel usage, have been identified in this pottery collection. Vessels with a variety of different fabrics, surface treatments and shapes were selected in order to chart the greatest possible diversity of surface marks with regard to type, shape, size and location.

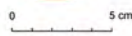
The use-alteration traces identified fit into the existing typologies that distinguish three main types: a) attrition — the removal or deformation of the ceramic material by scratching or friction; b) residue — the remnants of substances that may have been held by the pot over the course of its life history; and c) carbonisation — soot stains deriving from the contact with fire.

Of course, not all of the recorded marks were created by use-related activities, such as cooking, cleaning, or storage; however,

based on their extent and location, some are most likely to have been caused by vessel usage in ancient times and give clues as to how they were used. For example, abrasions on and around the base may indicate that the pot was frequently moved, as opposed to serving as a static storage container. On the other hand, abrasion on the rim top may suggest that the vessel was covered by a lid or placed in an inverted position when not in use. Expanding the analyses to a larger ceramic sample may allow us to



- 1: Abrasion
- 2: Black soot layer
- 3: Thinner soot layer
- 4: Absence of soot



Exterior carbonisation pattern on a cooking pot from B41 at HK43.

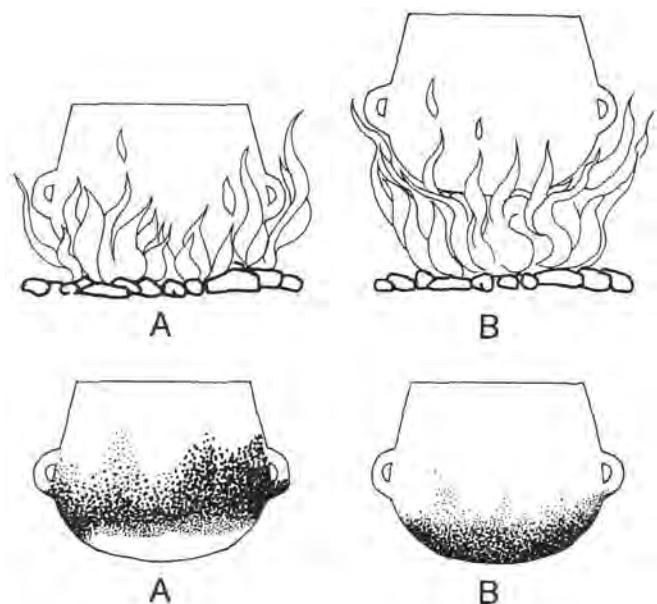
identify more patterns and relate them to specific activities and pottery types.

In the examined collection, residues mainly appeared in the form of stains. From visual inspection alone we cannot determine whether any are related to substances that were actually stored, cooked, processed or transported in the vessels, as this requires scientific testing. Nevertheless, from the location of some stains, or their association with other types of use-alteration traces, we can suggest those that were likely produced by the original contents. For example, three dark stains left by a liquid on the exterior of a soot-stained cooking pot may well represent spillage of what was once cooked in the vessel. Such observations can inform the sampling strategy when chemical residue-analysis becomes possible.

Traces of carbonisation have been observed mainly on the exterior of deep ovoid jars, likely used for cooking. The distribution of soot traces on the vessel surface can provide insight on modes of cooking and hearth design. Specifically, the carbon pattern observed on three vessels is compatible with the pots being placed directly in the hearth rather than being suspended above it (see illustration below).

Carbonisation on interior surfaces has also been observed, especially on red-polished hemispherical saucers from HK6. The soot marks together with the abrasion pattern on the lower interior suggest they served as lamps or braziers.

This use-alteration study is still at a very early stage, but it already appears to be a promising path for future research on Predynastic vessel function and use. In future we hope to widen the data collection and ideally couple it with both microscopic analysis and, perhaps even more informative (and certainly more fun), experimental replication to see exactly what it takes to make a mark. 🍲



Hypothetical reconstruction of the placement of cooking pots in the fire based on their soot patterns (from Vidale, *Acta geoarcheologica Urbica* 3, 1990: fig. 5).



Scenes of Hunting: The Rock Art of Three Hump Hill

— Fred Hardte, Macquarie University, Sydney

The hunt is a common theme in Predynastic art and it occurs at Hierakonpolis on material culture unearthed by excavations as well as on the natural rock in and around the site. So it comes as no surprise that graphic scenes of hunting should also be found on rock surfaces in areas that were potentially used for hunting. An inselberg on the western extremity of the concession is conspicuous not only for its form, having three flat raised peaks (leading to its name ‘Three Hump Hill’), but also for its location as a lone, prominent feature in the low desert affording sweeping views of the low desert and into nearby wadis. From this vantage point, any game traversing the surrounding terrain could be easily spotted.



View from the top of Three Hump Hill.

The horizontal sandstone surfaces of the three small peaks would not only be convenient places for rest and observation, but could also serve as a canvas for the production of rock art. My first sighting of this hill, with its solitary and unique disposition, raised the expectation that it was also of interest to people in antiquity. Scaling the hill, I immediately found evidence of human activity in the form of a series of curved notch rows and a row of small pecked cupules, rock markings that are relatively common around the site (see *Nekhen News* 24: 19). Further investigation revealed a series of long, heavily pecked lines which turned out to be the legs of a once beautiful group of giraffes.

The delight of this discovery quickly turned to sadness as it became clear that the giraffe panel had been partially removed, leaving only the legs of a larger animal but thankfully sparing a second one, enabling identification. The most shocking aspect of the destruction was that the panel’s removal had evidently been planned and carried out with the aid of cutting tools. Such acts demonstrate the growing threats faced by these exposed yet fragile parts of Egypt’s rich heritage.

Despite the damage, the theme of the hunt could still be distinguished here and in other scenes. One of the giraffes has a shaft protruding from its neck, possibly symbolising its dispatch. To the west of the giraffe group, a lightly incised scene



All that remains of the pecked giraffe group.

involves a highly stylised dog pursuing a hartebeest. The dog sports the characteristic upwardly curved tail and vertical lines to indicate ears, while the hartebeest is simply executed with a faint back, long head and lyre shaped horns. In style, the scene is reminiscent of hunting depictions incised on predynastic palettes (see *Nekhen News* 30: 36). Directly adjacent is a very stylised Barbary sheep, another animal that is usually shown as the subject of the hunt. Immediately below the hartebeest hunt is an abstract notch row which just touches it. This is the first time these two motifs have been found in such close proximity on the site. Perhaps the notches have some relevance to the symbolism of the hunt?

The scenes described here are not new in the Hierakonpolis corpus; in previous issues of the *Nekhen News* we have discussed rock art depictions of giraffe, dogs, hartebeest and Barbary sheep. What makes all this rock art interesting is the continual repetition of themes and motifs as opposed to any number of random patterns. This preference for consistent form over decorative fantasy can be seen in other Predynastic arts, ranging from decorated ceramic wares to tattoos on human skin. This cross-media focus is far from a mundane phenomenon and sheds important light on the culture and concerns of those who produced and viewed it. 🐾



Dog chasing a hartebeest with notch row below.

Ashmolean Object in Focus: The Narmer Mace-Head

— Liam McNamara, Lisa and Bernard Selz Curator for Ancient Egypt and Sudan, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

The imposing limestone object known as the Narmer mace-head is the most complete of several examples found in the 'Main Deposit' during excavations at Hierakonpolis in 1897–99. A large scale version of the small, undecorated pear-shaped mace-heads that were found in large quantities in the cache, its surface is decorated with scenes carved in raised relief featuring king Narmer. Like most of the smaller, functional mace-heads, it has been drilled longitudinally with a central hole that could have been fitted with a large handle. However, this mace was certainly too heavy to have been wielded as an effective weapon, so it was probably a ceremonial item that was paraded during festivals as a symbol of royal power. It therefore belongs to a group of over-sized objects from the Main Deposit that includes siltstone palettes, flint knives and stone vessels, which were perhaps intended to be viewed at some distance by a crowd of people, while the individuals who were permitted to carry and interact with them could appreciate the intricacy of their carved surfaces.

The focus of the scene on the mace-head is the figure of king Narmer, whose name is written in a *serekh* surmounted by a falcon in the space behind him. He is shown seated beneath a canopy elevated on a high stepped throne dais. Above the canopy is a vulture, probably representing the goddess Nekhbet, who offers her divine protection to the king. Narmer wears the Red Crown, is clothed in a long cloak and holds a flail. Below the king stand two fan-bearers and behind him are five attendants, three of whom hold long staffs, while closest to the king is an individual wearing an animal skin (captioned *tjet*) and a sandal bearer (captioned with a rosette and a seal amulet). These latter two captioned personages also appear with Narmer on his similarly over-sized palette.

Object Factfile

Findspot: 'Main Deposit', Temple enclosure, Hierakonpolis

Material: Limestone

Height: 19.8cm

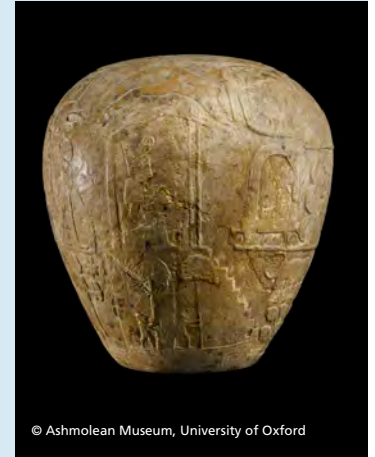
Weight: 8kg

Max. Diameter: 18.7cm

Date: c. 3100 BC

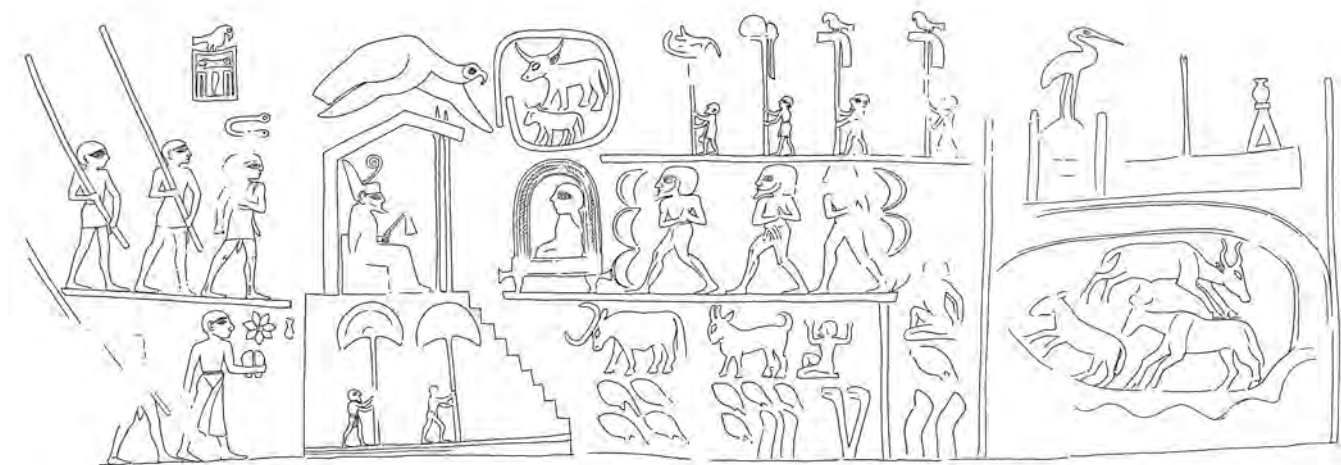
Museum No.: AN1896–1908 E.3631

Source: Egyptian Research Account 1897–99



© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

In the uppermost register to the right of the royal kiosk is an enclosure containing an ox and a calf, behind which there are four men — the 'Followers of Horus' — carrying standards on poles in the direction of the king. Beneath this register and also facing the king is a figure seated on a palanquin, behind which there are three men running between two groups of three lunate markers. Whether their hands are fettered or engaged in some ritual clapping-dance is difficult to determine. In the lowest register is an enumeration of "oxen: 400,000; goats: 1,422,000" and behind them "captives: 120,000". On the far right of the scene and separated from the rest by a vertical band is the depiction of a structure with a heron atop one of its walls.




The scenes on the Narmer mace-head.

© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

It has been suggested that this building is a shrine at the Delta site of Buto (based on the heron), and that the depicted event took place there. On the other hand, the oval enclosure below, containing three horned animals (hartebeests?), has been compared with the ceremonial structure excavated at Hierakonpolis Locality HK29A.

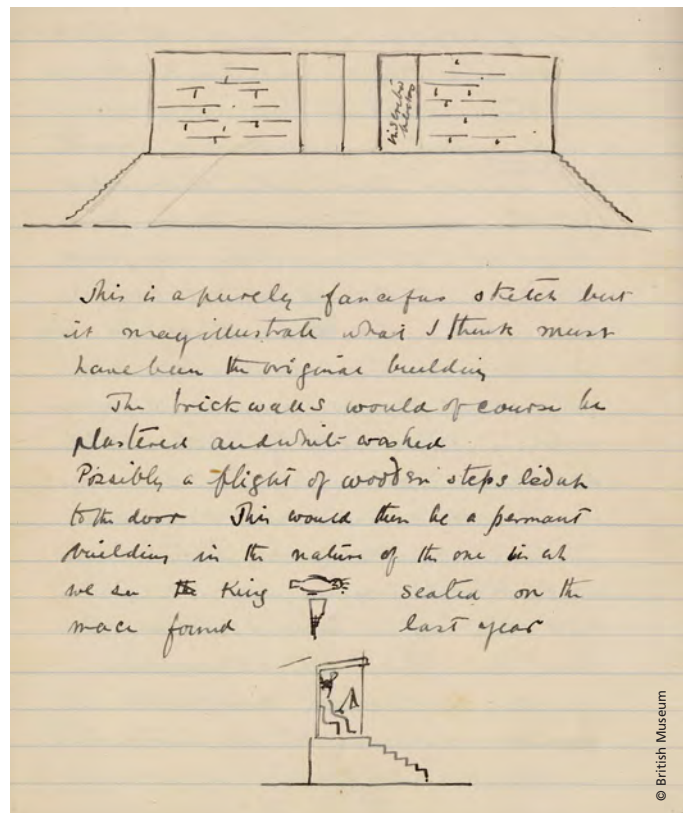
These scenes have been interpreted in various ways: a commemoration of Narmer's *sed*-festival, a public appearance of the king, or even his symbolic wedding to the heiress of the crown of Lower Egypt (the figure in the palanquin), legitimizing Narmer's conquest of the north. Whatever the specific ceremonies might be, a parallel can be drawn between the image of the king seated atop the throne dais and the remains discovered in the alluvial town-mound at Nekhen. At a low level in the centre of the town's New Kingdom temple enclosure, Quibell and Green unearthed a large mound of clean desert sand revetted with sandstone blocks. Green thought that this central structure might have formed a platform on top of which stood the site's early shrine. An extract from his diary, now in the British Museum, provides more detail: he envisaged the temple as a brick structure with plastered and white-washed walls, approached by a flight of wooden steps leading up to an entrance flanked by huge stone door jambs.

Other scholars have since imagined more or less elaborate temple buildings atop the mound, but the lack of any actual evidence for such structures means that all reconstructions are speculative. However, it is possible that the revetted mound represents not the foundation for an early temple, but rather a stepped platform like the one depicted on the Narmer mace-head. This monument could have been at the centre of a large enclosure in which royal ceremonies were performed. Over-sized objects like the mace-heads, palettes, knives and vessels found in the Main Deposit could then have been displayed on top of the mound to be viewed by members of the royal court gathered in the presence of the king. If this interpretation is correct, these and other objects from the cache should then be connected to royal cultic activity rather than the cult of the falcon-god, Horus of Nekhen, to whom later temples at Hierakonpolis were dedicated.

The fact that a number of different kings are attested on artefacts from the Main Deposit suggests that the cache represents material that was gathered over a considerable period of time, with successive kings adding objects before the collection was finally deposited. Promotion of the royal office was no doubt vital to the ideology of the incipient Egyptian state and — given its long association with the origins of kingship — Hierakonpolis was an entirely appropriate place for such celebrations to take place. 



F.W. Green's photograph of the south-east face of the circular revetment.



Extract from F.W. Green's diary, showing his imagined reconstruction of the structure on the revetted mound.

The Painting of the Painted Tomb: Conservation Update

— Alexandra Greathead, Conservation Manager, Works of Art on Paper, Ashmolean Museum

The good news is that we are nearing the end of the examination and analysis phase in the conservation of F.W. Green's watercolour copy of the Hierakonpolis Painted Tomb; however, it will be difficult to stop because it is an object so packed full of information and interest. The biggest hurdle has actually been the size of the painting (5m long!). When I examine it, most other activity in the studio has to stop, so I can only work on it a day at a time. During this phase of the project, my goal has been to determine the best strategy for removing the paintings from the textile backing so they can be flattened and repaired. This has involved a great deal of observation and testing.

When scientists use the term 'non-destructive analysis', they mean the sample was not destroyed, but when a paper conservator uses the same term, it means no sample was taken from the object, therefore no part of the object, however minute, was destroyed. Thus, analysis took place using the naked eye, microscopy (digital and binocular), photography and spot testing. The latter refers to a technique where a series of tiny drops of water are placed (using a fine brush) on areas of the object to observe any changes. In the examples illustrated below, a drop was placed so that it lay across an area of paint and an area of plain paper. The drop was timed to see how long it took to be absorbed into the support (paper) and the media (paint). Spot tests also check to see if stains appear once the drop has dried or if it creates a 'tideline'. This term refers to the line that forms around the outside of a drop as a result



Unfurled on the floor, the painting is intensively examined with a digital microscope.

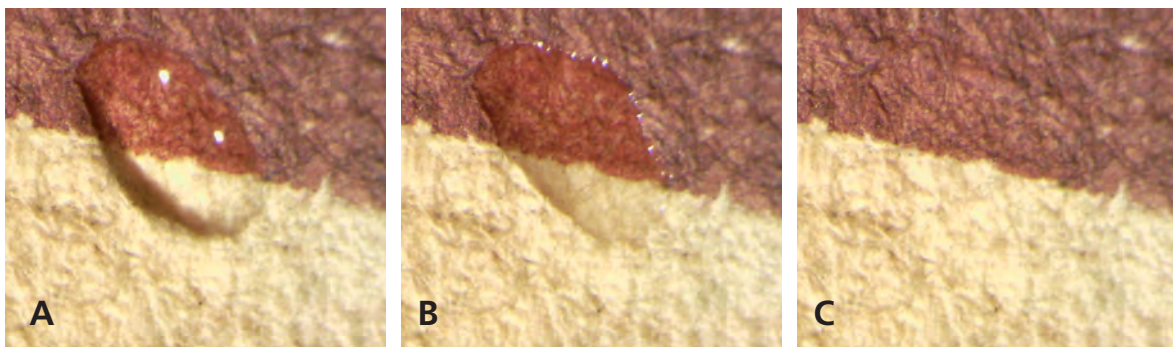
of the pigment dissolving and migrating to the edges as the water dries, thus leaving an outline or 'tideline'.

In the tested example no tideline was formed and nothing was visible when the area was blotted dry, suggesting that the red media is not highly soluble in water. This result helps to inform the method of treatment to be used for flattening the work, and indicates that a certain amount of light moisture could be applied. However,

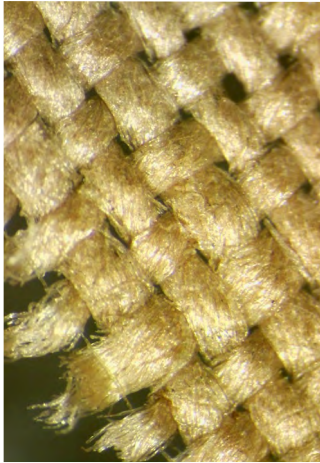
this is only one of the pigments used in the painting, and every colour needs to be checked.

Microscopic examination of the textile lining and comparisons with standard fibre images suggest that it is predominantly composed of linen. This identification gives us an indication of how the lining will behave when we apply the moisture needed to free the paintings. A small area was tested and the adhesive released easily and smoothly, resulting in no damage to the back of the paper. Nevertheless, removing the backing will be a very slow process because the adhesive retains the optimum moisture for detachment for only a short period. The age and condition of the paper suggest that if we were to humidify large areas of the textile, we would risk staining the recto (front) of the painting, so only a small area at a time can be treated.

From the diaries of F.W. Green we know he made the watercolour facsimile paintings on site under rather taxing conditions (see box). Microscopic observations have allowed me to find the hard evidence to substantiate his narrative.



Spot testing: A drop of filtered tap water pH7.8 applied with 0000 synthetic fibre brush. A) immediately after application; B) after 90 seconds; C) after 200 seconds with no tideline.



Micrograph of the lining indicates it is made of linen.

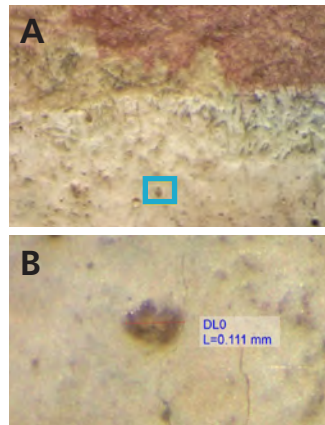
Aware of his story and the situation at the site, I had been on the lookout for sand and finally spotted a grain (though no doubt there is more). It was embedded in the white gouache of the belt of a staff-bearing figure. Using the microscope's digital eye piece, it can even be measured (0.111mm), providing approximate dimensions to the third decimal place.

Further evidence for Green's living conditions comes from drops of bat


guano visible on the paper. Examination has detected some movement of one stain resulting in a fine halo around the main area. This may be due to the migration of secondary products during a 'breakdown process', similar to that sometimes seen with ink; however, because guano is such a raw organic material, it is possible the halo was formed as the dropping, fresh from the bat, began to dry. Whether or not we will attempt to remove such stains is a matter for discussion since they are not simply dirt, but pieces of information that are specific to this painting and its provenance.

Observation and micro-photography have also revealed Green's use of under-drawing in media such as charcoal or graphite before applying the coloured washes or paint. I have so far taken approximately 350 photographs of the paintings and made detailed notes to ensure that all information is recorded and the implications understood before treatment begins.

What is the next step? In the following twelve months I plan to remove the lining, flatten the work and begin repairing it, while all the time continuing with my written and photographic documentation. The analysis and examination




Sand in the pigment of a figure's white belt: A) under the microscope and B) zooming in.

are opening up a hidden world within the object and more interesting observations are sure to come. The biggest challenge, however, continues to be its size! 

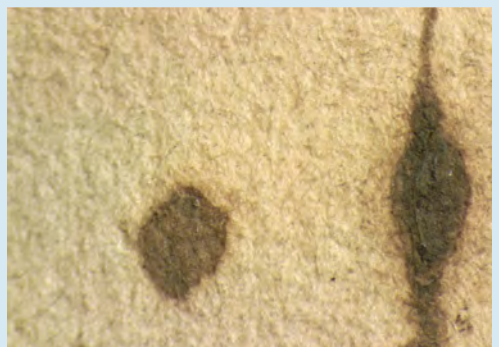
From the Hierakonpolis Diary of F.W. Green, March 26, 1899

There has been a spell of hot windy weather which makes me extremely lazy and dusty; working at the drawing of the decorated Libyan tomb is almost impossible when there is any wind as the fine sand is blown down upon one in bucket fulls. ... From time to time great columns of whirling dust sweep over the site smothering everybody; these columns are known as "Shitan" or devils. They are mild editions of tornados such as devastated long lanes of country in the United States.

Up to now I have been comparatively free from bats in my tomb but lately I have had quite a battle with them; they make a mess of everything besides keeping one awake by their incessant fluttering and cheeping; beside they bring down dust and small stones from the cracks which they inhabit..., so I have now at the insistence of one of my men fastened large branches of the "Sunt" or thorn acacia on the ceiling, the thorns of which are more than an inch in length and as hard as nails. They do not seem to have made up their minds to quit but fly in and have a look at the thorns, chirp and fly out again. 



Green's original sketch detected at the edge of a painted area.



Bat guano under magnification with haloing visible on the right.



Egypt's Heartland: Regional Perspectives on Hierakonpolis, Elkab and Edfu

— Renée Friedman

From the Predynastic to the Ptolemaic period, the sites of Hierakonpolis, Elkab and Edfu exerted profound political, religious and artistic influence on Ancient Egyptian civilization. On July 18-19, the Friends of Nekhen and the Ashmolean Museum hosted a colloquium to explore the inter-regional associations and extra-regional connections that made this triad of sites such a powerful force in Egypt's heartland.

For the event, 12 speakers were brought together to discuss their current research at these major sites, providing a wealth of new information and a chance to get to know our colleagues so much better. The first fact-filled day began in the lovely Nissan Auditorium at St Antony's College and finished in the stunning setting of the Ashmolean's Randolph Sculpture Gallery, with the Keeper of Antiquities Paul Roberts introducing a special evening lecture on new discoveries at Tell Edfu by Nadine Moeller. The following morning, participants chose from a variety of activities: Elizabeth Fleming, Cat Warsi and Cisco Bosch-Puche led visitors through the Griffith Institute archive to see the Somers Clarke papers and more; Susanne Woodhouse presented highlights of the rare books holdings of the Sackler Library; Professor Richard Parkinson graciously led guided tours of Queen's College, the home of the Peet Egyptological Library; and in a special handling session in the Ashmolean Museum Liam McNamara and guests got up close and personal with some of Hierakonpolis' iconic treasures. Our thanks go to all who helped make the event such a success (especially Filiz McNamara, Ilaria Perzia, Mike Woodhouse, Jude Barrett and Sara Harman), as well as the speakers who have generously provided summaries of their papers in the following pages for those who could not attend.

Of course, these sites are important not only for the new insights their exploration is giving us today, but also for how they were regarded in the past by the ancient Egyptians themselves. Indications for their esteemed status are reflected in their local gods, Horus of Nekhen, Nekhbet and Horus of Behdet, all of which attained national prominence and maintained a close relationship with kingship throughout ancient Egyptian history,

The antiquity of these sites continued to resonate both nationally and locally, but the region was also home to dynamic artistic, cultic and trading/administrative centers. Its strategic location and military might in the Second Intermediate Period made it a bulwark against Kushite incursions and an important player in the subsequent conquest and administration of Nubia. On the other hand, this area of Egypt's southland was also a melting pot with a diverse multi-cultural population.

Each site had a long and distinguished history, some aspects more familiar than others, and indeed one of the aims of the colloquium was to broaden perceptions. For Hierakonpolis, its Predynastic prominence is well known to our readers, but the study of the Main Deposit ivories is illuminating the continued influence it exerted on the development of the royal cult at the dawn of the Dynastic age (page 15). In later times, its decorated tombs and Nubian cemeteries also tell important stories now better understood within a regional framework (pages 26–28).

Its sister city, Elkab, famous for its massive Late Period town wall, is now revealing its own surprisingly early beginnings and dynamic development (page 18), while the richly decorated tombs of its necropolis, spanning from the Old Kingdom to the Ptolemaic period, continue to be gold mines of information for reconstructing history, society, family and the use (or reuse) of the past (pages 28, 30, 35, 37)

Edfu is dominated by its imposing Ptolemaic temple; nevertheless exciting discoveries are revealing aspects of life there in the Old Kingdom, which show that it was always more than just a simple provincial capital (page 22). Less well known is its necropolis at Hagr Edfu, nestled in the shadow of a Coptic monastery, which houses the tombs of some of Edfu's high officials as well as expressions of the personal devotion of its visitors (pages 32–34).

Each coming to the forefront at different times, these sites all share artistic, cultural, and social interconnections that illuminate the immense creativity and diversity away from court restrictions that can deepen our understanding of ancient Egypt society with a view from its heartland. ☸

Human Statuettes from the Hierakonpolis ‘Main Deposit’

— Liam McNamara, Lisa and Bernard Selz Curator for Ancient Egypt and Sudan, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

The spectacular cache of objects excavated by J.E. Quibell and F.W. Green in the ‘Main Deposit’ at Hierakonpolis in 1897–99 — which included iconic works of early Egyptian art such as the Narmer palette and the Scorpion and Narmer mace-heads (see page 10), amongst others — also contained hundreds of artefacts carved from hippopotamus and elephant ivory and bone. They were deposited in a trench measuring over 2m long, about 60cm wide and 60cm deep. The surrounding earth was waterlogged and the objects were encrusted with salts, while plant roots growing through the soil had caused them to splinter into fragments. Annie Quibell later recalled that one of the excavators described the process of extracting the objects as “like working through potted salmon”. Attempts were made to remove the salts on-site using vinegar and dilute hydrochloric acid. Some pieces were then consolidated by soaking them in gelatine, melted stearine or bees-wax; the remainder were conserved by immersion in boiling wax. This combination of surface deposits, mud, sand and wax consolidant has led to the formation of a dark brown layer of insoluble preservatives across most

of the objects, making some of their details difficult to see.

The challenge of dealing with these fragmentary and decayed artefacts was such that most of the Hierakonpolis ivories were never systematically published and therefore remain largely unknown. The majority of the pieces were presented to the Ashmolean in Oxford soon after their discovery: the museum holds over 700 items in its collection. Following a major conservation project to separate fused pieces (see *Nekhen News* 9: 13), all of the objects have now been identified and classified. They include inscribed plaques, sceptres and knife handles with scenes carved in raised relief, models of boats and animals, as well as

elements with tenons and sockets for attachment to other items, perhaps forming parts of composite furniture.

The largest category of object among the ivories are human statuettes, ranging from more or less complete examples to detached heads, arms, legs, feet and bases. At last count there were some 323 fragments of human figures in Oxford. A further ten statuettes are now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology, nine fragments in the Petrie Museum and six pieces in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo making for a total of 348 fragments. The group represents men, women and children in a variety of poses and costumes. The largest surviving example is almost 50cm tall; the smallest measures just a few centimeters.

The majority of the males are depicted standing with their legs together, while others are shown striding, typically with the left leg advanced. Some have both arms by their sides; more have the left arm bent at the elbow and held diagonally across the chest. Many are naked except for a penis sheath suspended from a belt around the

waist; others wear elaborate decorated garments. A few have unusual semi-circular straps around the shoulders, a feature which is also seen on some of the figures in the Hierakonpolis Painted Tomb.

Most of the females are shown standing with their legs together, typically with their left arm bent at the elbow and the left hand cupping the right breast. Many have elaborately braided and bouffant hair, which falls down the back in waves and in two sections over the shoulders onto the chest. The majority are naked with particular emphasis on the sexual characteristics, including bare breasts and an incised pubic triangle. Others wear dresses and jewellery or are wrapped in elaborate cloaks.



A selection from the range of ivory figurines from the Main Deposit (left–right): male, female, female dwarf, male youth and an exquisite cloaked female.

Dwarfs are also represented, the majority being female. They have large heads, short arms and bowed legs (all traits typical of achondroplasia) and wear bouffant hairstyles and knee-length dresses. Most are shown standing on circular or rectangular bases.

Depictions of children include boys standing with the left leg slightly advanced, while others are shown crouching with the right fore-finger held to the mouth.

Two small statuettes representing naked youths were separately registered into the museum, but a sketch in one of F.W. Green's notebooks shows they were originally joined together, making them one of the earliest surviving pair statuettes known from ancient Egypt. Green also recorded its findspot as coming "from soil under large inscribed mace", which must be a reference to the Scorpion mace-head now in the Ashmolean. Together with it was a small carving of a prisoner, a subject that is relatively rare amongst the ivory figurines. Prisoners appear in only a few examples and are typically presented in a submissive kneeling position, with their arms bound at the elbows behind the back.

In most cases, the facial features of the detached heads are exquisitely modelled; the nostrils are often drilled and the philtrum is carefully carved above the lips. Some of the males have long pointed beards and braided hair; others wear headgear similar to the White Crown. A small number of females are shown bald. Many of the heads, both male and female, have a hollow in the top (often utilising



Detached male heads can be bald, bearded or wear the White Crown(?). Many have a hollow at the top, using the tusk's natural pulp cavity, possibly for the attachment of other elements.

the tusk's natural pulp cavity) with holes drilled at the front, back and sides, perhaps for attaching elements such as hair or a headdress. The eyes and eyebrows can be modelled in relief or deeply recessed for inlay. Quibell reported that only one inlaid eye was found among all of the ivory statuettes, but the presence of inlays (including discs of lapis lazuli) on other ivory objects suggests the statuettes may once have been polychrome. The possibility that they may have originally been painted should also not be ruled out.

Most of the arms have detached at the shoulders and several feature tenons and sockets for attachment to the torso. The arms were typically carved free of the body. One hand is often clenched with a central perforation, presumably for inserting another object such as a staff or sceptre. Some legs were carved together, but often with the space between them cut through; others are modelled separately and attached to the torso using tenons and sockets. The majority of the feet have the toes indicated, some with the toenails carefully carved, and many with perforated tenons below for socketing into bases. Some bases have emplacements for multiple pairs of feet, suggesting the existence of more group statuettes. The presence of tenons, sockets and bases suggests that the statuettes were originally installed upright, perhaps to be arranged as tableau scenes for display. Indeed, Green observed in his notebook that even when finally deposited, the figurines had been cached with



Bits and pieces: Detached arm with clenched fist; leg with perforated tenon; and a circular base with the remains of striding feet.

“their heads roughly to the West, as if they had been standing up and subsequently overthrown, probably when the place was rifled”.

Perhaps all of these statuettes represent members of the king’s court — whether as generic ‘types’ or specific individuals is not clear — whose images were set up in the royal precinct at Hierakonpolis where they could be involved in rituals celebrating kingship (see page 10). Many of the statuettes are comparable with examples found in deposits at sites across Egypt, including the so-called M chambers in the temple area at Abydos, the early temples at Elephantine and Tell Ibrahim Awad and the unusual structure at Abusir-Saqqara. Although quite different in size, many direct comparisons can be made with the 62 miniature figures unearthed within a pottery jar at Tell el-Farkha (see cover), which had been cached inside a room within a large administrative and cultic complex dated to the late Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods.

It has been suggested that Egypt’s earliest shrines were ‘autonomous centres of culture’ where distinctive artistic and iconographic traditions developed as a result of ‘local diversity’. While each shrine later developed a formal dedication and patron deity that was recognised by priests and kings, for the local population they served as the focal point for personal practices and religious beliefs. It has thus been suggested that provincial temples had only loose connections with the central institution of kingship during the Third millennium BC. However, as can be seen, the statuettes of men, women, children and dwarves in each of these ‘temple’ deposits are strikingly similar in execution and imagery. These similarities and their pattern of distribution do not suggest a series of

disparate local customs, but rather a common iconographic tradition that was spread over the entire country.

One might suggest that such statuettes were distributed from central workshops or that ‘standard models’ were replicated by local craftsmen, but whatever the case, it seems unlikely that such similar objects had different meanings in different parts of the country. Instead, they may have had a common focus: the institution of kingship. Significantly, certain objects from each of the sites can be associated with kings and festivals of kingship in similar ways to those from Hierakonpolis. For example, the ivory statuette of a king wearing the White Crown and wrapped in an ornate *sed*-festival gown from Abydos and a cloaked figure from Tell el-Farkha find close parallels in pieces from Hierakonpolis.

Perhaps each of the sites where such deposits occur represents a centre at which the institution of kingship was ritually displayed and celebrated. The concentration of objects in each of the deposits that can be connected with royal rituals exemplifies the importance of the king during the late Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods. The promotion of kingship was presumably vital to the ideology of the incipient state and such centres could have consolidated the king’s power by distributing and displaying the royal cult across the entire country. Given the number, scale and quality of the objects found at Hierakonpolis, it is possible that they represent state sponsored ‘prototypes’ for the pieces found at other sites. If that is the case, they demonstrate the powerful influence of this most pivotal site in Egypt’s heartland, and reflect its strong associations with the origins of Egyptian kingship that stretched back into the prehistoric past.



Green’s notebook drawings recording a bound prisoner and a pair statuette, with the corresponding ivories now in the Ashmolean Museum.



Royal figures compared: The Abydos king with White Crown and a Hierakonpolis head; a cloaked figure from Hierakonpolis and a diminutive version from Tell el-Farkha.

The Settlement of Elkab

— Wouter Claes, Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels

The huge town wall of El Kab will be noticed by everyone who passes, either by train or boat. It is rather mysterious why it should have been so large, for the town seems to have occupied a small space in one corner, but it shows the importance the place must have once had.

This quote from Annie A. Quibell's 1925 travelogue *A Wayfarer in Egypt* perfectly illustrates some of the research questions the Belgian Archaeological Mission to Elkab is currently investigating: what was the precise location and extent of the Elkab settlement and how was it organised? Annie was the wife of James E. Quibell, famous for his work at Hierakonpolis, but he was also the first to undertake scientific excavations at Elkab already in 1897 (see *Nekhen News* 25: 28–29). Yet, despite more than a century of archaeological research, the occupational history of Elkab is still biased and limited. In contrast to its sister-site Hierakonpolis, its early history in particular is not very well known.

Work at Elkab prior to 2009 mainly focussed on its large religious and funerary monuments. As a result, we have a fairly clear picture of the religious beliefs and funerary practices of the inhabitants, but our knowledge of their modes of habitation contrasts glaringly. With the exception of some small Epipalaeolithic campsites (c. 7000 BC) and the remains of a Graeco-Roman village, few other habitation areas have been properly investigated and were only briefly noted. Virtually nothing was known about the late prehistoric and pharaonic occupation of Elkab or how it was established and evolved over time despite indirect evidence indicating the existence of a substantial settlement.

Based on several sources, it is clear that the settlement at Elkab was an important provincial centre from the Early Dynastic period onwards. It is undoubtedly of significance that its local deity Nekhbet became the tutelary goddess of Upper Egypt at the dawn of the Dynastic age and later featured as an element in the royal titulary. The presence of a



Workmen Hamada and Mohamed excavating an intact 2nd Dynasty storage jar in the settlement at Elkab.

state-controlled economy is attested by inscriptions and seal impressions mentioning bearers of the title 'Inspector of Elkab', most of them dating to the end of the 2nd Dynasty. The early importance of the site is also indicated by the presence of a Predynastic cemetery containing several high-status burials and elite mastaba tombs dating from the Early Dynastic to the early Old Kingdom. One of these mastabas, of 3rd Dynasty date, is situated on the top of the rock necropolis, rising about 50m above the floodplain. The topographical position of this imposing funerary monument is completely unparalleled in ancient Egyptian architecture. Royal names are also attested at the site. A small steatite plaque bearing the name of the 2nd Dynasty king Nebra was found in one tomb and several granite blocks, one bearing the name of king Khasekhemwy, were reported from the northeast corner of the Late period enclosure wall, hinting at the existence of a large stone building, possibly a sanctuary. Finally, two inscriptions showing *serekhs* of the 1st Dynasty king Qa'a facing a figure of the goddess Nekhbet were found in Elkab's wider surroundings.



Early Dynastic mud brick constructions emerging in Trench 3.



Special find: a complete 2nd Dynasty crucible used in the production of copper.

Mention of the settlement site dates back to the first half of the 18th century AD. The British traveller Charles Perry, who visited Egypt between 1739 and 1742, describes in his *A View of the Levant* (1743) a place called *Caab* where he observes “a high mountain with a

castle on top of it”. This high mountain is most probably the ancient tell of Elkab. This tell was destroyed almost completely by the *sebakhin* (fertilizer diggers) over the course of the 19th century, but must have been similar to those still partly surviving, for example, at Edfu and Kom Ombo. The location, height and shape of the tell can, however, still be reconstructed on the basis of old maps like those published in the *Description de l'Égypte* (1809–1822) or in Lepsius' *Denkmäler* (1849), and from descriptions, drawings and sketches made by a number of later travellers and artists, such as Robert Hay, Edward William Lane or Nestor l'Hôte. Based on these sources, the tell was at least 30m high. Situated west of the temple zone, it was oval in shape and must have covered an area of about 300 x 170m. This area is bordered in the northeast and northwest by the remains of a curved double wall that dates to the late Old Kingdom, which has always been considered the circular wall of the settlement, but without solid proof. The enormous quantity of sherds left behind by the *sebakhin* was subsequently removed for the construction of the Luxor-Aswan railroad in 1898, resulting in a large, desolate depression that looks more like the surface of the moon than a settlement area.

The extreme devastation of this area has meant that the settlement of Elkab never received much attention from archaeologists, even though F.W. Green and Somers Clarke demonstrated the presence of in situ archaeological remains up to 4m below the surface in the area where the tell once stood. Nevertheless, the limited work that was done was informative for reconstructing the site's early history. In 1938, Jean Capart excavated a number of granaries below and around the temple of Nekhbet revealing a large number of Early Dynastic seal impressions, and an Old Kingdom storage site was excavated immediately west of the temples in 1955. Predynastic objects were also found reused in these contexts and in 1968–1969 Pierre Vermeersch discovered black-topped and rippled sherds, the latter indicating the presence of the Badarian culture. These finds suggested that substantial in situ remains of the original settlement going back to the Neolithic could still



The massive Late period walls of Elkab rising over 10m in height surround the remains of earlier settlements still buried deeply below.

be found in the Elkab subsoil.

Since 2009, the archaeological mission from the Royal Museums of Art and History (Brussels) has focussed its research on this habitation area and is now investigating the origin, development and organisation of the ancient settle-

ment at Elkab. Over 15 trenches and test pits have thus far been excavated, spread out across different locations within the walled area as part of a systematic investigation of Elkab's occupation history. They have revealed the presence of a vast habitation area, possibly covering four to five hectares, with well-preserved mud brick buildings and other settlement remains, dating from the terminal phases of Egyptian prehistory (the period of state formation) and the early stages of pharaonic civilization. Geomorphological research indicates that the earliest occupations were spatially restricted to a large aeolian sand dune that rose above the Nile floodplain. Based on preliminary analysis of the excavated material, we know that a small community lived here with subsistence primarily based on farming and fishing, but there is also ample evidence for specialised workshops. Moreover, the rare discovery in a Naqada II context of a small fragment of obsidian with Ethiopian origins hints at the involvement of Elkab in long distance contacts at a very early stage. During the period of state formation and the early phases of the Old Kingdom, the settlement expanded into the floodplain, undoubtedly as a result of growing population pressure. Several well-preserved mud brick buildings clearly attest to urban planning. At least one building, provided with a stone foundation and dating to the 2nd dynasty, is unmistakably of special importance. The use of stone in early Egyptian architecture is exceptional and almost exclusively reserved for tombs, temples and state-controlled buildings. There are also strong indications, in the form of furnaces and a complete Early Dynastic crucible, for the presence of workshops for the small-scale production of copper. This is among the earliest direct evidence for ancient Egyptian metal-working and might furnish additional proof for state-controlled activities at Elkab.

The archaeological material, supported by a series of 14C dates, indicates that the origins of the Elkab settlement go back to the Badarian period. Whether or not this earliest occupation was only seasonal, there is no doubt that from the Naqada I period onwards the site was continuously inhabited until Graeco-Roman and Coptic times and is only just beginning to give up its secrets. 📖

The Traits of an Artist: Favourite Motifs of Sedjemnetjeru



Sedjemnetjeru in the Tomb of Horemhawef as lector priest (above) and sem-priest (right). DStretch enhanced.

Apotropaic wands



Horemhawef's nurse holding a wand before her children.

T-shaped nipples



Sobeknakht's daughter.

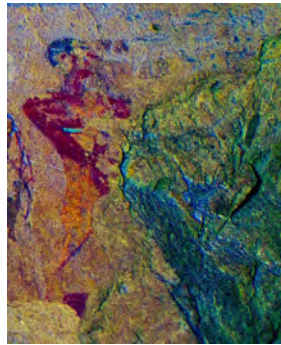


Horemhawef's daughter.

Masons



Masons at work in the Tomb of Sobeknakht.



On the job in the Tomb of Horemhawef. DStretch enhanced.



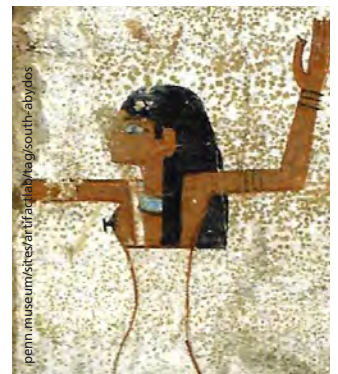
Horemhawef's relative.
DStretch enhanced.



Wand bearer in the Tomb of Bebi.



Attendant in Bebi.



Deity at Abydos , Tomb of Seneb-Kay.



Highlights from the Heartland

Hagr Edfu Tomb 3



Many ways of leaving one's mark (page 32).

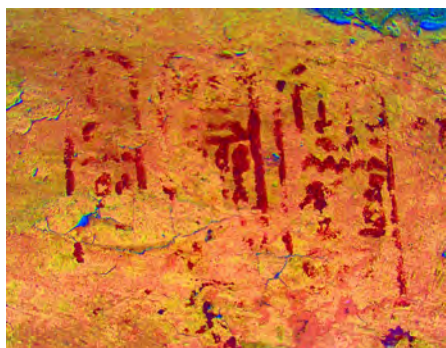


Fabulous falcon heads (page 32).

Elkab



"I made this beautiful rock-cut tomb in three months". Inscription in the Tomb of Sobeknakht (page 28).



Cartouches in the Ptolemaic Tomb. DStretch enhanced (page 37).

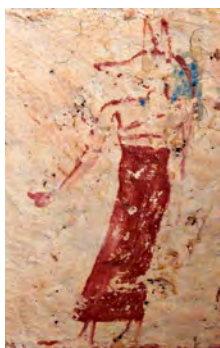


Figure of Anubis on the east wall.



Virtual section through the 3D model of the Ptolemaic Tomb, facing east.

West

North

East



P.D. Wordsworth/ Oxford ElKab Expedition

Orthographic images of the walls of the Ptolemaic Tomb. Colours enhanced through DStretch.



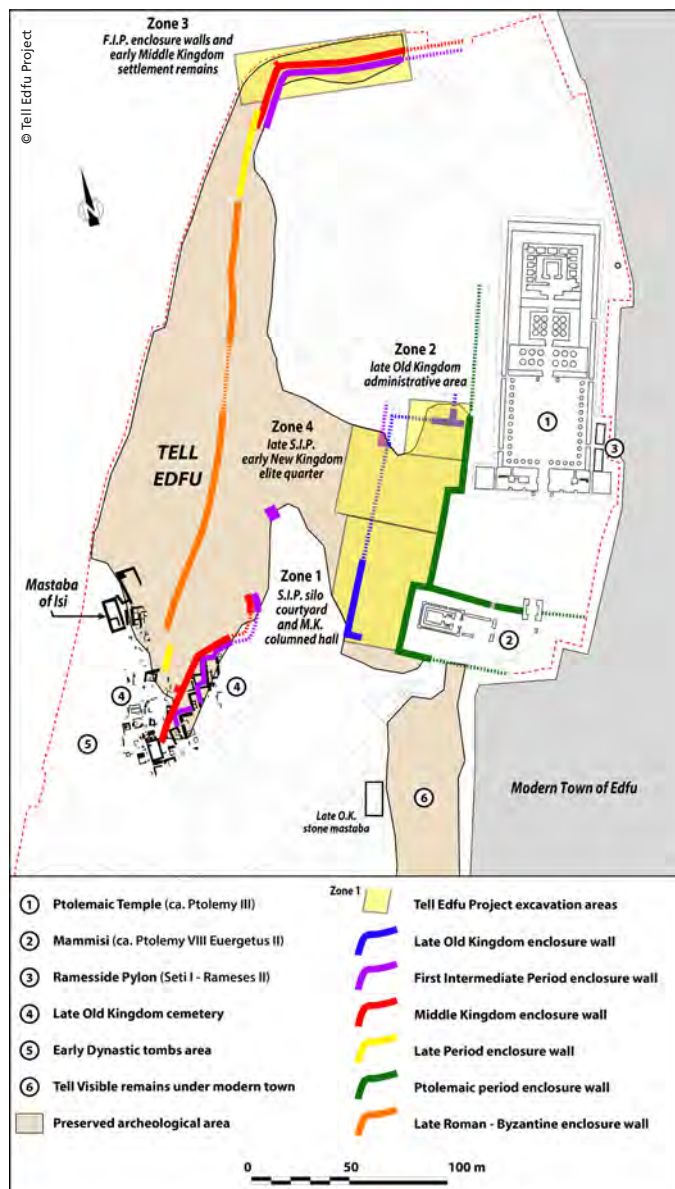
New Insights Into Relations Between Center and Periphery: Tell Edfu During the Old Kingdom

— Nadine Moeller and Gregory Marouard, University of Chicago

Over the past five years, excavations at Tell Edfu have focused on investigating the origins of the early town, which became the capital of the 2nd Upper Egyptian province and grew into an important regional center. Today the remnants of the ancient tell can be seen on the western side of the Ptolemaic temple where the superimposed settlement remains still rise to an impressive height of more than 15m above the temple threshold. The only area where it has been possible to access the earliest settlement strata that lie

directly on the natural bedrock is located on the eastern side of the tell, close to the temple walls (Zone 2). The precise origins of Edfu's foundation are still unclear, but indirect evidence hints at the first settlement possibly dating as early as the 3rd Dynasty. Support for this comes from a small step pyramid located along the desert's edge near the modern village of el-Ghoneameya. This small monument has recently been the subject of a cleaning and restoration campaign led by the Tell Edfu Project team in order to preserve the site as it was threatened by the growth of a modern cemetery on its northern side and the enlargement of a major road to the south. The presence of a pyramid in this location indicates that the kings of the late 3rd/early 4th Dynasties (Huni and/or Snofru) already recognized the importance of the town of Edfu within its region. Today the step pyramid is situated about 5km from central Edfu. The reason for this distance is still unexplained, but the pyramid's location marks an important departure point for a strategic route into the Western Desert and Kharga Oasis (and the modern desert road today).

An almost identical step pyramid can be found at el-Kula, which similarly lies about 6km north of Hierakonpolis, another important early center. In his recent research on the development of the provincial administration during the Third millennium BC, Juan Carlos Moreno Garcia suggested that by the 3rd Dynasty there might have existed a kind of 'ideal landscape' in Upper Egypt, which included the small step pyramids and local sanctuaries as "markers of the frontiers of the kingdom and as memorials to the power of the king." Those regions and towns located in the vicinity of these monuments would have been the main focal points of attention by the king and his highest officials for obtaining various resources by making best use of the existing infrastructure.



General plan of Tell Edfu showing the various excavation zones of the Tell Edfu Project.



The recently cleaned step pyramid at el-Ghoneameya, view of the eastern face.



Overview of the two monumental buildings and their associated courtyards in Zone 2 at Tell Edfu.

The view, however, was not only westward. The recent fieldwork by the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute team at Tell Edfu has uncovered settlement remains dating to the late 5th Dynasty, which can be linked to an increased interest by the central government in establishing an important base at Edfu for expeditions departing into the Eastern Desert.

An excavation area measuring 25 x 50m was opened in Zone 2 in 2014 and revealed an important ex-nihilo foundation of a new town quarter, which constitutes a phase of expansion from the original core of the town most likely located further to the south-east. The archaeological remains in Zone 2, so far the oldest urban remains ever discovered at Tell Edfu, consist of two monumental structures: Northern Building 1 with extremely thick and sloping walls and Southern Building 2 situated south of it. Although only partially preserved due to *sebakh* digging, both structures were fronted by large open courtyards in which evidence for various activities has been found including many indications for metallurgy linked to copper smelting. Numerous fireplaces and ash deposits related to the cooking of bread were also excavated as well as significant numbers of beer jars and globular storage jars, some of which were found concentrated in a small room to the east of Southern Building 2.

All of these installations were built in a very short period of time directly onto the natural Nile sand deposits that mark the substratum in this area. Based on the royal names found on the broken clay sealings, the occupation seems limited in time, stretching from the end of the reign of Niuserre (including the reign of Menkauhor, who is rarely attested) into that of king Djedkare-Isesi, whose reign marks a turning point in Old Kingdom history. This penultimate ruler of the 5th Dynasty is particularly well-known for his successful expeditions to the Eastern Desert, the Sinai peninsula (Wadi Maghara) and Nubia as well as the distant land of Punt. He probably established a



Details of the sloping walls and entrance area of Northern Building 1.

logistical base at Edfu as part of a larger network of strategic support bases for these expeditions.

In all of the courtyards associated with the two monumental buildings a large number of broken clay sealings were recovered, which bear fragmentary signs and inscriptions left by high-quality cylinder seals. Preliminary study of the inscriptions provides further links to royal expeditions for the extraction of copper and other precious raw materials in the Eastern Desert. Most significant is the mention of an 'overseer (*jmj-r*) of the *sementiu* (prospectors)'. The *sementiu* are closely linked to the extraction of resources in the Eastern Desert and well-attested within the framework of royal expeditions sent to the Sinai peninsula. Traces of copper ore together with copper slag and crucible fragments were found in significant quantities in Zone 2, and such activities can now be directly linked to official mining expeditions that were sent from Edfu.

Also likely related to these Eastern Desert expeditions is the peculiar occurrence of numerous pottery sherds with Nubian affinities that are difficult to classify as they are neither A-Group nor C-Group but more likely a kind of 'desert ware' indicating regular interactions with nomadic peoples living in the desert regions (see page 26). A possible connection to the Red Sea shore can also be suggested by the regular discovery of sea shells in the same archaeological contexts. This evidence can be further complemented by several graffiti recorded in the various wadis accessible from the Edfu region, which confirm the frequency of mining activities in this area during the late Old Kingdom. Edfu's location, as mentioned above, was strategically chosen to be close to important routes.

As the evidence stands now, it is clear that Edfu saw an increase in attention from the central Memphite government starting in the second half of the 5th Dynasty, at a time when high-ranking officials in charge of royal expeditions into the Eastern Desert established their logistical

base at Edfu. The two administrative buildings excavated in Zone 2 are good evidence for this development. It has also become apparent that the importance of regional centers like Edfu rose significantly during the late Old Kingdom, eventually resulting in the local elite becoming more visible as they established seats at their towns. The well-known tomb of Jsj, a prominent nomarch and governor of Edfu during the 6th Dynasty, who was buried in a large mud brick mastaba situated along the south-western side of the tell (and posthumously venerated as a local saint), can be considered as part of the wider phenomenon of the rise of the provincial elite. In the long term, Edfu was able to retain its strategic position with regard to accessing raw materials and trade routes probably until at least the Graeco-Roman period with important implications for the evolution of the town. ▲



Clay sealings from Zone 2 bearing the names of king Djedkare-Isesi and the title 'overseer of the *sementiu*'.



Tracking Serpopards from Hierakonpolis Onward

— Jordan Miller, University of Oxford

One of the most captivating finds from the 'Main Deposit' at Hierakonpolis, and now a star attraction in Oxford's Ashmolean Museum, is the Two Dog palette (see *Nekhen News* 30: 33–34). This ceremonial siltstone palette is famed for the hunting scenes carved on both of its faces, which have been a particular focus for studies of late Predynastic ideology and symbolism regarding notions of order and the containment of chaos. Of the various beasts depicted, three are particularly notable. Often termed serpopards (a portmanteau of 'serpent' and 'leopard'), they have the heads and bodies of wild cats, but undulating necks incised in a manner typically used to represent snakeskin. Also depicted on other palettes (e.g., the Narmer palette), where they are often shown circling the grinding area, they are a fascinating yet puzzling motif.

In an indirect fashion, the serpopards on these and other objects from Hierakonpolis attest to the site's important cultural position both before and after they were carved. Serpopards are first attested on cylinder seals from Iran and Mesopotamia, whence they likely made their way to Egypt either overland or via maritime routes. Their prominence on palettes in particular shows that such imagery circulated amongst the highest elite, but their different configurations and attitudes in the scenes complicate further interpretation. Best known are those shown entwined and lassoed on the Narmer palette, which are generally considered to represent hostile forces under control and the unification of Egypt's Two Lands — perhaps an antecedent to the later sema-tawy motif. Yet the same meaning does not fit the representations on the Two Dog and other palettes. Here, if the focus is on expressing the containment of unruly, then



The obverse of the Two Dog palette with long-necked serpopards encircling the grinding dish.



Serpopard on the reverse of the Two Dog palette engaged in the hunt.


serpopards are agents of order and control alongside creatures such as lions and hawk-headed felids — both of which were used to represent the king in later times. Perhaps the serpopard benefited from being introduced to Egypt in the late Predynastic, a period where the iconography of power was less fixed and more open to experimentation.

The serpopard seems to vanish from the artistic repertoire soon thereafter. The Minshat Ezzat palette, which was found in a First Dynasty tomb (reign of Den) but likely dates much earlier, provides the latest known example. The fixing of visual conventions during the pharaonic age, concomitant with new forms and subjects of display in temple and palace contexts, may have played a part in its demise. Only in the late Middle Kingdom do serpopards enjoy a brief revival in art, albeit in a different guise and form. The snakeskin texture of their necks, so characteristic of Predynastic depictions, is replaced by fur and the term 'long-necked cat' may be more appropriate now. The form occurs exclusively on apotropaic 'wands', made of hippopotamus ivory, alongside representations of other

aggressive animals and demons which worked to defend against hostile supernatural forces (see also page 29).

The return of the serpopard raises interesting questions. Was it still present in the Egyptian cultural consciousness during the Middle Kingdom, and what can this tell us about the view of earlier art? The serpopard is one amongst several other late Predynastic motifs that reappeared at this time and it has been suggested that when Middle Kingdom kings commissioned renovation works on earlier temples, objects such as decorated palettes may have been 'rediscovered' and their imagery incorporated onto new object types. Yet the use of serpopards on wands is suggestive of a more complex story. Wands were domestic objects, yet the lack of well-preserved settlement sites where they may have been used is a constant source of frustration in Egyptology. It is entirely possible that the serpopard remained a key part of Egyptian iconography, but in contexts of use and deposition that have simply not survived.

Another important piece of evidence is the hieroglyphic symbol for the town of Qus (Greek Cusae, modern el-Qusiya), capital of the 14th Upper Egyptian nome. The sign depicts a human figure grasping two long-necked creatures in the 'master of animals' pose — a motif also known from the Predynastic period in such famed contexts as the Hierakonpolis Painted Tomb. The sign is attested in Old Kingdom pyramid complexes and in elite tombs at Meir and Quseir el-Amarna, so perhaps the serpopard motif was never entirely forgotten.

Furthermore, the forms taken by the creatures in the Qus sign vary: serpopards, two snakes, a double-headed serpent, or even giraffes. The Egyptians were clearly reinterpreting and experimenting with this ancient motif. The phenomenon has been noted by other scholars, often with an aim to understanding the meaning of the sign itself. I, however, take a broader view and aim to integrate various strands of evidence regarding this and other fantastic creatures in order to reach a better understanding of the relationships between art, writing, and the transmission and reception of artistic motifs and the past. 



A serpopard among other magical forces on a Middle Kingdom apotropaic wand.



The symbol for the town of Qus (after Blackman, *Meir II*, 1915: pl. xvii).

Nubians, Nubians Everywhere!

— Aaron de Souza, Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology, Austrian Academy of Sciences

Various lines of evidence indicate that interaction with Nubian (or related) cultures was a feature of every age in Egypt's heartland. A full account of this complex relationship is yet to be worked out, but even a brief summary shows that Nubians played a varied but integral part (for better or worse) in the social landscape in the region.

The Nubian story seems to begin way back in the Badarian with a handful of sherds from both Hierakonpolis and Elkab featuring rippled (combed and burnished) surface treatments, a technique common also in the lands south of Aswan. While other sherds with incised decoration scattered across Hierakonpolis suggest limited contact with the early Nubian A-Group, unmistakable evidence of communication comes from a grave found by Henri de Morgan near the Fort. In it was a bowl (now in the Brooklyn Museum) with the distinctive conical form and painted basketry decoration typical of the 'eggshell ware' of the Terminal A-Group (c. 3100–2900 BCE). Its extreme fineness is a testament to the refined skill of early Nubian potters. Whether the tomb owner was a Nubian remains unknown, but finds in Nubia show that this was a period of much trade between the two lands, though their interactions were not always friendly.

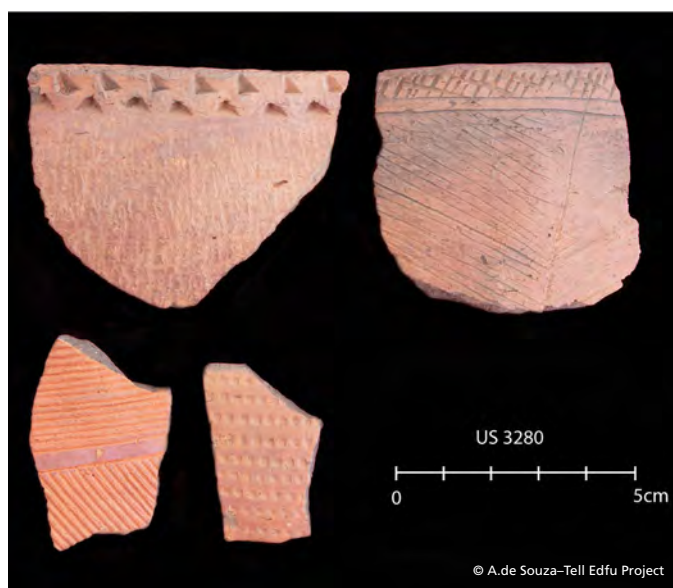
In the Old Kingdom, contact with Nubian cultures is attested at Tell Edfu. Considerable quantities of Nubian pottery sherds were excavated in late 5th Dynasty contexts (reign of Djedkare-Isesi, see page 22), but are difficult to attribute to a specific culture as they display characteristics of the A-Group, early C-Group, and the so-called Pre-Kerma

pottery traditions, the latter of which is rarely found outside of Upper Nubia. Tantalising clues regarding their makers come in the form of clay sealings mentioning the *sementiu*, or 'prospectors' involved in the extraction of raw material from the Eastern Desert. In addition, shells from the Red Sea also point to connections eastward. Thus, it is possible that these Nubian-style sherds are traces of contact with people of Nubian cultural heritage who were either involved in the mining expeditions, or living along the desert routes. The date of these sherds is also significant. Evidence for Nubian peoples in the Nubian Nile Valley by the beginning of the Old Kingdom is extremely sparse. These and similar sherds from Elephantine suggest that, although the Nubians may have abandoned the Valley, they still maintained contact with Nile-based communities.

Moving forward in time, the C-Group is the next Nubian tradition encountered in the region. Hierakonpolis cemetery HK27C gives us our first indisputable evidence for the physical presence of Nubians. Dating to the early Middle Kingdom, it is the northernmost known cemetery of this Nubian culture. Despite the early date, excavations have shown that the Nubians buried here had already adopted several Egyptian customs. Some of the graves were in the traditional Nubian style, being circular with contracted burials, but others followed a more Egyptian pattern with rectangular shafts and bodies placed in an extended position. This merging of traditions suggests that the Nubians and Egyptians living in the area shared a close social



Nubian A-Group eggshell ware bowl from Hierakonpolis (Brooklyn 09.889.426).



Sherds from Old Kingdom levels at Edfu showing a range of decorative motifs.



A profusion of cooking pot fragments of the Kerma tradition from early 18th Dynasty Edfu.

relationship, possibly one in which at least some of the C-Group people were in Egyptian employment. Support for this scenario comes from a scene in the nearby tomb of the Governor Ny-an-akh-Pepy, which depicts Nubian archers with feathers in their hair, holding bows and accompanied by hunting dogs. These may in fact be some of the same people that are buried at HK27C. Their inclusion on the tomb walls reflects both the status and importance of their presence at the site.

In the late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period, Nubian activity in the region seems to reach its peak, with evidence coming from cemeteries and settlements. Two cemeteries of the Pan-Grave tradition at Hierakonpolis (HK47 and HK21A) have been partly explored (see *Nekhen News* 29). Both sites date to the late 12th Dynasty, making them among the earliest known Pan-Grave sites in all of the Nile Valley, and the noticeable differences between them show just how varied this enigmatic culture was during its earliest phases. Pan-Grave pottery has also been found at Tell Edfu in contexts dating to the same period and was reported among surface finds from the town at Elkab. In addition there was likely a Pan-Grave cemetery (now lost) near the pyramid at el-Ghonameya. Putting it all together, it is clear that the Pan-Grave presence at this time was widespread (if perhaps intermittent) and that contact with the Egyptian communities was fairly intensive.

However, by the late 17th and early 18th Dynasty, the character of the Nubian presence changes. Pan-Grave pottery all but disappears and is replaced by that attributable to the Kerma tradition. The bulk of the evidence comes from Tell Edfu where considerable quantities of coarse, soot-covered,



On the tell at Edfu: Aaron excavating a Nubian pot which contained an infant burial.

cooking vessels have been found among the settlement debris mixed with a small number of fine Classic Kerma beaker sherds and mat-impressed wares that are unmistakable markers for the Kerma tradition. Although the quantity of Nubian pottery makes up only 1–2% of the total assemblage overall, it increases dramatically (by up to 700%) compared to earlier contexts. Despite this sudden increase, other evidence for a Kerma presence in the region is almost entirely absent save for a few sherds from Hierakonpolis. This concentration at Edfu, considered in its historical context, is both intriguing and suggestive, but is still unexplained.

Ceramics may make up the main evidence from which to reconstruct Nubian interaction, but the Nubian cemeteries at Hierakonpolis clearly demonstrate that it was not just different pots, but also different peoples that were actually present, each forging their own relationships with the Egyptian communities. On top of this, we must factor in the textual and pictorial evidence. While depictions on the walls of the early Middle Kingdom tomb of Ny-an-akh-Pepy suggest Nubians were status symbols to be flaunted, by the end of the Middle Kingdom some Nubians were much less welcome.

In the second inscription in his tomb at Elkab (see page 29), the governor Sobeknakht II recounts a raid conducted by a Kushite-led coalition of Nubians from Wawat, Khenkennefer, Punt, and Medja-land on a scale that he describes as “unprecedented since the time of the gods.” He successfully managed to repel them and the rest becomes history, but this unique testimony underscores the complexity of interactions, the variety of players, and the ever-evolving relationships between Nubians and Egyptians in this dynamic region of Upper Egypt. 🏺

Elkab, Hierakonpolis and the Artist Sedjemnetjeru

— Vivian Davies, University of Oxford



The artist Sedjemnetjeru (on left) taking part in the funeral procession of the governor. Tomb of Sobeknakht, Elkab.

A rare example of a regional artist known by name, the ‘scribe of forms, great one of the tens of Upper Egypt’, Sedjemnetjeru played a leading role in the decoration of the Second Intermediate Period tombs of the Governor Sobeknakht II at Elkab and Chief Inspector of Priests Horemkhawef at Hierakonpolis (see *Nekhen News* 12: 25–26). Highlighted here are some of the results of recent research on these two tombs, illustrating Sedjemnetjeru’s status and reach as an artist and some of the distinctive features of his style of tomb decoration.

The artist Sedjemnetjeru was almost certainly based at Elkab as a member of the governor’s workshop, the head of which was his father, ‘master craftsman’ Hormaakheru. Clearly well respected by Sobeknakht, both father and son are figured and mentioned several times in his tomb scenes. In one case, Hormaakheru is identified as “one praised for every craft”, while Sedjemnetjeru figures prominently as one of the ritual team in the funeral procession. Indicative of their status and function, both Hormaakheru and Sedjemnetjeru are accorded the privilege of their own offering (*hetep-di-nesut*) text invoking Ptah, the patron-god of craftsmen (also in Horemkhawef’s tomb, see page 20). Other categories of workmen who contributed to the tomb’s creation are also given their due, notably a gang of masons, all

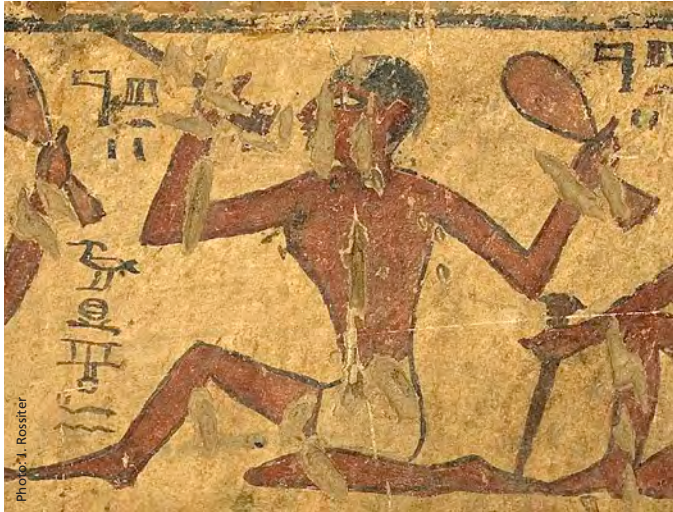
named, shown wielding mallets and chisels, one of them in the act of cutting at the actual tomb wall. The mason interacting with the tomb is one of Sedjemnetjeru’s signature motifs, and was probably developed initially in the tomb of Horemkhawef as a way to negotiate the significant irregularities in its walls (page 20).

In his main biographical inscription, Sobeknakht states: “I made this beautiful rock-cut tomb in three months” (see page 21), a rare contemporary record of the length of time taken to complete such a monument. There was, however, to be one later addition: a second biographical text, drafted in red, very likely in Sedjemnetjeru’s hand, on the thickness of the inner doorway. This gives an unprecedented account of Sobeknakht’s role in repulsing an attack from the south by Kush and its allies. New imagery (enhanced by DStretch) has brought welcome clarity to this remarkable text, which is now under renewed study.

Enhanced imagery has also contributed to better understanding of several scenes in Horemkhawef’s tomb. In the main offering scene, now largely destroyed, Sedjemnetjeru, assisted by ‘his brother’ Ahmose (also an artist), is shown acting as a lector-priest censuring the offerings for the tomb-owner (page 20). Sedjemnetjeru appears again in the funeral procession, clearly identified as a



The master craftsman Hormaakheru, father of Sedjemnetjeru, ‘one praised for every craft’. Tomb of Sobeknakht, Elkab.



A mason in the Tomb of Sobeknakht, El Kab. Note the T-shaped nipple.

‘scribe of forms’, shown wearing the characteristic leopard-skin of a *sem*-priest. While testifying to the artist’s special status and ritual knowledge, his priestly roles here might also be connected to the fact that Horemkhawef’s two sons had predeceased him.

Apart from self-portraiture and working masons, another favoured subject of the artist appears to be apotropaic wands or ‘birth tusks’ held by female figures, their presence now more clearly visible. In Horemkhawef’s main offering scene, a female relative is shown holding a protective tusk directly behind the seated tomb-owner, while in a sub-scene on the west wall his nurse holds a tusk before a row of her children (page 20). A similar tusk has also recently been identified in the tomb of Sobeknakht, held by a nurse directly behind the tomb-owner’s seated wife. Previously thought to be attested within the region only in the tomb of Bebi at El Kab, where snake-staves are also present, these ‘new’ wand representations are significant additions to the known corpus of these intriguing items.



Detail of the inscription of Sobeknakht telling of the coming of Kush (DStretch enhanced).



Archival image of the painted stela in the Tomb of Horemkhawef.

One of the most important recent developments has been the partial retrieval of the contents of a painted stela in the tomb of Horemkhawef. Now almost entirely lost, close study of an archival image has shown that the main body of the text is nearly identical, but with interesting differences, to that of Horemkhawef’s well-known stone stela now in New York (MMA 35.5.55). Both recount his journey to the capital Itjet-tawy to collect new statues of Horus and Isis in the presence of the king. Full publication of the new version is in preparation.

Sedjemnetjeru was responsible for more than just the two tombs discussed here. His name appears on the façade of the tomb of Hormin at El Kab and, on grounds of palaeography and figural style, he very likely also decorated the tomb of Bebi. Recently it has been suggested that Sedjemnetjeru’s reach might even have extended to Abydos. One of his singular artistic traits, observable in the tombs of Sobeknakht, Horemkhawef and Bebi, is the depiction of the human nipple on both males and females as T-shaped (page 20). This distinctive feature also appears on female figures in the newly discovered tomb at Abydos of the Second Intermediate Period king, Seneb-Kay. If this connection can be maintained (it seems feasible on current evidence), it casts Sedjemnetjeru as an artist of more than just local importance and adds to the growing consensus that the El Kab region, with its unusually large number of decorated tombs, was one of the major cultural hubs of the Second Intermediate Period. **M**



Nurse with wand behind the seated figure of Sobeknakht’s wife.

Family Portraits: Exploring the Representation of Female Relatives in the Elkab Necropolis

— Ellen Jones, University of Oxford

A significant proportion of ancient Egyptian tomb iconography involves what I term ‘family portraits’: depictions of the tomb owner with his family dressed in their finest clothes, performing their appropriate actions, in a snapshot of how this family wished to be remembered. While these images cannot be read as completely realistic portrayals, they were socially charged and the result of complex decisions. Who could a tomb owner include in their tomb decoration? Who were the most prominently portrayed? Who were depicted together in the same scenes and who were shown apart?

In my doctoral research, I explore these and other decisions with regard to the tomb owner’s female relatives and particularly whether there are any differences in how ‘mothers’, ‘sisters’, ‘daughters’, and ‘wives’ were portrayed relative to one another, which might suggest hierarchies among these kinship roles. Traditionally, depictions of elite women in ancient Egyptian tombs have been thought to provide the feminine element necessary for the tomb owner’s successful rebirth. I take a broader perspective to argue that female figures were also represented as an integral part of the tomb owner’s social network, with artistic and cultural conventions defining how both men and women could be portrayed relative to each other in funerary contexts.

My corpus comprises two clusters of early 18th Dynasty tombs, one from the Theban West Bank, belonging to the family of the vizier Rekhmire, and the other from the Elkab necropolis, focusing on the tombs of Ahmose son of Ibana and his grandson, the Governor Pahery. The overall presentation of female relatives in these two case studies follows



Close up of ‘the daughter of the sister of the mother of his mother’ Nebumiyh (right) and ‘her daughter’ Satamun (left) from the banquet scene in the Tomb of Pahery at Elkab.

similar trends, but with some interesting differences. The term ‘mother’ (*mut*) often appears only in texts captioning the offspring, usually the tomb owner, where his parental affiliation is provided. This usage suggests that knowledge of this family relationship was limited to (semi-)literate visitors. On the rare occasion that a ‘mother’ is pictorially represented, she is given visual prominence, which can include a large figure size, an elaborate outfit, extensive captions, and accompanying objects such as cloth and lotus flowers.



The banquet scene in the Tomb of Pahery at Elkab (orthorectified image).

It is women termed *hmt* (wife) that are most often shown in pictorial form in visually prominent positions, almost always as part of a couple, often with the tomb owner. The next kinship term *snt* seems to have had a double meaning of ‘sister’ or ‘wife’. Such women are also usually presented pictorially, but seem to have been mainly shown either as part of a group or as part of a couple, suggesting that the alternate meanings of this kinship term can be distinguished in the iconographic representations. Women termed *s3t* (daughter) are generally pictured in groups often comprising only other women, but are in much less prominent iconographic positions, as indicated by a small figure size, limited captioning, and positions within sub-registers which make them less visible. Thus, each kinship role seems to have had a typical mode of representation within which a subtle hierarchy can be observed. Women termed *hmt* (wife) were shown most prominently, followed by women termed *mwt* (mother), and thereafter women labelled *snt* (wife/sister), with those identified as *s3t* (daughter) depicted with the least visual prominence.

While these trends hold true in general, the Elkab necropolis shows some differences, particularly in emphasising the family’s maternal side. Evidence of this can be found in the banquet scene in the tomb of Pahery. This scene is arranged in the usual way and is paralleled in the tomb of Rekhmire. What makes Pahery’s version unique are the captions given to the banquet guests, which detail very specifically their kinship relationships, almost all of which are specified via the maternal line. For example, there is ‘the daughter of the sister of the mother of his mother, Nebumiyh’ and ‘the sister of the mother of his mother, Satamun’. This is not restricted by gender as there are also three men captioned ‘the son of the sister of the mother of his mother’ as well as two identified as ‘brothers of his mother’. The use of compound kinship terms to specify relationships in ancient Egypt is quite unusual, and even more so is the matrilineal focus. Furthermore, a large number of daughters are attributed to Pahery’s female relatives, primarily his wife Henuterneheh. Generally, within tomb iconography, children are labelled ‘his son’ or ‘his



Heryiry offering to his parents in the Tomb of Ahmose son of Ibana, uniquely labelled as ‘their son’ (in box) (orthorectified image).

daughter’, thus the decision to relate some of the children in this tomb via their mother is significant. In the Theban family cluster, there are only two women termed ‘her daughter’, while in Pahery’s tomb alone there are eight women identified in this way.

In the tomb of Ahmose son of Ibana this emphasis appears in an even more striking way. On one of the walls is a standard offering table scene showing Ahmose’s grandson Heryiry offering to his parents who are seated before him. The accompanying caption identifies Heryiry in

the usual way, but uniquely refers to him as *s3=snt*, ‘their son’, demonstrating the equality between his parents and further emphasising the distinctive ways in which this family chose to elevate its female members. I have yet to find a parallel for this.

The reasons behind this female focus at Elkab are open to speculation. In Rekhmire’s family at Thebes certain women appear to have been given more visual prominence due to their high personal status and the influential positions that this enabled their children to attain. An emphasis on mothers, in particular, is also attested in the Middle Kingdom letters of Heqanakht, where he entrusts the administration of the household ration-list to his mother Ipi. Perhaps something similar can be envisioned for Ahmose and his mother Ibana: with Ahmose frequently absent on military campaigns, perhaps the household was placed in the hands of senior female relatives, the significance of which was encoded in the funerary representations of this family.

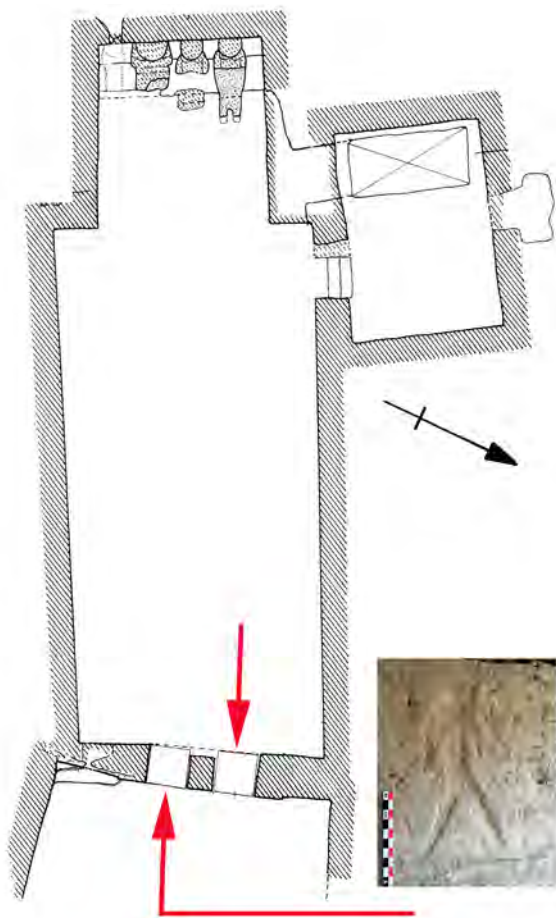
It is clear from these case studies that women were significant components of the tomb owner’s self-presentation, particularly at Elkab. Family portraits offer an insight into what these individuals considered important as well as internal hierarchies and power relationships. Through a systematic analysis of their iconographic representations, the complexity and care with which these individuals were portrayed can come to light, emphasising the inherently inter-relational aspect of these depictions, and the potential that this approach has for our understanding of the family and gender in ancient Egypt. 🙏

Figural Graffiti in Tomb 3 at Hagr Edfu

— Susanne Woodhouse, University of Oxford

Situated in the elite necropolis of Hagr Edfu, the mountainous area 3.5km to the west of Edfu, is a massive rock-cut tomb (HE3) of the late 12th–13th Dynasty (1880–1650 BCE), which has revealed unexpected visual treasures. Given its size (c.14m x 5m), the original owner must have been a person of great importance. Although he remains anonymous, he is shown in the niche on the west wall in an over-life-sized engaged statue accompanied by three of his family members. In magnitude and the quality of the carving, the tomb is certainly impressive, but in addition, roughly 290 graffiti have been recorded on its walls to date. Of these, 267 are figural and attest to the later repurposing of this tomb as a shrine dedicated to the veneration of local deities. Among the largest number of graffiti recorded in any one space in Egypt, pious visitors carved figures and inked inscriptions here throughout the New Kingdom, perhaps starting in the Second Intermediate Period (see page 34).

Another unusual feature of the tomb is its double doorway, which can be understood thanks to a rare Middle



Tomb HE3 with its double doorway and graffiti showing a man entering on the southern jamb (plan by G. Heindl).



Hagr Edfu Tomb 3, an impressive Middle Kingdom tomb whose walls served as a canvas for pilgrims' devotions in the form of graffiti.

Kingdom formula, known from Lisht and Dahshur, which describes the southern door as the entrance and the northern one as the exit. Whether the pilgrims were familiar with this formula is unclear, but it is noticeable that on the south wall the visitors' figures generally face towards the niche and on the north they look towards the door. As if to underpin the 'official' entrance, a graffiti of a man striding into the tomb is depicted in the reveal of the southern door.

Originally left undecorated, the white plastered tomb walls offered a blank canvas on which visitors eternalized their presence. With the exception of one painted example, the figural graffiti are carved or pecked into the plaster by hands that range from skilled to clearly untrained.

The graffiti form three thematic groups: a) 135 visitor representations in the form of human figures and feet/sandal outlines; b) 71 religious motifs, 54 of which are specific to the region; and c) 44 boat graffiti which may represent the means of transport by which the visitors arrived.

Visitor representations include men engaged in cultic activities, holding braziers and jar stands, or with hands raised in adoration (see page 21). While most of these tend to be rather schematic, the execution of the portrait of the scribe Neby looks more accomplished. Holding a lotus flower close to his chest and inhaling its scent (i.e., breathing life), he is also accompanied by his satchel, which held his writing utensils, demonstrating an obvious pride in his scribal profession, as was typical in the Thutmose period. Of the early 18th Dynasty, another well-drawn image depicts a man also in the act of smelling a lotus flower, but by placing this figure atop a pedestal, it has become the statue that the visitor was likely unable to afford, yet in this context was equally as effective.

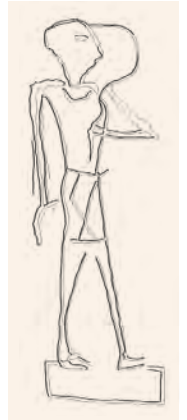
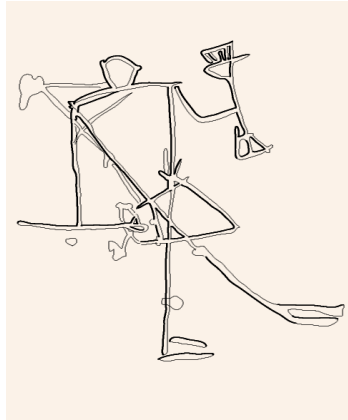
During the New Kingdom the channel of the Nile was closer to Hagr Edfu than it is today enabling visitors to

moor in its vicinity. This might explain the abundance of boat graffiti in HE3, amongst which two stand out. One depicts a man steering a large boat upstream under full sail. By indicating the decking planks inside the boat, the graffitist has created a rather un-Egyptian 3D effect. The second vessel of interest has a large cabin and a tall mast around which 14 feet and sandal outlines in varying sizes and shapes are arranged in groups. The care taken in the placement and grouping of the outlines suggests these commemorate the boat's passengers.

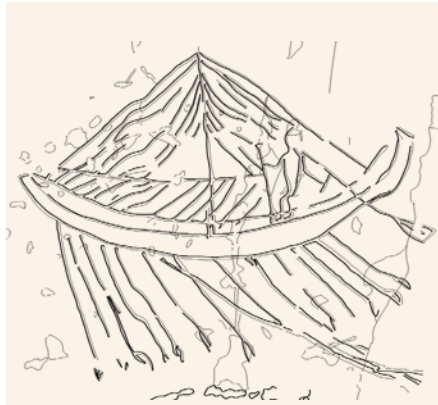
Examples of religious motifs include drawings of cows, falcon heads and hippopotami. The cows are shown either free-standing or placed in a shallow boat, their head sometimes adorned with a sun disc. They are concentrated in or near the niche and, regardless of what side they are on, all face toward the door of the tomb (in contrast to the visitor portraits). Indications for the identity of this bovine divinity can be found in the neighbouring tomb of Sataimau where two Hathor cows are depicted, one accompanied by texts describing it as the celestial cow and patroness of the very hill in which the tombs are carved. Considering the iconography, orientation and placement, the cow graffiti in HE3 likely represent the celestial cow emerging from the mountain and provide strong evidence for the existence of a cult shrine for this goddess in the immediate vicinity.

Falcon heads, the majority adorned with a sun disc, form another group of graffiti that are oriented to look out of the tomb. They depict the terminal end of the sacred staff of Horus of Edfu, which previously was only known from depictions in the Ptolemaic period. As a manifestation of the god, the staff was carried during the processions of Horus visible to everyone — as opposed to the deity's cult image which travelled in a closed shrine — allowing easy access to the god.

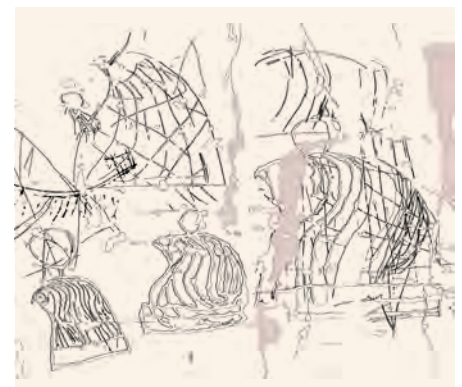
Also enhancing our understanding of cult practices, adorning the south wall



Visitor representations: Schematic man carrying a jar stand; the scribe Neby with his lotus flower; and a figure on a pedestal, representing the statue the visitor could probably not afford.




Boats: A craft under sail with deck planking creating a 3D effect and a vessel surrounded by the sandal prints of its passengers.



Celestial cows and a flurry of falcon heads evoking the sacred staff of Horus of Edfu.

are three schematic images of hippopotami rearing up in intimidating postures (see page 34). A harpooner on the same wall adds further testimony for the ritual killing of this animal in the Edfu temple during the New Kingdom.

The secondary decoration created by pilgrims in Hagr Edfu Tomb 3 attests to the reimagining of sacred space within a Middle Kingdom tomb and supplies unique insight into the popular devotion expressed for the regional gods during this interesting period in the history of the heartland. 

Visitor Records: Hieratic Inscriptions in Hagr Edfu 3

— Robert Demarée, Leiden

In addition to the figural graffiti incised into the walls of Hagr Edfu Tomb 3 (HE3), discussed above by Susanne Woodhouse, there are a number of visitor-inscriptions written in both hieroglyphs and hieratic. While the incised hieroglyphic inscriptions mainly provide only names and titles, those written in hieratic in ink are far more informative. Over a dozen different hieratic inscriptions have been observed on the tomb walls. Three among them are notable for their length, content and date.

The earliest is located on the north wall of the niche, but is only partly preserved. On palaeographic and other grounds it can be dated to the late Middle Kingdom or Second Intermediate period. Possibly the record of a festive event, it presents a “List of guests who came to establish(?)...”, comprising the Governor and Overseer of priests Hornakht, some of his family members and several priests and administrators. Hornakht was probably a governor of Edfu during this period, but is not known from other sources.


The two other inscriptions, both on the south wall, date to the New Kingdom (reigns of Thutmose III and Ramesses II respectively). The first reads: “Regnal year 32(?), month 4 of *shemu*, day [x] under the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Menkheperre, l.p.h., son of Re Dhutymose ... may he live eternally forever. The scribe Sementawy came to see ... the beautiful temple(?) of the house/domain of Isis-Weret of Mer(...). He found it pleasant in his heart more than [any other?] temple. Thereupon he said: ‘May heaven rain fresh myrrh and pour incense upon (the roof of ...) wherein Isis[-Weret?] is’.” While this inscription follows the typical visitor formula popular at the time (see *Nekhen News* 29: 23–24), the mention of a sanctuary of the house/domain of Isis-Weret is important, even though the partly illegible name of its location remains to be clarified.

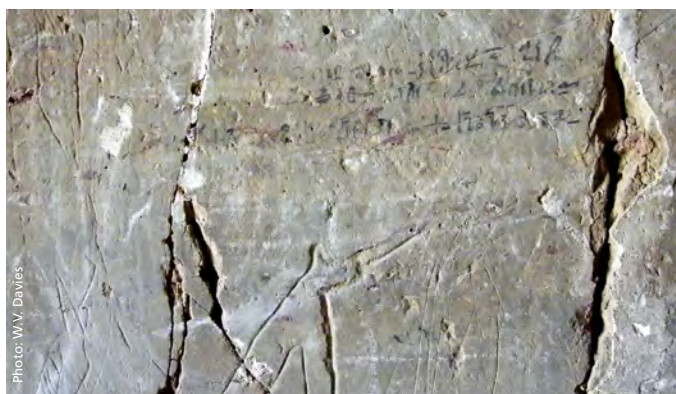
The second inscription reads: “O Horus of Edfu, you are the Light. Appear for me so that (I) may see Made/written



List of guests includes the governor on the earliest inscription in HE3.

by the Stable-master Nakhtmin, son of Amenmose, his mother Hathor ... of Khenu (Gebel Silsileh) in regnal year 51 of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Usermaatre-Setepenre, l.p.h, son of Re Ramesses-Mery-Amun ...”. The Stable master Nakhtmin is also known from a family stela of his brother, Scribe of the Treasury Mahu (now in the Museo Egizio, Turin). The stela gives us useful additional information: that his father was a Charioteer of the Lord of the Two Lands and his mother was a Chantress of Horus of Behdet (Edfu). His mother’s connection with the region was no doubt one of the reasons for the visit of this well-placed individual.

Together the hieratic inscriptions attest to the worship of two of the three main deities of Edfu, Isis-Weret and Horus, while the figural graffiti leave no doubt that the celestial cow Hathor was also honoured here. They also demonstrate that over a significant period of time (Second Intermediate period to at least the reign of Ramesses II), Hagr Edfu 3 was the focus of pilgrimage for a range of the populace — from those who commemorated their visit with a simple sandal outline to those who left their mark in a practiced hieratic hand. 



Ramesside inscription of Nakhtmin invoking Horus of Edfu placed among the figural graffiti on the walls of HE3.



Nakhtmin (second from left) and his mother, a Chantress of Horus of Edfu, on the family stela of Mahu (Museo Egizio, Turin 1465).

Worshipping ‘The Great Man’: From New Kingdom Tomb to Graeco-Roman Shrine

— Luigi Prada, University of Oxford

“The perfect name of Wereshwer ... endures here in the presence of the Great Man, the Great God...”. So begins a graffito traced in demotic (the last indigenous script of the Egyptian language, in use between the 7th century BCE and the 5th century AD) on one of the walls of the tomb-chapel of Reneny at Elkab, one of the site’s governors in the early 18th Dynasty. But who was Wereshwer and, more importantly, who was ‘the Great Man’ he was worshipping? To answer this and other questions, let’s start from the beginning.

The main necropolis of Elkab can boast a continuous history of use spanning three millennia of Egyptian history, from at least the Old Kingdom until Roman times. Among the gems of the necropolis are the decorated tomb-chapels of the members of its New Kingdom elite, including those of Reneny, Ahmose son of Ibana, Pahery (18th Dynasty), and Setau (19th Dynasty), which are all open to the public.

These tombs have been the subject of study by scholars since the early days of Egyptology, both for their artistic and historical value. The tomb-chapel of Reneny, although more damaged than its neighbours, was once sumptuously decorated. Amongst the scenes carved and painted on its walls stands out one of the earliest images of a horse-drawn chariot, a technology introduced to Egypt by the Hyksos only a short time before the tomb was constructed. Like the tombs of the other Elkab governors, it is highly likely that Reneny’s chapel continued to be visited and his funerary cults carried out for generations following his death, perhaps until the end of the New Kingdom. What happened after that, once all of his descendants had died, is more intriguing.

This is one of the questions that the Oxford Epigraphic Expedition to Elkab is currently investigating. Having expanded its documentation work to include not only the original decoration of the tombs, but also indications of any later reuse and modifications, the Oxford team hopes to write a comprehensive, diachronic history of the necropolis and of its monuments. This kind of investigation is made possible in part thanks to some (at first glance) rather unassuming traces left behind by the inhabitants of Elkab in the later Dynastic and Graeco-Roman periods: graffiti. Unlike their modern counterpart, which society may consider a form of street art (at best) or plain vandalism (at worst), in ancient Egypt graffiti were an expression of religious devotion. Pious visitors would commonly paint or scratch their names and those of their loved ones on the walls of sacred structures, such as temples and shrines (see also page 32).



Tomb of Reneny at Elkab, view of the cult-chapel.

In this way, they meant to leave behind a part of themselves as an ever-lasting presence at a sacred site, in a way somewhat similar to how Christians today light a candle in a church, as a living symbol of their presence and prayers even after they have left the building.

It turns out that many New Kingdom monuments in Elkab, be they the tombs in the necropolis or the temples in the nearby Wadi Hilal, are teeming with graffiti left by visitors from later times. It is in this context that we can place the graffito inscribed by Wereshwer, which in full translation reads as follows:

“The perfect name of Wereshwer, son of Hebnefer, the overseer of secrets, and that of his brothers endure here in the presence of the Great Man, the Great God. It is so written. Regnal year 2, month 4 of the harvest-season, day 11.”



Wereshwer’s demotic graffito on the west wall of Reneny’s tomb (orthophotograph).

The demotic graffito contains the precise date of its writing but, unfortunately not the name of the pharaoh in whose second regnal year this occurred, so we remain in

the dark as to when exactly Wereshwer made his visit. Nevertheless, the features of the demotic signs — that is, their palaeography — suggest a Ptolemaic date (c. 305–30 BCE).

This is not the only graffito that Wereshwer left in the tomb of Reneny in honour of ‘the Great Man, the Great God’; there are three others, now incomplete. In addition, further graffiti in the tomb, some from the earlier Late period (c. 7th–4th century BCE), also contain testimonies to the worship of ‘the Great Man’. It is thus clear that Wereshwer, probably a locally-based priest bearing the title of ‘overseer of secrets’, was only one of many visitors to this tomb-chapel, some ten centuries (or more!) after Reneny had originally been buried beneath it. Yet it remains unclear to what extent any remembrance of the historical figure of Reneny was involved, since his name appears nowhere in the graffiti. Instead, the reason for these pious visits was to honour a divine entity whose name is simply, yet tantalisingly, given as ‘the Great Man’.

It seems that over the millennium separating the original construction of the tomb and the later visitors inscribing their demotic graffiti, the tomb owner’s identity had faded to a dim recollection and, for motives unknown to us, he was deified and turned into a sort of local god for Elkab. This is not a unique phenomenon in ancient Egypt. We know of many other historical figures who underwent a process of deification. Perhaps the most famous is Imhotep, the high courtier and architect of the Step Pyramid of king Djoser, who enjoyed a cult as an actual god, particularly in the Late and Ptolemaic periods, being worshipped as the



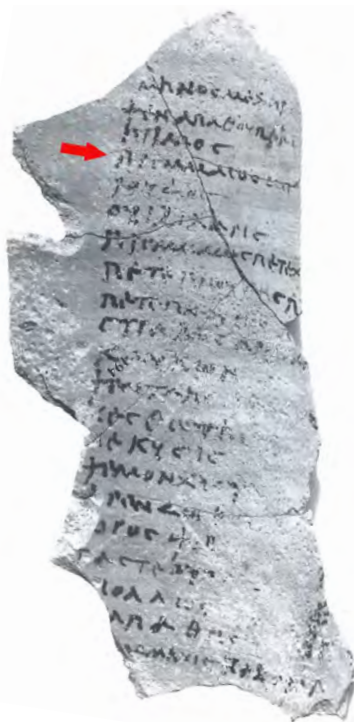
Demotic graffiti from the Late period worshipping ‘the Great Man’, east wall of Reneny’s tomb. Colours enhanced through DStretch.

son of Ptah throughout Egypt.


However, unlike Imhotep, no memory of Reneny by name survived. Even though his name appears in many of the hieroglyphic

inscriptions in the tomb, by Late and Graeco-Roman times literacy in hieroglyphs was extremely rare. Typically, the literate minority would have been able to read and write only the cursive demotic, the writing which was used for the graffiti.

This cult of ‘the Great Man’ appears to have been centred exclusively in the tomb of Reneny, which had now been repurposed into a holy shrine of sorts. Almost certainly a provincial cult, it was practised in Elkab and, perhaps, the surrounding area, as indicated by another kind of evidence: onomastics. As we know, the ancient Egyptians enjoyed giving their children theophoric names, that is, naming them after members of their pantheon, as for instance in the popular name Petosiris (*Pa-di-Wesir*, translating to ‘The one whom Osiris has given’). This practice is widely attested in the daily-life documents from Graeco-Roman Elkab, but amongst them is a not-so-common personal name in use by the local community. This name, which is found on a number of ostraca (potsherds or limestone flakes) written in Greek, is Premmaos. This may not sound much like an Egyptian (or Greek) personal name, but looking at it closely, one can see that Premmaos is actually the phonetic rendition in Greek of the Egyptian *pa-Remetj-A’a* (we know that *tj* was not pronounced by this time), which is nothing other than the demotic for ‘the Great Man’.



Greek ostracon from Elkab with list of personal names including Premmaos, 1st–2nd century AD (O. *Greek Elkab* 191; Bingen & Clarysse 1989).

Clearly, some of the parents inhabiting Graeco-Roman Elkab were so devoted to the deity that resided in the rock shrine above their city, they even wished to put their children under the protection of their ‘Great Man, the Great God’. 

Boats and Horses: A Painted Ptolemaic Tomb at Elkab

— Luigi Prada & Susanne Woodhouse, University of Oxford

Whilst visiting the rock necropolis of Elkab in 1844, Richard Lepsius discovered a small decorated tomb dating to the Ptolemaic period. Half a century later, in the early 1890s, Somers Clarke traced and photographed scenes in this tomb, as documented by his archive, now held in the Griffith Institute, Oxford. During the 20th century, mention of this monument appeared in the specialised literature, and at the 1989 International Congress of Papyrology Jan Quaegebeur made an appeal that this small but important tomb “be published without delay”. Yet, no actual study — let alone full publication — ever appeared.

In fact, even the exact whereabouts of this tomb were forgotten until the Oxford Epigraphic Expedition to Elkab relocated it during the 2018 season. Since then, with the help of Günter Heindl and Paul Wordsworth, the team has completed a full digital record of the tomb and a first study of its intriguing decoration.

Of modest size, the two-room structure consists of a decorated cult-chapel and an adjacent, undecorated burial chamber (see page 21). The painted scenes survive in reasonably good condition, though damaged by sunlight, masonry wasps, and in particular the carving of three niches into the walls, supposedly for the burial of crocodile mummies. The scenes are arranged on three horizontal registers of nearly equal height, and were carried out in a limited palette consisting of red, pink, blue, and white. The paint has now faded, but processing the digital images through the DStretch plugin makes the details stand out quite clearly.

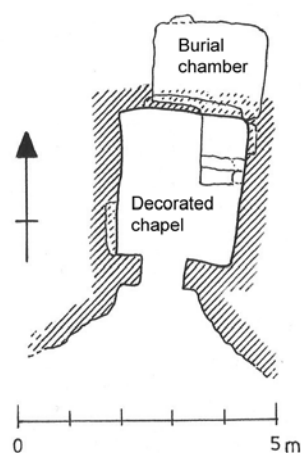
Looking out of the tomb, their eternal dwelling, the seated couple appear in the north corners of the top register on both the east and west walls. They sit side by side, with the wife embracing her husband, but their names are unfortunately not given and so they remain anonymous.

The majority of the decoration is religious in nature, depicting vignettes from the late version of the Book of the Dead (BD). Scenes from the vignette of BD1, which deals with the day of the burial, are placed in the top and middle registers of the east wall, and include offerings

for the deceased, the lector priest reciting from a papyrus scroll, mourners, and standard-bearers. The four scenes of vignette BD16, presenting a triple adoration of Re-Horakhty in which the deceased participates, are located in the bottom register of the west wall, while in the top register the vignette of BD110b shows the deceased couple supervising agricultural activities in the Field of Reeds (Egyptian paradise). Occupying part of the bottom register on the north wall and continuing onto the west wall, the vignette of BD110c depicts the tomb owner being ushered into the presence of Osiris and Isis with the scarab-headed god Khepri seated in his barge behind them. The scenes of vignette BD143L fill the bottom register of the east wall: behind the deceased, who is in adoration before Anubis, are four solar-boats carrying, amongst others, figures of divine falcons and the goddess of the West.

In their totality, these and the other BD vignettes on the tomb walls secured for the deceased physical preservation, nourishment for the body, freedom of movement, a positive outcome at the judgement in the netherworld, and transfiguration into a glorified spirit — the major themes of the Book of the Dead. Whilst vignettes BD16 and 143 were never accompanied by texts in papyrus scrolls, and acted as introductory scenes for following spells, the vignettes of BD110 were supplemented by a text until the Saite period (7th–6th century BCE), after which they were understood alone. Consequently, by the time the decoration of this Ptolemaic tomb was under way, at least four of the BD vignettes reproduced in it were meaningful without a text, which may be one of the reasons the artist of the tomb selected them. Indeed, no written utterances from the Book of the Dead accompany any of the decoration. A few short captions in demotic in the top register of the east wall are the only writing here. These are not funerary formulae, but rather appear to be labels associated with the priestly cortège.

Scenes in three other registers stand out for not showing any connection with religious or funerary themes. In fact, we suspect that they may record a single historic event in the life of the tomb owner. These are



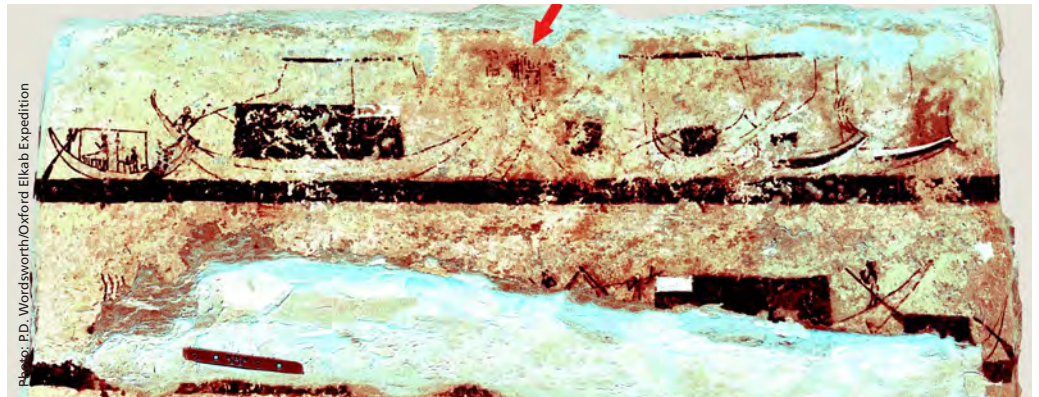
Plan of the Ptolemaic Tomb (G. Heindl/Oxford Expedition).



The tomb owner and his wife on the west wall, top register.

located in the top and middle registers of the north wall and the middle register of the west wall. The first two registers contain a flotilla composed of a significant number of large boats travelling along the Nile. In the top register, the boat formation faces right and is clearly meant to show travel southbound and upstream, for the sails are unfurled. Below, the same flotilla faces left, travelling northward carried by the river current, with no sails on display. What might this naval scene represent? Surely, this is not an instance of the well-known pilgrimage to Abydos, showing the deceased sailing to the city of Osiris and back again to his/her tomb. Not only is the flotilla too large and imposing to be part of a standard pilgrimage scene, but also the order of travel does not accord with such a journey. A pilgrimage from Elkab to Abydos would require sailing first downstream and then returning upstream, but here we see the opposite.

A clue to the nature of these scenes comes from the only hieroglyphic inscription present in this tomb, which also allows us to date its execution to the early Ptolemaic period. This inscription includes three cartouches painted in red ink above the ships in the centre of the top register (see page 21). The cartouches bear the throne and birth name of Ptolemy III Euergetes (reigned 246–222 BCE) and his wife Berenike II, thus suggesting that the scene depicts a royal flotilla. Historical sources tell us that Ptolemy III and the royal family did in fact visit Upper Egypt, travelling from the new capital at Alexandria all the way to Philae. The most significant visit occurred in the year 237 BCE, when, on August 23, Ptolemy III carried out the ritual foundation of the temple of Horus at Edfu, located just south of Elkab and one of the best-preserved temples that still stand today in Egypt.

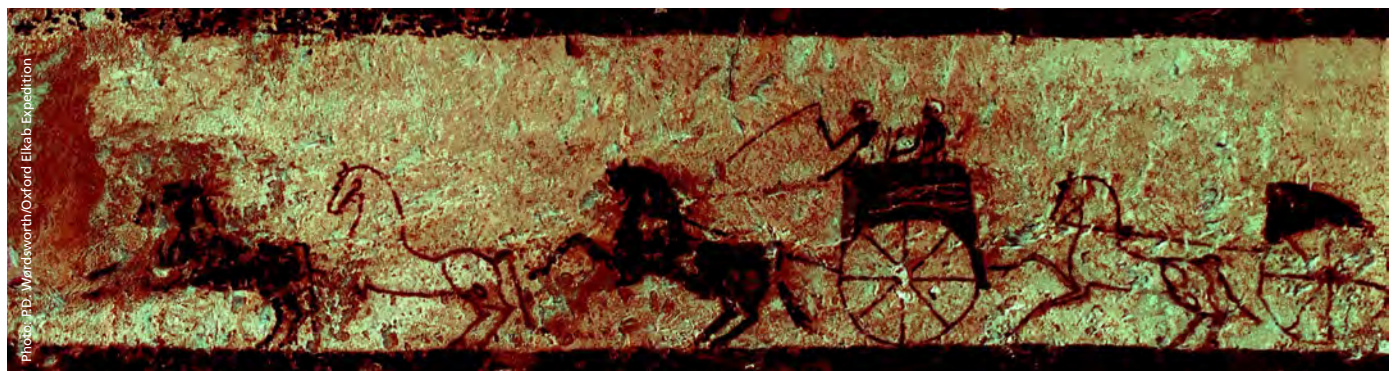


The flotilla scenes on the north wall with cartouches of Ptolemy III and Berenike II in the top register (arrow). Colours enhanced through DStretch.

Quite possibly the paintings in the Ptolemaic tomb constitute a unique record of this specific visit of the royal court. The tomb owner, who undoubtedly was a member of the Elkab priesthood, would likely have been part of a delegation of regional clergy present at the ceremony. Perhaps the most memorable event of his life, the tomb owner may have chosen to immortalise this honour for eternity.

The register on the west wall possibly records another episode related to this royal visit. The surviving decoration shows a man in a chariot steered by a driver and pulled by three pairs of horses — clearly a remarkable means of transport and a symbol of status. Following behind, another pair of horses pull a second chariot, but this is oddly empty. Could the passenger of the first chariot be the deceased? Unfortunately, the southern section of this register is cut by a niche and it is now impossible to tell where the chariot was headed. Whatever this scene represents, it seems most likely that it, too, pertains to an historical event from the tomb owner's life.

Further investigation of the tomb's decoration in all its details is in progress and will hopefully shed further light on the secrets of this small and, until recently, hidden treasure of the Elkab necropolis. 🐾



The chariots on the west wall, middle register. Colours enhanced through DStretch.

The Friends of Nekhen

Nekhen is the ancient Egyptian name for the site of Hierakonpolis, the city of the hawk, and one of Egypt's first capitals. The Friends of Nekhen is a group of concerned individuals, scholars and organizations that is helping the Hierakonpolis Expedition to explore, conserve, protect and publish all aspects of this remarkable site. The largest Predynastic site still extant and accessible anywhere in Egypt, Hierakonpolis continually provides exciting new glimpses into this formative — and surprisingly sophisticated — age, and more.

In return for your contribution you will receive the annual newsletter, the *Nekhen News*, produced exclusively for the Friends. Lavishly illustrated, the *Nekhen News* keeps you up-to-date on all of the Expedition's latest discoveries.

Help the Hierakonpolis Expedition to continue its important work. Your contribution (tax-deductible in the USA) will support vital research that might not otherwise be possible. Share in the excitement and the sense of commitment by making a genuine contribution to the search for understanding. Join the Friends of Nekhen. 🐙

Ways to Contribute

I would like to help the Hierakonpolis Expedition to explore and conserve the site of Hierakonpolis, ancient Nekhen. In return for my contribution (tax-deductible in the USA), I will receive the annual newsletter, the *Nekhen News*.

The contribution category I prefer is:

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(If you have already renewed, thank you!)

Make your GBP £ cheques / US \$ checks payable to (we are unable to accept cheques in Euros):

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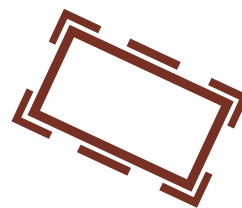


Fort failures: A cause for concern.

Fort Refresh

More than 10 years on and the Fort is still hanging in there, but climate change and increased traffic are taking their toll. In particular around the gateway, the walls are crumbling and in need of immediate attention. At the request of the Egyptian SCA, we are making refreshment of the Fort a priority in 2020. But, as with any old house, repairs are always more expensive than you think. If you can top up your donations and help us out, we would be most grateful. We need to show the Fort it has not been forgotten and how much we all still care. Thanks! 📄

Special contribution for
Fixing the Fort Further



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Prefer to receive the *Nekhen News* as a PDF file?

Let us know at: friendsofnekhen@yahoo.com

News from Around the Heartland



Insights into the El Kab tombs (pages 28, 30, 35, 37).



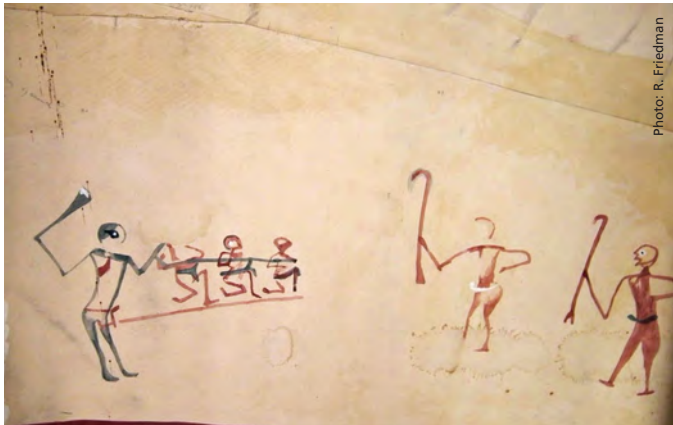
Digging deep in the El Kab settlement (page 18).



Tell Edfu in the Old Kingdom and beyond (pages 22, 26).



A visit to Hagar Edfu (pages 32, 34).



The Painted Tomb conservation update (page 12).



Another side of HK6 (page 4).



Egypt's Heartland colloquium speakers, participants and friends (left to right): Wouter Claes, Bert Verrept, Will Schenck, Susanne Woodhouse, Renée Friedman, Jordan Miller, Liam McNamara, Ellen Jones, Vivian Davies, Richard Parkinson, Greg Marouard, Paul Wordsworth, Luigi Prada, Aaron de Souza, Adam Grubner, Nadine Moeller, Filiz McNamara, Xavier Droux, and Jim Rossiter (page 14).