

Further Adventures at HK6: the 2010 Season

— by Xavier Droux, Lincoln College, Oxford, and Anna Pieri, University College London

In 2009, reinvestigation of the area around Tomb 16 revealed a remarkable complex of subsidiary tombs enclosed by interconnected fences. The tombs immediately adjacent to Tomb 16 were apparently reserved for young human retainers (see next), while those in the outer rung held a collection of animals forming a veritable royal menagerie that included an elephant, aurochs, hartebeest and more (*Nekhen News* 21: 4–14). This year, limited excavations on the south side of the complex added new members to both groups.

It was supposed to be a study season, but we really needed to resolve the issue of Tomb 20/21. In 1998–99, Barbara Adams' team uncovered two small circular tombs containing some lovely (and intact) pottery (see *Nekhen News* 12: 4–6; 21: 16), and in the surrounding area found the first fragments of the distinctive ceramic masks exclusive to this cemetery. We needed to verify the architecture of the tombs and obviously wanted to find more of the masks. We were successful on both counts, but had to work hard for it since the excavations had been backfilled, and the dull and labour intensive enterprise of clearing them took up precious time.

Soon after stripping back the upper layers, a dark round feature appeared, indicating the existence of only one tomb within an enclosure of small posts. Ultimately, this single tomb (20) was revealed to be oval, roughly 2.5m in diameter, and 1.2m deep. Although it is clear that the earlier excavators had not reached the bottom, someone else certainly had. Ancient plundering left little in place. The remains of three juveniles (15–20 years of age) in various states of preservation were found on the tomb floor. Only one was still partly articulated, lying on its back with head towards the east. All of the bodies were originally wrapped in linen and matting, but pads of resin-soaked textile up to 2.5cm thick suggest that certain parts of the body were specially treated, perhaps like the

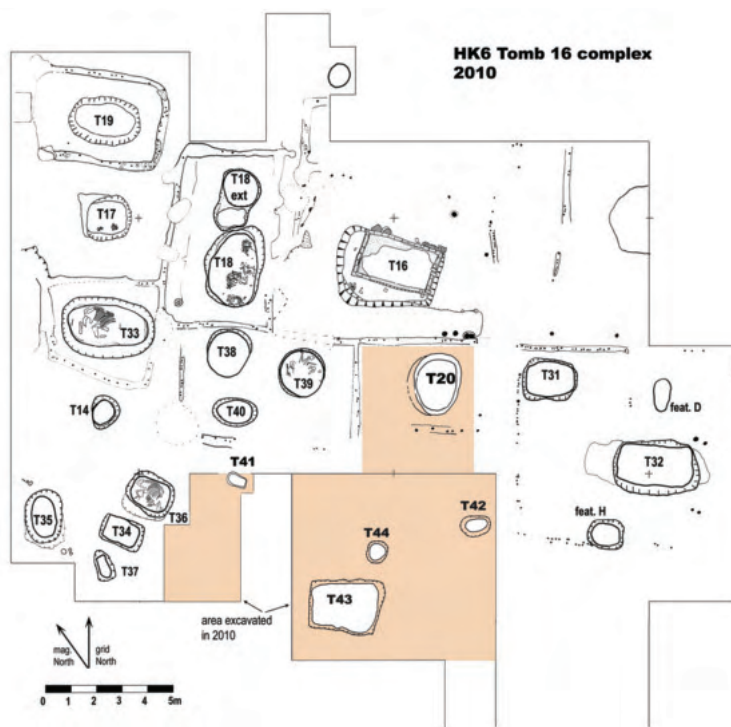
three wrapped burials known from the HK43 cemetery (see *Nekhen News* 14: 13).

Of the fine grave goods that once accompanied these young people, all that remained was one skillfully crafted arrowhead embedded in animal

hide, possibly a pouch, up against the wall. Traces of red around the tang may be the remnants of the leather hafting. Together with the earlier finds, we now know that this single tomb once contained at least eight pots, eight arrowheads and two other lithic implements, suggesting that at least one of its occupants was a hunter.

Of course, once we had begun to dig, it was hard to stop. Further exploration on the south side of the complex revealed Tomb 41. This very small and shallow grave (1.2 x 0.75m) held remnants of an adult male,

who must have been tightly contracted to fit into the space allotted. Matting was provided both above and below the body, along with copious amounts of textiles, but no other objects. Although only limited remains of the owner's skeleton were retrieved, he was one of the few to present pathologies. The neural spine of the fifth (?) cervical vertebra was bent from left to right, most probably due to a healed fracture. This injury along with his minimal grave suggest he was not one of the more illustrious retainers to accompany his lord.



Map of the Tomb 16 complex with area excavated in 2010.



Arrowhead in situ in Tomb 20.



Photo: J. Rositer

Lucky dogs! A matched set of pots from Tomb 42.

The other tombs uncovered this season all belonged to members of the animal world. Tomb 42, an oval grave (1.2 x 0.8m), contained the disturbed remains of three dogs (two adult and one juvenile) along with bits and pieces of a young baboon. Despite its disturbance, a matched set of intact Black-topped beakers was found upright along the southern side of the grave. These fine vessels are the first unambiguous evidence of grave gifts for the animals in this cemetery, and the matting and linen that lined the tomb are further reflections of the care given to these creatures.

More dogs were uncovered in Tomb 44, a small round grave, 1m in diameter. Originally the final resting spot of four dogs (three adults, one juvenile), most had been displaced into the adjacent Tomb 43 during plundering. Only the back legs of one dog were *in situ* at the base of the grave, with claws and yellow fur miraculously preserved after 5500 years! While this may seem like way too much information, discoveries like these will allow us to investigate parasite



Still fuzzy after all these years. Tomb 44 dog paw with claw and fur.

presence, not just with a view to understanding the health of the dogs, but also the humans who interacted with them and the vectors of early diseases.

The biggest job of the season was excavating the domestic bull, which we eventually uncovered on the mat-lined floor of a large (3.1 x 2.2m, 1.2m deep) rectangular tomb (43). We really didn't want to go there (it was a study season after all!), but the cascade of bones to the east of the large crater that eventually became the tomb left us no choice. Although the chances of finding anything in place initially looked bleak, beneath layers of matting and linen, the hind quarters, some ribs and the tail were found in articulation. In the fill, a substantial part of a White cross-lined bowl with geometric designs was recovered, but its association with the tomb is not certain.

No fence was detected around Tomb 43, but its size and depth indicate special efforts were taken for this bull in contrast to the domestic cow with her calf, which were packed into the small and shallow Tomb 36 without evi-

Object of Desire

There were many reasons for reinvestigating the area around Tomb 16. One of them was to find the missing bits of the ceramic masks, especially the smaller, more feline or 'feminine' of the two known from that tomb complex. Since their initial discovery in 1999, fragments of at least six other masks have been recovered from all around the cemetery, with numerous pieces of ears, eyes and upper edges attesting to their presence. Chin/beard fragments, on the other hand, have been notable by their absence. With only the one complete face, we couldn't even begin to suggest the full appearance of the others. Since the majority of the smaller mask had been uncovered in the vicinity of Tomb 20, from the beginning we kept a vigilant eye out for more and were rewarded, finally, with that all important pointed chin, or more precisely, the beard. We can now confirm that both masks portray men and, together, their jaw lines reinforce the significance of beards as markers of social or divine status. This does not necessarily mean that women were not endowed with distinctive and individualized masks, but we'll have to find the chins to prove it. A quest of 11 years is now concluded with two nearly complete and almost other-worldly faces to ponder as we unearth other well-kept secrets of HK6. 🐾



Face to Face. Large and small masks from Tomb 16.

dence of additional care other than a good last meal (see Final Meals). Surprisingly, the bull appears to have gone to his grave hungry. While quantities of rump roast and beef jerky were preserved, only a very small amount of gut contents was recovered. Thus, his eating habits remain a mystery. Together, these are the oldest and most complete skeletons known to date that can be attributed to Egyptian Longhorn cattle (see below).

Once this load of bull was out of the ground, the 2010 excavations were brought to a close. It was only later that we discovered, mixed in with the disturbed deposits at the top of Tomb 43 and the surface debris to the south of Tomb 41, the feet of a crocodile. With one foot in each deposit, the sliver of space we left between them as an access path must be the location of its burial. It may be a textbook example of Murphy's Law (wherever you dig, it will always be in the next square), but at least we know where to begin next season! 🐾



Sorting out the bull in Tomb 43.

Death in Fragments: Piecing Together the Skeletons of HK6

— by Sean P. Dougherty, MATC, Milwaukee, WI

Thus far, readers of *Nekhen News* have been introduced to the various marvels uncovered in the elite cemetery at HK6. There have been lovely artifacts demonstrating the craftsmanship of the Predynastic Egyptians, a skeletal menagerie of animal remains, and the remnants of what must have been an impressive display of funerary architecture. These ancient wonders of mortuary display and conspicuous consumption were dedicated to the elite of Hierakonpolis and this article will discuss the remains of those humans who were apparently dedicated to them as well.

The remains of a minimum of 36 individuals were excavated from 11 tombs in the Tomb 16 complex (see Table). Unfortunately, all had been looted, and the skeletons were mixed and highly fragmented. While it is possible to establish a minimum number of individuals for each tomb, further details are more difficult to ascertain. Estimations of sex and age rely upon the macroscopic observation of morphological traits of the pelvis and the cranium. The loss of any of these traits due to fragmentation greatly decreases the accuracy of the assessment. Therefore, while sex and age could be established for most of the skeletal remains from HK6, there is an unavoidable margin of error.

As shown in the table, the demographic profile is a curious one. Adult females represent the greatest proportion of the sample (33%), and six of these are estimated to be young adults. Non-adults make up 30% of the sample. The youngest of these was an 8–10 year old from Tomb 32, but most appear to be in their mid to late teens. Only seven adult males

were identified, and these too appear to have been mainly young adults. In general, pathologies were rare, although this may be more an artifact of poor preservation than a true reflection of the disease and injury load of the population.

The demographic profile is difficult to interpret. The absence of younger children and infants, as well as the poor representation of males and older individuals, is troubling; one would expect more of each in a 'normal' population. Perhaps it is among the seven for which neither sex nor age could be es-

	Male	Female	Unknown Sex		Total
	Adult	Adult	Adult	Non-adult	
Tomb 14				1	1
Tomb 17				2	2
Tomb 18		4		1	5
Tomb 18 ext.	2	2		1	5
Tomb 20	1	1	1		3
Tomb 32	1	1	3	3	8
Tomb 34	1				1
Tomb 38				2	2
Tomb 39	1	3	2	1	7
Tomb 40		1			1
Tomb 41	1				1
Total	7	12	6	11	36

Sex and age distribution of HK6 skeletal remains.