Acknowledgments

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Seeking the Roots of Ancient Egypt. A Unique Cemetery Reveals Monuments and Rituals From Before the Pharaohs

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It is a thrilling experience to be excavating in the desert in Egypt and see an object emerge from the sand that is like nothing that has been found before. Such it was in the winter of 1998 when the first part of a pottery face with cut-out eyes seemed to look at us from its ancient resting place. To know that one has instigated the work that leads to such an amazing and unexpected discovery give a sense of awe and amazement that such good fortune should ensue, especially in such a despoiled site. For a moment all the staff were amazed, as were our experienced Egyptian workmen who share in our delight when something interesting is revealed. Then I am told the comment: « My, that's unbelievable, I have never seen anything like it », escaped from my lips. In a day or two, there was another face fragment of another mask staring up at us in another part of the excavation, but we have never become blasé about what this incredible place will reveal next.

The setting for these and the other amazing things we have found and are still trying to understand is a wadi, or dry valley, which leads from the edge of the cultivation alongside the west bank of the Nile river in the south of Egypt into the western desert. It is only 80 kilometres from Luxor to the north and Aswan, the southern border of Egypt, is some 100 km to the south. The area is known by various names in Arabic and earlier languages. Locally one part of it is called the Kom el-Ahmar after the mound of burnt potsherds marking an ancient brewing establishment at the opening of the wadi. The village closest to the agricultural land is called Kom el-Gemuwia and this modern settlement is next to the city of the falcon god Horus known to the ancient Egyptians as the city of Nekhen. This translates into the Greek, Hierakonpolis, the name by which the site is known to modern Egyptologists. And what a huge site it is, as the web page of the Hierakonpolis expedi-

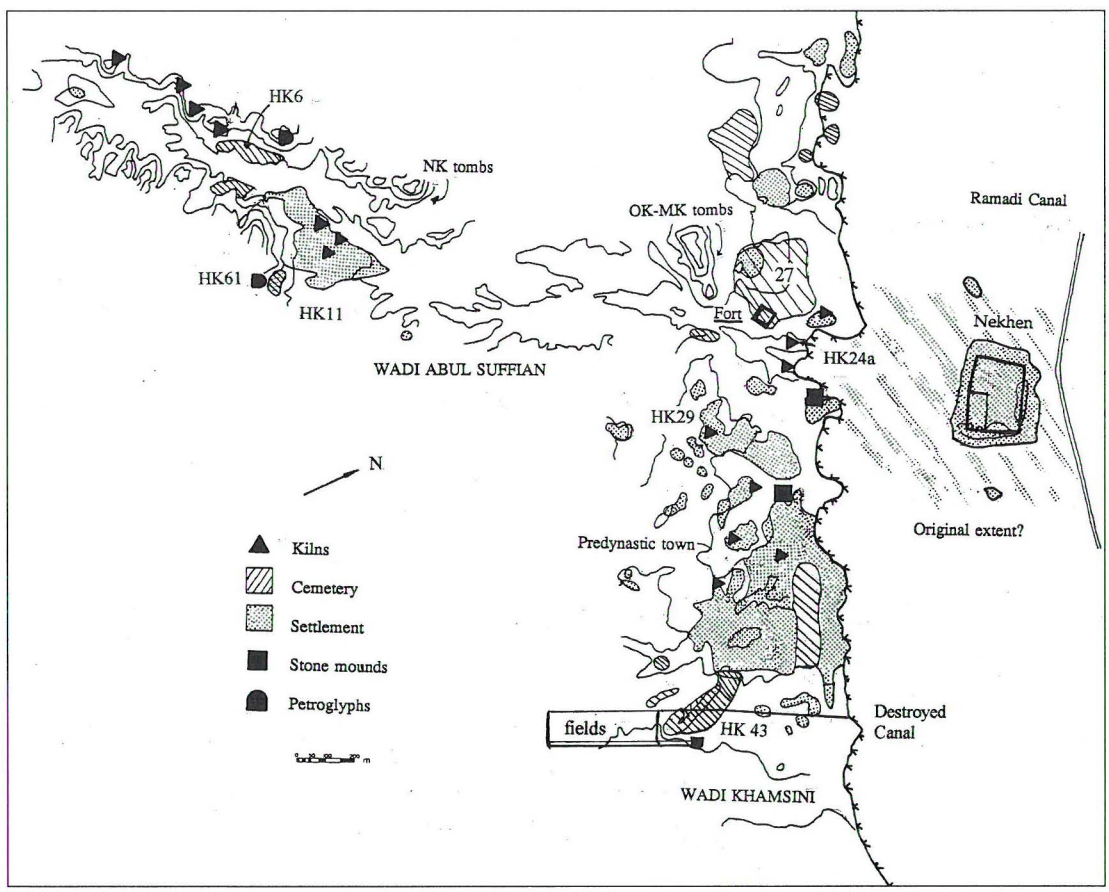
tion (**www.hierakonpolis.org**) announces to the world : it is the largest extant Predynastic site in Egypt, an archaeological concession covering an area of 144 km^2.

To the ancient Egyptians of later times, this was the source of their civilisation – the place from which the Followers of Horus took up arms and conquered the north and drew the country together under one ruler. Throughout history the Souls of Nekhen were shown accompanying the reigning pharaoh as he undertook sacred ceremonies in temples throughout the land. Now, archaeological research is putting the flesh to the bones of these legends in the most spectacular way, providing the solid evidence of a long period of Predynastic development and the first appearance of many classic Egyptian practices at Hierakonpolis.

The development of the modern, multidisciplinary Hierakonpolis Expedition since it was launched in 1967 by Walter A. Fairservis, an American who had previously worked in the Far East, has seen two ladies as the site directors of active fieldwork since 1996. Renée Friedman works in a number of localities in the concession (fig. 1) where spectacular results have been forthcoming, such as the preserved bodies in a Predynastic cemetery near the cultivation, the revelation of the decorated New Kingdom rock cut tombs through a programme of conservation, a habitation complex of the early Predynastic and, most recently, cemeteries dating to the Old Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period and New Kingdom when mercenaries from Nubia lived in Egypt.

My work since 1997 has been concentrated on the cemetery in the great wadi known by its locality number, 6 (fig. 2-3), as are all the sites in the archaeological concession. Although my involvement with Hierakonpolis goes back a very long way, for I began to work on the material from it in 1971 at University College London, my emergence

Fig. 1
Hierakonpolis map.



as a dig director is a late development. It arose, as these things often do, through a mixture of circumstances, one of them a tragedy. For Walter Fairservis had taken a student of anthropology along with him to Hierakonpolis in 1969 called Michael Hoffman, who went on to become the director of work in the desert part of the concession, while Walter concentrated on the city of Nekhen. Michael's innovative work led to his justified fame and laid the basis for a renewed thrust of fieldwork on various Predynastic sites which took place in the Nile valley in the 1980s and 1990s. Both Renée and I are proud to have worked with Michael in various localities at the site and were devastated when he died, all too young, in 1990. It was quite a torch that he left to be picked up and carried on. Part of my burden became the responsibility for the academic publication of Michael's work, most particularly the report on the excavations he undertook in the Locality 6 cemetery in 1979, 1980, 1982 and 1985. When I came to finalise this report, which has just been published, it seemed to me that I would never understand the cemetery properly unless I went back and dug more of it than Michael had been able to investigate whilst he concentrated on his excavation of settlement localities.

The results of his work had established, beyond doubt, that it had been a cemetery for the high status members of society during the Protodynastic phase of Egyptian prehistory, that is a period of about one hundred and fifty years (3200-3050 B.C.) at the end of the Predynastic. This was a time when society was changing and the country was unifying, just before the first dynasty and the historical period. In the relative dating scheme used by most Egyptologists it is termed the Naqada III period. The importance of the cemetery was shown through the excavation of three large, mud brick lined tombs, nos. 1 (L : 8.20 W : 5.40 m), 10 (L : 6.6 W : 3.7 m) and 11 (L : 5.7 W : 3.0 D : 2.0 m) at the north end of the Locality 6 Cemetery, all of which had been robbed in antiquity. Fortunately the excavation of one

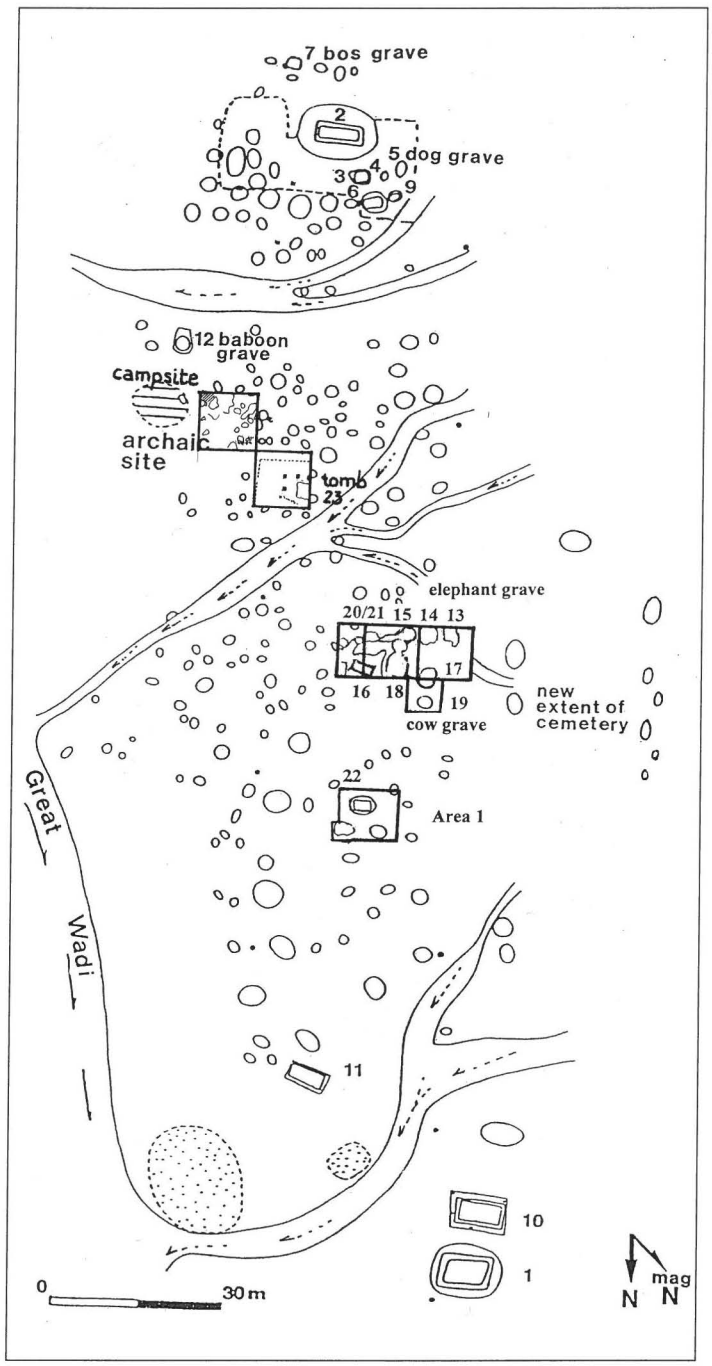


Fig. 2
Locality 6 Map.

of them, Tomb 11, produced spectacular objects from the fill and the area around the tomb which included a wooden bed with carved bulls' legs, lapis lazuli amulets of flies and shells, silver, gold, garnet, turquoise and carnelian beads, obsidian and crystal blades, ivory carvings of bulls' legs and other decorative devices, stone vessels in material such as calcite and basalt and stone and ceramic models of animals, par-

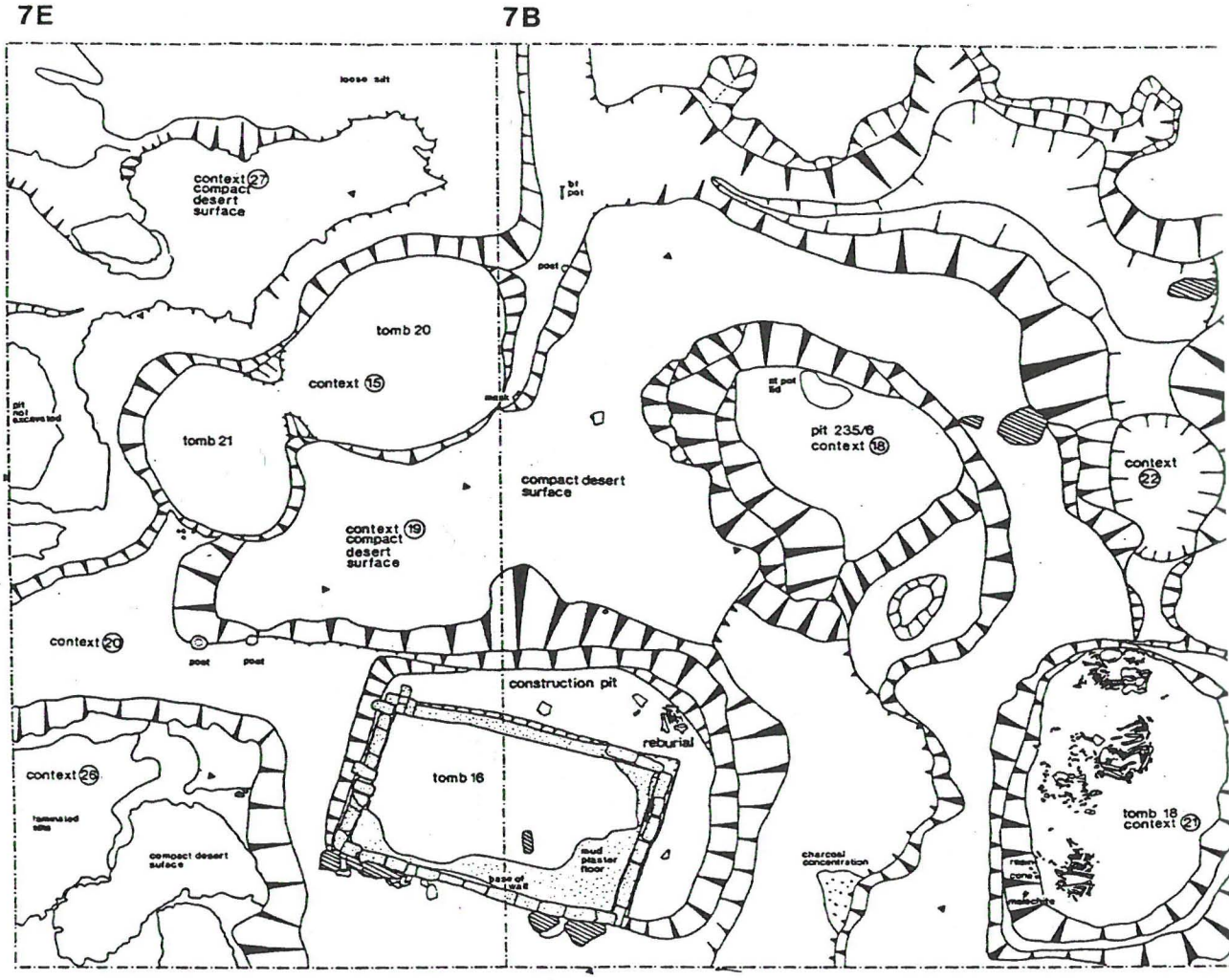
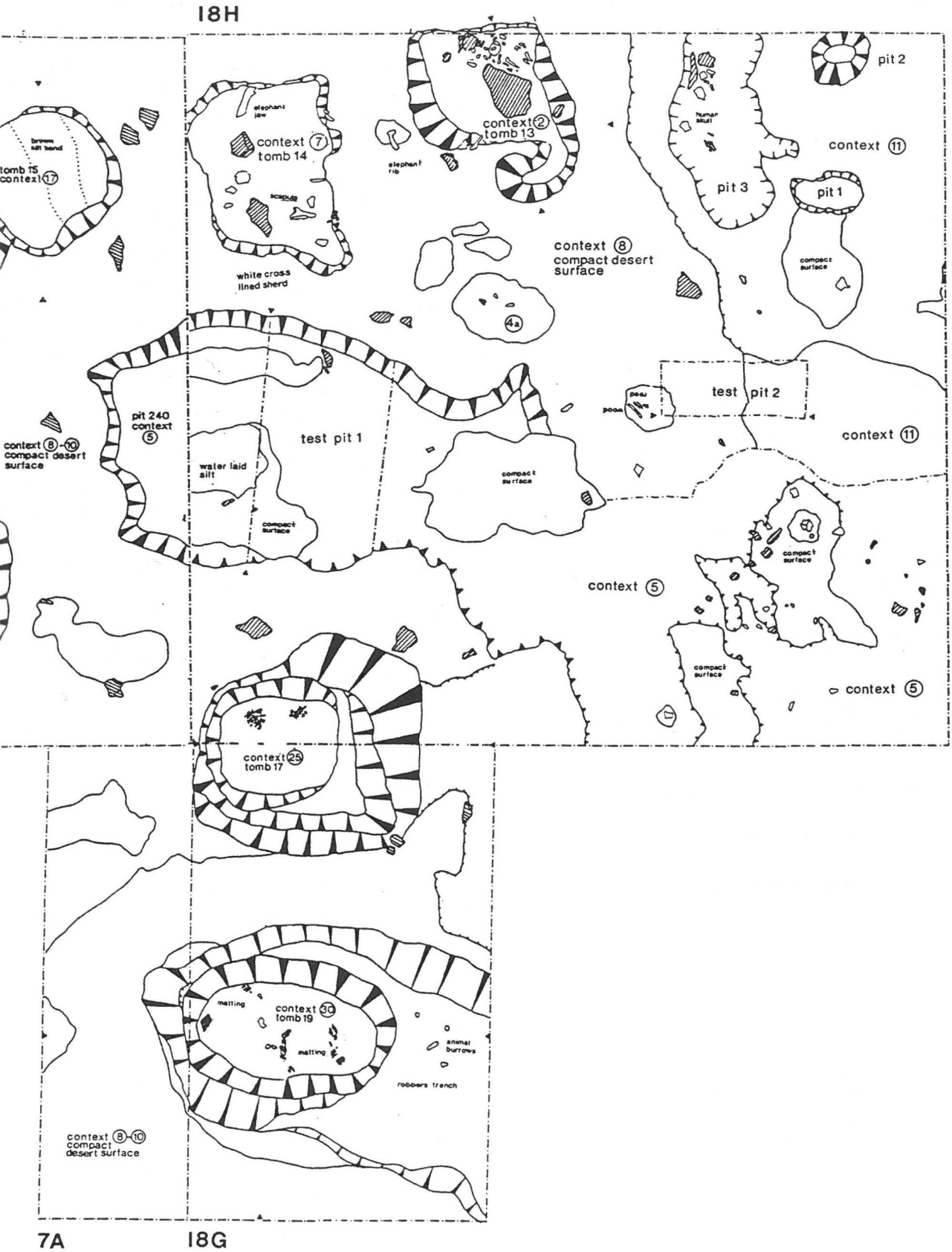


Fig. 3
Locality 6,
detail of the central part
of the cemetery
(tombs 13, 14, 15, 16,
18, 19, 20/21).


18H
tomb 15
context 17
elephant jaw
context 7
tomb 14
scapula
white cross lined sherd
elephant rib
context 2
tomb 13
human skull
pit 2
context 11
pit 3
pit 1
context 8
compact desert surface
compact surface
4a
test pit 2
pea
pea
context 11
pit 240
context 5
test pit 1
water laid silt
compact surface
context 8-10
compact desert surface
compact surface
compact surface
context 5
compact surface
context 5
context 25
tomb 17
matting
context 30
tomb 19
matting
animal burrows
robbers trench
context 8-10
compact desert surface
7A
18G

ticularly bovines. This industry saw not only the use of native Egyptian raw materials, but also the utilisation of those imported from a long distance. The silver probably came from Syria and the lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, the obsidian was imported from Ethiopia, the basalt came from an outflow near Cairo and the gold and turquoise from the eastern desert, or even Sinai. This is an indication, not only of the wealth of the ruling members of the society, but also of their trading capacity and desire for luxury imported objects. There were also numerous pottery sherds, many of which could be restored into fine vessels. The analysis of the human bones found in the tomb, plus the indirect evidence of the bed and the models that seemed more like toys than votive objects, showed that the occupant of the tomb had been a child of about 11-12 years of age. It is not unknown in stratified societies, which by this time the population at Hierakonpolis had become, for rich graves to be devoted to children.

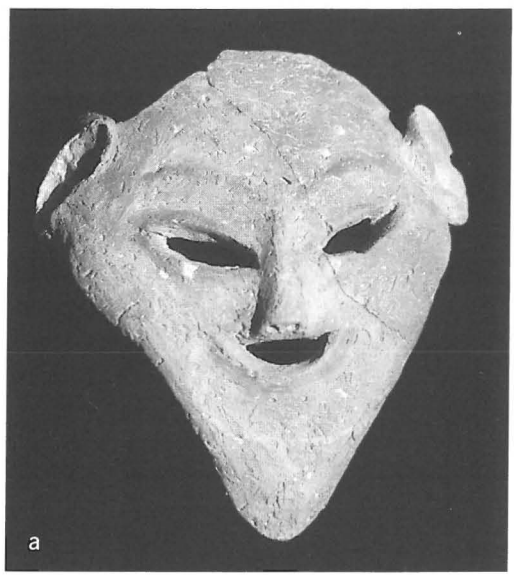
There was also some indication that the cemetery had been used for the burial of important individuals in earlier Predynastic times. Michael excavated three graves which can be dated to the Naqada IC-IIA period (c.3700-3600 B.C.) by the pottery they contained. Because of the size (L : 2.36 W : 2.60 D : 1.80 m.) and contents of one of them, Tomb 3, he suggested that this south section of the Locality 6 cemetery had been the burial place of important chieftains, or « Pottery Barons », as he dubbed them. It has to be admitted that this was a somewhat presumptuous assumption based on such limited excavation of a cemetery that is approximately 220 m. long and 90 m. wide, but one that is now being reinforced by recent finds. The date of the graves at each end of the cemetery and the limited excavation at the north and south led him to state that it had been abandoned during the late Predynastic period after Naqada IIB through Naqada IIC- Naqada IID (c.3500-3200 B.C.), after which use was then resumed with the building of the large, mud brick lined tombs of Naqada III.

Michael also made much of the fact that the Locality 6 cemetery is unique among Predynastic cemeteries in one respect because it contains the dedicated burials of various animals. At the south end of the cemetery there is a rectangular tomb (n° 2) with a side chamber cut into the sandstone bedrock that can probably be dated to the Protodynastic period by its size and comparison with tombs in elite cemeteries in Lower Nubia. On its southern side Michael excavated a grave which contained the skeletal remains of three bovines, which had been treated as human internments, packed with resin and covered with matting. As the cemeteries in Nubia are known for cattle burials, a sign of wealth and status, he dated the bovid grave to the Protodynastic period, contemporary with Tomb 2. But on the north side of Tomb 2, in association with the Naqada IC-IIA Tombs 3, 6 and 9 he found a dog grave (Tomb 5) also dating, by association with Tomb 3, to that time. Some distance to the north he also found the grave (n° 12) of four baboons, which he associated, erroneously I think, with a Protodynastic (Naqada III) faunal cemetery with its hub at Tomb 2. Surface finds of exotic animals, such as giraffe, elephant and crocodile, in this south part of the cemetery reinforced his concept of a symbolic microcosm of Upper Egypt just before the time of the unification.

Thus, when I took a small expedition back to the Locality 6 Cemetery in 1997, courtesy of research grants from the British Academy and the Institute of Archaeology, there were certain chronological and spatial distribution questions to resolve. The first was to ascertain whether the period of disuse was real, or if the excavation of more graves would reveal the elusive late Gerzean or Naqada II period in the burial ground. The second was to elucidate the date of the faunal graves because a small quantity of pottery sherds that had come to light from Tomb 12, the baboon grave, indicated that it was Naqada IIA in date and not Naqada III, as had been suggested. This led me to the suspicion that the animal burials

actually dated to the early Predynastic and that they were not associated with the larger Protodynastic tombs.

Now four seasons of work have been completed, each producing more spectacular results than the last, that enable us to state that the cemetery was indeed important, particular and original in the Early and Middle Predynastic. We are showing that it was this early period that probably laid the fundamentals of later funerary practices, leading to the memory of the Souls of Nekhen. Given that burial practices are accepted as a reflection of the structure of society, they provide the undertow to the development of Egyptian hierarchical system in which power stemmed from the foremost person of the king.



And what of the masks ? They are still somewhat of an enigma, but now they are not quite so unique, because fragments of four of them have now been found suggesting that, even if not known in other cemeteries, they were a regular feature of the ritual here (fig. 4a-c). The first fragment of the bearded mask, the right side of the face, was found in what was identified as a robbers' trench in 1998 alongside the immense cavity that was cut for the insertion of a mud brick Naqada III tomb (n° 16) in the south central part of the cemetery. With it there were a few potsherds and a modelled, hollow pottery breast with a flattened rim where it had been attached to a vessel, or a figure ; another strange piece that we have not been able to explain.

At the time of its discovery, the mask had no clear archaeological association and I suspected that it might have been thrown out of Tomb 16, as much else was, and therefore might be dated to the Protodynastic (Naqada III) period. This possibility was reinforced by the fact that I discovered the worn right ear of the mask among the copious number of pottery sherds that came out of

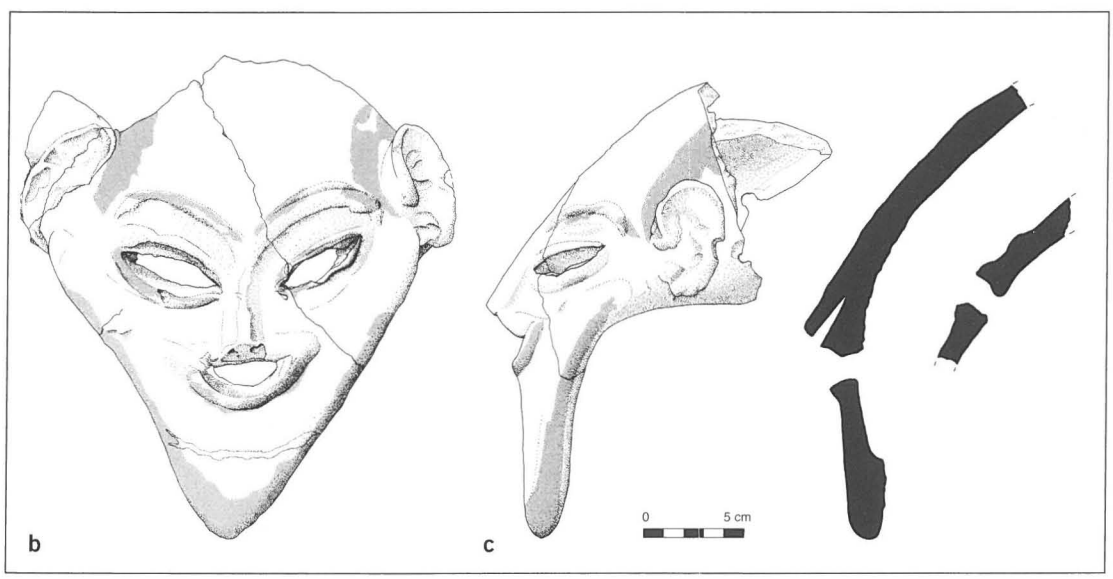
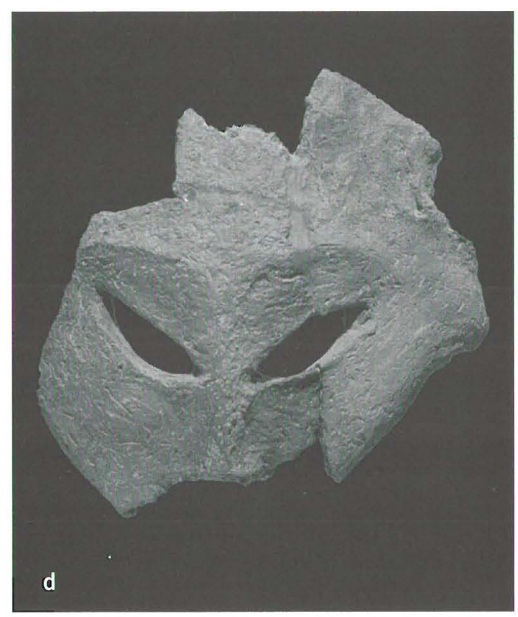


Fig. 4a-c
Bearded pottery mask (tomb 18).

the fill of Tomb 16. There is limited evidence on stone palettes and bone and ivory labels depicting various scenes that masks were worn in ceremonies at that time. Further consideration and a search for parallels among the tag and tusk figures and combs decorated with human heads of Naqada IIB and IICD, which often have faces with beards or pointed chins, led me to wonder if the bearded mask could be earlier. Fortunately, further excavation north of Tomb 16 in 1999, a season funded by the National Geographic Society, revealed that the « trench » was actually a large grave (n° 18) dating to Naqada IIAB. The third fragment of the bearded mask, which includes the left ear, was found in the upper part of the grave and fitted the first two pieces precisely. The mask is still not complete because the top and back of the head are missing, but the perforations behind each ear show that it was meant to be tied to a human face and the interior has a depression where a chin can be precisely fitted. In addition, the eye holes in the mask provides true stereoscopic vision, neither the sharply modelled nose nor any other part of the mask obscures the wearers' ability to see 180° three-dimensionally. The details of the hair, beard, eyebrows, eyes and mouth painted on the surface of the straw tempered pottery in plum red paint with a white band across the face at chin level add terrific character and life, which changes according to variations in the light. The small, almost pinhole, nostrils imbue a sense of animation, as if they have taken up the « breath of life ».

The second mask (fig. 4d-f) is also made up of fragments found in 1998 and in 1999. In this case, the first fragment was found at the south end of a robbers' trench, and then two other fragments were found in the fill of Tomb 16 and in Tombs 20/21, which date to Naqada IC-IIA. This mask was an amazing sight to see as it came face up out of the ground, so other unexpected and other worldly is it with its accentuated, inwardly sloping, cut-out eyes and an aquiline nose. There were two wooden posts *in situ* quite near the first fragment, which was found with a cut tuft of twisted hair. The second two fragments, which add the curve of the forehead and the ear on the left side make the mask seem less symmetrical. The upper part of the mouth cut is still intact and, from the curve of the sides of the face, and by analogy with the second mask, the jaw could have tapered to a point, although the impression that this mask gives is more female than male.

The context of these masks in the first area of our excavation approximately in the centre of the cemetery is in association with an area containing a number of early tombs into which the aforementioned mud brick Tomb 16 had been inserted some two or three hundred years later. The pit that surrounded this tomb was filled with a large number of mixed pottery vessels that dated to Naqada I, early Naqada II and Naqada III. It seems that the builders of Tomb 16 cut into the earlier graves and then retained their contents, which were then muddled with the pottery vessels originally placed in Tomb 16 that had been thrown out by robbers. In was in this robbing process that not only the vessels, but also the mask fragments had become mixed with the pottery fragments. Fortunately, the complexity of these events, which clearly



showed there had been a chronological hiatus, provides a microcosm in a relatively small area of 50 sq. m. for what happened in the cemetery and a convenient division of the graves by date and type.

The first graves dated to Naqada IC-IIA, the last part of the Amratian period, are small and circular. They contained red polished pottery bottles, fine black-topped red polished pottery jars, white crossed-line pottery bowls, an early type of red polished pottery with white painted designs, sherds of the early local grit-tempered domestic ware pottery and fine bifacial arrowheads. Few, if any, human bones remain in them. The graves of Naqada IIAB are larger and more rectangular, like Tomb 3, and a preponderance of fine, black topped red polished vessels and straw tempered pottery jars, which superseded the grit-tempered ware used in Naqada I, were deposited in them.
The largest grave of Naqada IIAB in this part of the cemetery is the aforementioned Tomb 18 (L : 3.45 W : 2.44 D : 1.15 m), which not only produced the third fragment of the bearded mask, but also the charming head of a straw tempered pottery cow modelled with a flat base at the neck, as if it had been applied to a vessel (fig. 5). Its head would have tilted down horizontally when in position with the horns extended horizontally. It has white pigment filled depressions that make it look slightly cross-eyed and a snout that looks like the stem of a bucranium (cow's head) amulet. The tips of its horns are broken off. Excavation of this grave revealed, for the first time in this looted cemetery, four recognisable human skeletons at the base on the east side. The upper parts of the bodies were disturbed with bones missing, but they could be discerned as crouched burials facing south. Three were alongside each other with their legs aligned and their knees fitting into the body in front. The last body of a female in the southeast corner of the grave may have been the last to be interred and her feet lay over the body behind. She still had the rest of her leg bones, the pelvis, the spinal column, ribs, scapula and the neck with part of the jaw and traces of the back of the head resting on the remains of a reed mat. She made a wonderful composition in the bottom of the grave and there were four polished red pottery bowls in the side of the pit in front of her face.

Tomb 16 proved to be a rectangular tomb lined with a single thickness mud brick wall with external dimensions of L : 2.97 W : 1.89 m and an internal height of 1.21 m constructed within the purpose dug pit which had cut through the earlier graves.

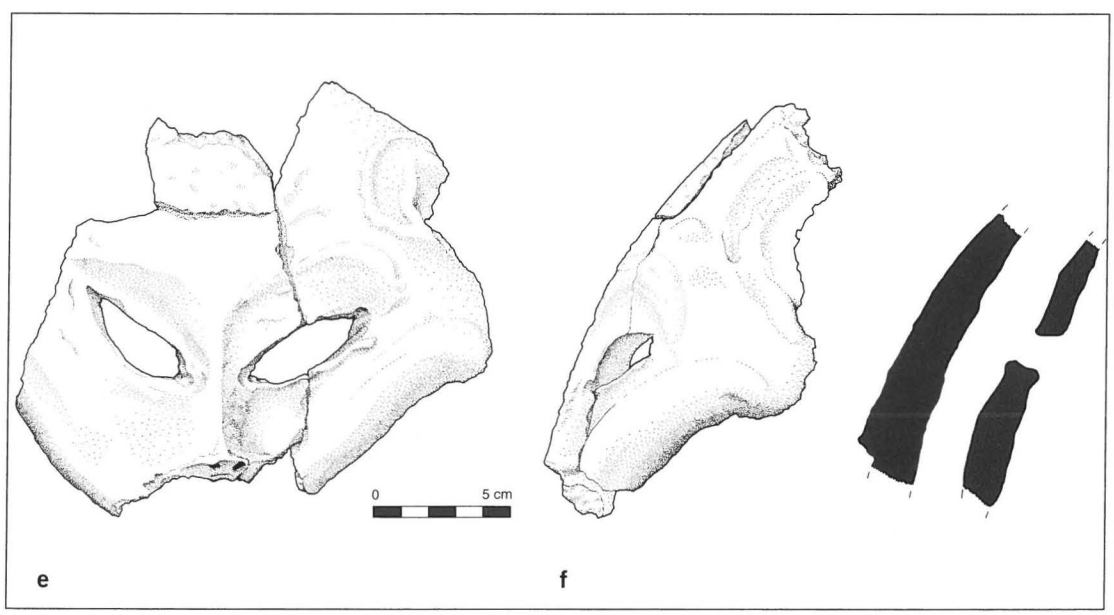


Fig. 4d-f
Bearded pottery mask (tombs 16, 20/21).

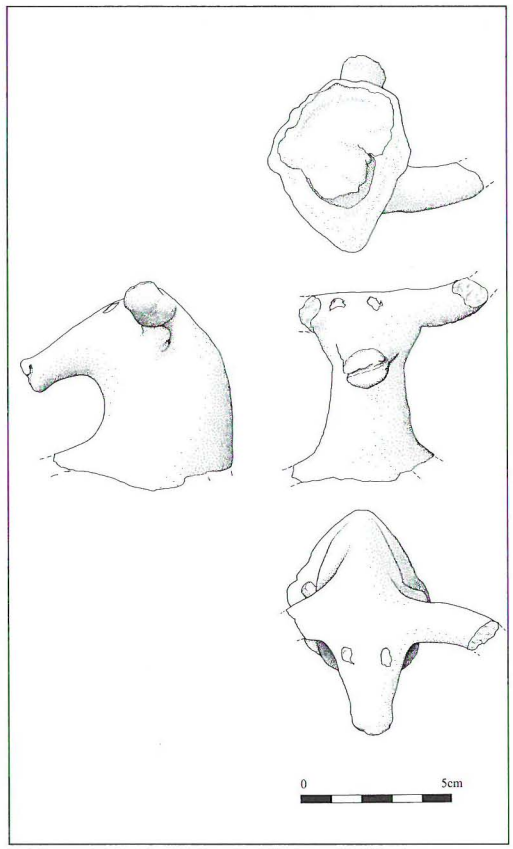


Fig. 5
Pottery cow (tomb 18).

The north wall of the tomb abuts the edge of the construction pit and the bricks are laid parallel to the wall with a full Dutch bond and all the walls are cross-bonded at the corners with overlap. The interior of the tomb is mud plastered, between 0.5 –1.0 cm thick, and the floor was originally mud plastered, only traces of which survive in the northeast and northwest corners. There is evidence on the top of the east and south walls of a mud brick cap, which overhangs the edge of the tomb by half a brick. In the centre top of the east wall there is a pair of small depressions that possibly represent a point where a longitudinal roof beam ran the length of the tomb, which was added when the mud plaster was still damp. The charcoal retrieved from the overburden and construction pit of Tomb 16 suggest that a large quantity of timber was slowly burnt in this area. The burning of the roof timbers while buried would produce just such taphonomic conditions, but there are no rubified bricks at the top of the tomb walls. Samples of the charcoal have been identified by Ahmed Fahmy, our botanist, for the first time at Hierakonpolis, as cedar wood imported from the Lebanon. The imported cedar wood reinforces the social status of the occupants of these graves who could acquire such luxury items for funerary use. A cluster of human bones from a single individual was found in the southwest corner of the construction pit, including some of the vertebral column still in anatomical position, suggest that they were reburied in the fill when Tomb 16 was constructed.

Whilst the purpose of the masks and the reason for the burial of four bodies in Tomb 18 remain obscure, an important clarification of burial practice has resulted from the excavation of this part of the cemetery. When excavation was resumed in 1997, work was started in the west of the cemetery, approximately 90 meters north of the stone cut Tomb 2, which contained a line of three grave depressions according to the (1980) map. The expedition that year was run with reduced personnel due to the massacre of tourists that had taken place in Luxor in early November, so work proceeded slowly.

Then, when time seemed short and results rather depressing, it began to get interesting. It had been noted that the pit, which became Tomb 14, had a spread of animal bone over its north west corner, which, because of its large size, was tentatively noted as *Bos* (cattle). Another bone scatter to the south of the pit was labelled dog, an identification confirmed by the discovery of over forty claw cores. Finally, the long bones of at least seven domesticated dogs were identified together with skull, jaw and teeth fragments, vertebrae and foot bones, as well as the aforementioned claws. Human bone was found under the animal bone in the spoil, associated with scraps of linen, resin and string, as if it had been thrown out from the grave pit first. The bones within Tomb 13 proved to be a mixture of human and dog and the few pottery sherds found *in situ* are Naqada IC-IIA.

Early on during the clearance of the bones in the spoil on the north edge of Tomb 14, flakes of ivory were noted and many further fragments continued to come out of the fill, finally constituting a small, round straight tusk. The right side of a large lower jaw lacking teeth, with tooth sockets uncha-racteristic of cattle, was found in the south end of the grave, so the original identification of *Bos* (although there was some of that too) was amended to elephant. A rim fragment of a white cross-lined pottery bowl came out of the north end of the grave, which, together with the few other sherds of black-topped jars, polished red bowls and shale and calcite tempered sherds found in it, dates the burial to Naqada IC. The discovery of the early white crossed-lined sherd in an archaeological context, rather than as a surface find, was a first for the expedition.

The identification of a juvenile savanna elephant, *Loxodonta africana,* was confirmed from photographs by Adrian Lister and Paul Davies of the Biology Department, University College London. Tusk, skull, the right side of the jaw, vertebrae, foot bones, ribs, pelvis and scapula, numerous fragments of long bones, a quantity of unfused epiphyses of the large animal and tooth plates were sorted from the surface contexts and the fill of Tomb 14. Andy Currant of the Natural History Museum, London estimated the age of the young elephant at approximately 10 years. Since then our zoologist, Sylvia Warman, has worked through the animal bones excavated in 1997-1999 on site and confirmed the identifications. Elephant teeth migrate from the back to the front (deciduous) of the mandible through six sets, and are used to age the animal. Our baby has both erupted and worn teeth and tooth buds, like mittens, which were still hidden in the jaw waiting to emerge when it died. Unlike the hippopotamus, there are no teeth on the front of the mandible (lower jaw) in the elephant, which is broken away on the specimen from Tomb 14. The tusks descend from the upper jaw (maxilla) and Sylvia was able to identify the sockets into which the small tusks conserved by Richard Jaeschke could be fitted.

Apart from the fragments picked up by Michael Hoffman on the surface of Locality 6 in 1982, which came from another suspected elephant grave in the south part of the cemetery, not far from where we are now working, specimens of the African elephant are unknown from Predynastic sites in Egypt, so this is a very special find. Some supposedly Neolithic elephants discovered in the western desert have been shown to be reworked remnants from Middle Palaeolithic sites, but elephants have been found in Neolithic contexts in the Fayum and the Dakhla oases. In 1934 Gertrude Caton Thompson excavated the skeleton of an elephant at Site K on the shore-line of the Fayum lake with a concave based arrowhead lodged in its bones, but could not accept that such a weapon could have killed it without poison. Recent experiments in America have shown that mammoths could have been hunted with fulsom flint points, the spear heads used by native Americans, but these are of course bigger than arrowheads. One of the surface finds from near the elephant grave was a concave based flint arrowhead, which adds a little intrigue to this story.

As to contemporary depictions of the elephant, the closest geographically is the small graffito of an elephant carved into the rock in the gebel hills northeast of the Locality 6 cemetery. Unfortunately, the date of this rendering is not known and it could predate the use of this area of the great wadi as a seasonal settlement and cemetery during Naqada I-II. The Subpluvial II phase or Neolithic moist interval replaced arid conditions around 7000 B.C. and the pictographs in the Libyan and eastern deserts (including our « local » Wadi Baramiya) depict giraffe, elephant and ostriches which favour a savanna or parkland environment and avoid dryer steppes. Their disappearance from the record on the rocks at the end of Naqada I

around 3500 B.C. led Karl Butzer to suggest that there had been a temporary climatic change to less rainfall.

Various other authors have presumed from the depictions known on artefacts such as pottery vessels and slate palettes that the elephant was still living in Egypt during Naqada I (c.3800-3500 B.C.), but had been hunted to extinction by Naqada II (c.3500-3200 B.C.), which corroborates the petroglyphic record. On investigation of these pre-disappearance early depictions, it seems that few of them derive from excavated contexts. The only free-standing model known comes from the Naqada I-II settlement at the desert edge at Hierakonpolis excavated by Henri de Morgan in 1912 and it is now in the Brooklyn Museum, New York (09.889. 325). It is a crude pottery figure (H : 4.5 L : 5.8 cm) with a stumpy trunk and relatively small ears and may suggest that the animal was commonplace enough to have been modelled as a toy, or indicate that it was in some way domesticated. The only depiction on a Naqada IICD artefact is on a decorated pot from grave 454 at Naqada (Ashmolean 1895.584).

So, with uncanny luck, or shrewd judgment, we had not only discovered the grave of a very exotic animal that was probably buried at a time when its species was becoming extinct in the Egyptian Nile valley, but also established that the faunal graves in the Locality 6 cemetery can date to Naqada I. But, a further discovery of a similar kind awaited us in 1999 when another grave dating to Naqada IIAB was excavated to the west of Tomb 18. A large cow jaw was found on the north side of Tomb 19 with resin impregnating some of the tooth sockets. The residual organic matter, including reeds, indicated that this animal had been covered by a mat in the grave. Ahmed Fahmy, identified the matting over the animal bones as *Juncus* reed (a Nile plant), adding further evidence to the observation that the creature was accorded a human-style burial. The grave produced a large quantity of *Bos* bones which comprise an almost complete skeleton. Although not fully grown these bones are very large, the femur being five times the size of the normal domestic cow, and may well represent the remains of an aurochs, (*Bos primigenius)* a pre-domesticate. Not only further fragments of cow bone, but pieces with resin and matting attached, such as ribs, were found in the fill of the grave, as well as fragments of reed matting and scraps of a linen bag. Fragments indicate a multi-layered bier, consisting of a wood substrate with plaster and reed impressed into it was placed under the cow's body at the base of the grave (L : 2.96 W : 1.97 D : 1.40 m). Apart from black-topped red and straw tempered pottery sherds that date the grave to Naqada IC -IIA, the upper part of a red painted pottery human figurine was also found in Tomb 19.

Animals also feature particularly as another type of artefact which is characteristic of the Locality 6 cemetery, namely the fine bifacial carvings of animals in chert which have been found in surface contexts. As a site, Hierakonpolis is particularly blessed with these fine objects, which are frequent in museum collections from unknown provenances. Three intact examples have now been found in the cemetery. The first was a hippopotamus found by Michael Hoffman on the surface not far from Tomb 1. The second is the head and neck of a giraffe (fig. 6) that we found just to the south of Tomb 20/21 in 1999. The third is an ibex (fig. 7a-b) with curved back horn(s) that was a surface find to the east of Tomb 23 in 2000. Although the grave robbing is the norm rather than the exception here, the fact that these carvings and other fine bifacial knives and fragments are most often found as surface discoveries that can not be associated with graves suggests that they might have been used in the ceremonies which took place in the cemetery, rather than having been placed in the graves as funerary offerings. This interpretation will be touched on further in the consideration of the special nature of the discoveries of the 2000 season.

A small excavation some 30 m north of the centre in 1999 had shown that the northern part of the cemetery, where the large craters marking the large mud brick lined graves are located, has suffered the most from the deprivations of robbers. An interesting, but almost completely robbed out mud brick lined grave dating to Naqada III was cleared, but there were very few artefacts left *in situ* and only scanty bone remains of one human adult. Tomb 22, which almost exactly fits a sub-rectangular hole (L : 3.28 W : 2.18 m) cut into the deposits in the wadi floor. The maximum height of the remaining mud brick wall is 1.53 m on the north side. The wall is two courses thick, and where the bonding pattern could be ascertained on the east wall it forms a not entirely consistent run of headers in groups interspersed with stretchers. The construction of the tomb shows some other interesting architectural details because neither the southwest nor the northeast corners were bonded. The west wall butts the south wall and the north wall butts the east wall. There is a discernible change in the alignment of the mud brick courses at the southeast corner which may mean that the builders decided to shorten the tomb, or that the south and north walls were constructed by a different work gang who failed to locate them correctly in relation to each other; the tomb is particularly narrow. The interior of Tomb 22 is coated with white mud plaster, which is well preserved on the west wall. Knowing of the famous Naqada IIC decorated tomb found in a cemetery near the cultivation at Hierakonpolis in 1899, where a scene of boats, men and animals was painted in red, yellow, white, black and green on the plastered walls, a discovery never repeated, anticipation ran high as Tomb 22 was excavated. As the chamber was cleared down to its base we revealed a perfectly level line scored into the mud plaster around all four walls 0.25 –

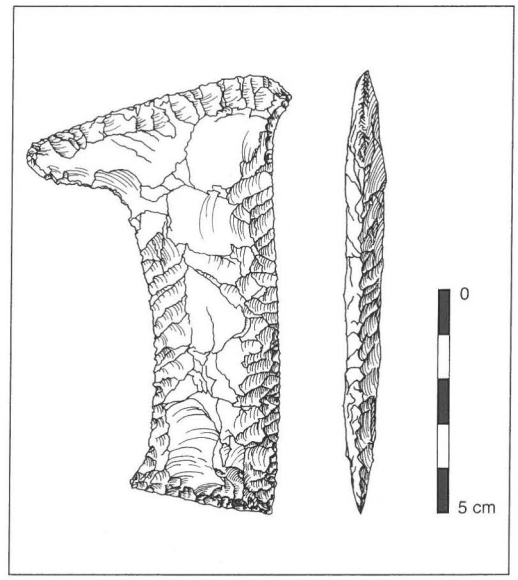


Fig. 6
Chert giraffe (surface 7E).

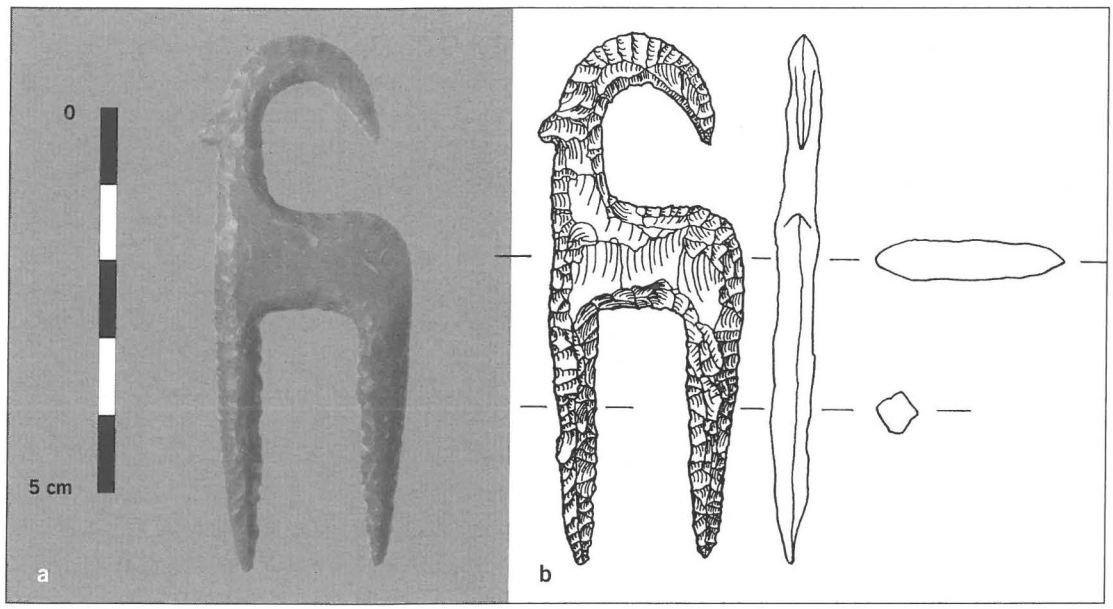


Fig. 7a-b
Chert ibex (surface East of tomb 23).

0.30 m above the base of the tomb before they were coated in white, perhaps as a guideline for a decorative border for a plastered tomb that was, alas, never painted with a scene or design.

Overall the result of the 1997, 1998 and 1999 seasons showed that, in a relatively small area in the centre of the cemetery there are separate and possibly mixed graves of humans and animals dating to Naqada I, an individual early Naqada II animal grave and a much larger human grave dating to Naqada III. Flushed with the success of finding graves with a relative abundance of skeletal remains in this plundered cemetery, another season was planned for 2000, funded by the British Academy and the Institute of Archaeology, with the aim of discovering more such Naqada I and II graves in the southern part of the cemetery. This follows the logic that the cemetery may have grown from this point and then extended to the north where the Naqada III tombs are concentrated, and our work has shown that these later tombs cut into earlier graves in the centre. If successful, we would add to the meagre corpus of human remains from this cemetery and provide skeletal material from an elite population to compare with the working class people that Renée Friedman has found in the contemporary Hk43 Predynastic cemetery on the south edge of the concession near the cultivation.

Once again we took recourse to the site map produced by Carter Lupton for Michael Hoffman in 1980 which is now affectionately termed the « potato map » because it plots the abundant oval craters which can be observed all over the surface of the cemetery. Those suspected to be graves by a surface scatter of bones and sometimes artefacts were kept in the final version of the map, published in 1982. Our excavation has shown that these ovals do not always turn out to be graves. One of them which was clearly marked on the map turned out to be a depression with a fill of laminated silts and others were subsumed into the robbers' trenches which wound between graves. The basis for the selection of the squares to be excavated in 2000 was the map combined with surface observation. From this we expected that the square which was furthest south would be disturbed by a later Early Dynastic camp site, which indeed prove to be the case, but might retain a few small, Naqada I or II graves. In the square to the north diagonal we presumed that the largest depression would reveal a large grave, which it did, dating to Naqada III, which it did not, and that other ovals would again prove to be the small graves containing the human or animal burials we were looking for, which they did not.

Remarkably, the 2000 season, fitting the millennium and my twentieth year working at the site of Hierakonpolis, produced results that we could not have guessed at. We began work in an area that Michael had identified as an Archaic campsite where copious quantities of pottery sherds were lifted. These proved to be parts of rough Nile silt pottery beer jars and bread moulds, as well as other Early Dynastic vessels and a few fragments of fenestrated straw tempered cylinder jars, possibly dating to Naqada III. At least three sequential charcoal hearths were found, located almost in the same spot, but used at different times. The only flint sickle blade ever found in this cemetery was discovered in a sub-stratum of the hearth consisting of several hearth stones, thus emphasising its settlement, rather than funerary, character. Analysis of the campsite pottery, which includes beer jars datable to the reign of Qa'a, the last king of the first dynasty (2890 BC), and part of an orange streak-burnished pottery bowl, confirmed the date that Michael had anticipated.

In contrast, the surface finds to the northwest and southwest, such as flint hollow based arrowheads, bifacial flint point fragments, a complete bifacial fishtail knife, ostrich egg fragments and porphyry mace head fragments, date to Naqada IC-IIA.

Further investigation revealed a number of pits, some of which had been marked as grave ovals on the site map, and none of them are convincingly graves. The pits on the southwest had six wooden posts associated with them and those on the northwest had ten, making sixteen posts in all. The posts had been set in white sand that could be differentiated from the surrounding yellow silt and gravel and formed an east west line. We then concentrated on the excavation of the large tomb and the area around it.

From previous experience, I expected this to be a mud brick lined Naqada III grave that had cut into earlier Naqada I and II graves. When half of Tomb 23 was excavated however, there was nothing in or near it that could be dated to that time and it was devoid of a mud brick lining. All the pottery sherds and other artefacts date to the middle Predynastic, Naqada IIAB in the relative dating scheme, or about 3600-3500 B.C., and what artefacts they are. The first, large greywacke cosmetic palette with a bird-head decoration found in the cemetery, fine bifacial flint arrowheads, calcite and limestone scorpion amulets, part of a modelled pottery cow bed and very fine black topped red, intact pottery vessels. Not only the remaining objects are special, but also the size of Tomb 23 is unprecedented for its date. Only half of Tomb 23 has been excavated so far, but its width of 3.10m and depth of 1.20m exceeds that of any known grave of its date from Egypt. Judging by the surface crater of the unexcavated half of Tomb 23 it will be at least 5m long. Before this, large rectangular tombs were only known from the following Naqada IIC period in the decorated tomb cemetery at Hierakonpolis, where Tomb 100, the decorated tomb itself, was L : 4.5 x W : 2 x D : 1.5 m and Cemetery T at Naqada, where Tomb T5 was L : 4 x W : 2.80 m. Three large wooden posts were found outside Tomb 23 set close to its south and east side which presumably were the supports for a superstructure raised over the tomb cavity.

But these massive posts were not all the structural treasures around Tomb 23. The amazing revelation, never observed at another site, is that this Naqada IIAB tomb is set in the earliest funerary complex yet discovered. Excavation southeast and northeast of Tomb 23 (fig. 8) revealed trenches in which a line of evenly spaced wooden posts were set forming a large enclosure some 2.70 m from the south side of the tomb and 6.60 m from its east side. Its longest extant section is 9 m running from the east baulk, where the trench cut for the posts is clearly visible, to the west alongside and beyond the south side of the tomb. It then turns the corner and runs on the east side of the enclosure where it was burnt, most probably in antiquity, into the north baulk of the square. The plan of this larger enclosure suggests that its long east west line on the north side will be found running about half a metre into the square to the north. The entire enclosure will be at least 9 m wide and probably 18 or 20 m long, forming a large rectangle around Tomb 23.

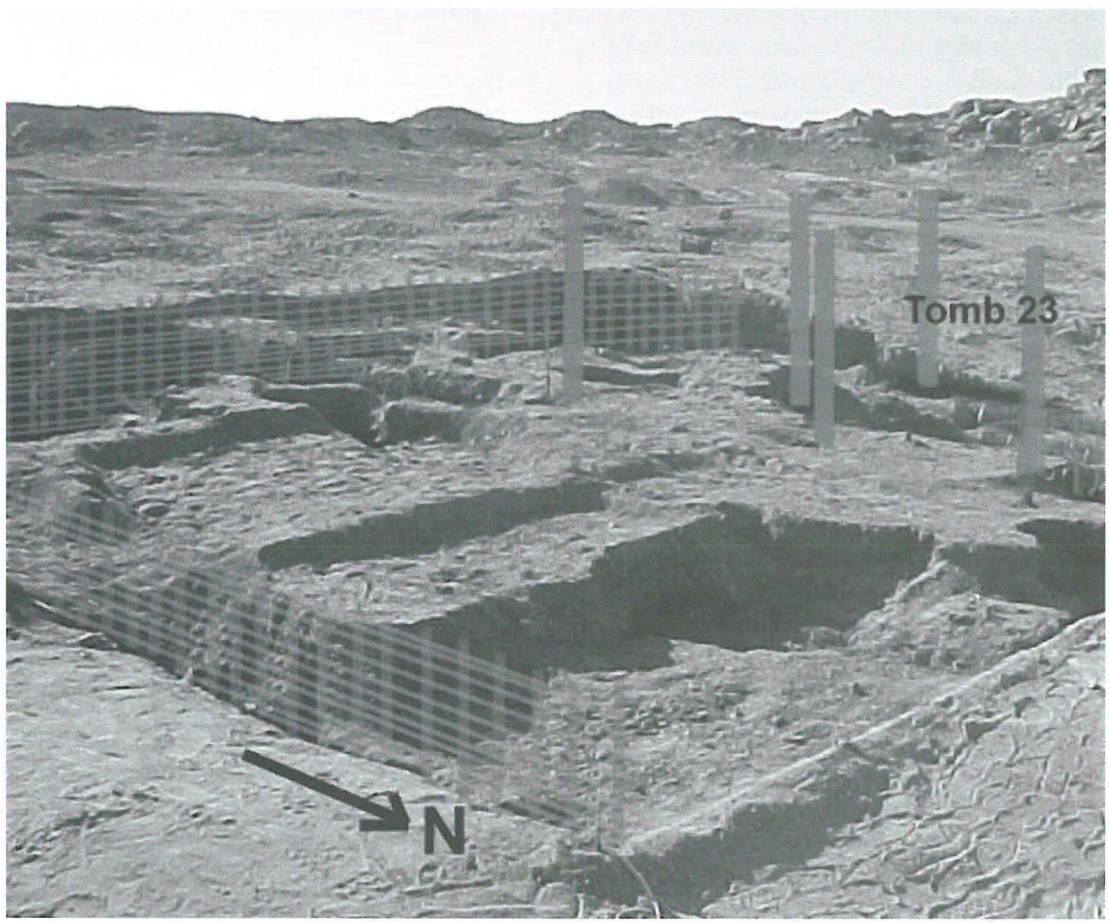
The preservation of the smaller posts forming this outer enclosure is good, and posts in the same spot at different levels indicate that it may have been repaired. One of the posts was still 56 cm high and their depths varied according to whether they were struck down onto the hard desert floor or into softer sediments. Certain sections of the fence retained fragments of the twigs and the matting that formed the wattle that was attached to it. Ahmed Fahmy has identified the posts as *Acacia* sp. with two posts identified as *Acacia raddiana* and another as *Acacia* cf. *nilotica* and the matting as *Juncus* and *Phragmites australis*, all native Egyptian trees and reeds. We noted an amount of what at first seemed to be modern contamination by robbers in the form of locusts, rodent bones, hair, feathers, straw, basketry and paper fragments and a cigarette butt in sections near to the wooden posts. Much debate raged among the staff as to whether we had found an unrecorded British latrine cut dating to the late 1890s before these deposits proved to

be natural disturbance due to animal and insect burrowing to get at the preserved wood during which the intrusive material had been taken down to lower levels.

It can be seen that the puzzling posts that we found in the square to the south diagonal could well be part of an even bigger enclosure surrounding the one we have found around Tomb 23. Relating this discovery to the unexcavated pits marked on the potato map it is possible that the post line could continue along the south side to the west. As excavation ended in december 2000, a further line of fourteen small wooden posts, which slope in a southwest direction towards the tomb cut, was excavated on the northeast side of Tomb 23. Michael Hoffman showed that the entrances to the post and wattle structures around the large, mud brick lined Naqada III tombs in this cemetery were located on the northeastern side of the tombs and it is also the situation of the entrance to the enclosure around the tombs in the royal first dynasty cemetery at Abydos. Renée reports that this is also the situation of the entrance to the domestic structure that was occupied during the same date range (Naqada IC – IIB) she has just excavated at Locality 11 in the wadi bed to the north. If this is the first example of this architectural layout in a cemetery, then these posts are part of the entrance to the enclosure and further indications of the structure should be located just inside the square to the north.

As this amazing realisation sank into our consciousness, post by post, and we realised that we had discovered one of Egyptology's holy grails, the first funerary enclosure, presaging those set in brick and stone, most famously in the Step Pyramid, in later history, an accumulation of another sort was taking place. Part of the process of

Fig. 8
Tomb 23 reconstructed.



digging in this robbed desert cemetery involves sieving all the sand to find artefacts and then bagging them by type. Further sorting and recording then takes place each day at the dig house, and it was there that we began to build a collection of worked limestone fragments that could not be related to any known type of Predynastic object.

At the close of the dig, a mass of grey clastic limestone fragments, presumably imported into this sandstone area, which were found in Tomb 23, in the northeast of the square and scattered on the surface to the northeast outside the present excavation area, had been collected. Worked fragments and chips of stone such as these might have been unnoticed, or discarded, in earlier excavations at important Predynastic cemeteries. In this case, however, their importance has been confirmed by the discovery of an intact sculptured, human nose (fig. 9) in the same limestone from the surface of a pit in the northeastern part of the square. It is therefore most likely that all the fragments came from one life-size human sculpture. Helena Jaeschke, our conservator, has so far partially reconstructed two ears and made some joins among the other fragments, some of which bear angles and grooves which suggest they may be part of a stand or throne, so the figure may have been seated. The nose has nostrils similar to those of the pottery masks, clearly showing the drill holes at different angles, which are completely dissimilar to those on statues of later periods.

These discoveries also shift the debate about the relative importance of the elite cemeteries of Abydos and Hierakonpolis back in time a little. It has long been known, and confirmed by the work of Émile Amélineau and W. M. Flinders Petrie that the cemetery at Abydos was extremely important just before and during the first dynasty when it became the burial place of the kings of Egypt. Recent work by the modern German expedition directed by Gunter Dreyer has shown that the beginning of the Naqada III period was also important there with the excavation of large mud brick tombs in Cemetery U including the spectacular multi-chambered Tomb U-j with its evidence for early writing. Thus, there has been discussion about whether Hierakonpolis or Abydos was the Predynastic capital of Upper Egypt during Naqada III. Now the excavation in Cemetery U at Abydos directed by Ulrich Hartung has uncovered many early graves, which contained some important artifacts. These include red polished pottery vessels painted with hunting scenes and others with prisoners being led in procession in white paint and others with painting and modelled figures on the rims. Figurines of animals and humans have been found in Naqada IC-IIAB graves there, but so far, no pottery masks, faunal graves, funerary enclosures or stone sculpture.

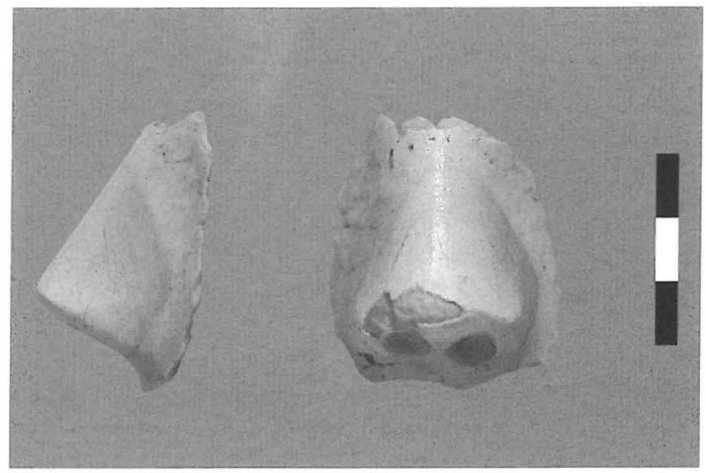


Fig. 9
Statue nose (tomb 23).

The discoveries made so far suggest that the southern part of the Locality 6 cemetery was a focal point for ceremonial activities and ancestral rituals celebrating the high status of the individuals interred in the Locality 6 cemetery during the formative stage of the Predynastic at Hierakonpolis. This serves to explain the special nature of the objects that we have found within the inner and outer enclosures including the intact fishtail knife, which is the precursor of the *pesh-kef* knife that was used in a ceremony at the graveside to « open the mouth » of

the deceased. In addition, although there were enough scraps of human bone in and to the east and southeast of Tomb 23 to indicate that three individuals were originally buried in it. The general observation was made that although there were human bone remains from this square, only animal bones were retrieved from the square to the southeast diagonal, except for one fragment of a human third metatarsal bone, a fact that surely relates to the function of the two areas. If the area to the south was part of the larger funerary enclosure we postulate, the sacrifice of animals may have taken place within it at the time Tomb 23 was used, or the cow, goat and dog bones could have been associated with the first dynasty camp site. A partially burnt cow leg bone was found in the base of Tomb 23, the first indication of a possible funerary repast.

Never can an excavation that failed to properly fulfil its research aims have ended in 2000 with such a pleased and fulfilled director, who can not wait to get back to the site for another winter season late in 2001 to uncover the rest of the funerary complex. The likelihood that more sculpture fragments will be discovered, making possible the restoration of a statue that may have been set up within the sacred enclosure near to the east side of the tomb, facing the sun as it rises over the hills, is also a tantalising prospect. ■