

Pulling early kingship together

In 1898, shortly before Flinders Petrie discovered the tombs of the first pharaohs at Abydos, James Quibell (1867–1935) and Frederick Green (1869–1949) were working at the site of Hierakonpolis, south of modern Luxor. They found the spectacular palette of Narmer (see *King Catfish*, p. 40). The palette is the earliest monumental representation of a pharaoh and, for many today, it embodies the origins of Egyptian civilization. Yet the more the Narmer palette was vested with symbolic value by Egyptologists, the further it was dissociated from its archaeological context.

The palette was found in a temple deposit, together with more than 2,000 votive objects, including the two illustrated here. The Petrie Museum is blessed with a range of artefacts from this trove, from royal valuables to fairly simple items. This large fragment of a mace head, with its formal depiction of a king seated on a throne opposite a dancing courtier, is similar in dimensions to the Narmer palette.

In contrast, the crude limestone baboon holding its baby is more playful and intimate. Like the mud figurines and natural stone pebbles found in the same deposit, it might have been offered by people without access

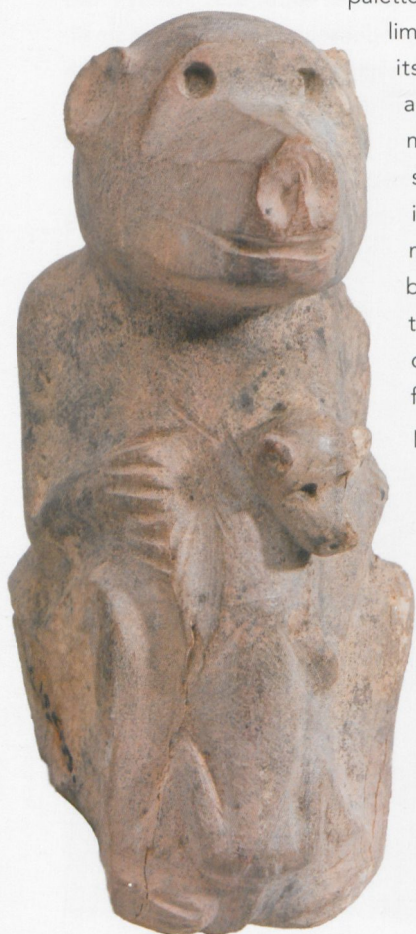
to the materials and technologies of kings and courtiers. Seeing the royal palettes and mace heads from Hierakonpolis in the context of local votive practices, and given the almost complete absence of royal objects in other early Egyptian shrines, one starts to wonder whether early kingship was more of a local affair – much less grand than its portrayals on the palettes and mace heads suggest.

The 1960s and 1970s bestowed a second life on the objects from Hierakonpolis. While an American team recommenced fieldwork in the temple area, Barbara Adams, co-director of the mission to Hierakonpolis and later Curator of the Petrie Museum, laid the foundation for a fresh interpretation of the material. Merging information from Green's unpublished pocket



Above: and Opposite:
Two fragments of a ceremonial mace head or mace heads, found at Hierakonpolis in what the excavators' called 'The Main Deposit' (UC14898 and UC14898A).

Left: Limestone statuette of a baboon and its baby (UC15000).



diaries, the excavation reports and object labels, she was able to define groups of associated objects and identify their location at the site.

Adams' research in archives and collections brought to light a wealth of objects excluded from the original reports. Adams documented all objects from Hierakonpolis kept in the Petrie Museum. Her books *Ancient Hierakonpolis* and *Ancient Hierakonpolis: Supplement* are among the first in Egyptology to make ample use of archival material and to develop publication of the Petrie collection through a site-based rather than a typological approach. It remains the only comprehensive documentation of material from Hierakonpolis in any one collection. Today, the temple and town area of Hierakonpolis are gradually vanishing from the ground. Objects and archives are all that will be left from a once-flourishing settlement that is considered to be a birthplace of pharaonic civilization.

Richard Bussmann



Above: Normal sized example of a mace head (7 cm tall) from Hierakonpolis (UC14944). These weapons were attached to a handle and many were possibly just a symbol of status.

