Decorated sherds from renewed excavations at
Locality 6, Hierakonpolis

Barbara Adams

Relatively few provenanced decorated pots are known from
the early Predynastic with depictions of human figures and there
are not so many with animals either,\(^1\) so it is worthwhile
presenting the new decorated sherds from the Locality 6
Cemetery at Hierakonpolis prior to the preparation of a second
site report.\(^2\) Although study seasons and preparation for
publication have continued since Michael Hoffman’s death in
1990,\(^3\) no excavation took place in the high status Locality 6
cemetery from 1985, the last season he directed, until work
resumed under my direction in 1997. The main purposes of
returning to excavate in the cemetery was to clarify certain
chronological issues left unresolved and to as certain whether the
hiatus in use Hoffman postulated between Naqada IIC and
Naqada IIIA was real.\(^4\) Now that limited excavation has taken

\(^1\) Discussing armless human figures on Predynastic vessels, El-Yahky (1981)
found only twelve pots with depictions in museums and private collections, but
none of them were provenanced; Stan Hendrickx has compiled a table of
provenanced and unprovenanced Naqada II D-class vessels with human figures,
which he has kindly agreed to publish as an Appendix to this article.

\(^2\) The first site report on the cemetery is Adams 2000.

\(^3\) Hoffman directed an international expedition to Hierakonpolis from 1979, see
R. Friedman and B. Adams (eds.), The Followers of Horus: Studies Dedicated to

\(^4\) The relative chronology used here is Hendrickx 1996.
place over four seasons, there is enough additional evidence to confirm that classic Gerzean (Naqada IICD) graves do seem to be missing from the cemetery as he suggested (Hoffman 1982, 1983).

One of the most important points to make is the extent of the robbing that has taken place in the cemetery, which makes the preservation of material intact and *in situ* a rare occurrence. Fragments of artefacts, bones and organic material can be spread for quite a distance over the surface, although what has been discovered, and, in some cases reconstructed, has proved to be unexpected and spectacular. The work of the 1997, 1998 and 1999 seasons was concentrated in several 10 m squares virtually in the centre of the 200 m long cemetery on its west side near the track which runs from the Nile valley into the western desert (Adams 1999). Excavation of two large graves and the surface contexts established the existence of white cross-lined and grit tempered pottery sherds (Hierakonpolis Ware 3),\(^5\) which dated them to Naqada IC and thus took the use of the cemetery back that far.\(^6\) These took the form of bowl sherds, one painted with white painted wavy lines (Fig. 2, Find No. 30b),\(^7\) and the other with sharp pointed triangles (Fig. 3, Find No.77/2).\(^8\) One of the graves contained the bones of a juvenile elephant *Loxodonata africana* (Adams 1998, 1998/9). The 1998 season saw the discovery of fragments of two pottery masks with cut-out eyes and mouth, totally unprecedented types of artefact (Adams 1999), and fragments which joined them were found in 1999 (Adams 2000a). Work continued in this area in 1999 when the large mud brick lined grave, Tomb 16, was cleared and several graves that can be dated to Naqada IC and IIA were excavated. One of them produced one of the joining fragments of the bearded pottery mask, a pottery cow head and four human bodies more or less *in situ* at the base of the grave.

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\(^5\) For the Hierakonpolis pottery system see Friedman 1994 and Adams 2000: 4-17.

\(^6\) The graves dug by Hoffman in 1980 and 1982 at the south end of the cemetery date to Naqada IIA, see Adams 2000.

\(^7\) The sherd found in the elephant grave, Tomb 14.

\(^8\) From the robbers’ spoil. The pattern is similar to Petrie 1920: pl. XI, 19; Petrie 1921: pl.XX, C10H, see Adams 1999:30. The geometric precision of the decoration on the latter sherd is also seen on bowls from Ma’mariya, about 5 km downstream from Hierakonpolis, see Needler 1984: cat. n°. 2, 23,fig.11,41, 43.
Generally speaking, we had assumed that the further north in the cemetery, the later and larger the graves become, but we have now learnt that the history of its use is more complicated. As the cemetery was abandoned for sometime after Naqada IIB it may be that the spread of the burials in Naqada I and II was not to the north as had been thought, but to the south. This would mean that what is now the centre, where the 1997-1999 excavations took place, was the focus of its first use in Naqada IC. The excavation in 2000 seems to confirm this possibility because part of a funerary complex dating to Naqada IIAB has been discovered in the south part of the cemetery (Fig. 1, Map). The microcosm of its history exposed in the centre has shown that round, human graves and shallow, rectangular animal graves were cut first in Naqada IC, followed by larger, deeper, sub-rectangular human and animal graves in Naqada IIAB. Then came the hiatus, lasting approximately three hundred years, followed by the construction of large mud brick lined tombs in the north and the centre of the necropolis that cut through earlier graves, indicating that their surface mounds had perhaps been obscured in the time that had passed.

But the decorated pottery sherds presented here came from another area some 20 m to the north of the first excavation where a larger square was opened in the 1999 season with the express purpose of excavating more large mud brick lined graves. Surface finds discovered in this area around Tomb 22 were expected to date, and chiefly did, to Naqada III, as did the tomb itself (Adams 2000a), the construction of which, like Tomb 16, had presumably cut into earlier graves, although no convincing trace of them was found in close proximity. Another indication that Tomb 22 was slightly earlier than the other mud brick lined tombs in the cemetery was the fact that it had been coated with white mud plaster, as if it had been prepared to take a painted decoration like the famous decorated Tomb 100 dating to Naqada IIC found at Hierakonpolis in 1899 (Green 1902: 20-24, pls.LXXV-LXIX). Judging from the evidence of the large elite tombs in the Locality 6 cemetery and those found in the Cemetery U at Abydos by the German expedition in recent years

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9 A pit near Tomb 22 proved to contain very little except fragments of wood.
(Dreyer 1992, 1993, 1998; et al 1996, 1998), this kind of wall decoration was not carried on into Naqada III. It is contended that the scenes transferred to the portable ceremonial palettes, mace heads and knife handles.

Among some interesting fragments of Naqada III ceramics from Area 1, there were some earlier sherds of white cross-lined pottery. One of them (Fig.4, Find 270) which came from the fill of Tomb 22, has the head of an ibex facing to the right with both the horns in view, curled into towards each other forming a heart shape above the animal’s head, a frontal presentation normally seen on bovid heads. During the 2000 season in the cemetery, an amazing, intact bifacial flint figure of an ibex was discovered near Tomb 23.¹⁰ This prompted the zoologist, Achilles Gautier, to remark (personal communication) that the animal did not live on the west bank of the Nile during Predynastic times when its range was restricted to the opposite east bank of the river.

Another sherd (Fig.5, Find 220A) has a rectangular shape infilled with lines on the exterior, similar to later signs described as plain serekhs (van den Brink 1996), except that there are only two vertical lines within the rectangle instead of a minimum of three. There seems to be an opening in the rectangle on the long side near one corner and it is set between lines of dots. The pattern of the dots can be seen as different to the dots on the other sherds from the cemetery because they are used to delineate the vertical panel which contains the design and not blocked beneath the rim in a decorative way as on the interior of Find No. 220B, or enclosed within curved lines as on the sherds previously found.¹¹ If this proto-serekh design, which may have an entrance near one corner, is meant to convey a sacred building or complex, then the dots may signify lines of fences, for which there is now evidence in the cemetery. Recently there has been renewed discussion about whether the serekh and the palace-façade originated in Lower Egypt and was influenced by Mesopotamia (Jiménez-Serrano in press; van den Brink in press), or began in Upper Egypt, where physical evidence is lacking before Naqada

¹¹ See note 23 below.
III A2, but the oldest examples are nevertheless from Upper Egypt (Hendrickx in press).

The strangest white crossed-line sherd (Fig.6, Pl.1, Find 259) has a seemingly headless male creature (man or monkey) with what seems to be a tail and large splayed feet painted on the interior. If the sherd is turned the other way up, the feet would become hands with fingers waving and the blob of paint between the arms would represent the head, not the genitals or tail on a standing figure as in the first orientation. A large handle (H: 4.7 W: 5.2; Handle L: 3.4 Th: 2.8 cm.), not normally seen on this type of pottery, extends horizontal to the figure from the exterior.12

The white cross-lined sherd with the upper part of human figure (Fig.7, Find 220B, 227, 257) was reconstructed from five sherds found in the sandy surface contexts. It consists of the rim of a flared bowl with a double band of white painted dots below the rim on the interior and the upper part of a man with a halo of dots around his cursory head, indicated by an elongated oval of pigment, on the exterior. He has a triangular torso, in-filled with patches of white pigment and his right arm across his waist, sloping down to the left. The break in the sherd cuts his left arm off above the elbow, but it is likely that it extended horizontally to his left side. The nearest parallel for the head of the figure are the two largest figures on an unprovenanced jar in Brussels,13 on which the heads are rounder and have only one enclosing crescent of dots. A figure with a similar head, big hair and the body pierced with arrows was found as a petroglyph by John and Deborah Darnell in their Theban western desert survey.14

Most of the few white cross-lined pottery vessels with depictions of humans show them in active positions with their arms raised above their heads, such as the vase in Brussels just cited, on which there are two large and six smaller figures.15 An

12 Handles as thick as this with the same round sections were found in the cemetery and settlement at Badari, see Brunton and Caton Thompson 1928: pl.XXXIX,19, pl.XLV,12, UC.9613, but they are set vertically on the straw tempered vessels.
15 Another unprovenanced vase of the same shape is in the Petrie Museum of
excavated jar from Tomb U239 at Abydos again features one large figure interacting with two others in four different scenes around the circumference but he only has raised incurved arms in one of them. In the case of the pottery bowl from grave L209 at Nag el-Alawna, there is a design painted on the interior of three figures with outstretched arms, one of whom is spearing a hippopotamus. Interestingly, a number of anthropomorphic figurine fragments came from the same grave, the present museum location of which is unknown. The rest of the known humans on white cross-lined pottery are cursory stick figures without detail on the heads. None of the figures has their arms in the position of the figure of the sherd from Hierakonpolis; indeed the figure on the example from grave B5 at Abydos lacks arms.

Some years ago Elizabeth Finkenstaedt developed a theme on regional painting styles in white cross-lined pottery through a number of articles (1980, 1981, 1982, 1985). She studied the whole range of pottery, both excavated and purchased, and postulated regional styles based on appearance, the style of the designs and, to an extent, the nature of the pottery fabric. She defined three basic areas: the Badari area, which includes Hemamieh, Qau & Mostagedda; the Abydos area, which includes Mahasna, Nag el-Alawna and Mesa’eed; and the Naqada area, including Abadiyeh (Diospolis Parva) and Armant. Of these, she found it easiest to define the Naqada style with a typical motif of chevrons within vertical lines, triangles on the border which do not meet around the circumference and “a balance of painted and reserved areas not found at other sites”, on which hunting scenes

Egyptian Archaeology, UC.15339, Petrie 1920: pl. XVIII, 74, Petrie 1921: pl. XXV, C100M.

18 A bowl painted on the interior with two figures ensnaring a crocodile, Boston BMFA 11.1460 from Cemetery U at Abydos, Peet 1914: pl. IV, 1 & 2, XXVII; a bowl with a single figure and two hippocampi painted on the exterior, Ash. 1909.1026 from grave B5 at Abydos, Payne 1993: cat.no. 411; a bowl with a depiction of two figures weaving on the interior, Petrie Museum UC.9547, from Badari grave 3802, Brunton and Caton Thompson 1928: pl.XXXVIII, C70k; and a jar with a painting of a the figure of a man patting an antelope on the rump, Cairo JeE 26541, from Gebelein, de Morgan 1896: pl.III, 1, F. von Bissing 1904: no.2077.
are rarely shown. She defined the Abydos style as "energetic, fanciful, mannerist" with "action and dramatic tension, lacking in the Naqada region". The animals at Abydos with a repetition of symbolic behaviour such as hunting by the humans she interpreted as emphasizing "the cultic importance of Abydos and the association of the dangerous hunt with monarchical power".\textsuperscript{19} The most recent finds in Cemetery U at Abydos of two white crossed-lined vessels with scenes of a hippopotamus hunt and captives being dragged certainly reinforce her perspicacity as to the type of scene that is likely to occur at the site.\textsuperscript{20} It is however unlikely yet that the whole corpus of these vessels can support her implication that a narrative was being played out on them. Likewise, her later interpretation of the emphasis on crocodile and hippopotamus as illustrating pockets of a limited swamp environment in areas of verdant park life full of savanna fauna before the desiccation of the late Holocene began to take effect from around 3500 B.C. is an unlikely scenario. The animals that were depicted on the pottery are also found in contemporary western desert rock art and together they probably signify the existing savanna fauna in and beside the valley that existed before the environmental change to a dryer climate that took place early in Naqada II.\textsuperscript{21}

If there is any validity in the above argument, then one would expect a regional style of white cross-lined pottery to have existed at Hierakonpolis and for its links with elitism, or royalty, to be just as identifiable in this early period. Alas, the limit of the corpus at present only enables us to say the filled triangle and chevron are Naqada motifs also known at Hierakonpolis.\textsuperscript{22} So far, the linking motif at Hierakonpolis is the dot, either as part of the decoration, or forming the dividing lines between panels,\textsuperscript{23} but this motif is known in the repertoire of the potters working

\textsuperscript{19} Finkenstaedt 1985.
\textsuperscript{20} "Digging Diary", \textit{Egyptian Archaeology} no. 18, Spring 2001: 30.
\textsuperscript{21} I noted the absence of depictions of the elephant on objects in Naqada IID (Adams 1998/9: 50).
\textsuperscript{22} These motifs are also found at Ma'mariya, see note 8 and Needler 1984: fig.11.
\textsuperscript{23} Two white crossed-line sherds decorated with painted dots within parallel lines were found in Tomb 11 in 1985, see Adams 2000: cat.no. 230.
further north in the Badari area. However, the hunted or sacred animal, so typical of Abydos, is beginning to appear at Hierakonpolis in the form of the ibex and, even although the examples are limited, there are already two white cross-lined pottery sherds decorated with humans, the meaning of which is so far inexplicable.

The decorated pottery sherds found in the area around Tomb 22 in 1999 were not limited to the white crossed-line variety because three painted sherds, which are probably part of the same vessel made of Hierakonpolis ware 5 (crushed calcium carbonate tempered Nile silt), were also found. Unlike the earlier sherds described above, they are virtually without precedence because of the blend of Naqada II and Naqada III motifs on them. Enough remains of the sherds to indicate they could be part of a cylinder vessel with a rounded shoulder not unlike the bodies of the wavy handled vessels (Petrie types W49, W50, W51, W56a, g), which Hendrickx dates to Naqada IIIA1 (Hendrickx 1999:31). In fact, the only sherd with a classic wavy handle in relief that has been discovered in this cemetery was a surface find nearby (Plate 2); the few other wavy handled vessels from the Locality 6 Cemetery are Naqada IIIA2 types. It is not usual for later, cylindrical wavy handled vessels to have painted decoration, except for net painted jars (Petrie type W62), but it is not unknown; a jar from Badari grave 3701 has painted wavy lines (Brunton and Caton Thompson 1928: pl.XXXIX, D12e). Each of the fragments from Area 1 has decoration on the exterior surface in plum red paint. That on the sherd broken from just below the rim consists of a totem with what appears to be a single horn ensign and traces of possible plant motifs and vertical wavy lines and the other two fragments have vertical wavy lines (Fig.8, Pl.3, Find No. 201/4).

The elements of classic Gerzean (Naqada IICD) decorated pottery are well known, consisting of a boat scene with various

24 For example Brunton and Caton Thompson 1928: pl.LXXII, 110, UC.10127, pl.LXXIII, 145, UC.10086, Hemamieh North Spur; pl.XXXVIII, C18d,n, C33k, C44t and others to which Friedman 1999:6 drew attention as evidence of a regional style derived from a Tasian beaker.
25 See footnote 5.
26 cf. Petrie 1920: pl.XXX, handle type F. Other wavy handled vessels from the Locality 6 Cemetery are Naqada IIIA2 types, see Adams 2000: Cat.n. 234, 241,242.
additions such as Naqada plants, horned animals, birds, humans, wavy lines and sometime triangles and spirals (Payne 1993: 98-101). An ensign often appears supported against the ‘cabin’ nearest the stern of the boat, and the different types, numbering over thirty, were identified in 1913 (Newberry 1913: 182-142). The fact that boats on the same pot have different ensigns argues for them being cult-emblems, rather signs for nomes, villages or tribes. The ensign that is similar to the depiction on the sherd from Area 1 is the double horn, numbers 5 and 6 in Petrie’s identification chart (Petrie 1920: pl. XXIII, 5 & 6, p.19), which consists of two pairs of horns, one on top of the other. In the case of the sherd from Hierakonpolis, there is a vestige of the tassel hanging down from the single pair of horns. The second peculiarity is that where the Naqada II ensigns have two pendants hanging down from the pole at about a 45° to the vertical, the pole on the Hierakonpolis sherd also has two projections at about the same level, but in this case, they are pointed up at the same angle. If the motif were painted at a time when the meaning and correct iconography of ensigns had been almost forgotten, this might explain the fact that the motif is identifiable, but not quite right.

A slightly different totem featuring cow or bull horns appears on pottery vessels in the U Cemetery at Abydos, which has become famous in recent years as the site where the earliest hieroglyphs have been found on bone and ivory labels, chiefly from Tomb U-j (Dreyer 1992), which dates to Naqada IIIA1 (Hendrickx 1996: 61). The motif consists of a bull’s head in which the horns are rendered full frontally and the head of the bull is shown in right profile with an eye socket painted under the left horn; the pole curves up through the snout. On some examples there is a palm frond attached to the centre of the top of the head (Dreyer et al. 1998: 65). The horns on both types are depicted as crescents curved up, sometimes filled in with slanting

27 This structure has also been identified as a chief or king’s house by Fairservis (1983) and a removable reed platform by Payne (1993).
28 This ensign was identified on 36 boats on decorated vessels by Newberry (1913), but not traced into dynastic times as a nome standard or other religious emblem.
29 Newberry (1913) identified them as leopards’ tails.
lines with their points nearly meeting at the centre top, which is
the only part that is similar in outline to the painting on the sherd
from Locality 6. These depictions would seem to be schematic
renditions of actual bull skulls as they might have been raised on
totem poles in a ceremonial area. Such literal depictions, rather
than the schematic ensigns of Naqada IICD, seem to have been
skipped over at Hierakonpolis where no artefacts with painted
hieroglyphs have been found yet either. However, there is a
partially excavated Naqada IICD ceremonial area at
Hierakonpolis, complete with an oval court, at Locality 29A near
the edge of the cultivation (Friedman 1996). The zoological
evidence from this site of a greater preponderance of post cranial
skeletal elements from young animals (both goats and cattle)
compared to cranial remains supports the interpretation that the
heads were removed from the animals, perhaps for display in this
way (McCardle 1992). The courtyard at Locality 29A, which
was replastered five times, includes a socket for the emplacement
of a totem pole at its apex (fig.9).

Bands of horizontal wavy lines bordered by straight lines are
depicted on the decorated pots in Naqada IID1 and IID2 (Petrie’s
types D63a, D10m) and in one case, panels of wavy lines without
a border flank a male and female figure on a sherd, which
probably dates to the latter part of the Gerzean (Naqada IID2). The
evolution of the motif and indeed of decorated pots in
general was that the unbordered bands of wavy lines continued to
be painted on bulbous plain crushed calcium carbonate tempered
Nile silt (Hierakonpolis ware 5) or marl ware jars (types D20m;
D20q), both in horizontal and increasingly in vertical or angled
sets (types D20n, p; D24A; Needler 1984: cat. No.63) during
Naqada III, with the introduction of finger-painted vertical bands

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30 A depiction on a painted bowl from Tomb 23 in the cemetery contemporary
with the Naqada III period in Egypt at Qustol in Lower Nubia has been
identified as a bearded man with open arms in front of shrine fronted with
crocodile totems on poles (Williams 1986: pl.84-5, 1988: 10, fig. 1). This
putative human figure has a ring with descending wavy lines directly above it
and could be the frontal view of a cow’s skull on a totem with hanging fronds,
or intestines.

31 St Germain en Laye, 77.719E probably from Silsileh, see Cleynet-Merle and
Vallet 1982: 140.

32 Petrie 1921; Brunton and Caton Thompson 1928.
(type D25a; D26a, d, g, m) and finally only vertical bands of wavy lines (type D21g; D27f, g). The lines on the largest sherd from Area 1 (Fig.8) consist of a multiple rope of wavy lines on the left and a single wavy line on the right flanking what might be the lower part of the ensign pole in the centre. The smaller sherd has part of a wavy line, next to two possible pendants. The sherd with the possible horn emblem has a wavy line on the left. Therefore, the simplest reconstruction of the design on the vessel might be a band of intertwined wavy lines, a horn ensign and a forked wavy line, possibly repeated around the pot.

Whether the design is single, or repeated, it is unique in the published corpus of motifs. The pot from which the sherds come may date to Naqada IIIA1 and therefore predate Tomb 22, which, from the scant number of vessels found in it dates to early Naqada IIIA2. Although the Naqada IIC, IID1 and IID2 phases are lacking so far in the Locality 6 Cemetery, it gives some indication that the elements featured on the decorated pottery of that period were not forgotten in early Naqada III. Here it seems that they were blended with the minimalist fashion that was developing for simple wavy lines on vessels made for funerary use to convey a symbolic message which is not entirely clear to us.

These tantalising glimpses of the exceptional motifs of human figures on C-class pottery and a bull ensign on late D-class pottery reinforce once more the elite status of the Locality 6 Cemetery at Hierakonpolis in the early and late Predynastic periods.
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Appendix by Stan Hendrickx
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<td>L: 8.9</td>
<td>IC-IIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>C-class jar sherd; vertical panels divided by double lines of dots and a rectangular shape on the interior</td>
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<td>C-class bowl sherd; head of ibex and double line of dots on exterior.</td>
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<td>IC?</td>
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1 After Hendrickx 1996.
1.- The figure on Find No. 259 the other way up, see fig.5.

2.- The wavy handle fragment from a W-class vessel from Area 1 (Find No. 234/6).

3.- The three late D-Class sherds with painted bull ensign, plant motifs and wavy lines, see fig.8.
1. Map of the Locality 6 Cemetery
2. Find No. 30b, white crossed-line bowl rim from the elephant grave, Tomb 14.
3. *Find No. 77/2, white crossed-line bowl rim.*
4. Find No. 270, white crossed-line sherd with ibex.

5. Find No. 220A, proto-serekh between dotted lines on white crossed-line sherd.

6. Find No. 259, white crossed-line sherd with figure and profile of the handle.
7. Find No. 220B, white crossed-line reconstructed sherd with human figure.

8. Find No. 201/4, crushed calcium carbonate tempered ware vessel fragment with ensign.
9. The reconstruction of the ceremonial centre at Hierakonpolis, Locality 29A (after Hoffman and Friedman).