

Animals in Predynastic Material Culture at Hierakonpolis

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When it comes to animals in Predynastic art at Hierakonpolis, outstanding amongst many significant finds are the remarkable flint figurines from the elite cemetery at HK6 (see back cover). Who could have imagined in 1980, when the flint hippo was found on the surface at the north end of the cemetery, that ten more animal flints would be recovered from the site? Portraying ibex, Barbary sheep, donkey, elephant, and dog(?), these new finds provide strong evidence that the three flint figurines in Berlin's Ägyptisches Museum, including a lovely hartebeest, also hail from the site, while the stunning crocodile, now in Basel, can hardly come from any place else.

Comparing the animals depicted in flint with those buried at HK6 is revealing. Almost all of the flint figurines find counterparts among the creatures interred, with the notable exception of the elusive ibex. No grave of a confirmed ibex has ever been found anywhere in Egypt, and isolated bones

although they will enter the corpus later on, and in a big way (see pages 24-28).

Given the disturbed condition of the cemetery, we are very fortunate to have found so many of these fantastic flint creations. This is mainly due to the fact that the figurines were not placed within the graves, but rather deposited by or inside the above-ground architecture of the pillared halls or superstructures (see green dots on pages 20-21 centrefold: hereafter CF). As a result, they escaped most of the ravages of plunder. This is also the case for many of the other treasures we were to discover here.

Relatively unscathed, Structure 07 was the best preserved of the pillared halls and also the most prolific. The star piece from within it is arguably the malachite falcon (CF2). Found broken in fragments, it is thanks to the skilful mending of Lamia El-Hadidy that we were able to reconstruct



Five flint ibexes in a row. (Middle image ÄM15775, courtesy of the Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin).

occur with extreme rarity at only a few sites (Maadi and Hierakonpolis). Yet, with five figurines, it is the most frequently knapped species and, in fact, together with the Barbary sheep, it is the only one that appears in multiples or as sets. The ibex was also popular in other media across early Egypt, such as on vessels of C-ware (10 examples) and D-ware (37 examples), not to mention countless rock art occurrences. Clearly, its prevalence in art does not reflect the frequency of its slaughter, be it for burial, rituals, or as a food source. Insofar as HK6 is concerned, it suggests that the species represented in flint did not all have the same symbolic meaning and may have served different purposes within the cemetery. It is also notable that not all of the buried animals have corresponding flint portraits; chosen are those that already had resonance in the art of the early Predynastic and would have been immediately recognizable. So while exotic baboons and cats were included among the burials, they are not yet present in art,

it and see the distinctive way the wings were carved away from the body with just a small point of attachment. This allowed us to identify curious objects found previously clearly as falcon wings. Two carved in steatite were discovered on the south side of the Tomb 16 complex, while another set in red breccia came from its northwest side, and a third pair in calcite was recovered around Tomb 23. These are the earliest falcon statuettes known from Egypt and they show just how ancient the long-standing connection between the site and the falcon is. Close by was another outstanding object: an ivory wand with tiny hippos carved along its upper edge (CF2). In the same corner was a tiny, but well carved, steatite figurine of a hippo, measuring just 3.3cm long, which ranks among the smallest known three-dimensional depiction of this massive creature, and can be contrasted to the largest, estimated to be at least 1.5m long, which we found on the cemetery's northern tip (CF9).



Falcon and falcon wings: The collection so far.

The circumstances of these discoveries within the pillared halls suggest that, just like the flint animals, these items were not grave goods, but rather served as objects for ritual use at funerals or later on. They appear to have been placed in the corners of the structures, but the disturbed find contexts of many pieces means we can't tell whether they were originally on display or cached after use. This includes the fragments of at least three (based on paw numbers) steatite carvings of felines. One set of legs comes from a small figurine and the others from larger ones, possibly suggesting a family grouping. Part of one head survives, but the bodies are missing. Without characteristic details, such as mane or spots, it is hard to determine which big cat was represented: lion or leopard. Until the very end of the Predynastic period, representations of large felines are almost non-existent outside Hierakonpolis. Big cats are also extremely rare in the faunal record, with the leopard from HK6 Tomb 50 the only example to date. That tomb was most likely subsidiary to the rich Tomb 72, within which was an unusual brown-polished jar incised before firing around its belly with the delicate outline of a large feline (CF6). Here again, there are no features to indicate which species was meant, or whether the distinction between lion and leopard was even relevant at this time.

The small size of most of the objects suggests that they were not meant for all to contemplate; however, definitely meant to be seen was the large ceramic hippo standing at the north tip of the cemetery rise (CF9). This area, if not the statue itself, was the focus of much attention. Several human figurines have been recovered there (see *Nekhen News* 32: 19-21), as well as one small clay hippo figurine that was likely appended to the rim of a vessel (CF9). The flint hippo (CF11) found in the vicinity so long ago probably also comes from this rich context. In addition, the area also yielded statuettes of a feline and birds, crudely carved in soft sandstone with sockets in their base (CF10), which were apparently meant to be attached to poles, perhaps as standards or architectural embellishments. Discovered near Tomb 11, which yielded



Steatite felines: Paws and claws from at least three figurines.

lapis fly and shell beads as well as a limestone vulture pendant (CF7), their date and association are still uncertain.

From within the tombs at HK6 there are only scant remains of what were no doubt originally much richer inventories. Tomb 72 gives us some indication of the diversity and special quality of the animal imagery present (CF6). In addition to the brown-polished jar with felid mentioned above, two of the ten ivory combs in the tomb were also adorned with animals: respectively a donkey and a stunning hippo—a creature that, while frequent in various other media, is only rarely found on combs. Far more common in this position are what we can generally call ungulates (hoofed critters) into which category we can place three fragmentary ivory carvings with heads missing from the Tomb 30 area and the charming little giraffe recovered near Tomb 78 (CF5).



Fragmentary quadrupeds from ivory combs at HK6.

So far unique to Hierakonpolis are the three calcite scorpion figurines from Tombs 23 and 26 (CF16-17), which along with five stinger tips from the pillared halls, reflect the long and intimate connection of this arachnid with the site, as will be seen more clearly later. Rounding off the HK6 animal round up are two clay cattle figurines, one a fragmentary but free-standing figurine from Tomb 23 (CF17), the other, from Tomb 18, possibly an applique on a vessel (CF13). Numerous other clay figurines are preserved only as horns—presumably bovine—and in a few cases legs, but exactly what animals are meant is lost. As wild animals were most favoured for depiction, the extravagant horns may suggest that aurochs was



The Tomb 26 scorpion with tail reconstructed and stinger tips of others from HK6.



Horns and legs of ceramic figurines from HK6.

intended; however, a pre-firing potmark on a roll rim jar from Tomb 6 seems to show short horned domestic cattle (CF20). Of painted pottery, the most frequent medium at other sites for animal representations, we have only one example from HK6. A single sherd preserves the head of an animal rendered with a unique inward curving configuration of horns (CF12). It possibly portrays a hartebeest, or some type of gazelle, a species whose physical remains, so common elsewhere on site, are notably absent at HK6.

Moving on to the various non-elite cemeteries at Hierakonpolis excavated over the years by different teams, only a limited picture can be compiled due to plunder and poor recording. Aside from the greywacke palettes in the common fish, bird and turtle shapes, there is a lovely example of a Barbary sheep found by F.W. Green in the HK43 area, one of only 11 known. A calcite hippo pendant from the same cemetery is also rather nice, while the D-ware fish- and bird-shaped jars, while not common, are similar to those known from other sites during the Naqada IIC-D phase. All these items are known throughout Upper Egypt at this time and were likely produced in workshops not located at the site.

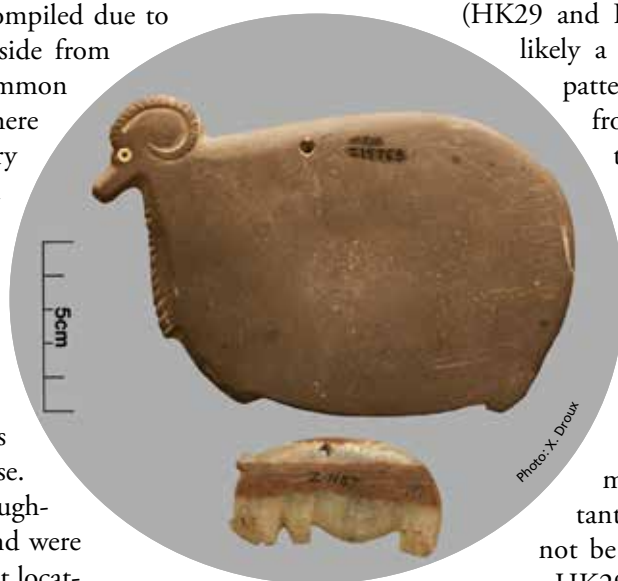
However, more interesting are images created by the inhabitants themselves, in particular the marks applied to pottery. Potmarks are rare in the HK cemeteries, but two of the most elaborate were applied to straw-tempered bottles at HK43. The one from Burial 104 depicts a large giraffe and a long-legged bird (ostrich) in the company of another motif that is harder to understand. Ostriches also

feature on the other bottle, deposited in the intact grave of a small child (Burial 213). A notch in the rim suggests it may have been a feeding jar.

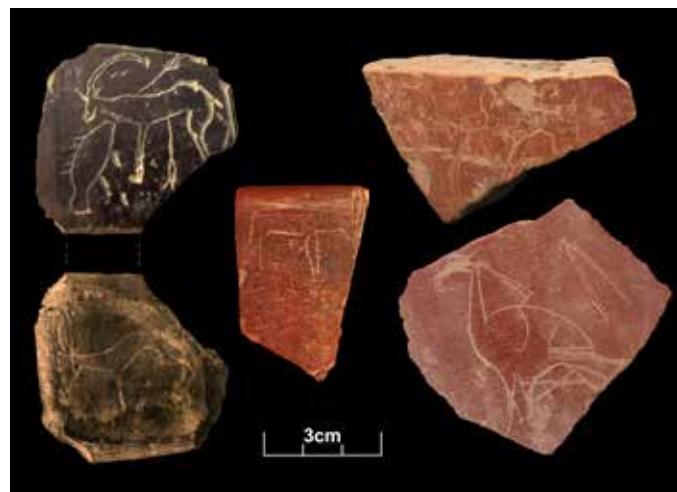
Animal marks are also found within the settlement remains, although in many cases it is clear these incised motifs were not applied to pots, but rather to the sherds, and served to transmit a message. Best known in this category is the black-topped sherd carefully incised with an ibex and fish on one side, and 'countersigned' on the back with a gazelle (HK49). Other examples include various quadrupeds, probably antelopes which cannot be more fully identified (HK29 and HK29A), and one bird (HK25), likely a crested ibis. Given the breakage pattern, a sherd with two ostriches from HK29 may also be placed in this group.

Amongst the marks that were most likely applied to full pots, notable is a hartebeest and Barbary sheep incised on a thick vat sherd from the brewery at HK11C Operation B, both of which being very similar to rock art (see page 12). Unfortunately, many other fragments only retain tantalizing parts of animals that cannot be further identified, but from the HK29A area two vat sherds preserve images of gazelles and a bovid.

Animal imagery in other materials from the settlements is much more limited. In flint, there are two crude figurines of dogs. Of painted motifs, one C-ware sherd retains the head of a gazelle (HK24B) and another depicts a hippo (HK25), both examples standing out amongst the quantity (though highly fragmented) of painted pottery in the settlement that bear geometric or floral designs.



Barbary sheep palette and calcite hippo pendant from HK43.



Sending a message: Animal marks on sherds from the settlements.

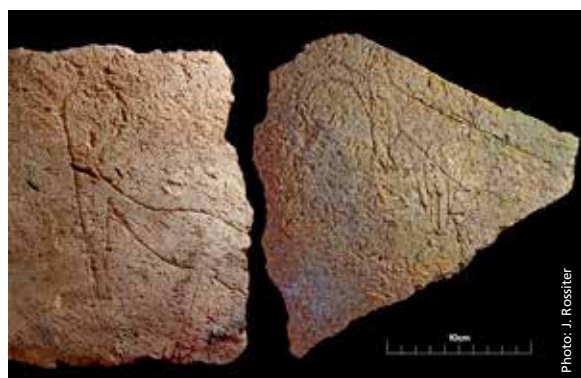
Potmarks on bottles from HK43: Giraffe and ostriches.

It is perhaps not surprising that a greater quantity of animal-bearing objects comes from the area around the ceremonial center (HK29A-B/HK25). In addition to the objects mentioned above, there is a finely carved hippo-shaped vessel in calcite, the only one of this type with known provenance. A relatively large clay hippo recovered as a surface find in this area makes it likely that the collection of figurines found by Henri de Morgan, which includes over a dozen cattle and two hippos and one elephant, may come from this part of the site, but sadly we cannot know for sure.

Looking at all of the material together shows that the inhabitants of Hierakonpolis made full use of animals and animal imagery, employing species that already resonated in their culture as well as experimenting with new forms to convey messages, ideas, or concepts. The disturbed state of the settlements makes it difficult to determine how prevalent or varied animals were in the visual culture of daily life for the general population. To what extent animal imagery was present on materials that have not survived, such as house or enclosure walls, textiles, painted leather, or even tattooed

skin, we cannot say. What remains, notably the pot markings, shows a definite preference for the wild rather than the domestic animals around which they worked and lived. Yet, not all were used to convey the messages of the marking: non-threatening animals were definitely favoured. This contrasts markedly with the elite's use of animals, both at the ceremonial centre or in their extraordinary cemetery. For them, powerful creatures took centre stage with the hippo amongst the favourites, a situation that is comparable to the elite cemetery of Abydos. However, while the Upper Egyptian elites may have used the same or similar wild species in their mobile art, they did not always express precisely the same concepts. For example, the hippo is mostly shown as hunted and annihilated in the north, while at Hierakonpolis, it seems to have been revered for its might and fierceness, powers they sought to obtain through ownership and control of the actual beast.

Every new discovery adds to this very incomplete, yet beautifully crafted puzzle, as we endeavour to find the key. The past decades of work at Hierakonpolis have greatly enhanced our understanding of Predynastic people and their relationship with their environment and the animal world. Let us hope for more fabulous finds in the future! 🐘



Vat sherds incised with hartebeest and Barbary sheep.



Calcite hippo jar from HK29A.



Elephant figurine found by H. de Morgan.

'Bowtied' Donkeys at Hierakonpolis — a Riddle Solved?

—Frank Förster, University of Bonn

Despite their small dimensions, the considerable (and probably still growing) number of figural flints rate among the most impressive discoveries made within Predynastic Hierakonpolis. These encompass representations of wild animals such as ibex, elephant, hippopotamus and Barbary sheep, but also a hunting dog and the stunning figure of what seems to be a bow-legged dwarf, all of them testimonies to the outstanding creativity and exceptional craftsmanship at this unique site.

Among the flint artefacts there is also a number of enigmatic objects which, due to their distinctive shape, have been dubbed 'bowties'. These are roughly rectangular flints that were notched in the centre, resulting in two opposing trapezoids with sides sloping in toward the middle. Five examples, or fragments thereof, were found during excavations around the Tomb 16 complex at HK6, while a sixth one, purchased near the site in 1902, now resides in the Liverpool World Museum. Remarkably, all of them are made from the same fine beige-coloured flint using similar knapping techniques, and have comparable dimensions (L: 6.6–7.55cm; W: 3.2–3.8cm; Th: 0.58–0.75cm). The four examples, found in 2011 near Tombs 48 and 49, are even virtually identical in terms of size, material and production technique, each with the same specific corrective measures applied to small mistakes on their surfaces. This suggests that they not only derive from a single workshop, but were made by the same craftsman (see *Nekhen News* 23: 18).

Despite their homogeneity and distinctive shape, the identity and possible function of these mysterious objects remain unknown. Considering their dimensions, form and

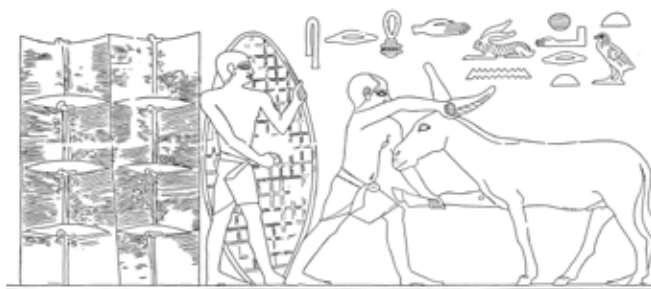
weight (c. 14 grams), they could not have been used as projectiles or arrowheads. Instead, a tentative identification will be proposed here taking into account two specific aspects: the possible figural character of the objects; and a potential, perhaps even physical, relation to another flint eccentric: the donkey figurine (11.6 x 6.8 x 0.8cm). It too was uncovered in 2011 by the north edge of Tomb 49, just a few meters to the north of the find spots of three of the bowties.

When viewing the donkey and the bowties together, and considering the typical work of the (domestic) donkey, one is struck by certain similarities with harvest scenes, such as the one represented in the 5th Dynasty tomb of Ti at Saqqara. Here, sheaves of grain are shown piled up, awaiting transport on donkey-back to the threshing floor. These sheaves of bundled grain, tied in the middle by a cord, bear a strong resemblance to the general shape of the bowties. One can even imagine that the notches in the flints were used to affix cord, or even stalks of grain, in order to create small models of such sheaves. To some extent, their function would be comparable to the same motif in historic heraldry, which is used to represent the agricultural wealth of a specific region or locality.

Yet, there might be an even closer conceptual link between the donkey and the bowtie flints. Apart from their possible identification as sheaf models, the bowties might alternatively represent a double pannier, i.e., twinned bags of trapezoidal shape that in reality flanked both sides of a donkey's body, but in two-dimensions were often depicted in top view as a double trapezoid. This is well-known from a number of First Intermediate Period tomb scenes.



Flint donkey and selected bowties with line drawing showing dimensions of all bowties compared.



Above: Bundled sheaves of grain in the Tomb of Ti, 5th Dynasty. Below: Bundled grain in modern heraldry used as symbols of agricultural wealth.



Donkey with double pannier shown in top view. Tomb of Iti and Neferu, Gebelein. Museo Egizio, Turin.



Pair of model bags tied together for transport. Tomb of Iti and Neferu, Gebelein. Museo Egizio, Turin inv. S. 13094.

Moreover, hundreds of model bags have been found in various late Old Kingdom or First Intermediate Period tombs at Gebelein and Qubbet el-Hawa, often tied together as pairs, implying transport on donkey-back, some still holding remains of grain or other organic matter. In the Middle Kingdom, wooden tomb models of loaded donkeys show that such double panniers were regarded as units, and were created separately as one piece.

Thus, foreshadowing the pictorial renderings of later times, it can be imagined that two flint bowties were fixed by a cord to each side of the donkey figurine, either horizontally as grain bundles or, perhaps somewhat more likely, vertically as double panniers. Of course, there is a huge chronological gap between the Hierakonpolis flints and dynastic depictions, but models or imitations of bags and slings denoting transport are also attested in Early Dynastic times.

Throughout the dynastic period, the depictions and models convey the same idea, regardless of whether sheaves or bags full of grain are represented, alone or on pack animals: the infinite supplying of the deceased with agricultural products. The same concept might therefore also be applied to the flints at HK6.

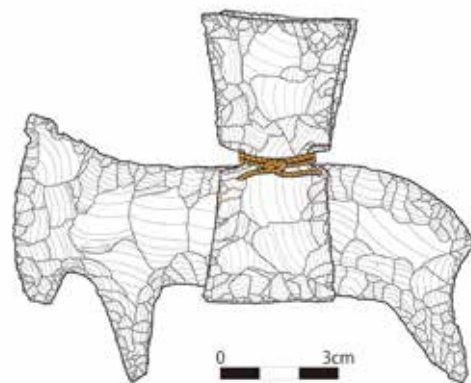
If this (admittedly speculative) interpretation of the bowtie flints is correct, it has some interesting, albeit not completely surprising, implications. It would mean that the range of animal species depicted by the Hierakonpolis

figural flints would also encompass, in addition to the hunting dog, another domestic creature: the donkey, as the principal beast of burden. Almost all species represented in flint are also attested by physical remains buried at HK6, and this includes four potentially domestic donkeys (one from around Tomb 14 and three babies in Tomb 111). The identification as domestic and the association with the bowties would then add to the overall picture of a well-organized ritual landscape displaying the basic concepts of 'order over chaos', apotropaic magic and the eternal provisioning of the deceased. The distribution of the flint objects, often found at the corners or boundaries of mortuary buildings and complexes, certainly seems to reflect a ritual purpose.

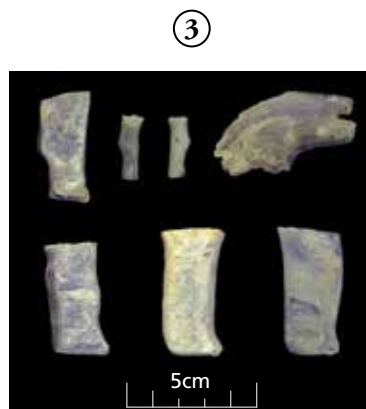
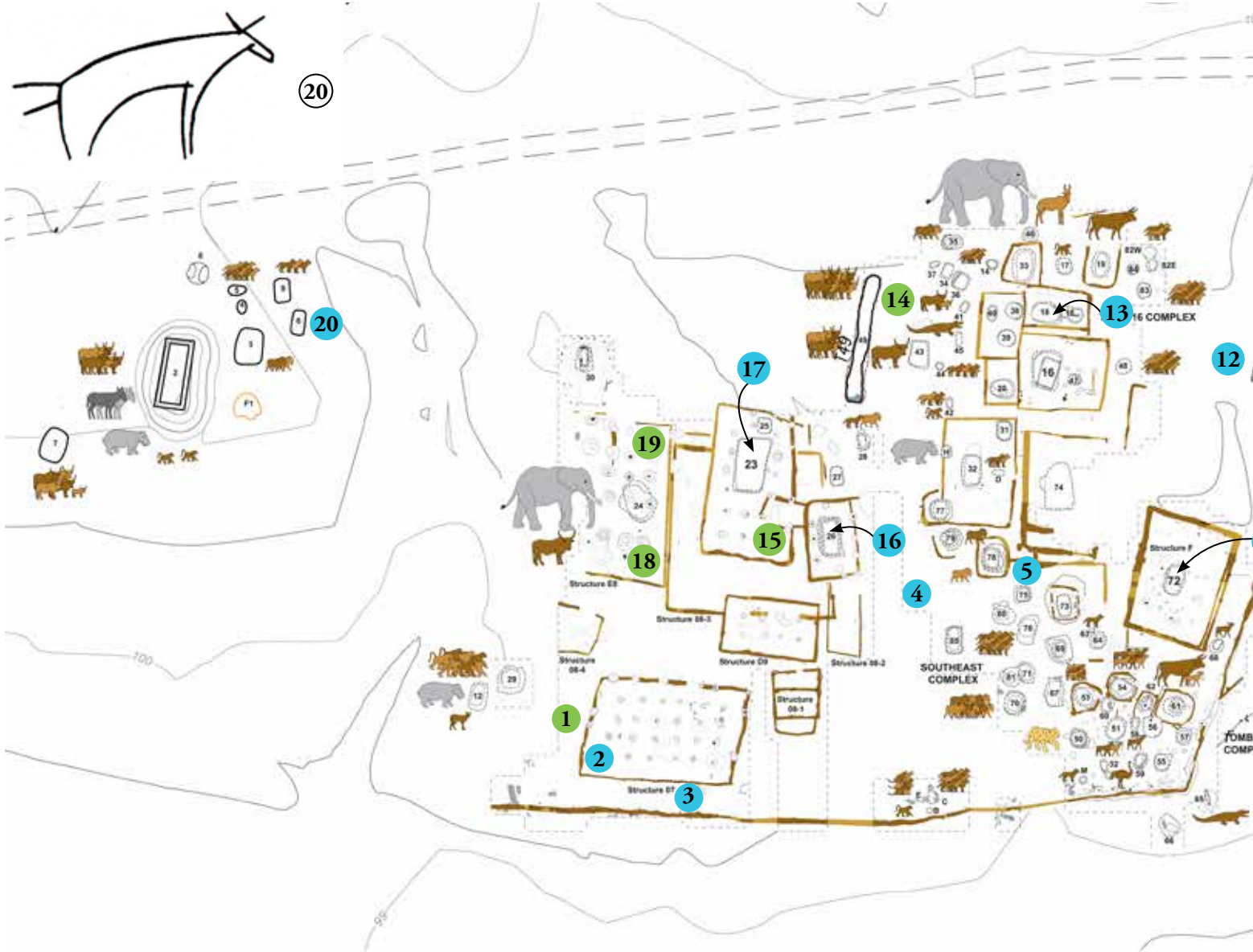
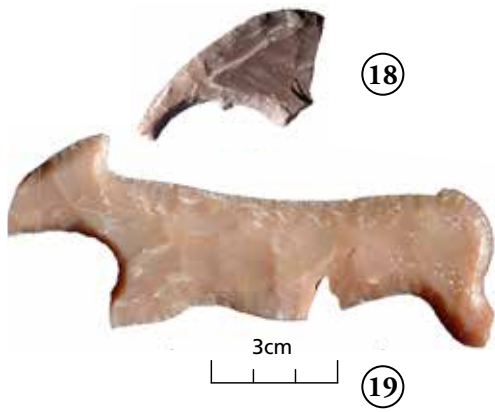
Finally, recent research suggests that the figural flints from HK6 were commissioned, and in some cases created as sets, specifically for use in this elite cemetery. In view of the six bowties so far attested and the burial of the three baby donkeys mentioned above, I would propose that at least two more donkey flints were originally present. Alternatively, instead of three, representing the plurality or even the totality of potential pack animals, a set of four donkey flints might plausibly have been created, representing the cardinal points from which such provisions could or should be received. It is to be hoped that, despite these difficult times, ongoing excavations at HK6 will discover answers to this and related questions. 🐴



Wooden tomb model of donkeys with separately modeled panniers. Middle Kingdom. Roemer-Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim, inv. 1891.



Flints together: A tentative reconstruction.





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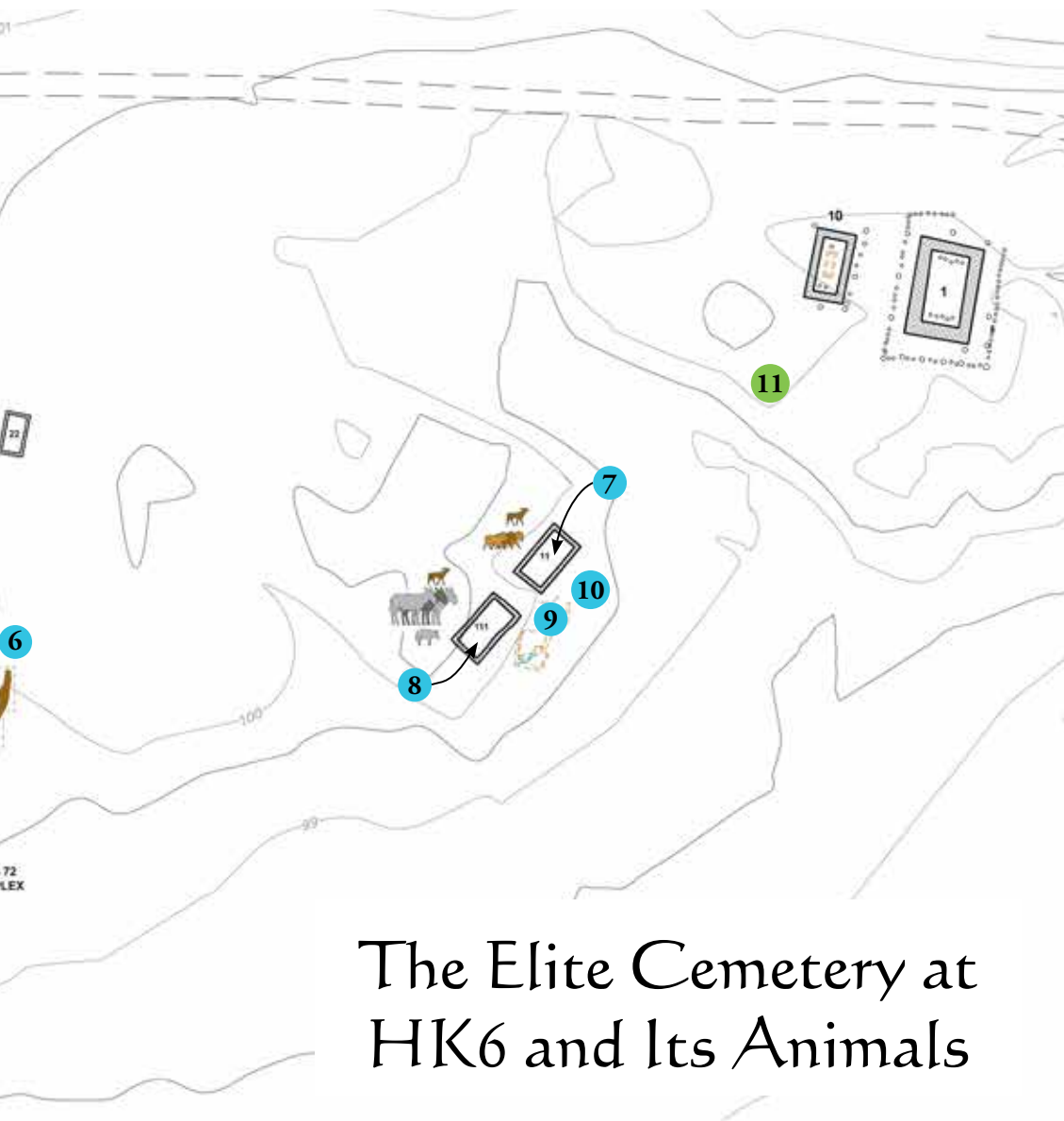
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The Elite Cemetery at HK6 and Its Animals



Animals in Stone and Bone



A Hierakonpolis speciality: Flint critters from HK6 (pages 14–17).



Bea and the crocodile from Tomb 65.



Only at Hierakonpolis: A leopard from HK6 Tomb 50 (pages 5–10).



Pan Grave painted cow skulls (pages 34–35).



Main Deposit imagery (pages 24–28).



Big fish from HK29A (pages 5–10).



Animals in rock art (pages 11–13).