

The Horned Quadruped Conundrum

—Xavier Droux, Lincoln College, Oxford

The list of wild animals attested at Hierakonpolis is now quite impressive when one puts together those buried at HK6 with the new additions made each year by the Hierakonpolis rock art survey. Between them, these two archaeological records share some notable similarities. For example, the elephants and hartebeest were both buried and drawn. Hippos are also present in both—three were buried in the cemetery, while an increasing number of rock art depictions are being discovered some 4–5km away from the river. These additions to the rock art record further highlights the obvious resonance the hippo had in the early Predynastic period. It is known from a record-breaking 166 pieces of mobile material culture from across Egypt, appearing on C-ware vessels, as cosmetic palettes, and as figurines, including the remarkable steatite example and unique ivory wand from HK6 Structure 07 (see *Nekhen News* 19:7–9).

From the similarities between the faunal, the figural and artifactual records, it is tempting to generalise that species that had widely understood representational value were necessary components of the funerary entourage of the rulers of Hierakonpolis, and vice versa. However, more intriguing are the still unexplained differences between these bodies of evidence. Aside from the giraffe, which is now well-attested in the site's rock art, but continues to be frustratingly elusive in the cemetery (though we remain hopeful), the most significant difference involves what are collectively known as horned quadrupeds. These include gazelle, ibex, oryx and other less easily identified four-legged antelope-like creatures with horns, which occur frequently in the iconography of the predynastic period. Beautifully depicted in the Painted Tomb and on other elite objects from the site, predominant on Decorated ware of

the Naqada IIC–D period and widely attested in the rock art of the Hierakonpolis region and elsewhere, they are prominently absent from the buried fauna at HK6. Why is this?

Granting that the actual bones of ibex and the larger of the antelopes, such as oryx and addax, are missing or exceedingly rare anywhere in Egypt, had the rulers at HK6 wanted these species buried with them, we cannot doubt they would have been able to do so. The situation becomes even more curious when it comes to the gazelle. The excavations at the ceremonial centre at HK29A yielded numerous bones of dorcas and the rarer damas gazelle, which supplemented by the iconographic record, suggest that they played a significant role in the rituals undertaken there. Their bones were found together with those of other wild animals, like hippo and crocodile, representatives of which were also buried at HK6. So what is the difference between them? If gazelles were hunted and gathered for rituals at HK29A, how come they weren't selected for burial? Did they have an altogether different symbolic value from other animals at the temple? Were they too common or too weak to be included with the more powerful in the cemetery? As for the other members of the horned quadruped collective, can we explain their absence by assuming they were so sacred that it was a matter of look (and depict) but don't touch? We simply don't know, and it all remains a conundrum.

Clearly, one explanation will not fit all of our four-legged friends, and the perceptions of kings and commoners need not to be the same and probably weren't. But as new discoveries are made across the site—in the rock art, cemeteries and settlements—we will be in a better position to theorize on the matter, and maybe even find the solution! 🐘



Horned quadrupeds in the Painted Tomb.