

Hierakonpolis Locality HK29A: The Predynastic Ceremonial Center Revisited

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Abstract

In 1985–1989 excavations at Hierakonpolis Locality HK29A uncovered a large structural complex surrounding an oval floor, which was identified as a predynastic (Naqada IIB-First Dynasty) ceremonial center based on the unique features of its architectural, ceramic and faunal assemblages. Continued investigation in 2002 and 2008 clarified aspects of its architecture and phasing and has led to a revised interpretation of its layout and appearance, especially in light of the discovery at HK29B of a large palisade wall, which suggests that the complex is only one part of a monumental compound potentially covering over 1 hectare. Meanwhile comparative data with which its distinctive assemblages may be more accurately assessed have become available from other localities at Hierakonpolis, most notably in the elite cemetery at HK6 where a series of predynastic mortuary chapels have been uncovered, and from locations throughout Egypt, such as el-Mahasna. Despite recently posed questions regarding its function, the comparative data indicate even more strongly that HK29A was indeed a special place. At minimum it may be called a locus of ritual activity, and as such provides important insights into actual ritual practices in the predynastic age, and its developments during the time of state formation.

From 1985 to 1989 Michael Hoffman undertook excavations at a locality called HK29A in the central part of the so-called ‘Predynastic town’ in the low desert at Hierakonpolis (fig. 1 inset). His work revealed the eastern half of a large architectural complex arranged around a 13 m wide, over 32 m long, oval floor that had been paved several times with mud-plaster, providing evidence for major phases of usage in Naqada IIB-C (c. 3500 BC) and Naqada IID-Naqada IIIA (c. 3300 BC), with more sporadic activity continuing into the First Dynasty (figs. 1–2). The evidence available at that time indicated that in the early phase, the courtyard was surrounded by a fence of wooden posts that was subsequently augmented or replaced by mud-brick walls. The limited clearance to the south of the court revealed an earlier alignment of medium-sized postholes, which were later replaced by four larger pits, up to 1.6 m deep, at the bottom of which the decayed stumps of the original wooden posts were found. These were interpreted as the façade of a tall and impressive main structure, some 13 m across, opening onto the courtyard. In the 1980s, this was the first wooden architecture of such size reported for the Predynastic period; at that time, both the scale and the unique nature of the ceramic and faunal assemblages, amongst other aspects, suggested that the complex was an early ceremonial center.¹

¹ Michael A. Hoffman. *A Final Report to the National Endowment for the Humanities on Predynastic Research at Hierakonpolis 1985–86* (South Carolina, 1987). Diane L. Holmes, “Chipped Stone-working Craftsmen, Hierakonpolis and the Rise of Civilization in Egypt,” in Renée Friedman and Barbara Adams, eds., *The Followers of Horus. Studies dedicated to Michael Allen Hoffman 1944–1990* (Oxford, 1992), 37–44. Barbara Adams and Renée Friedman, “Imports and Influences in the Predynastic and Protodynastic Settlement and Funerary Assemblages at Hierakonpolis,” in Edwin C. M. van den Brink, ed., *The Nile Delta in Transition: 4th–3rd. Millennium B.C.* (Tel Aviv, 1992), 320–28. Renée Friedman, “The ceremonial centre at HK29A,” in Jeffrey Spencer, ed., *Aspects of Early Egypt* (London, 1996), 16–35.

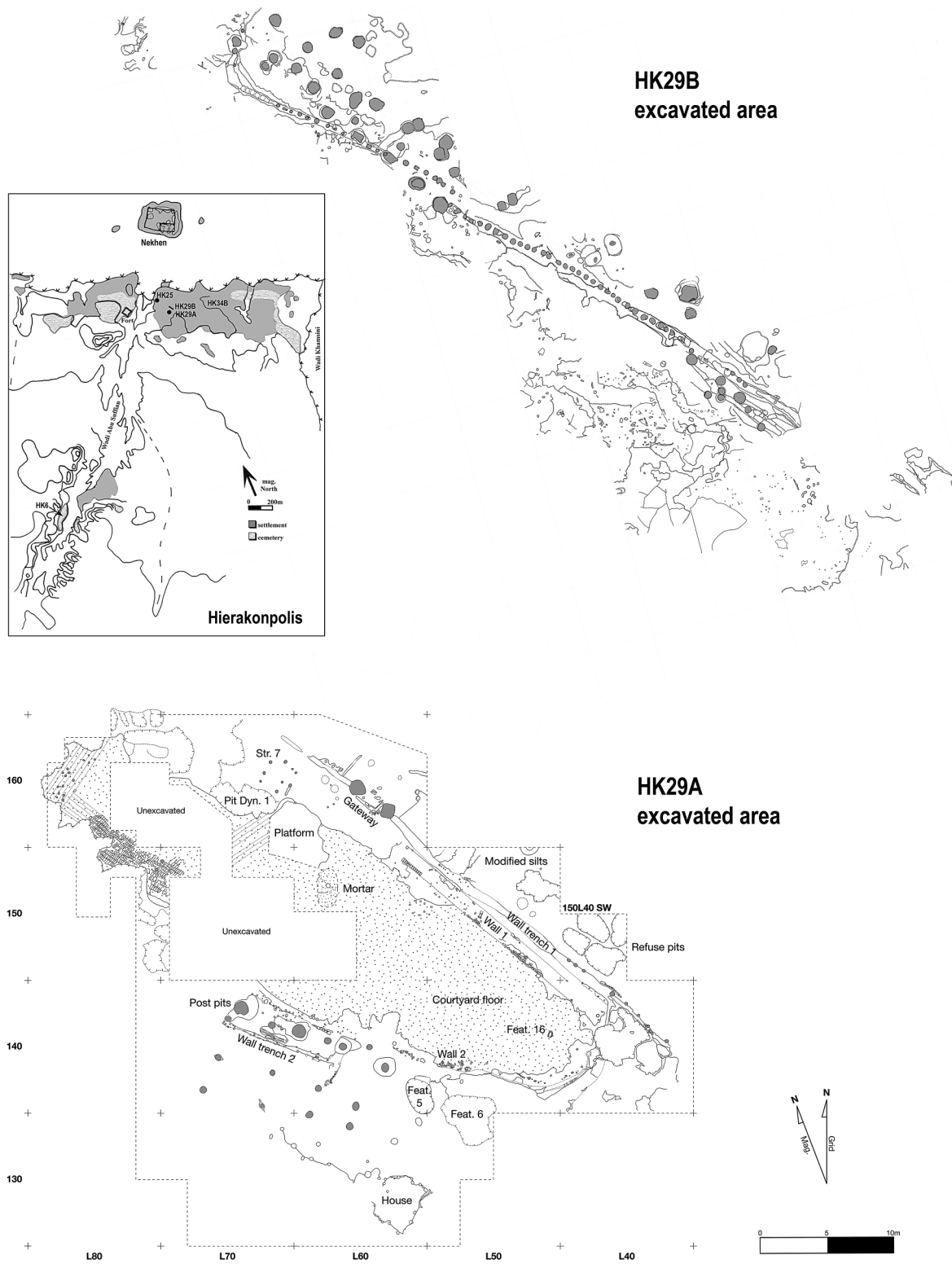


Fig. 1. Plan of excavated areas at Localities HK29A and HK29B with inset of the general Hierakonpolis area showing the location of localities mentioned in the text.

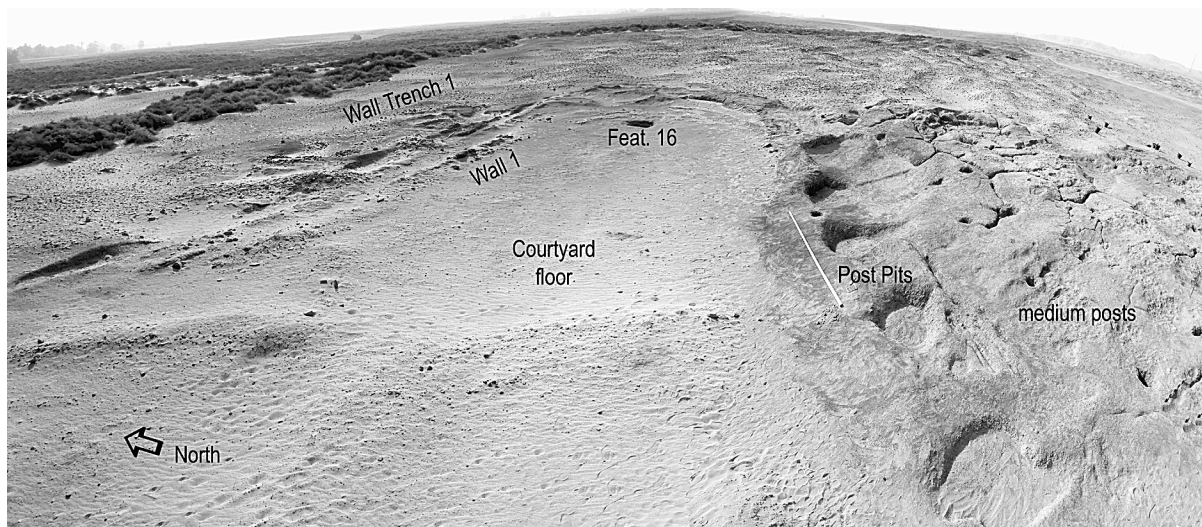


Fig. 2. View of the eastern half of the HK29A complex. The measuring rod on the right is 5 m.

Comparison of the exposed remains with architectural depictions on contemporary documents, most notably the Narmer mace-head, led inevitably to the complex being described as a temple; however, based on a textbook definition of that term, this attribution has been recently questioned and its function demoted to “a feasting or perhaps butchery site.”² While not wishing to enter to a discussion of the validity of the definition or the manner in which it has been applied, the results of resumed excavations at HK29A have allowed us to revise earlier interpretations of the architectural remains, while new research at other locations at Hierakonpolis and throughout Egypt have provided comparative data which indicate even more strongly that HK29A was indeed a special place. Its architecture, material culture, faunal and botanical remains can all be differentiate from domestic and industrial pursuits and show that, while feasting and butchery, activities both charged with much social and ritual significance,³ undoubtedly took place there, this was not its sole purpose. At minimum it may be called a locus of ritual activity, and as such provides important insights into actual ritual practices in the Predynastic age, especially when situated within its contemporary context.

The purpose of this paper and the two that follow is to revisit the HK29A complex and reassess the evidence for its function in light of new data and research. In particular, this investigation takes a detailed look at elements of its material culture and architecture; the faunal assemblage and botanical materials recovered from the site will be discussed in the accompanying reports.

History of Recent Research

In 2002 excavations at HK29A were resumed⁴ and succeeded in locating the west end of the courtyard floor, revealing it to be 45 m long, 13 m wide, and oval in shape (fig. 1). This work also promoted a better understanding of the chronological phasing of the complex and an enhanced

² Barry J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt. Anatomy of a Civilization*, 2nd ed. (London, 2006), 114–48.

³ See Christopher Eyre, *The Cannibal hymn: a cultural and literary study* (Liverpool, 2002), 191–201.

⁴ Excavations in 2002 were made possible by a grant from the AIA and the kind permission of the SCA. The work was directed by the author with the assistance of Joe Majer, Helena Jaeschke, Gillian Pyke, Wim Van Neer, Veerle Linseele, Fran Cole, Kathryn Piquette, site inspector Ramadan Hassan Ali, and our crew of highly trained workmen. This article supersedes previous preliminary report posted to www.archaeology.org and published in Renée Friedman, “Return to the Temple: Excavations at HK29A,” *Nekhen News* 15 (2003), 4–5.

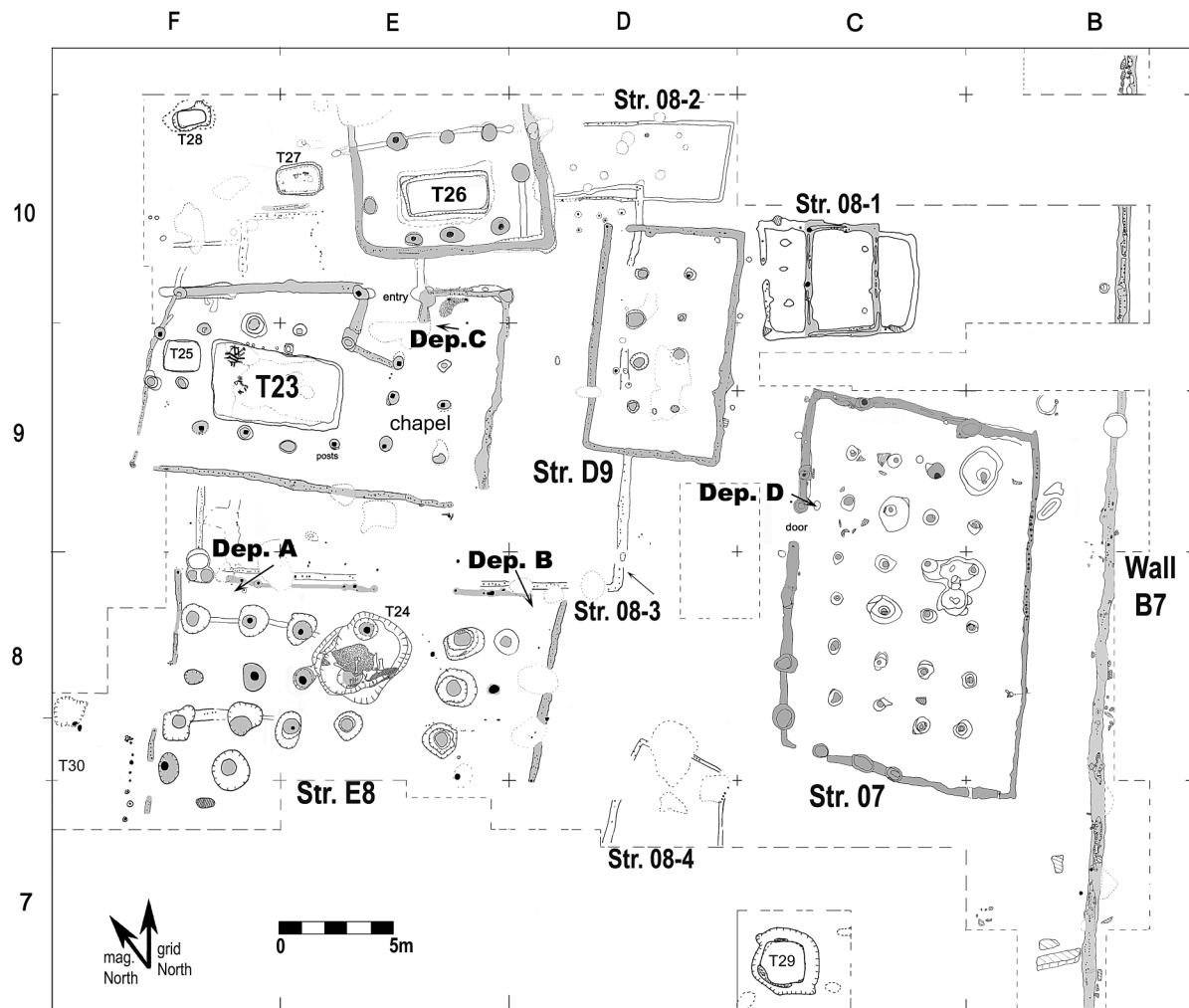


Fig. 3. Plan of the Pillared Hall precinct in the elite cemetery at HK6.

appreciation of the fine items it once contained. A reinvestigation of the faunal assemblage was also launched at that time, and was supplemented by renewed exploration along the eastern sector (Square 150L40SW) of the features called Wall Trench I and the Modified Silts. Previous excavations in these areas yielded the unique assemblage of faunal bones and distinctive pottery that informed earlier discussions of the special nature of the site.

At the time of these excavations, the architectural remains at HK29A and its archaeological assemblages were essentially unparalleled; however, comparable contemporary material is now available from the elite Predynastic cemetery at HK6, located in the Wadi Abu Suffian (fig. 1 inset). Since 2005, on-going exploration of that cemetery has revealed remains of wooden architecture not only around tombs of substantial size (e.g., tombs 16, 23, 26), but also and more notably in the form of multi-columned structures with a focus that was entirely above ground (fig. 3: Structures D9, 07 and E8).⁵

⁵ Renée Friedman, "Excavating Egypt's early kings: Recent discoveries in the elite cemetery at Hierakonpolis," in Beatrix Midant-Reynes and Yann Tristant, eds., *Egypt at its Origins 2. Proceedings of the International Conference "Origin of the State. Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt," Toulouse, 5–8th September 2005*, OLA 172 (Leuven, 2008), 1157–94. Renée Friedman, "The Cemeteries of Hierakonpolis," *Archéo-Nil* 18 (2008), 11–20.

These pillared structures, or hypostyle halls, had walls composed of closely spaced wooden posts, 4–10 cm in diameter, while larger wooden columns, set in 2 to 6 parallel rows, filled their interiors. The largest of the structures, E8, was equipped with posts up to 45 cm in diameter set into postholes up to 1.3 m deep and as wide. These structures provide important parallels for the architectural acumen and construction techniques observed at HK29A. Radio-carbon dates and associated pottery date these structures to the Naqada IC-IIB period.⁶

Located in a discrete area within the HK6 cemetery, and endowed with a number of the prestige objects, these pillared halls may be explained as buildings erected for the performance of funerary rites. However, it remains to be determined whether they should be understood as mortuary chapels dedicated to individuals, or as an ensemble forming a ritual precinct, which served to promote the funerary/ancestor cults for the cemetery's elite inhabitants. Whatever the case, by virtue of their funerary association, they are by definition loci of ritual activity, and the material found within them provides direct parallels for several of the most distinctive elements of the assemblage at HK29A (see below).

Encouraged by the similarities between the two areas, excavations were resumed at HK29A in 2008 to investigate the heavily disturbed area immediately south of the four large postholes considered to form the façade of the main structure or 'shrine'.⁷ Contrary to expectations, only two rows of postholes were found running parallel and in alignment with the posts of the 'façade' (figs. 1–2). The postholes, four in each row, measured about 40 cm in diameter and ranged from 20 to 80 cm deep; four still contained remnants of the original wooden posts. The exposed architecture suggests a building only 6.5 m wide (north-south) and 13 m long (east-west). No evidence for exterior walls was uncovered, and it is possible that the columned area is only one segment of a much larger structure, or simply a light pavilion hung with mats. Alternatively, and perhaps most likely, the large posts may mark the entrance into the oval court to which an exterior portico, flagpoles or some other light architecture was appended. Whatever the case, the popular reconstructions of the appearance of HK29A⁸ will now require substantial revision, although exactly how remains to be determined.

In association with the eroded foundations of a semi-subterranean dwelling in the southeast (fig. 1), the ceramic, lithic and faunal assemblages from this southern area were essentially domestic, and contained little of the distinctive elements so prevalent on the north side and over the floor. This, too, was unexpected, but highlights the concentrated nature of the material despite the extensive disturbance of the site in general, and suggests that the focus of special activity was not necessarily only on the courtyard floor itself and may have been further to the north and east.

This latter suggestion is supported by the excavations at HK29B led by Thomas Hikade in 2005–2007,⁹ during which a palisade wall of substantial wooden posts was discovered running along the same trajectory as the oval floor at HK29A, but at a distance of 40 m to the north (fig. 1). Uncovered for a length of over 50 m, two phases of construction have been proposed for this enclosure. Its earlier phase is marked by larger, more substantial posts and appears to be contemporary with the early phase at HK29A. The specialized pottery shapes that distinguish this phase at HK29A were also found in association with this wall, but in more limited quantities. Its later phase, marked by some-

⁶ For the chronology used throughout, see Stan Hendrickx, "Predynastic–Early Dynastic Chronology," in Erik Hornung, Rolf Krauss, and David A. Warburton, eds., *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*, HdO 83 (Leiden-Boston, 2006), 55–93.

⁷ Work in 2008 was made possible with funds from the Friends of Nekhen and was undertaken with the assistance of Liam McNamara, Anna Pieri, Szymon Zdzienkowski, Joe Major, Joel Paulson, Xavier Droux, and site inspector Ahmed Awad Seleim. For a preliminary report see Renée Friedman and Liam McNamara, "Return to the Temple Part II," *Nekhen News* 20 (2008), 6–7.

⁸ See, e.g., Friedman, "The ceremonial centre at HK29A," fig. 11; Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (New York, 2000), 17.

what smaller posts, appears to date to Naqada IID-III A, corresponding to the refurbishment of the HK29A complex documented for that time. At HK25, some 80 m to the northwest, a structure with at least five rows of wooden pillars (10 posts per row) was uncovered, along with a deposit of burnt lithics and mace-heads. Although the relationship of the building at HK25 to the others structures is unclear, these discoveries suggest that HK29A is only one part of a much larger monumental complex that may cover a significant area of over one hectare, perhaps incorporating or associated with the stone mounds (localities HK25C and 34B), for which an administrative function has been proposed.¹⁰

Comparative material with which the finds at HK29A may be more accurately assessed has also been forthcoming from locations outside of Hierakonpolis. Particularly significant are the discoveries at el-Mahasna. Excavations by David Anderson in the northern part of that site (Block 3) revealed remnants of a structure composed of at least eight posts, ranging in size from 19 to 36 cm in diameter, in association with an intentionally laid mud flooring on which 21 clay figurines of cattle and seven figures of seated women were recovered. In addition to concentrations of other notable objects, the deposits around that structure also produced a faunal assemblage that contained the highest amounts of cattle, wild mammals and large fish from anywhere on that site, providing a striking parallel for the situation at HK29A (see the article by V. Linseele, W. Van Neer, and R. Friedman on the faunal assemblage below). The structure has been dated to Naqada IIA B. The excavator, avoiding the pitfalls of more contentious terminology, has carefully identified the structure as “a focus of elite activity exhibiting patterns of ritual or ceremonial use.”¹¹ Situated within its own time and place, this is a definition that stands up to scrutiny independent of, or in addition to, comparison with HK29A.

Preliminary publication of the Italian work at Naqada South Town (Zawayda) also gives some indication of ritual or ceremonial activity in conjunction with, or as a means of legitimizing, administrative activities attested in the same area by the seals, clay sealings, and tokens. Numerous fragments of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines and other model objects were found together with the administrative devices in association with a series of post holes arranged in several rows, apparently defining one (or more) pillared structures. Nearby, a two-roomed rectangular structure was distinguished by the remains of red mud.¹² The pattern of object distribution has suggested to the researchers that “at least [for] a part of the site, [the existence of] a sort of archive, which may have stood alongside a place of worship.”¹³ A preliminary date of Naqada IIB-III has been suggested. Al-

⁹ Thomas Hikade, “Does firing make stone tools special? Remains of a possibly pit deposit at Hierakonpolis HK25,” in Eva-Maria Engel, Vera Müller, and Ulrich Hartung, eds., *Zeichen aus dem Sand. Streiflichter aus Ägyptens Geschichte zu Ehren von Günter Dreyer*, Menes 5 (Wiesbaden, 2008), 273–82; Thomas Hikade, Gillian Pyke, and D’arne O’Neill, “Excavations at Hierakonpolis HK29B and HK25—the campaigns of 2005/2006,” *MDAIK* 64 (2008), 153–88; Renée Friedman et al., “The 2005–2006 Field season of the Hierakonpolis Expedition,” *ASAE* 82 (2008), 95–97, figs. 11–12; Thomas Hikade, “Origins of monumental architecture: recent excavations at Hierakonpolis HK29B and HK25,” in Renée Friedman, Liam McNamara, and Peter Fiske, eds., *Egypt at its Origins 3: Proceedings of the Third International Colloquium on Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt* (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Michael Hoffman, *The Predynastic of Hierakonpolis* (Cairo-Macomb, 1982), 130–32. Werner Kaiser, “Bericht über eine archäologisch-geologische Felduntersuchung in Ober- und Mittelägypten,” *MDAIK* 17 (1961), 11, fig. 2, areas 5–6.

¹¹ David Anderson, “Power and Competition in the Upper Egyptian Predynastic: A View from the Predynastic Settlement at el-Mahasna, Egypt,” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburg, 2006); David Anderson, “Zoomorphic Figurines from the Predynastic Settlement at el-Mahasna, Egypt,” in Zahi Hawass and Janet Richards, eds., *The Archaeology and Art of Ancient Egypt. Essays in Honor of David B. O’Connor*, *CASAE* 36 (Cairo, 2007), 33–54.

¹² Grazia Di Pietro, “‘Kleinfunde’ from the Italian Excavations at Zawaydah (Petrie’s South Town),” in Hany Hanna, ed., *The International Conference on Heritage of Naqada and Qus region. Monastery of the Archangel Michael, Naqada, Egypt 22–28 January 2007* (Cairo, 2007), 79–87; Grazia Di Pietro, “Miscellaneous artefacts from Zawaydah (Naqada, Petrie’s South Town),” in Friedman, McNamara, and Fiske, eds., *Egypt at its Origins 3* (forthcoming); Rita Di Maria, “Naqada (Petrie’s South Town): the sealing evidence,” in Hanna, *The International Conference on Heritage*, 65–78.

¹³ Rosanna Pirelli, “Pottery Discs and other Counters from Zawaydah (Petrie’s ‘South Town’),” in Hanna, *The International Conference on Heritage*, 61.

though only a small portion of South Town (550 m²) was investigated, these discoveries implying that administrative and ceremonial activities took place in close proximity or in the same multi-component establishment and provide a suggestive model for interpreting the situation at Hierakonpolis.¹⁴

In light of the new data from these and other sites, as well as access to archival documents unavailable when the initial description was published, the complex of HK29A will be re-examined in detail during its various phases.

The Early Phase at HK29A

The best evidence for the early phase at HK29A is the debris left behind rather than the architectural setting in which it was originally used. This material is concentrated in the northeast sector of the excavated area in the upper levels of Wall Trench I and the area to the north of it where the natural Sahaba silts have been modified in a number of ways in ancient and modern times (Modified silts). These features were covered by an extremely dense and coherent accumulation of faunal bone and pottery, the unique characteristics of which are major indicators of the special nature of the activities taking place at this time.

The ceramic material recovered in the 1980s indicated a date of Naqada IIB-C for this extensive deposit, and the consistency of the assemblages was such that it was suggested that the material derived from a major clean up of refuse in conjunction with one of the renovations of the complex.¹⁵ However, comparison with the less disturbed deposits recovered in 2002 now indicates that refuse collection may have occurred on a more regular basis, and that activity of a similar nature was continuous over a longer period of time.

In 2002, excavation in square 150L40SW, a 5 × 5 m unit adjacent to the northeastern end of the courtyard floor, revealed several trash pits into which this material was originally deposited (figs. 1, 8). Approximately 2 m long, 1.5 m wide, and about 40 cm deep, these oblong pits had been roughly hollowed out of the natural silts with an orientation running parallel to the wall trench.¹⁶ They were densely packed with bone and pottery. The ceramics were large, fresh and numerous, and included the same unique shapes as found previously, but in different relative percentages (Table 1).

Nearly 43,000 sherds (5,976 rims; 1,274 bases) were recovered from the area of the wall trench and modified silts in the 1980s,¹⁷ to which can be added roughly 25,000 sherds (4,387 rims; 602 bases) from the 2002 excavations. Despite the large size of the ceramic sample, the range of shapes was limited to a small number of specific forms (fig. 4).

The most distinctive shape is a unique jar with a 'collared' rim, made of fine Nile silt fabric, which was coated with a red, micaceous slip that was never polished, giving it a matte appearance (fig. 4: shape 2-2h). The second most frequent vessel is a small egg-shaped jar with a highly polished all-black slip (fig. 4: shape 2-2a7). Together sherds from these vessels make up over 60% of the fine Nile

¹⁴ A similar combination can also be seen at Tell el-Farkha, see Krzysztof Ciałowicz, "The Early Dynastic administrative-cultic centre at Tell el-Farkha," *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan* 13 (2009), 83–123 (http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/online_journals/bmsaes/issue_13/cialowicz.aspx); Piotr Kolodziejczyk, "Architectonic Constructions from the Western Kom at Tell el-Farkha (Nile Delta). Some Remarks," in Midant-Reynes and Tristant, eds., *Egypt at Its Origins* 2, 1221–29.

¹⁵ Friedman, "The ceremonial centre at HK29A," 24.

¹⁶ In more recent times, these refuse deposits have been disturbed by fertilizer diggers (who left behind several fragments of Turkish pipes), and the material has been scattered along the northern periphery and over and within the upper 10–15 cm of the wall trench itself. From the quality of the material collected, it is possible that Henri de Morgan also worked here during his 1908 season, see Winifred Needler, *Predynastic and Archaic Egypt in the Brooklyn Museum* (New York, 1984), 53, 114–21.

¹⁷ Renée Friedman, "Predynastic Settlement Ceramics of Upper Egypt: A Comparative Study of the Ceramics of Hemamieh, Naqada and Hierakonpolis," (PhD Diss., University of Berkeley, 1994), 697–720, tables 6.32–33.

Table 1. Number and relative frequency of vessel types in the assemblages from the early phase

Shape	Wall trench/modified silts 1980s		Square 150L40SW 2002	
	number	%	number	%
Fine Nile silt rim total	651		667	
2-2h “collared jars” rims	139	21.3	265	39.7
bases	49			89
2-2a7 “black eggs” rims	93	14.3	146	21.9
bases	36			41
2-1d3 flare-rim beakers, blacktopped	11	0.2	85	12.7
2-1a1 hemispherical bowls, red polish	102	15.6	68	10.2
2-1b flat bottom bowls, red polished	212	32.5	68	10.2
Straw Tempered rim total	5305		3686	
1-1b5 elliptical bowls	1767	36.2	1223	33.2
1-1j hat-shaped bowls	911	17.2	1192	32.3
1-1b6 rough bottomed bowls	154	2.9	187	5.1
1-2b modeled rim jars	1685	31.7	714	19.4
1-2e bottles	221	4.2	110	2.9
Marl fabrics rims+ bases all shapes	21+2		2+1	

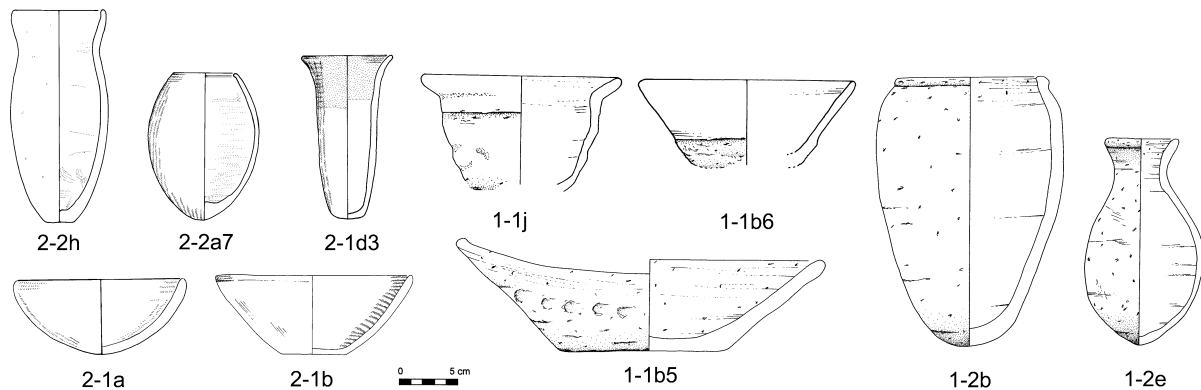


Fig. 4. The pottery assemblage from the early phase: the most frequently occurring forms. The prefix 1 indicates straw tempered Nile Silt; 2 indicates fine untempered Nile silt. The base shape for 1-2b is only suggested.

silt ware rim assemblage (39.7% and 21.5% respectively). Small beakers of black-topped red ware, with flaring rims and slender bodies narrowing to bases only 2–3 cm in diameter (shape 2-1d3), were also frequent in the 2002 assemblage, making up 12.7% of the rim assemblage ($n = 85$), but were represented in the earlier material by a scant 11 examples. The lack of wear and scratch marks on the bases of all of these vessels suggests that they were not subjected to extensive use before they were discarded.

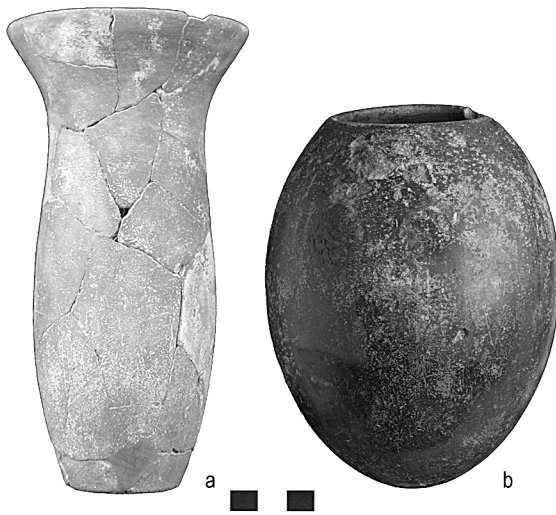


Fig. 5. The matte red collared jar and the black polished egg-shaped pot from the elite cemetery at HK6.

The collared jar is entirely without parallel outside of Hierakonpolis,¹⁸ and the black ‘egg’ jars, while present in the Predynastic mortuary corpus, are relatively rare.¹⁹ Only the black-topped beakers are well attested,²⁰ but this specific shape is generally dated to the Naqada IC-IIA period,²¹ suggesting that the 2002 assemblage may be somewhat earlier than that discovered in the 1980s, although the retention or fossilization of forms for ritual purposes cannot be ruled out.

The use of these same shapes in ritualized contexts is confirmed by their presence in the pillared halls in the elite cemetery at HK6, structures that contained only limited amounts of ceramic material. More significantly, these specific forms appear in noteworthy contexts in these structures, but in reverse order of frequency to that observed at HK29A.

In Structure E8, clearly intentional deposits of objects were recovered from shallow pits placed near its northeast and northwest corners (fig. 3, Deposits A and B). In the northwest, the deposit contained over twenty transverse projectile points, two tanged arrowheads, a large chunk of obsidian, a figure of a gazelle chipped from flint, and an imitation fishtail knife made of steatite.²² The only potsherds in this deposit joined to create a complete example of a collared jar with the same distinctive matte finish as those from HK29A (fig. 5a). From the parallel deposit of flint objects near the northeast corner, another collared jar was also partly reconstructed. A minimum of ten black egg-shaped vessels (according to the base count) were also present throughout the structure, but no particular concentration was observed. The bases of ten narrow beakers were also recovered along with a large quantity of their characteristic everted, black-topped rims.

Another deposit (fig. 3, Deposit C) included fragments of at least two collared jars and four highly polished egg-jars in association with the foot bones of a young sheep/goat. These items had been

¹⁸ The closest form is P48 (undated) in W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Corpus of Prehistoric Pottery and Palettes* (London, 1921), pl. 12.48.

¹⁹ Petrie, *Corpus*, pl. 19, F91d is similar in shape, but the actual vessel to which this corpus number refers is in reality a Nubian black-mouthed pot (UC London 5926 from Naqada grave 329; I thank Stan Hendrickx for drawing this to my attention). Despite their all black/brown surface treatment, it would appear that pots of this type were ascribed to Corpus type B44s, see George A. Reisner, *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia 1907–1908 Report* (Cairo, 1910), 317, fig. 278a, 38, and the corpus equivalents given by Petrie, *Corpus*, pl. 60. Based on its occurrence in six datable graves, B44s has been placed in the Naqada IIB period by Stan Hendrickx, “De grafvelden der Naqada-cultuur in Zuid-Egypte, met bijzondere aandacht voor het Naqada III grafveld te Elkab. Interne chronologie en sociale differentiatie” (PhD diss., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1989). However, the presence of this vessel type in Abadiyah grave B101 and in various locations within the HK6 cemetery indicates that it occurred earlier in elite contexts. For the example from Abadiyah B101, see Joan C. Payne, *Catalogue of the Predynastic Egyptian Collection in the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford, 1993), cat. no. 592.

²⁰ Petrie, *Corpus*, pl. 3, B23b, but for the range of shape variation this corpus type subsumes see again Reisner, *Archaeological Survey*, fig. 278a, 25–28, 30–33.

²¹ Hendrickx, “De grafvelden der Naqada-cultuur.” See also Rita Hartmann, “The Chronology of Naqada I tombs in the Predynastic Cemetery U at Abydos,” in Friedman, McNamara, and Fiske, eds., *Egypt at its Origins 3*, fig. 7.

²² Friedman, “Excavating Egypt’s early kings,” 1170–74, fig. 8.

placed within a basket or mat-lined pit by the entrance leading to the so-called chapel of Tomb 23, where fragments of a near life-sized human stone statue were recovered.²³ Fragments of at least fifteen beakers and five egg-shaped vessels were also collected from within the general tomb enclosure, and one complete egg-pot was found in the tomb chamber itself (fig. 5b).

Structure 07, which contained strikingly little pottery considering the prevalence of other fine items, such as a malachite falcon statuette and ivory wands,²⁴ yielded fragments of one black egg-shaped pot and one collared jar from near its entrance (fig. 3, Deposit D).

The frequency of these specific forms in these funerary structures leaves little doubt of their ritual function. It has been suggested for the collared jars and the egg-shaped pots at HK29A that their distinctive surface finishes of matte red and shiny black had symbolic significance associated with the coming of the Nile flood when the dry (matte) red land would become the fertile ('shiny') black land.²⁵ The presence of such unique vessels at HK6 and HK29A suggests both had broadly similar, but not identical,²⁶ ritual requirements, which can be presumed to relate to the concept of rebirth, be it of the deceased elite or the land and cosmic order, and indicates a close connection between the two.

The funerary structures at HK6 are dated to Naqada IIA-B, and it is partly on the basis of the similarities in the ceramic assemblage that the deposits at HK29A from the refuse pits in the eastern quadrant are considered to be somewhat earlier than those recovered from further west.²⁷ This east-west divide can also be seen in the relative frequency of shapes in straw tempered ware (Table 1; fig. 4), although both contained the bowl forms that distinguish this assemblage from any other locality at Hierakonpolis, i.e., the so-called 'hat-shaped bowls' (1-1j), small bowl with unsmoothed bases (1-1b6) and the ubiquitous elliptical bowls (1-1b5). The predominance of open forms in straw tempered ware and of closed forms in the finer wares is notable, and contrasts markedly with domestic assemblages at the site.²⁸ Although numbers were limited, it should also be mentioned that the greatest number of decorated (D-ware) sherds (n = 6) and imported wares in a settlement context were recorded in these assemblages. A similar concentration was also observed at el-Mahasna in Block 3.²⁹

²³ Barbara Adams, "Excavations in the Elite Predynastic Cemetery at Hierakonpolis Locality HK6: 1999-2000," *ASAE* 78 (2004), 49-50, pl. 2b; Helena Jaeschke, "The Stone statue fragments from HK6," in Stan Hendrickx et al., eds., *Egypt at its Origins. Studies in Memory of Barbara Adams*, OLA 138 (Leuven 2004), 46-65; Nicola Harrington, "Human Representation in the Predynastic Period: The Locality HK6 Statue in Context," in Hendrickx et al., *Egypt at its Origins*, 25-43.

²⁴ Xavier Droux and Renée Friedman, "The Columned Hall at HK6 and Other Wonders," *Nekhen News* 19 (2007), 7-9; Renée Friedman, "The Early Royal Cemetery at Hierakonpolis: An Overview," in I. Incordino, M. Nuzzolo, and Francesco Raffaele, eds., *The Proceedings of the First Neapolitan Congress of Egyptology* (Wiesbaden, forthcoming), fig. 6; Stan Hendrickx, Renée Friedman, and Merel Eyckerman, "Early Falcons," in Ludwig Morenz and Robert Kuhn, eds., *Vorspann oder formative Phase? Ägypten und der Vordere Orient 3500-2700 v. Chr. Leipzig, 07.09-08.09.2007* (Wiesbaden, forthcoming).

²⁵ Stan Hendrickx and Renée Friedman, "Chaos and Order: A Predynastic 'Ostrakon' from HK29A," *Nekhen News* 15 (2003), 8-9.

²⁶ The varied faunal assemblage and distinct forms in straw tempered pottery, which distinguish the early phase at HK29A, are missing in the HK6 funerary structures. There is no evidence for feasting by the living at HK6, although it is possible that its refuse was cleared away.

²⁷ A sample of the bark from one of the wooden pillars of HK6 Structure E8 provided a conventional radiocarbon date of 4930±50 BP, which calibrates (2-sigma) to 3790-3640 BC (Beta 216824, AMS technique). Previously tested samples from HK29A are less precise, but support the contention: charcoal from the eastern area (square 140L40) yielded a radiocarbon date of 4820±330 uncal. BP, and a sample from the western reach (square 150L50), 4770±70 uncal. BP. See Friedman, "Predynastic Settlement Ceramics of Upper Egypt," table 9.2.

²⁸ Compare HK11C Test A and HK29 with Wall trench at HK29A in Friedman, "Predynastic Settlement Ceramics of Upper Egypt," table 9.33.

²⁹ Anderson, "Power and Competition in the Upper Egyptian Predynastic," 165-70; Adams and Friedman, "Imports and Influences in the Predynastic and Protodynastic Settlement," 320-24.

The unique ceramic assemblage is accompanied by an equally unparalleled faunal one. A distinction between the collections made in 2002 and the 1980s can also be observed in the copious faunal remains; however, both contained far higher percentages of wild animals and greater quantities of large fish than in any other settlement area at Hierakonpolis. Of the 5185 identified bones from these deposits, 7.9% are of hunted mammals, 9.5% are the remains of crocodile and turtle, and fish bones make up an impressive 35.5%. This can be compared to 1.5%, 0.5% and 12% respectively in the settlement assemblages. The data show that at this time hunting no longer was of significance for general food acquisition, but instead should be viewed as a social pastime of the elite as well as an expression of power and control. This is clear from the iconography of the predynastic period, and it remained so into Dynastic times.³⁰ The presence of hippopotamus in the assemblage makes a ritual connection more explicit,³¹ while the numerous bones of dog, some bearing butchery marks, suggest other cultic actions.³² The quality of the cattle and the quantity of the fish imply that feasting was taking place, but this was far from the only activity (for more detail see the article by Linseele, Van Neer, and Friedman below).

The actual location of butchery cannot be pinpointed, but the creation of flint implements was a major industry at the site. Study of the lithics from HK29A has shown that the overall assemblage represents several distinct, specialized technologies, which must be viewed as the work of skilled craftsmen, who were involved in the manufacture of bifacial tools and beads, among other industries.³³ Compared to later periods, the amount of lithics associated with the early phase is limited, but still present in significant numbers.

Preliminary analysis of the lithic material from the 2002 excavations shows that these refuse pits, like most parts of the complex, contained a high percentage of biface thinning debitage on special, high-quality flint (65% of 1350 pieces); however, no micro-drills were identified.³⁴ These results indicate that the production of bifacial implements was actively taking place in the early phase, but that bead production had not yet joined the repertoire. Again, no other locality at Hierakonpolis has yielded the industrial-scale quantities of debitage,³⁵ and points to the presence of specialized and attached workshops. However, most of the products appear to have been destined for use elsewhere, as few have been found; presumably it was the elite buried in the HK6 cemetery who were the chief beneficiaries to judge from the quantity and quality of the flint artefacts found with them.

Of the products of this flint workshop, only few pieces can be attributed with certainty to the early phase at HK29A: the highly-crafted mid-section of a fine bifacial knife and the tip of another (fig. 6ab), as well as part of a rhomboid lance and a tanged arrowhead.³⁶ A nodule of tabular flint, covered with cortex except for some flaked facets, allows one to infer the original shape of the nodules that

³⁰ Stan Hendrickx and Merel Eyckerman, "Continuity and change in the visual representations of Predynastic Egypt," in Incordino et al., *The Proceedings of the First Neapolitan Congress of Egyptology*; Eyre, *Cannibal Hymn*, 191–93.

³¹ Vera Müller, "Nilpferdjagd und geköpfte Feinde—zu zwei Ikonen des Feindvernichtungsrituals," in Engel et al., *Zeichen aus dem Sand*, 477–93.

³² Stan Hendrickx, "The Dog, the Lycaon Pictus and Order over Chaos in Predynastic Egypt," in Karla Kroeper, Marek Chłodnicki, and Michał Kobusiewicz, eds., *Archaeology of Early Northeastern Africa. In Memory of Lech Krzyżaniak*. (Poznań, 2006), 723–49; Thomas J. Logan, "The Origins of the *Jmy-wt* Fetish," *JARCE* 27 (1990), 61–69; John Baines, "Symbolic Roles of Canine Figures on Early Monuments," *Archéo-Nil* 3 (1993), 57–74.

³³ Holmes, "Chipped Stone-Working Craftsmen," 39–44.

³⁴ Analysis was carried out by Izumi Takamiya and Hitoshi Endo, who also report that amongst the tools, retouched pieces were the most common, but scrapers, burins, and denticulates were also present.

³⁵ Diane Holmes, "Lithic Assemblages from Hierakonpolis and Interregional Relations in Predynastic Egypt," in Lech Krzyżaniak, Karla Kroeper, and Michał Kobusiewicz, eds., *Interregional Contacts in the Later Prehistory of Northeastern Africa* (Poznań, 1996), 193–98.

³⁶ Holmes, "Chipped Stone-Working Craftsmen," fig. 5 and fig. 4a, respectively.

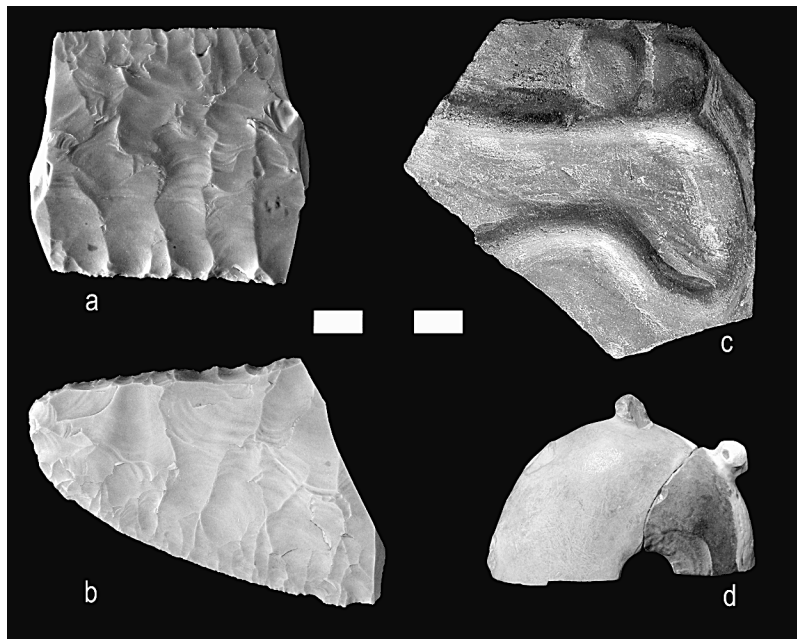


Fig. 6. Objects from the early phase: fine bifacial knife fragments, a black-topped sherd with raised relief, and an indurate limestone mace-head with projecting knobs. Photographs by James Rossiter.

shape of a bivalve shell and a fragment of a stone figurine previously identified as the head of a falcon.³⁹ Comparison of this piece with recent finds from Tombs 23 and 26 at HK6 indicate that it is actually the tail (with stinger) of a scorpion statuette; the three examples from HK6 reveal their highly stylized but unmistakable identity.⁴⁰ Together these statuettes appear to stand at the beginning of the special relationship that Hierakonpolis has with the scorpion, as is exemplified by the large number of scorpion figurines found in the Main Deposit, the significance of which remains a matter of discussion.⁴¹

Other fine objects found on the surface in the general vicinity may plausibly be attributed to this phase or possibly even earlier. These include part of a limestone periform mace-head decorated with a series of small knobs (fig. 6d);⁴² a body sherd from a large black-topped vessel preserving the head of an animal in raised relief (fig. 6c);⁴³ and the head of a hippopotamus from a theriomorphic calcite

must have been imported to the site for this purpose, as there are no known resources of such high quality flint in the predominantly sandstone cliffs of the Hierakonpolis area.³⁷ Two flakes of obsidian were also included in the 2002 collection and probably represent imports from the south.³⁸

The unique nature of the ceramic, faunal and lithic assemblages attests to the special status of HK29A within the broader settlement context at Hierakonpolis and elsewhere; however, other objects to bolster this claim are rare. Aside from a few fragments of stone vessels and discoid maceheads, objects securely attributable to this phase include one half of an ivory object carved in the

³⁷ Izumi Takamiya and Hitoshi Endo, "Return to the Temple Workshop: The Manufacture of Bifacial Flint Tools," *Nekhen News* 20 (2008), 8–9.

³⁸ Three samples from Hierakonpolis were amongst those analyzed for a study identifying an Ethiopian origin for early obsidian in Egypt, see Laurent Bavay et al., "The Origin of Obsidian in Predynastic and Early Dynastic Upper Egypt," *MDAIK* 56 (2000), 5–20.

³⁹ Friedman, "The Ceremonial Centre at HK29A," 29, fig. 7.

⁴⁰ Adams, "Excavations in the Elite Predynastic Cemetery," fig. 11e–f. Friedman, "Excavating Egypt's early kings," 1178–79, fig. 12b, 13a. A tail segment of another figurine in calcite was found in disturbed contexts at HK29A in square 160L60.

⁴¹ See Toby Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London, 1999), 270; Jochem Kahl, "Die frühen Schriftzeugnisse aus dem Grab U-j in Umm el-Qaab," *CdE* 78 (2003), 127–29; Stan Hendrickx, Dirk Huyge, and Barbara Adams, "Le scorpion en silex du Musée royal de Mariemont et les silex figuratifs de l'Égypte pré- et protodynastique," *Les Cahiers de Mariemont* 28–29 (1997–1998), 6–33. Twenty-seven of the thirty examples with known provenance listed in the above originate from Hierakonpolis.

⁴² Paralleled in Badari grave 3740, Guy Brunton and Gertrude Caton Thompson, *The Badarian Civilization* (London, 1928), pl. 53.8, dated to Naqada IIA by Hendrickx, "De grafvelden der Naqada-cultuur in Zuid-Egypt."

⁴³ For parallels see Payne, *Catalogue of the Predynastic Collection*, cat. nos. 105–107, 604, 774, which includes the famous relief decoration of the red crown from Naqada. The majority of examples have been dated to Naqada IIA by Payne.



Fig. 7. Calcite head of a hippopotamus from a theriomorphic stone vessel. Photograph by Peter Hayman.

vessel (fig. 7).⁴⁴ The rarity of similar objects in the predynastic record and their concentration in the HK29A vicinity lends further supports for the special status of the complex.

In contrast to other locations that are considered to have a ritual function, no discrete deposit of votive or cultic objects has been uncovered at HK29A. All of the contextual materials discussed above have essentially been discarded. Whether a special favissa of objects from this period has yet to be discovered, or was even created, remains to be seen. That the material does not meet our expectations says more about our expectations than it does about the site, and should not detract from an appreciation of the extraordinary nature of the materials, which as by-products, give us a clearer idea of actual ritual practices than the 'votive' objects themselves.⁴⁵

Appearance of the Complex in the Early Phase

The locus of ritual activities is assumed to be on or near the courtyard floor, but as the floor was completely re-plastered during subsequent refurbishment, it is not possible to verify this. As the material pertaining to the early phase is no longer in its primary place of usage, the appearance of the contemporary complex can only be suggested (fig. 8). The courtyard floor was resurfaced in the Naqada IID-early Naqada III period (called floor d). One or more of the underlying floors (a-c) are therefore assumed to be associated with the early phase. These earlier surfaces are visible at the eroded eastern apex of the courtyard and in the section cut to examine Feature 16, a large post hole sunk into the floor, which contained two large stones, one roughly battered and pecked into shape, apparently intended to support a tall solitary pole in all phases of the complex.⁴⁶ The exposed surface of floor c exhibits a number of small postholes indicating that a wall ran around the curved east end and along the southeast perimeter where it presumably joined up with four posts of medium-size (post-holes c. 35–50 cm in diameter) in the center of the south side, and with which two further rows of similar sized posts are aligned.

As mentioned above, the purpose of these posts is not clear. In light of the results of the explorations in 2008, it is possible that they may mark the entrance into the courtyard plaza; however, the impressive palisade wall at HK29B introduces the central question of orientation. If any of the gaps in the HK29B wall should prove to be a monumental gateway, then one might see the 13 m by 6.5 m area defined by the posts on the south side of the courtyard as representing the rear of the complex,

⁴⁴ Stan Hendrickx and David Depraetere, "A theriomorphic predynastic stone jar and hippopotamus symbolism," in Hendrickx et al., *Egypt at its Origins*, 802–7.

⁴⁵ Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 113–35.

⁴⁶ Friedman, "The Ceremonial Centre at HK29A," fig. 3.

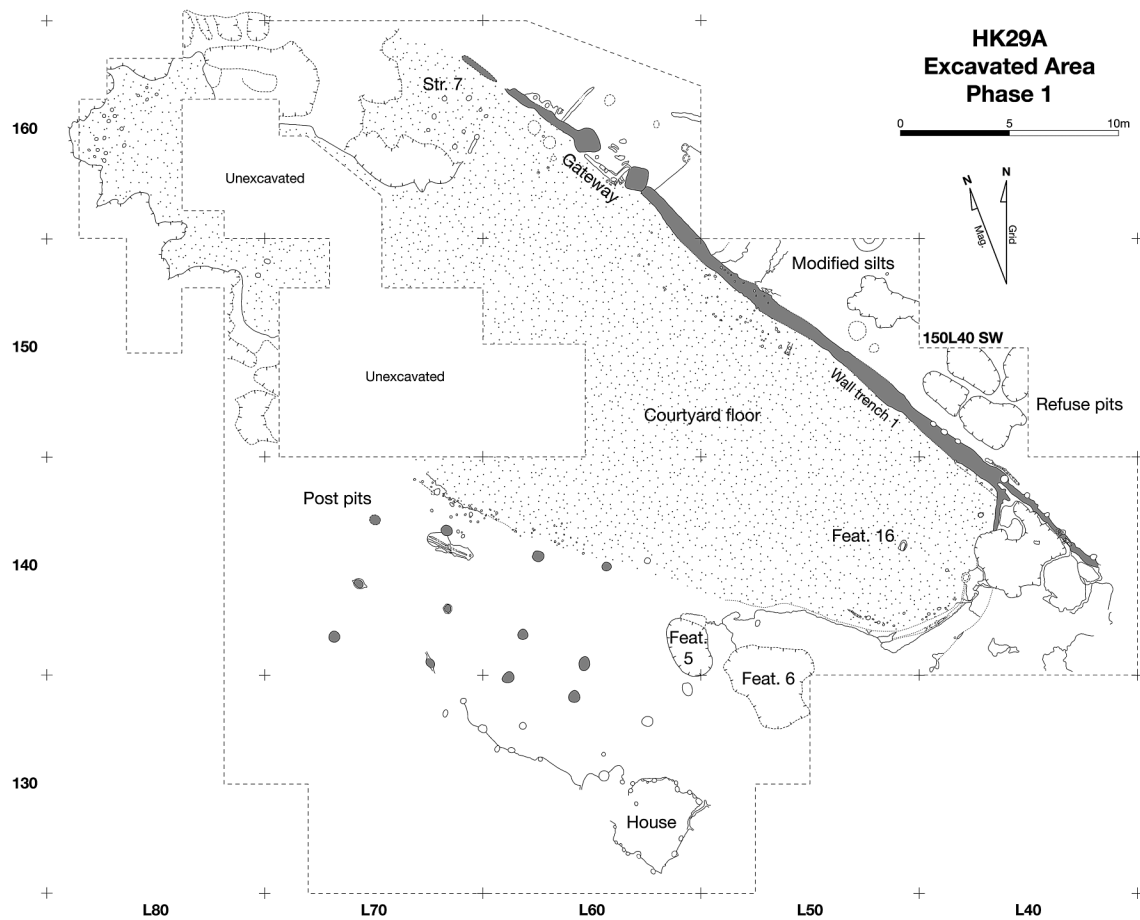


Fig. 8. Plan of the excavated area of the HK29A complex showing the features of the early phase. Cartography by Liam McNamara.

perhaps with a light-material or mat-walled viewing pavilion,⁴⁷ or something similar. Whatever the purpose, it is clear that considerable effort was invested in the architecture in this area. It is difficult to make sense of the small postholes and wall trenches around these posts, but it is possible that they represent the westward continuation of the enclosure wall, the rest of which has been obliterated by erosion and disturbance.⁴⁸

At the west end of the floor, traces of what is presumed to be floor c were observed below the upper pavement. Some of the postholes (c. 10 cm in diameter) in the cluster at the west end may derive from the early period, but this cannot be conclusively verified at this time. Nevertheless, the

⁴⁷ Cf. the second register of the label of Aha from Naqada, e.g., Gabriella Porta, *L'Architettura Egizia Delle Origini in Legno e Materiali Leggeri* (Milan, 1989), pl. 25.1; and recently redrawn in Jochem Kahl, *Vergraben, verbrannt, verkannt und vergessen. Funde aus dem "Menesgrab"* (Münster, 2001), fig. 10.

⁴⁸ To the southeast of this structure, Features 5–6 (now heavily disturbed) appear to have originally been additional refuse disposal pits and contained the distinctive pottery of the early phase.

evidence now suggests that the complex in the early phase included the full extent of the 45 m long floor, and was enclosed along the east, south and west by a light post wall.

In contrast, the majority of, if not the entire, north side of the floor was bounded by a fence set into a foundation trench, which was pierced by a doorway flanked by two large post-holes (Wall Trench 1/Gate) near the center. To the west of this door, the further continuation of the trench could only be traced for another 5 m as the area is very eroded. The constellation of postholes defining a small rectilinear structure (Structure 7) nearby cannot be securely affiliated because the floors are broken away. Similarly, the two depressions or drip basins for holding liquid-filled pots in this area are also undatable, but both are probably to be associated with this phase.

Compared to the other architectural traces observed for the early phase, Wall Trench I, approximately 44 cm deep and 0.5–1 m wide, and the posts and postholes found within it represent the most substantially-built structure around the floor. Its construction of closely spaced wooden posts and fresh-water plant stems used as wattle set into a deep trench is directly paralleled in the pillared halls at HK6, although the gypsum plaster coating applied to these walls was not observed at HK29A.⁴⁹ In light of the effort expended on its construction, it may now be suggested that the wall rooted in this trench was not part of the enclosure surrounding the courtyard, but instead the wall of a separate but associated structure, possibly forming its façade or an enclosure wall around it.

Unfortunately exposure to the north is limited and the surface has been extensively disturbed. Various posts and shallow trenches in the modified silts have been interpreted as small structures or dependencies,⁵⁰ but further research is required. The continued attention given to this side of the complex in the following phases suggests that if the locus of activity is not the courtyard floor itself, then it lies in this area or further to the north.⁵¹ Activity in the highly disturbed area to the east is also a possibility, as many of the finer objects mentioned above were recovered in that region.

The Second Phase

The second phase is a rather broad rubric for constructions and activities on and associated with floor d, which according to the pottery found embedded in its mud-plaster surface was laid down in Naqada IID2–IIIA.⁵² A number of modifications to the architectural plan of the complex are associated with this repaving and areas of localized patching on the south side called floor e (fig. 9). Amongst the earliest of these is the installation of the four large posts in pits 1.50 m in diameter and 1.60–1.70 m deep on the southern side of the court, replacing the medium posts of the earlier phase. The shallow wall trench running along the south side (Wall Trench 2) may be contemporary, but it should be noted that the presence of only one trench running perpendicular to it could be confirmed (albeit tentatively) during the 2008 excavations. The reports of subdivisions defining three compartments to the south of these large posts are unfounded.⁵³

⁴⁹ See Ahmed Gamal el-Din Fahmy and Mohamed Fadl, this volume; and Ahmed Gamal el-Din Fahmy, Renée Friedman, and Mohamed Fadl, "Archaeobotanical studies at Hierakonpolis Locality HK6: The Pre and Early Dynastic elite cemetery," *Archéo-Nil* 18 (2008), 169–83.

⁵⁰ Friedman, "The ceremonial centre at HK29A," 17.

⁵¹ This is also suggested by the finds made predominately near the east end of the wall at HK29B, where the distinctive pottery of the early phase and a pit with a similar range of faunal remains were uncovered, see Hikade et al., "Excavations at Hierakonpolis HK29B and HK25," 165–77.

⁵² Closest approximate shapes in Petrie, *Corpus*, are R68m, R26e, but see the contemporary settlement pottery in Peter Kopp, *Elephantine XXXII: Die Siedlung der Naqadazeit*, AVDAIK 118 (Mainz, 2006), pl. 9, 182, 183; pl. 10, 189, 190; pl. 11, 205–9, dating mainly to Elephantine stufe B1, which is equivalent to Naqada IID2.

⁵³ Friedman, "The ceremonial centre at HK29A," 24.

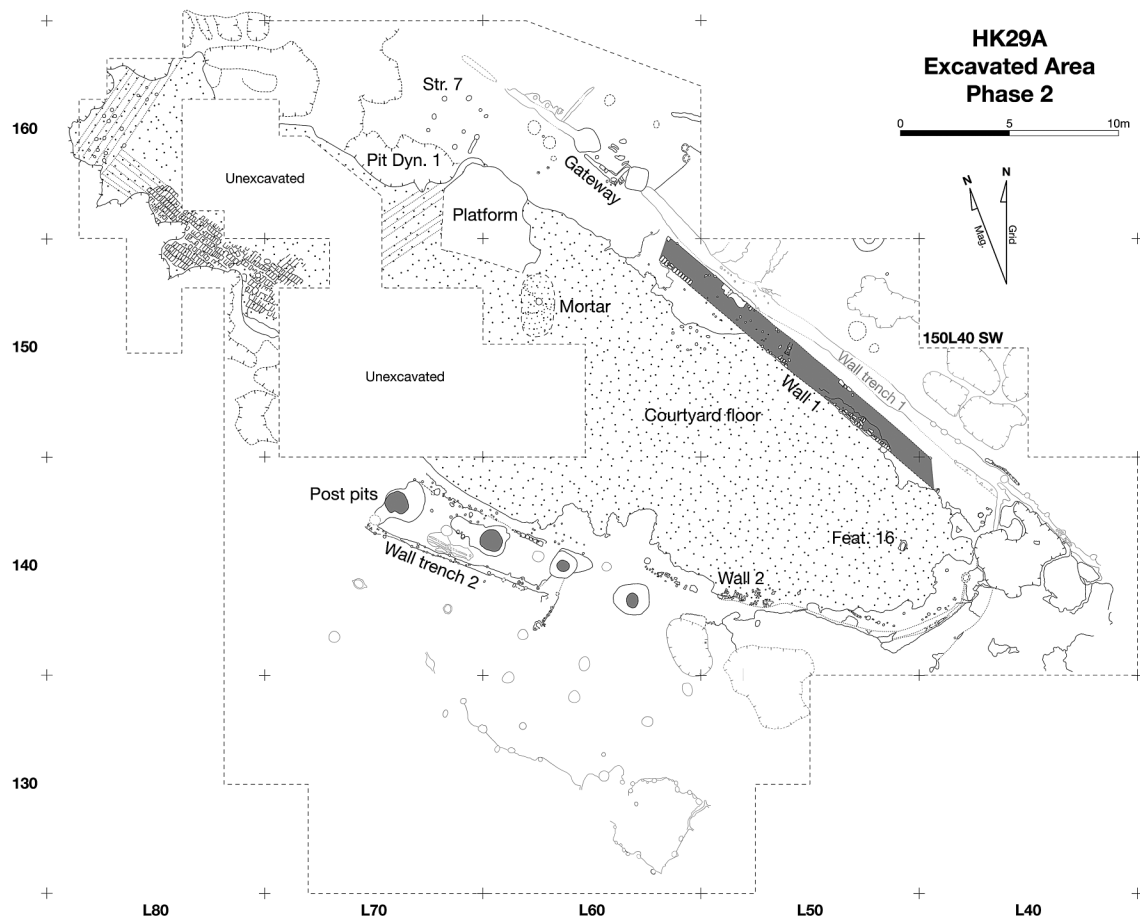


Fig. 9. Plan of the HK29A complex showing the features of the later phases. Cartography by Liam McNamara.

A cluster of small posts along the south perimeter and at the west end indicate that a wooden fence still enclosed the courtyard at this time, and it seems likely that the posts of the early phase were simply retained, at least for a while. The situation on the north side, however, is harder to determine. It was reported that the plaster of floor d ran up to, and formed a concave coping against, the southern face of the mud-brick wall (Wall 1), which runs along the north side of the floor. This would indicate that the wall construction predated the re-plastering, but this assertion requires fresh verification. If it is so, it shows again that the structure along the north side is the focus of special interest. Surviving elements of this brick wall indicate that it was at least 1.2 m wide, bringing its exterior face to the edge of the trench of the wooden wall it replaced. However, traces of articulated brick uncovered in the northeast corner suggest that it may have been at least 50 cm wider and covered the wall trench completely. Hoffman proposed a casemate construction for this wall with an internal filling of sherds and debris (which would in part explain the dense accumulation of refuse over the wall trench), but evidence for this remains weak. Pending investigation, it is unclear whether Wall 1 was the only brick structure at the beginning of phase 2, but if so, it did not remain that way for long.

At some point after floor d was laid down, the western part of floor was used for brick manufacture. There are clear impressions in the floor plaster of bricks with a standard size of 26 × 13 cm laid

out in long lines of headers. As the brick impressions cover the postholes at the west end of the floor, it appears that this brick-making is related to a renovation of the complex during which the post fence was replaced, presumably by a mud brick wall.

It may be at this time that Wall 2, on the southeastern side of the floor, was constructed. Composed of mud-bricks and naturally exfoliated sandstone slabs cemented with straw-tempered mortar, it sits upon floor d. It is poorly preserved, but shows that the court was surrounded by a brick enclosure wall, the majority of which has been carried away during seabkh collection.⁵⁴

The correspondence in brick size with the floor impressions indicates that the manufactured bricks were also used to create the so-called 'platform'. This is a structure over 4 m wide, solidly composed of sandy mud-brick set in mortar, built upon a thin layer of sand over the floor. Unfortunately it is currently preserved to only 1–2 courses in height due to collapse, melt and seabkh activity, but presumably it was considerably taller to judge from the amount of fallen and melted brick that surrounded it. No original outer edge of the structure survives, but it appears to have been at least 4–5 m square. To the east of it, below fallen brick and brick melt, a puddle of mud mortar on the floor preserved the footprints and finger impressions of an ancient builder, perhaps applying the final touches to it.

The purpose of the platform is unknown. It may replace the post-built pavilion (Structure 7) beside it and form the plinth for a raised canopy, as previously suggested based on the depictions on the Narmer mace-head. Ultimately, it could be interpreted in myriad ways, but its location by the north gateway is probably significant.

The time between the laying of the floor and the brick constructions upon it cannot be determined; likewise, it cannot be ascertained whether all of the brick additions were built at the same time. The only relatively undisturbed material in association with this phase is the so-called 'floor deposit'. Restricted mainly to the eastern half of the courtyard, this was a deposit of bone, ceramics and lithics within organically rich charcoal-laden silts, 5–10 cm thick, resting directly on the surface of floor d.

The faunal bone from this deposit, although more limited in number (n = 295 identified), displays the continued importance of hunted animals (mammals 8.4% and crocodile 3.1%) and large quantities of fish (43.4%). The generally smaller size of the skeletal elements retrieved suggests that the larger refuse was periodically removed for deposition elsewhere. On the other hand, the predominance of foot bones from cattle and ovicaprids may reflect a change in practice, in which only 'representative' parts of the animals were offered, while the more meat bearing elements were removed for use elsewhere (see Linseele, Van Neer, and Friedman article below).⁵⁵

A change in practice is also suggested by the limited number of ceramics, although those found were large and fresh (fig. 10). Compared to the earlier phase, the ceramics occurring on the floor are rather ordinary. The shapes are limited and all have been encountered at several other settlements, allowing the deposit to be dated to the Naqada IIIA period. Of particular note is the prevalence of flat or slightly concave slabs of rough clay (fig. 10: shape 1o1–2; n = 119). Similar objects have also been found at a number of other sites as well as in graves, some of the richest graves of the period, i.e., Abydos Tomb U-j (40 fragments) and Tomb L23 at Qustul (25 complete examples).⁵⁶ Fragments

⁵⁴ Reported brick size for this wall, 23 × 11 × 4.5 cm, is at variance with the impressions on the floor, but this may be due to poor preservation of the bricks. The bricks of Wall 1 are reported to be 26–28 cm × 13–14 cm.

⁵⁵ See evidence for similar practice in Willem van Haarlem, *Temple Deposits at Tell Ibrahim Awad* (Amsterdam, 2009), 106.

⁵⁶ Gunter Dreyer, *Umm el-Qaab I. Das prädynastische Königsgrab U-j und seine frühen Schriftzeugnisse*. AVDAIK 86 (Mainz, 1998), 38, fig. 24, pl. 24 g–h; Bruce Williams, *The A-Group Royal Cemetery at Qustul: Cemetery L* (Chicago, 1986), 131, 344–56, fig. 161.b; see also the example from the rich tomb Naga ed Der 7304 in Albert M. Lythgoe and Dows Dunham, *The Predynastic Cemetery N7000* (Berkeley, 1965), 79–183, fig. 79j.

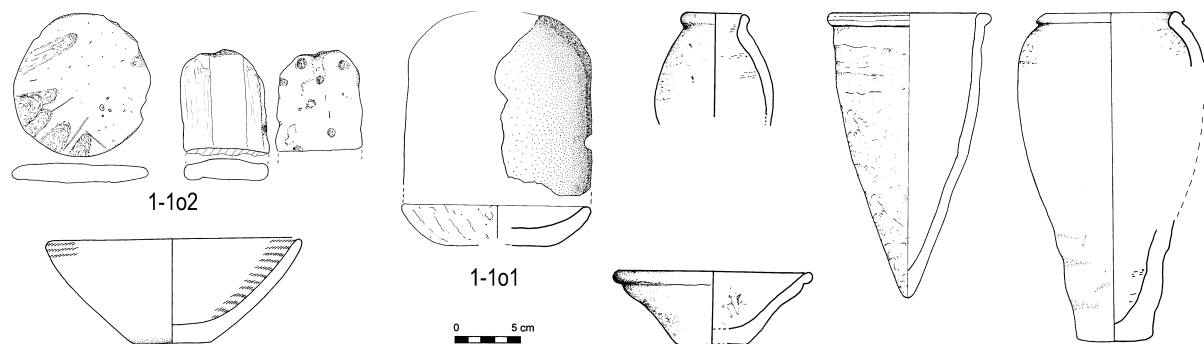


Fig. 10. Pottery assemblage of the second phase or 'floor deposit' at HK29A.

of over forty of these peculiar items have also been recorded at Naqada South Town (Zawaydah), concentrated with sealings and counters/tokens around the architectural features identified as an administrative/cult center.⁵⁷ Opinions differ as to their function, but they are generally considered to be model bread loaves or baking plates, and therefore may be a further reflection of the use of token or representative offerings as suggested by the faunal material.

Within the category of true token is one of the most interesting objects to come from the floor deposit. It is a sherd from a red polished bowl, which was roughly shaped before it was incised on both sides with images recognizable from Late Predynastic-Dynasty 0 iconography (fig. 11). Deeply incised on the interior is a stylized image of the goddess Bat, her horns enclosed in a stellar or rosette motif, similar to that on the palette from Gerzeh and the seal impression from Umm el Qaab (U-210).⁵⁸ On the exterior, more lightly incised, a highly stylized female figure appears to be held prisoner by a bull's head mounted on a pole. As discussed in more detail elsewhere,⁵⁹ the bull's head motif finds parallels in pot inscriptions from Tomb U-j at Abydos and especially in the rock tableau at Gebel Tjauty, where it also occurs in the context of captive taking. In this context, the bull's head standard can be interpreted as a symbol of power (either royal or general), and correlates with the symbolism invested in the bull and the active power of the animal-topped standards in the Early Dynastic period, as seen most clearly on the Bull Palette in the Louvre.⁶⁰

In conjunction with the hunted animals, which certainly by this time (if not long before) represent chaos and its containment,⁶¹ this incised sherd is an important piece of evidence for the concerns addressed in the HK29A complex. It demonstrates that the desire to maintain order was not limited to controlling only the world of nature, but also included the maintenance of an orderly human society with reference to or propitiation of powerful or divine beings. Whether or not this was already a

⁵⁷ Di Pietro, "Miscellaneous artefacts from Zawaydah," fig. 4.

⁵⁸ For the Gerzeh palette, see W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Ceremonial Slate Palettes*, BSAE 66a (London, 1953), pl. B5; for the Abydos seal, see Ulrich Hartung, "Prädynastische Siegelabrollungen aus dem Friedhof U in Abydos (Umm el-Qaab)," *MDIAK* 54 (1998), 200–202, fig. 8; for later depictions, see Stan Hendrickx, "Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography," in Fekhri A. Hassan, ed., *Droughts, Food and Culture: Ecological Change and Food Security in Africa's Later Prehistory* (New York, 2002), 310, Appendix H. The earliest attestation for the emblem of the goddess Bat is a potmark on a bowl from the elite cemetery at HK6, Tomb 16, dated to Naqada IC-IIA, Stan Hendrickx, "The Earliest Example of Pharoanic Iconography," *Nekhen News* 17 (2005), 14–15.

⁵⁹ Stan Hendrickx and Renée Friedman, "Gebel Tjauti Rock Inscription 1 and the Relationship between Abydos and Hierakonpolis during the Early Naqada III Period," *GM* 196 (2003), 97–101.

⁶⁰ Hendrickx, "Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic," 275–318.

⁶¹ Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 92–99, fig. 31; for discussion of earlier manifestations of this theme, see Hendrickx and Eyckerman, "Continuity and change in the visual representations of Predynastic Egypt."

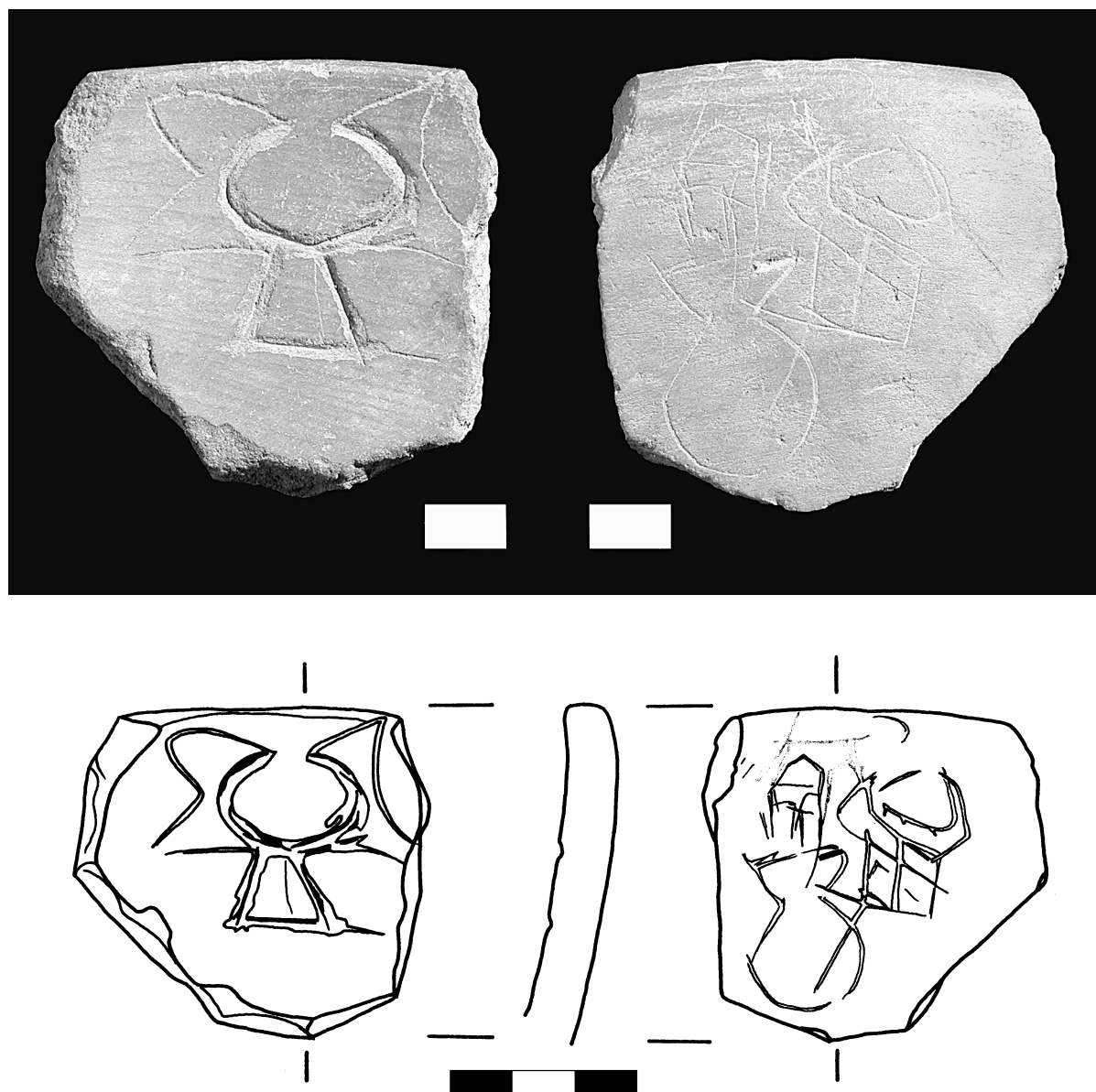


Fig. 11. The incised sherd from HK29A.

royal task, however, remains to be determined.⁶² Other sherds or ostraca, incised on both faces, were also retrieved from various contexts at HK29A. Their designs are more difficult to interpret; nevertheless, they show this practice to be current at the site.⁶³

Numerous perforated disks made from potsherds were found at el-Mahasna concentrated in Block 3, in large quantities with and without perforation at Naqada South Town, and they are common in

⁶² Cf. Müller, "Nilferdjagd und geköpfte Feinde—zu zwei Ikonen des Feindvernichtungsrituals."

⁶³ See Friedman "Predynastic Settlement Ceramics," fig. 9.69, and from HK25, Gillian Pyke, "An Enigmatic Bird from HK25," *Nekhen News* 18 (2006), 6.; Hikade, "Origins of monumental architecture," fig. 16.

all phases at HK29A.⁶⁴ Such items are generally considered as spindle whorls or lids, which they may well be, but this does not detract from the possibility that these humble objects may also have ritual significance.⁶⁵

The lack of fine pottery on the floor is compensated by a notable increase in stone ware and accords with the general trend in the Naqada III period for greater interest in stone vessels.⁶⁶ Examples that can with confidence be attributed to this phase include pieces of what must have been a large, spherical andesite porphyry vessel with roll handles, similar to the impressive examples from the Main Deposit,⁶⁷ the base of a tall diorite jar and fragments of calcite vessels, amongst others in a variety of stone types. All had been broken, but none appear unfinished.

A number of crescent drills found in the vicinity attest to stone vessel manufacture probably in an area further to the east.⁶⁸ Bead-making was also an important part of the activities in the immediate vicinity. Making up approximately 34% of the lithic tool assemblage over all, micro-drills in coarse grey flint and the debitage from their manufacture were often found in the sands directly above the floor deposit along with a number of carnelian beads and one unfinished bead in obsidian.⁶⁹ The interdependence of stone working and bead making has been discussed by Stocks,⁷⁰ and that both occur together is perhaps not surprising; nevertheless, evidence their presence at HK29A demonstrates the diversity of industrial pursuits in its workshops. An increase in the production of fine bifacial flint implements is also attested by truly vast quantities of debitage, often from fine translucent cream, orange and occasionally attractively striped flint, which has obviously been specifically chosen for use.

Cleaning may be responsible for the limited faunal assemblage and the lack of fine ceramics, but overall it would appear that ostentatious wastage of meat and pottery was no longer a part of the activities in this phase. This may be a reflection of the diminished status of the complex in particular, or of Hierakonpolis in general, with the rise of powerful rulers in Abydos.⁷¹ On the other hand, in this deposit we may also be able to chart a growing trend toward token display, which flowers most notably in the Naqada IIIB-C period in the form of the faience 'votives'.⁷²

The Third Phase

Above the 'floor deposit' was an accumulation of sand up to 1 m thick, intercalated in places with dense layers of charcoal. The distinctive faunal bone and lithic materials were present within this sand, but the pottery was very mixed and weathered. As a result it is difficult to determine with certainty the formation processes involved. This sand could have built up naturally (with some modern disturbance), but it is also possible that some of it may have been intentionally deposited in the third phase of activity at the site.

⁶⁴ Anderson, "Power and Competition in the Upper Egyptian Predynastic," 232–33; Pirelli, "Pottery Discs and other Counters from Zawaydah"; Friedman, "Predynastic Settlement Ceramics," 719, fig. 9.68.

⁶⁵ Geraldine Pinch, *Votive Offerings to Hathor* (Oxford, 1993), 344.

⁶⁶ Peter Kopp, "Prä- und frühdynastische Steingefässe—Chronologie und soziale Divergenz," *MDAIK* 63 (2007), 193–210; Hendrickx, "Predynastic—Early Dynastic chronology," 72–73.

⁶⁷ James E. Quibell, *Hierakonpolis I*, ERA 4 (London, 1900), pl. 37.

⁶⁸ Hoffman, *The Predynastic of Hierakonpolis*, 130, reports a concentration of ornamental stone on the northwest periphery of Locality HK29, which would place it almost due east of the HK29A complex.

⁶⁹ Holmes, "Chipped Stone-working Craftsmen." Microdrills occur in frequencies of roughly 20% at HK29B, suggesting intensive production, see Hikade, "Origins of monumental architecture," table 1.

⁷⁰ Denys A. Stocks, *Experiments in Egyptian Archaeology* (London-New York, 2003), 128, 212.

⁷¹ Hendrickx and Friedman, "Gebel Tjauti Rock Inscription 1," 103–6.

⁷² The most tightly dated faience figurines appear to be at Elephantine in settlement contexts; see Kopp, *Elephantine XXXII*, 72–76.

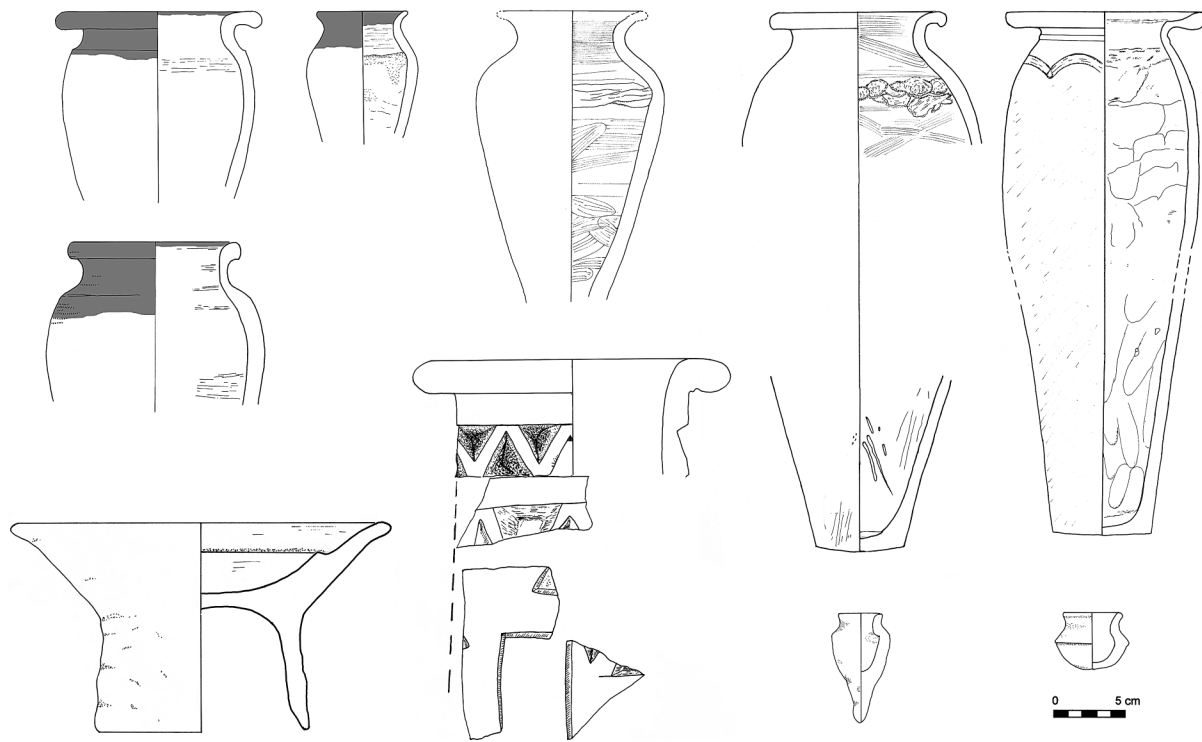


Fig. 12. Selected pottery of the third phase.

Evidence for activity in this phase is only clear in the area around the platform and the north gate (squares 160L60, 160L70), where a concentration of early First Dynasty pottery was observed. Directly to the west of the platform, a pit containing this pottery was discovered in 1989. Resumed excavation of this pit in 2002 showed the area had been severely pitted by modern sebak digging, and the only notable finds were a piece of lapis lazuli, apparently from a bangle bracelet, and an iron sickle blade. Despite this disturbance, further exploration in the area produced more pottery of First Dynasty date, many pieces mending to those in the pit, which may originally have been an intentional refuse deposit.

Amongst a number of fine pottery vessels (fig. 12), the assemblage includes at least one red and five black-topped 'hes' jars in various sizes,⁷³ several jar stands with cut out decoration,⁷⁴ and at least three pedestalled bowls,⁷⁵ all of which are vessel types linked with ritual or offering activities.⁷⁶ Several miniature vessels and the base of a combed jar imported from Syro-Palestine were also recovered.⁷⁷

⁷³ Karen Sowada, "Black-topped ware in Early Dynastic Contexts," *JEA* 85 (1999), 85–102; Van Haarlem, *Temple Deposits at Tell Ibrahim Awad*, 101–2.

⁷⁴ For discussion of jar stands in ritual contexts see Stephen Harvey, "A Decorated Protodynastic Cult Stand from Abydos," in Peter Der Manuelian, ed, *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson* (Boston, 1996), 361–78, to which can now be added van Haarlem, *Temple Deposits at Tell Ibrahim Awad*, 100–102.

⁷⁵ Patricia Podzorski, "Incense Burners of the Late Predynastic Period in Egypt: An Examination of the Evidence from Three Sites," in Carol A. Redmount and Cathleen A. Keller, eds, *Proceedings of the 1990 Pottery Symposium at the University of California, Berkeley* (Berkeley, 2003), 22–42.

⁷⁶ All are also paralleled by finds from the Hierakonpolis Main Deposit, e.g., see Barbara Adams, *Ancient Hierakonpolis* (Warminster, 1974), cat. nos. 274–81, 288.

⁷⁷ Adams and Friedman, "Imports and Influences in the Predynastic and Protodynastic Settlement," 327–28, fig. 8.

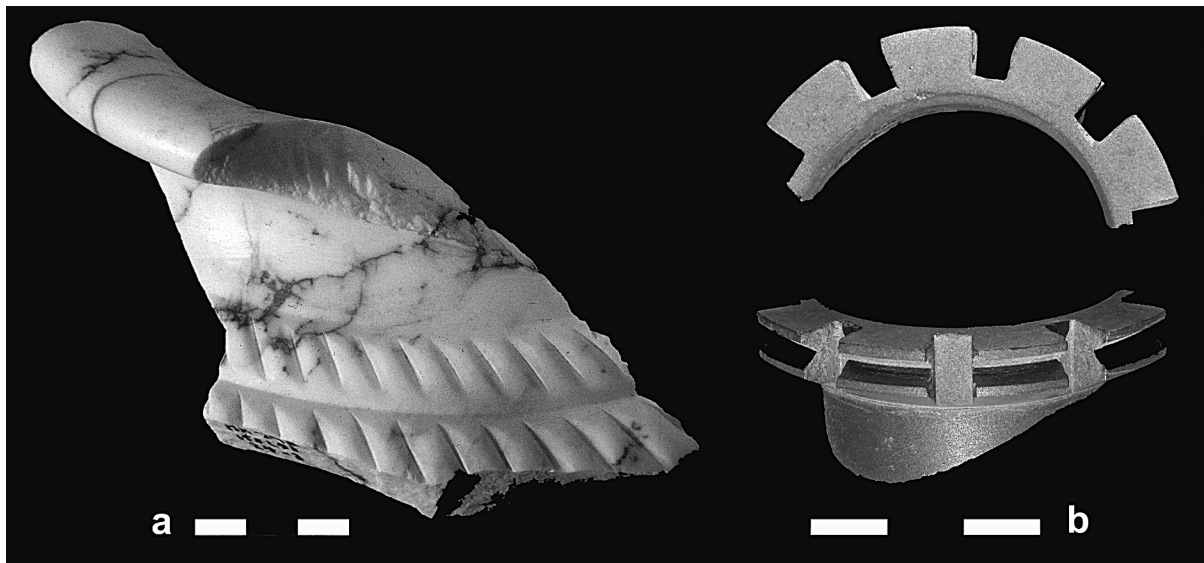


Fig. 13. Fragments of fine stone vessels of the third phase. Photographs by Peter Hayman and James Rossiter.

Altogether, the pottery attests to activity of a special kind in this area in the Naqada IIIB-IIIC1 period (Dynasty 0—reign of Djer).

The gate area also yielded a large number of stone vessel fragments in a variety of shapes and materials, including the rim of a fine marble jar with cord decoration around the neck⁷⁸ (fig. 13a) and fragments of similar stone with a fluted surface. However, the most impressive of the stone fragments is part of a greywacke vessel decorated with intricately carved projections around the rim (fig. 13b). The vessel was presumably cylindrical, but not enough survives to determine this with certainty. Although unparalleled, its connection to the elaborately carved ‘fancy’ stone vessels known almost exclusively from the Royal Tombs at Abydos is clear.⁷⁹ This fragment is possibly part of a more stylized version of the palm tree vessel almost certainly from the tomb of Den, which has been reconstructed from several pieces in various museums.⁸⁰ The presence of this fragment at HK29A strongly suggests some form of royal patronage at the site during this phase.

Further materials associated with this phase were recovered from the surface to the northeast. These include two objects of blue-glazed quartz, which appear to have been carefully shaped (fig. 14a). Similar items are known from the Hierakonpolis Main Deposit but were commented upon only passing by the excavators.⁸¹ These and similar enigmatic objects made of the same material have been considered as plaques or tiles, and in later contexts from the Satet Temple at Elephantine as model bricks.⁸² In addition, the same area produced a fragment of fine limestone incised with a woven mat/basket design. This

⁷⁸ Possibly paralleled by Walter Emery, *Great Tombs of the First Dynasty I* (Cairo, 1949), 146, fig. 77 (Type EE1).

⁷⁹ Barbara Adams, *Fancy Stone Vessels from the Early Dynastic Royal Tombs at Abydos*, SAGA, (Heidelberg, in press).

⁸⁰ Stijn Bielen, “The Funerary Objects from the Early Dynastic Royal Tombs at Abydos in the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels,” in Hendrickx et al., *Egypt at its Origins*, 628–31, figs. 1–3; Stan Hendrickx and Camile Van Winkel, “Fragments de récipients décorés en pirette provenant de la nécropole royale des premières dynasties à Abydos (Haute Égypte),” *BMRAH* 64 (1993), 12–13. A mending piece was found by the DAIK in the tomb of Den.

⁸¹ See James E. Quibell and Frederick W. Green, *Hierakonpolis II*, ERA 5 (London, 1902), pl. 48b, first column; Fitzwilliam E106.1898; E37ab.1898.

⁸² Adams, *Ancient Hierakonpolis*, cat. nos. 168–73, pl. 20. Günter Dreyer, *Elephantine VIII. Der Tempel der Satet. Die Funde*, AVDAIK 39 (Mainz, 1986), 81, 122–23.

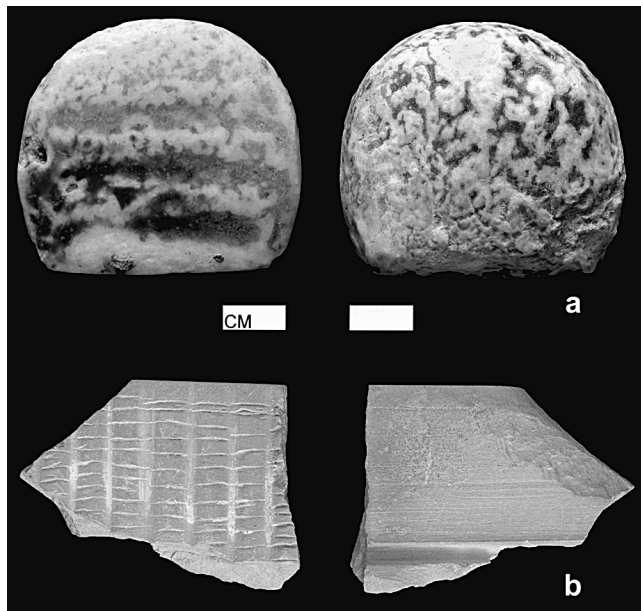


Fig. 14. Blue-glazed quartz object (front and back) and the carved limestone tile (?). Photographs by James Rossiter.

motif was popular among the fancy vessels from the Royal Tombs at Abydos, but judging from its size, flat shape and groove on the exterior, this object may be a decorative tile known in great numbers from early temple deposits, although usually in faience.⁸³ Whether other objects commonly found in temple deposits throughout Egypt will be found in this area, or were taken away for use and deposition elsewhere (i.e., the Main Deposit) as activity in the complex diminished, remains unknown.

Further evidence of Early Dynastic activity extending into the Second Dynasty⁸⁴ is attested by surface finds especially to the east of the complex, indicating that the area retained some significance at a time when habitation of the low desert had been completely abandoned in favor of the walled town enclosure of Nekhen.

Discussion

Over its long use-life, the complex at HK29A was the location of activities that are distinctly different from those undertaken at other, domestic and industrial, parts of Hierakonpolis. This is most clearly indicated by the ceramic assemblage, the composition of the faunal remains, and analysis of the botanical samples. Close parallels for many of its attributes can be found in the pillared halls erected in the elite cemetery at HK6 for conducting funerary rites, from the structure at el-Mahasna, and from Early Dynastic 'temples' at several sites throughout Egypt. While the so-called votive objects and figurines that have distinguished these other early temples are not much in evidence at HK29A, it is by looking at all of the material, much of it refuse, that the special nature of the complex becomes obvious. By placing it within the context of its own time and place, this body of material gives us direct insight into what can safely be called ritual behavior, and not simply because we lack the ability to explain it in any other way.⁸⁵

Whether we have yet uncovered the actual location where these rituals took place is another matter. This is a problem not limited to HK29A, but has also been encountered at many other 'temple' sites.⁸⁶ Further exploration will be necessary before we can propose a reconstruction of the architectural setting, especially as work around both the complex at HK29A and the palisade wall at HK29B illustrates the immense area the compound may have originally covered and the scale on which construction could be undertaken during the predynastic period. At minimum an area 50 m north-south

⁸³ For tiles with mat-work pattern, see Dreyer, *Der Tempel der Satet*, cat. 377; van Haarlem *Temple Deposits at Tell Ibrakim Awad*, 109–99, pl. 24; also in the Main Deposit: Quibell and Green, *Hierakonpolis Part II*, pl. 32.

⁸⁴ Second Dynasty activity is indicated by characteristic beer jars, bread pots and the early form of Meydum bowl.

⁸⁵ Contradicting unwarranted criticism in Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 148.

⁸⁶ For review see Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, 303–20, and see also David O'Connor, "The Status of Early Egyptian Temples: an Alternative Theory," in Friedman and Adams, *The Followers of Horus*, 83–98.

and 80 m east-west is likely to be involved, far in excess of previous perceptions about predynastic architecture and its primitive simplicity.⁸⁷

From the work to date, we can, however, make a few observations with respect to predynastic architectural interests and acumen. In the early phase, the architecture is entirely composed of wood like that observed in the mortuary structures at HK6. The size of some of the wooden elements, especially on the south side of the courtyard and at HK29B, indicates access to large stands of substantial trees and the manpower to fell, transport and erect them. This architecture was not intended to be small or ephemeral. Its durability is demonstrated at HK6 by the continued respect paid in the Third Dynasty to wooden structures built almost a millennium earlier.⁸⁸ At HK29A the continued use of wood into the Naqada IID period was a deliberate choice, but whether it was intentionally archaizing or was simply considered appropriate for such structures is unknown. Seal impressions, model shrines from Tell Ibrahim Awad, and dockets⁸⁹ all suggest that wooden architecture was retained for these significant structures into Early Dynastic times, presumably in conjunction with mud brick elements around them. The wooden shrines lining the Royal Tombs at Abydos⁹⁰ and the detailed imitation of this architectural type at the Step Pyramid also attest to the continued affection the Egyptians had for wood construction. Thus, we might reconsider whether the use of brick represents a greater interest in a structure and its monumentality, or only reflects a depletion of the available wood resource.

At this point in our research at HK29A orientation remains an issue, and thus it is difficult to form an idea about how freely accessible or open the compound would have been.⁹¹ The impressive palisade at HK29B, with a possible bastion gate at the north end, may have been the main approach for a large number of people; however, the limited amount of special materials found near it gives little indication of activities undertaken in that part of the compound. The concentration of artefacts and materials especially during the early phase in the vicinity of the courtyard floor at HK29A strongly suggests that the activities reflected by them took place either in the court or very close by. The most highly charged activities could potentially have taken place in an exclusive setting at the rear of the complex; equally possible, the open courtyard at HK29A could be situated at the front. In this case, entry would be from the south, via a portal emphasized by the size of its posts and possibly embellished with flagpoles, other decorative elements or a vestibule. The installation of the four large pillars here in the second phase makes this explanation appealing.

The faunal remains on the courtyard floor in the second phase indicate that the activity involving the animals probably took place there, be it their slaughter or consumption or both. The brick platform near the north gate may have served as a viewing platform, a dais for the royal canopy, or a plinth for a portable shrine, amongst many other possibilities. Unfortunately, too little remains to say more.

The wall trench flanking the north side of the court suggests a substantial structure here in the early phase, but whether the trench represents its façade or part of the temenos wall surrounding it awaits further investigation. Its replacement in the second phase with a stout brick wall suggests the latter as does the deposition of ritual refuse within it. It also suggests that this material, although its purpose had been served, still retained some residual value. The concentration of First Dynasty pot-

⁸⁷ Cf. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, fig. 45.

⁸⁸ Friedman, "The Early Royal Cemetery at Hierakonpolis."

⁸⁹ Porta, *L'Architettura Egizia Delle Origini*. Willem van Haarlem, "Archaic Shrine Models from Tell Ibrahim Awad," *MDAIK* 54 (1998), 183–85.

⁹⁰ Eva-Maria Engel, "The royal tombs at Umm el-Qa'ab," *Archéo-Nil* 18 (2008), 34, fig. 5.

⁹¹ Ann M. Roth, "Social Change in the Fourth Dynasty: The Spatial Organization of Pyramids, Tombs and Cemeteries," *JARCE* 30 (1993), 33–39.

tery in the northern area also lends support for an important structure in this part of the complex, still to be located.

As at other early ‘temple’ locations, the focus of the activities is unstated; no specific deity can be clearly identified. Set within a sizeable and labor-intensive enclosure, and surrounded by skilled craftsmen making prestige items, HK29A is unlikely to be a location for ad-hoc personal piety or parochial concerns. The largesse shown in the faunal remains and the special quality of the ceramics and stoneware suggest elite patronage and elite clientele, a view strengthened by the similarities with ritual materials in the elite cemetery. The sherd incised with Bat and prisoner taking indicates larger issues are at stake, which involve the display of power and control in a ritual setting, probably in conjunction with one of the many festivals known from early documents.⁹² While feasting almost certainly took place here, this was not its only function. A consideration of all of the facts makes that abundantly clear.

Further investigations will be necessary to elucidate the architectural surroundings, but this does not detract from the fact that something very special was occurring at HK29A. Rather than applying strict definitions based on expectations from other periods and places it seems far better to allow the available data to speak for itself and tell *us* about the varied “religious life” of the early Egyptians.

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British Museum

⁹² On royal festivals of the period, see Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, 208–22; Alejandro Jiménez Serrano, *Royal Festivals in the Late Predynastic Period and First Dynasty*, BAR-IS 1076 (Oxford, 2002).