

# A MINUTE PREDYNASTIC FLAKE INDUSTRY FROM HIERAKONPOLIS

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The stone industries of the site of Hierakonpolis, near Edfu in Upper Egypt, have only been very cursorily published so far. Quibell and Green<sup>1</sup> who carried out the excavation of the Early Dynastic to Old Kingdom townsite, lying some 450 meters east of the desert margin only published a few odd implements. These included a limestone and a sandstone vase grinder<sup>2</sup>. These authors further refer to a great number of minute drills from an Old Kingdom floor<sup>3</sup> of the town situated in the alluvium, without however providing illustrations or any closer descriptions.

Apart from the so-called « painted tomb » Quibell and Green paid no attention to the great field of cultural debris lying on the adjoining edge of the desert. The true significance of the latter remains, once designated as « prehistoric cemeteries », was first recognized by G. Brunton<sup>4</sup>. Brunton pointed out that the desert site represented an extensive middle Predynastic settlement, a fact confirmed by more recent authors. Although pottery examples from this Predynastic town have become well known in the egyptological and prehistorical literature, the publication of the

1. *Hierakonpolis*. London 1900-02. 2 voll.

2. *op. cit.* II, pp. 17-18, Pl. LXII.

3. *op. cit.* II, pp. 11-12.

4. *The predynastic town-site of Hierakonpolis*. Studies presented to F. Ll. Griffith. London 1932, pp. 272-276.

associated flints was limited to a handful of slender, unifacial blades without retouch<sup>5</sup>. This then is the sorry state of our present knowledge of the flint industries of Hierakonpolis.

It is not here intended to give an outline of the types and forms represented, as great numbers of flints have already been removed by various collectors from this surface site. However one association of implements, at what had obviously been a stone-cutter's workshop, is deserving of closer attention. The site was discovered in February 1958 while mapping the cultural remains in relation to the geological deposits of the area<sup>6</sup>. It is situated on the Sebilian Silts<sup>7</sup> some 1000 m southeast of the Early Dynastic fort and 380 m west of the alluvium. Within a radius of 5 to 10 m some one hundred « microlithic » drills and blades and an unlimited amount of stone chips lay upon the ground or in the loose surface silt. In the general area the usual rough-faced, polished red and black-topped pottery sherds occur<sup>8</sup>. Clearly recognizable as implements were countless borers flaked on one side and worked to a thin, long point at one end (tav. I, nos. 1-8). Chiefly single backed they vary in size between 16 and 30 mm. In general they are minutely retouched marginally, but the quality is variable. Miss G. Caton-Thompson has kindly informed the writer that drills referred to by Quibell and Green (unpublished) from the Old Kingdom site are practically identical to the ones described here. They were found in connexion with carnelian, amethyst, « rock-crystal » and obsidian<sup>9</sup>. These stones occurred in various stages from broken pebbles to rough beads, leaving no

5. Idem.

6. K. W. BUTZER, *Archäologische Fundstellen Ober- und Mittägyptens in ihrer geologischen Landschaft*, Mitt. deut. Archäol. Inst. (Abt. Cairo) 17, 1959 (in print).

7. K. W. BUTZER, *Quaternary Stratigraphy and Climate in the Near East*. Bonn 1958, pp. 65-67; *Contributions to the Pleistocene geology of the Nile Valley*, Erdkunde 13, 1959, H. 1.

8. W. KAISER, *Zur vorgeschichtlichen Bedeutung von Hierakonpolis*. Mitt. deut. Archäol. Inst. Cairo 16, 1958 (in print).

9. QUIBELL and GREEN, *op. cit.* II, pp. 11-12.

doubt that the drills were used to bore these beads. At our site no trace of semi-precious stones was found although a good amount of earth was sifted, but it is well possible that such will have been long picked up already. Beside these borers a number of further minute flakes were found which cannot be so clearly associated with bead-making. These were broader and purposely worked to a somewhat blunt point (tav. I, nos. 9-12). The minute retouching is carefully done and a piece of red quartz was also used. Lastly one or two minute blades without retouching, often with broken-off point, occur (tav. I, no. 13). Naturally these little drills and flakes cannot be termed « microliths » in the modern sense of the word.

In association with these deliberately executed pieces were large numbers of minute flakes representing nothing but flaking debris of implements large or small. A collection of larger implements common to both this site and the whole Predynastic settlement was also made. These included above all a broken off, leaf-shaped, bifacial polished arrow head (tav. I, no. 14), a crescent shaped drill (tav. I, no. 15), a sickle blade of the common type and a number of various blades. The last include slender, unifacial blades without retouch of the various types illustrated by Brunton<sup>10</sup>, blades with marginal retouch on one or two sides, large convex-ended flakes, etc. Notably some of the large blades were unfinished or had not been put into use. The overall material in connection with the great amount of chips and debris most probably represents the workshop of a stone-cutter and bead-maker. Such a bead-making industry has only been published from the contemporary Gerzean settlement at Abydos<sup>11</sup>, where however it was not recognized as such. The individual forms and general association correspond strikingly well. It is all the more unfortunate that the apparently similar collection of Quibell and Green,

10. *op. cit.*

11. T. E. PEET, *The Cemeteries of Abydos*. Part II. 1911-1913. London 1914. pp. 2-4, Pl. III.

dating from at least eight centuries later, remains unpublished in the University Museum, London.

Of further interest is the crescent drill (tav. I, no. 15) occurring in an unequivocal middle Predynastic association. Miss G. Caton-Thompson<sup>12</sup> believes these stone-vase grinders belong to the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom periods only, never occurring earlier. However from the older Hierakonpolis site the use of crescent drills several hundred years earlier than was previously assumed seems certain.

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12. G. CATON-THOMPSON and E. W. GARDNER, *The Desert Fayum*. London 1934, vol. I, pp. 129-130.