

Chapter 2

The Archival Record of W.M.F. Petrie's 1894–5 Excavations in the Predynastic Cemeteries of Naqada

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Introduction

The Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology at UCL holds an extensive, albeit incomplete, archive relating to the career of Flinders Petrie (Quirke 2009). For the Naqada and Ballas excavations, relatively well known to scholars are several notebooks (Adams 1975: 110; Payne 1987; Quirke 2009: 442–61), which have been used alongside the excavation memoir (Petrie and Quibell 1896), Elise Baumgartel's (1970) *Naqada Supplement* and a handful of letters sent by Petrie relating activities and material at the site (e.g. see Challis 2013: 173; Drower 2004: 92–3) to reconstruct the season he led there in the winter of 1894–5. The resulting picture of the work, however, has remained partial and confused. For instance, Baumgartel's listings were based on a long-term correspondence project with curators worldwide to identify grave numbers inked onto artefacts at the site by the excavators. However, these numbers are ambiguous. Quibell was working at Ballas, while Petrie was at Naqada and they both began numbering tombs from 1 to 900, meaning that any number inked onto an artefact in this sequence could come from either cemetery. The problem is compounded by the later annotation of the letter 'Q' onto some objects from Ballas, but this was also the case for some objects from Naqada, whose excavation Quibell joined after completing work at Ballas (e.g. see Petrie Notebook 136, Table 2.1).

Less well known to scholars are several other sources within the Petrie Museum archives that offer insights into the season at Naqada and Ballas. This includes a few distribution records, Petrie's sequence dating slips, Petrie's pocket book and a handful of unpublished negatives and drawings. Additionally, in 2015, I located within the Petrie Museum a series of otherwise unaccounted for papers, which list every single grave at the cemeteries of Naqada and Ballas with the types (although not quantities) of pottery in each. These are published here for the first time and, as discussed below, resolve some of the outstanding confusion. They also, unfortunately, demonstrate numerous inaccuracies in the previously published supplements; Baumgartel (1970) and Payne's (1987) listings must be used with caution and cross-checked with other sources. A second substantial find was made in 2016 when I was consulting the archives of Kate Bradbury (F.L. Griffith's wife) in the Griffith Institute, which were found to include copies of Flinders Petrie's missing diary of the 1894–5 season. I have transcribed here the key parts of Bradbury's copy that relate to the discovery of Predynastic material and this forms a narrative context for the fieldwork. Such a resource is not merely illustrative; it provides a historical perspective that should encourage a more critical engagement with archival records and the interpretation of material recovered more than 120 years ago. This chapter provides an introduction and overview of the archival record of Naqada, but stops short of a re-interpretation of the site on its basis. Such an endeavour will, I hope, be taken up by other scholars.

Excavation Team and Financing

By the late 1880s Flinders Petrie was working independently of the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF) by relying upon the patronage of two wealthy industrialists, Jesse Haworth and Martyn Kennard, to support his fieldwork. After his appointment to the Edwards Professorship of Egyptian Archaeology and Philology at University College London in 1892, he established the Egyptian Research Account (ERA) in order to support the training of a new generation of archaeologists. Both of these financial resources were at his disposal for mounting four months of work in the winter of 1894–5. James Quibell and his sister Annie were supported by the ERA bank account and took charge of efforts at Ballas. Petrie, Hugh Price, Reverend John Garrow Duncan and Bernard Grenfell, together with a team of 16 trained Egyptian workmen—11 from Quft and 5 from the Fayum, including his ‘best lad’ Ali Suefi (Quirke 2010)—focussed on cemeteries and settlement areas of Naqada. Intermittent assistance came from visitors, such as James Henry Breasted, who spent two weeks working with the team in December 1894 during what was his honeymoon. Breasted’s letters to his son from the site provide vignettes of camp life and Petrie’s infamous frugality (Breasted, C. 1943). Breasted reported finding Petrie on site, for example, dressed ‘not merely careless but deliberately slovenly and dirty... thoroughly unkempt, clad in ragged, dirty shirt and trousers, worn-out sandals and no socks’ (Breasted 1943: 74). It was a formative experience for the young Breasted, who ‘absorbed every detail of the technique of excavation, its supervision and cost’ (Breasted 1943: 76).

A summary of the excavation was promptly published (Petrie and Quibell 1896). The first five chapters were authored by Quibell who provided an overview of graves from the ‘new race’ through to Old and Middle Kingdom tombs. Petrie’s subsequent chapters focussed largely on the ‘new race’ discoveries, with the exception of a short seven-page final chapter which summarized all other discoveries of the season through to the New Kingdom. This style of monograph was typical of Petrie’s approach to publication, which privileged plate illustrations over narrative. It means, for instance, that out of the 2256 graves numbered on the cemetery map, detailed drawings and discussion are only provided for 24, while an additional 115 graves are described as ‘notable’ and another 44 discussed in terms of the treatment of the body. The publication constitutes an abridged version of what was in reality a more fully-documented mission, partial records of which survive in the Petrie Museum.

Excavation Notebooks

Often referred to as the ‘Petrie notebooks’, the collection of 150 items documenting various aspects of the excavations led by Petrie between 1880 and 1924 are in fact authored by many different members of the fieldwork teams. They include plans of sites, lists of objects found, ledgers of workmen’s names and salaries, expenditure, registers and even music from the songs of the work teams (Quirke 2009). Former Petrie curator, Barbara Adams, made most of these available on microfiche, which was then transferred onto a CD-ROM in 1999. The quality of these scans by modern digitization efforts is poor and ongoing efforts by staff at the Petrie Museum are being made to capture higher quality images, although at the time of writing these are not yet available online. A total of 21 of these notebooks relate to the Naqada and Ballas season as summarized in Table 2.1.

Notebook	Site	Author	Contents
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Number			
8	Ballas	?	Graves 74–103
9	Ballas	?	Graves 51–71
11	Ballas	?	Graves 5–36
69	Naqada	?	Nubt South Town; Temple and foundations deposits; Graves 1–11, 17–50
70	Naqada	Price	Graves T57, T91–3, T97–102, T114, T116–125; B86, B89, B91–134; 501–20, 526, 557–73.
71	Naqada	?	Graves B8, B12, B14–47, B50, B53, B60–4; T2–17, T51–9; 52–61, 100, 103–115, 12 (140), 121 (141, 122 (142), 143–9.
72	Naqada	?	Graves 162–212, 214–229, 231–42, 245–64, 266, 400–02, 521–5, 527–44, 546–58, 600–01, 701–04, 709–12, 714, 716, 718–57, 800; G1–2, G5–6; T19–20, T32–43.
75	Nubt/Qift	Petrie	Miscellaneous notes made in Paris and Italy, but including a sketched map of Naqada area
135	Naqada	Price	Graves 228–9; 232–4, 236, 239, 400–02, 704–12, 715, 717–19.
136	Naqada/Ballas	Duncan/Quibell	Graves 1300–29, 1345–67, 1450–81; Duncan’s duplicate Ballas numbers to which Petrie added a ‘1’ prefix and ‘Q’ suffix (e.g. 436 = 1436 (Q): 436–49, 459–62, 470–96.
137	Naqada	Quibell	Graves 1490–2, 1550–9, 1586–1661
138	Naqada	Price	Graves 1535–49, 1560–85, 1700–29, 1760–79, 1788–1854
139	Naqada	Quibell	Graves 1661–9, 1730–59, 1780–7
140	Naqada	Quibell	Graves 1854–1916
141	Naqada	Quibell	Graves 1917–18
142	Ballas		Graves 104–200, Zowaydeh 24–8 (27 & 28 Q numbers)
143	Ballas	Quibell	Graves 201–93, 296–307, 310–14, 320–7, 330–48, 351–2
144	Ballas	Quibell	Graves 353–421
145	Ballas	Quibell	Graves 423–519, 530–41, 543–688
146	Ballas	Duncan	Graves 520–30, 700–10
147	Ballas	Duncan	Graves 690–99, 750–874

Table 2.1

As Stephen Quirke (2010) has demonstrated these notebooks have additional value as a social historical record and a means of recognising the broader agencies behind Egyptian collections given that the name of Egyptian workmen who cleared each grave are listed beside individual tomb records.

Distribution of Finds

In his 1934 memoir, *Seventy Years in Archaeology*, Petrie recalled that following the Naqada season there were ‘three hundred cases for London and a large exhibition, which surprised all those who knew the usual things from Egypt’ (Petrie 1931: 157). Such a division of finds between foreign excavator and the museum in Cairo had been established a decade previously and was referred to as *partage*. It meant that a share of all that was discovered was legally permitted to be exported out of Egypt and redistributed amongst the sponsors of each season of work, as the *Artefacts of Excavation* project has detailed (see Stevenson and Libonati 2015; Stevenson 2014; 2018). In the case of Naqada the finds exported from Egypt were subject to a three-way split between Petrie and his two financial backers, Kennard and Hayworth. One of the few archival documents relating to the distribution of finds in 1896 provides an insight into how this proceeded (Fig. 2.1). A single large sheet of paper records Petrie’s attempt to divide some of the non-ceramic finds between the three men. Lintels from the temple of Set, stone vases, beads, ivory ornaments and metal implements are all equally assigned to one of three columns with a record of their tombs numbers: A for Kennard, B for Petrie, and C for Haworth. ‘Slates and pottery’ were noted to be divided ‘ad lib’. The routes of dispersal after this split are more difficult to track down. Much of Haworth’s collection is now in the Manchester Museum (the extension to which he helped fund), while Kennard’s was largely sold at auction by Sotheby’s in 1912, although a sizable portion was presented to London’s Victoria and Albert Museum. In addition to this three-way split, Petrie notes in the excavation memoir (Petrie and Quibell 1896) that a complete series of finds would be presented to the Ashmolean in Oxford. Petrie went on to say that ‘other museums in England, Germany and America, have also received considerable selections’ (Petrie and Quibell 1896: x) as a means of spreading, standardizing and cementing knowledge of the ‘new race’.

The complexity of object histories means that several items from the site have circulated through multiple hands and numerous institutions via a variety of mechanisms over the years. Baumgartel spent almost a decade tracing material to 26 institutions (Table 1.2). The index cards that she employed to record her ongoing research are held in the Griffith Institute in Oxford. Notably, several are annotated with the destination ‘private collection’ with no further details. That several excavated pieces passed into private hands is clear from a chance discovery in 2014 of a black-topped pottery vessel in a Cornish village, accompanied by a printed label identifying it as ‘Libyan pottery’, which was Petrie’s interpretation of the location the ‘New Race’. The vessel had been given to Charles Funnell, a taxi driver in the High Wycombe area of Buckinghamshire in the 1950s. It had come into his possession in a rather unusual way; it was recompense for a series of unpaid chauffeur bills. The name of the customer who parted with the vessel is currently uncertain. While their identity remains obscure, the nineteenth-century story of the pot’s discovery and the fourth millennium BC context of its use are, thanks to that label, clear. The numeral written on the top of the card, and inked on the base of the vessel, is 1754. The recorder of this find, James Quibell, documents here a number of artefacts from grave 1754. We only know the present-day location of four of them: a set of shells (UC4658) and fragment of rock crystal (UC4659) in the Petrie Museum, and a red polished P-ware bowl in Oxford’s Ashmolean Museum (1959.274). The latter has a 1950s accession number because it came to the Ashmolean not in the first distribution of material from

Petrie himself, but by way of the private collection of Joseph Grafton Milne (1867–1951), the Deputy Keeper of Coins at the Ashmolean Museum, who visited Egypt in 1895–6 and spent time with Petrie. It is possible that on his death his private collection was dispersed by his family in a variety of ways. A more famous collector, Hilton Price, also had in his possession several items from the excavation, which were sold at a Sotheby's auction in 1911 (Price 1897).

These private collections highlight the ways in which artefacts circulated away from field sites through opaque networks never subject to archival reckoning. Another route out of Egypt was with dig participants, who frequently acquired mementoes from the sites they worked on, artefacts that sometimes re-emerged decades later in museum collections, auction houses or private hands. The connection of such individuals to fieldwork is easily overlooked given the tendency to ascribe heroic status to excavation directors under whose names field seasons were credited. Reverend John Garrow Duncan (1872–1951) was one of the core members of the fieldwork team. He was an ordained minister from Aberdeen who had been admitted to the British School of Athens in 1894 and joined Petrie's team at Naqada for six weeks. According to Petrie he was an 'active and precise observer, making excellent notes of the graves' (Petrie and Quibell 1896: p. vii). There is no record of Garrow Duncan receiving objects from these excavations, but in the stores of Dundee's McManus Art Gallery and Museum are numerous Egyptian artefacts donated by him. What links these objects back to specific excavation sites is not his name, but the ciphers scrawled onto their bases; short sequences of numbers and letters indicative of specific field seasons. A flat, grey-stone palette in the shape of a fish numbered '31' links it to a prehistoric tomb documented at Naqada, while the inked marking 'B119' relates a black-topped pottery vessel to a grave excavated nearby at Kom el-Bilal, Cemetery B. It is likely that dig participant Hugh Price similarly acquired souvenirs, but his appearance in the annals of archaeology is fleeting and they are frustratingly silent on where he went after 1896. Price had gained archaeological experience in Central America as Alfred Maudslay's assistant at sites such as Palenque in 1891–2 and Quirigua in 1894 (Graham 2002). Price was responsible for mapping and surveying, skills that Petrie put to use at Naqada. He is described in Petrie's memoir as an 'invalid', although maybe Petrie mis-remembered because he is described in the excavation report to have been 'most energetic in the excavating' (Petrie and Quibell 1896: vii) and is shown in photographs from Palenque scaling the monuments. Bernard Grenfell is better known for his papyrological work with Hunt in the Fayum, and it is unknown if he took an interest in procuring material from his week's worth of work for Petrie at the site.

Quibell's work at Ballas, in contrast, was funded by ERA with several sponsors directly being allocated finds. According to Petrie 'a large part of the Research Account results went to the principal contributor, the University of Pennsylvania through the agency of Sara Yorke Stevenson' (Petrie and Quibell 1896: x). Stevenson was also involved with the American Exploration Society, which equally channelled funding to Petrie's ERA, resulting in a sizable donation of 43 pottery vessels to Harvard's Peabody Museum. The distinction between material from Naqada and Ballas seems not to have been strictly adhered to, however. Overall, the 'Artefacts of Excavation' project identified a further twenty institutions over and above those noted by Baumgartel or Payne that hold (or once held) material from either Naqada or Ballas (Table 2.2). The actual number of institutions is likely to be higher.

Ashmolean Museum	Batley	Berlin (Neus Museum)	Birmingham
Bolton Museum and Art Gallery	Bonn	Boston Museum of Fine Arts	Bournemouth Natural Science Collection (V. F. Grenfell)
Brighton Museum and Art Gallery	British Museum	Brussels	Bryn Mwar College
Cairo Museum	Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology	Charleston Museum, South Carolina	Chicago, Oriental Institute
Copenhagen National Museum	Dundee McManus Art Gallery and Museum	Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge	Ghana National Museum
Hilton Price Collection	Ikley Manor House Museum	Liepzig	Lincoln
Liverpool World Museum	London Science Museum	Macclesfied, West Park Museum	Maidstone Museum
Manchester Museum	Merhant Taylors' School	Munich	Newcastle Hancock Museum
Norwich Castle Museum	Peabody Museum, Harvard	Philadelphia University Museum	Potteries Museum, Stoke on Trent
Rochdale Museum	Romer Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim	Sheffield Museum	UCL Institute of Archaeology
UCL Petrie of Museum of Egyptian Archaeology	University of Strasbourg		

Table 2.2 Partial list of known locations of material from the 1894–5 excavations at Naqada and Ballas

Flinders Petrie's Pocketbooks

A separate category of document is referred to as 'pocket diaries' and these have been most fully described by Paolo del Vesco (2013), who digitized the whole collection in 2012 with Kristin Phelps. There are 58 of these pocket diaries in total, most measuring 8 cm by 15 cm, and they cover the period between January 1881 and September 1941. These were an invaluable resource for Margaret Drower when preparing Petrie's biography and she drew from them extensively (Drower 1985). As del Vesco has noted, their value lies in the detail they offer on the timing of excavations and activities, as well as the fact that they cover the months in which the excavation journals and notebooks were not being kept.

Pocket diary number 14 summarizes the daily activities from 14 November 1894 through until 12 November 1895. It additionally contains a short list of 'Fayum men' with wages and a long list of objects acquired by Petrie during the year, together with their prices. Not every date in the diary has a notation of activities beside it, but where it does, it has been transcribed in Table 1.3. Few details emerge from this

resource regarding the how excavations in the prehistoric cemeteries proceeded. Indeed from January entries are few and far between, suggesting Petrie was too busy with the discoveries to maintain his pocket diary.

Date	Entry
3 December 1894	Walked from Negada to Ed Der el Ballas where Quibell had built huts. Stayed there with him
4 December 1894	With Q+Grenfell to Coptic Convent and N side in afternoon. Boxes arrived.
5 December 1894	Went over from Ed Der to pyramid with men to build. Began clearing on N of fort + building with 18 men & boys. Walked back to Ed Der to Q in Even. 6 miles each way & 3 miles more about desert.
6 December 1894	Men building over rooms at pyramid. I walked over from E der + back to Q. Boxes came to Ballas
7 December 1894	Men finishing building their rooms. Went over to pyramid. Q over with bedding, baggage. Waiting for camel. Boxes up to pyramid. Slept there.
8 December 1894	Righting rooms + clearing in front all day
9 December 1894	Finishing room
10 December 1894	Began on town. Granite (insert hieroglyphs from 11591-14-081)
11 December 1894	Men off to home
12 December 1894	On town. Blue glaze column & wigs
13 December 1894	On town. Ram III lintel. Letter from De Morgan
14 December 1894	On town. Began N tumulus. With Gardner, Hogarth, Wallis
15 December 1894	Began on pyramid. N Tumulus. Town
16 December 1894	Pyramid, N Tumulus, Town
17 December 1894	Pyramid, N Tumulus & Town
18 December 1894	N Tumulus. Blank. Long walk S of Naqadeh & up to cliffs
19 December 1894	Rain began early, on & off all day. Well found in pyrm. Central foundn. Dept. ...[?] III, S. Town with flints + pots
22 December 1894	Hogarth & Carter over
25 December 1894	Long walk up cliffs. Found large Palaeolithic flints
1 January 1895	Long walk up cliff
8 January 1895	Clearing up. Bevan came
9 January 1895	Took up Belal gisr work + gave Grenfell the shoal(?) valley
13 January 1895	Surveying near Belal gisr
17 January 1895	Bevan left

18 January 1895	Two fine cannibal tombs E of tumuli
24 January 1895	Duncan came
27 January 1895	Wrote Mr Grant about water
26 February 1895	Classifying wavy handle pots
5 March 1895	Left Nubt. Over to Kus. Bishara (?) out to aftn. Boat to Luxor. Grenfell & Duncan came on at Neqedeh
6 March 1895	At Lux. Over dealers at Luxor. To Sayce. Left in even. Leave Lux.

Table 2.3 Transcription of pocket diary entries for the 1894–5 excavations at Naqada and Ballas

Negatives and Drawings

The Petrie Museum holds more than 4000 negatives from identified archaeological sites (Picton and Pridden 2008), 90 of which are associated with Naqada and Ballas. These were identified by volunteer Joan Merritt who compiled a handbook of all negatives in 1996, which were subsequently each allocated a unique Petrie Museum Archive Negative (PMAN) number. The majority of these are glass plate negatives of images that were published in the excavation report (Petrie and Quibell 1896; PMAN 2589–2629). Forty-nine, however, are catalogued as being ‘unpublished’ (PMAN 2630–2672). Of these, PMAN 2630 to 2642 are just different views of photographs that were published in the volume. The remainder show views around the landscape of the site, shots of pottery, and three shots of the same un-numbered multiple Predynastic burial (PMAN 2670–PMAN 2672; Fig. 2.2).

Sequence Dating Slips

Amongst Petrie’s most famous achievements is the development of sequence dating based on the corpus of Predynastic pottery recovered from the cemeteries of Naqada, Ballas and Diospolis Parva (Gertzen and Grötschel 2012; Hendrickx 2006; Kemp 1982; Kendall, 1963: 659–61). Petrie transcribed the pottery contents of graves that contained five or more types of vessel onto long, thin cardboard strips. Each pottery type was assigned to one of nine ruled columns. A number of observations then guided how he sorted these slips. A key assumption came from Victorian culture-evolutionary principles; the idea that over time forms gradually either became more complex or more simple (degraded). Within the Predynastic corpus Petrie was quick to identify ‘degradation’ in the production of jars with wavy handles (W-ware). He assumed that the earliest examples were globular in shape with protruding, undulating ledges and that over time these vessels became incrementally more cylindrical, while the wavy handle ‘degraded’ until only a line traced around the rim remained. Cards with globular W-ware vessels recorded on them were thus placed earlier in the sequence than cards noting the presence of cylindrical W-ware containers. Petrie also observed that the two types of decorated pottery—C-ware and D-ware—were never found together in the same tomb and so he separated out the cards with these distinctive types into two groups. By continuing to group like with like and separating out dissimilar forms Petrie sorted around 900 slips into a sequence, a task that was far from straightforward considering that no two graves contained the same combination of pottery forms. His final task was to divide this continuous arrangement of graves

into 50 groups numbered from 30 to 80 (so as to allow for extension of the system at both ends).

The slips of card that Petrie laboured over in the summer of 1899 have survived the last century in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology. They exist in state of suspended animation affixed upon cardboard frames, but their grubby surfaces, smudged pencil lines and dented corners bear witness to the interchanging of positions that each underwent at Petrie's hand. In addition to being a valuable historical document illustrating Petrie's method, they provide data on the pottery types recovered from graves otherwise not attested in the published report, nor in the surviving notebooks. There are 12 frames of slips in total (e.g. Fig. 2.3) and these were digitized in 2012.

The codes used to distinguish the various cemeteries are problematic because Petrie needed to differentiate tomb numbers from several sites that all shared the designation 'cemetery B': Ballas, Naqada (Kôm el-Bilal) cemetery B and Hu cemetery B. To that end he used an upper case 'B' for the graves from Hu, and two different variants of lower case 'b' for the 1894–5 seasons at Ballas and Naqada cemetery B; a 'b' for Ballas and a cursive version of 'b' for Naqada cemetery B. This distinction is confirmed by an annotation at the top of one of the newly-discovered pottery lists discussed below (Fig. 2.47), providing a link between the pottery listing and the sequence dating slips, suggesting that both were created in 1899. There are numerous inconsistencies and ambiguities in these slips that remain to be resolved.

Pottery Listings

Out of the roughly 2,200 graves numbered on the cemetery map of Naqada, detailed drawings and discussion were only provided in the excavation memoir for 24. An additional 115 graves are described as 'notable', while another 44 discussed in terms of the treatment of the body. Only 32 are accounted for in Quibell's Ballas work. It has been clear for some time, however, that Petrie had at his disposal a much more detailed record of the work in order for him to develop sequence dating four years after the excavation's completion. It is likely that he used the notebooks to this end. Fortunately, in 2015 an intermediate stage in Petrie's sequence dating preparation was discovered in the Petrie Museum in the form of lists of pottery types for the Great 'New Race' Cemetery, Cemetery B, Cemetery T and Ballas (Figs. 2.4–2.64).

At a basic level, this new information allows for a more precise account of the scope of the excavations. Estimates of the numbers of graves investigated given by subsequent scholars, for instance, have varied. For cemetery B, the number of tombs excavated at the site ranges from 133 (Hoffman 1979: 109) to 144 (Bard 1989: 230), while for cemetery T Bard (1989: 230) suggested 66 burials, Davis (1983: 17) 58 and Hoffman (1979: 116) 57. It is now possible to confirm that there were up to 1918 burials in the 'new race' cemetery, 135 in cemetery B and 57 in cemetery T. The Ballas tombs are numbered up to 883. However, since there are several tomb numbers with no pottery referenced in them, it remains unclear as to whether that means there was a tomb of that number devoid of ceramics or a number in a sequence allocated to a particular excavator that was not in fact used. In other words, some of these numbers could conceivably be 'indexical absences' (Tortorichi 2015); contexts implied by the processes of recording and the distribution of numbers to different team members that were not eventually utilized.

Since only the type, rather than the quantity, of pottery is given, the potential for quantitative analysis of the ceramic profile is limited. Nevertheless, it provides a

measure of the relative frequency of ceramic types, such as cross-lined ware (C-ware) and decorated-pottery (D-ware). Moreover, given that great cemetery was actually an agglomeration of what started out as separate cemeteries it is possible that with this new data it will be possible to get a finer grained picture of the spatial-temporal development of the site.

Flinders Petrie's Diary

The Griffith Institute of Egyptology in Oxford holds what are known as 'Petrie's Journals', photocopies of which are also accessible in the Petrie Museum. These are composite files of letters (occasionally accompanied by drawings or watercolours) sent, usually on a weekly basis, by post to a network of his friends and family in England. As Drower (1985: xvi) has explained, each instalment was read by the first recipient and quickly passed on or copied for further distribution. The letters provide a narrative account of daily events and discoveries in the field from the 1880s through to Petrie's Palestinian fieldwork years in the late 1920s and 1930s. The collection is extensive and covers most of Petrie's field seasons. Yet, as Adams' (1975: 109) list of these noted, there was no available journal for the 1894–5 Naqada season. However, found amongst Kate Bradbury's papers in 2016 was a copy of the letters sent during that season. There are 27 pages of text recounting a variety of activities from Petrie's arrival in Cairo on 15 November 1894, to the building of the dig house at Naqada from 3 December and his departure from the site on 9 March 1895. As an account written for friends and family primarily, the text contains numerous colloquialisms and abbreviations that complicate its transcription. What is provided below, therefore, is my interpretation of the text that refers to the fieldwork relating to clearance of the Predynastic cemeteries and settlement area specifically, rather than the whole season. Where there is uncertainty in a translation or the text is illegible or there are other qualifying comments, I have indicated these with square brackets. My transcription is shared here to provide a general character of the content of this resource, rather than to give a definitive account. Anyone wishing to interpret this further is advised to contact the Griffith Institute in order to consult the original or facsimiles thereof.

Assessing the account as a whole, worthy of mention in particular is the speed of excavation, up to 30 burials in a single day. More importantly, throughout there are reminders of the imperative to apply caution when working with material said to be from 'Naqada'. The journal recounts regular visits to the camp from dealers and the many things Petrie purchased, some of which were published in the excavation report (e.g. Petrie and Quibell 1894: pls. XXVII.69b and c; XXXVI.95; LX.22–26). Indeed the final entry in the diary recounts what he did when he left Naqada and spent some time in Luxor: 'I bought a few things at Luxor, including some cannibal things, probably from Abydos... bought a fine flint lance, a bull's head weight, and a lot of stuff'. One of the many myths that gets perpetuated is that Petrie was assiduous in the recording of context, but that 'context' is not as we as we would understand it today. In Petrie's own words 'the aim, then, in excavating should be to obtain and preserve such specimens in particular as may serve as keys to the collections already existing' (Petrie 1888: vii). And context could be provided as much be the oral testimony of dealers as it could from archaeological fieldwork, because what was in Petrie's mind's eye was the museum, not necessarily the field site.

The account begins on 15 November 1895 with a list of Petrie's purchases from dealers of scarabs, bronze figures and papyrus fragments. On arrival in the Naqada region the early part of the text outlines the finds in the Temple of Set. It was

not until 26 December that the first 'remarkable' burials of 'cannibals' were recovered and Petrie's letters portray his early difficulties in identifying and dating the material.

26/ XII 1894

I have tapped an unsuspected cemetery S the tumuli. The burials are so remarkable, & so diff't from usual Egn tombs I will describe the finest. An open pit in the ground, 5ft 6 in wide, 10 ft 3 by, 7ft 6 deep lies N-S. On the floor of it stood a couch, of wh a few decayed traces remained, a great number of jars stood on either side at ft of the couch & a little stand on the left of the couch frame of round poles 2 in thick with carved bulls ft, not tails as usual. Hind legs at the S, & yet the skull was S half & in other tomb. On the E. the large jars contained ashes, & gravel with dried remains of beer? On the W. This order is fd in the other burials. Also contain charred bits of charcoal, but nothing more. They seem the result of great burning gathered together at burial The skeleton is never burnt. Every tomb has these ash jars. Other jars, with wavy handles always contain mud. Some small polished jars are also fd, & many rough saucers. 24 needles of copper by the left on the couch, ½ small alabaster jar at the right. The skeleton is the greatest puzzle. The bones are scattered all about, stretch 4ft from head. This was not the result of accidental disturbance of any kind for the skull was turned base up, the upper jaw broken away, & a quantity of beads placed inside the skull. No possible shifting cld move a bead necklace into a skull this broken up. The beads differ all I know. They are formed in the most primitive way of a conical hole on each side [drawing] – one carnelian, white stone glazed, all uniform & small. Other burials have been quite as great puzzles. In No1 the pelvis was under the skull wh had its base against a wall; No. 2 was all broken up above the middle of the spine; No. 3 is given above. No. 4 had no skull or bones above the breast bone. No. 5 had nothing but one foot, though with 13 large jars of ashes & 11 smaller. No. 6 had only the top of the skull, and that upside down. No.7 had the ribs and jaw in a heap; apart from the skull only was base. Tho not a single body appears as if buried entire. This is all so strange that only 2 old and trusty men are employed to clear down to the pottery, then Ali clears away the gravel so as to explore the pottery in position & then I & A together move & clear out everything, & every large bone is carefully traced by me before disturbing it. So I can be confident that these positions are certain & that the bodies noted as imperfect really were so as the bones lie under the pottery. P. suggests that they were buried after a battle; but also bury 1 foot with great ceremony. None of the large bones are split, so tribalism [?] is unlikely; & none are burnt, although so much burning took place. I am inclined to remember H's tale about Libyans who killed and ate their aged relatives. Did these people partially eat, as a ceremony, these bodies & bury the rest of them.

The pottery found is the of just the same varieties as the South town. This S. town is along the desert edge, for ¼ mile S. of xviiiith Dyn town; low heaps of rubbish, with some walls & there contain pottery (some painted) in the style wh I supposed to be Libyan & worked flints. That this certainly an early settlement is shown by a Rammeside burial being cut through it. As the date of the burials I am very uncertain. The copper needles show that they are not Neolithic, but of metallic age; between the IVth-XCVIIIth dyn there is little evidence. But at Medum (early IVth) there were copper needles as here, so I incline to date them to IV-VIth Dyn. In one grave the head of an oryx in slate was fd: the eye inlaid is white. This is the first of these small slate figures described in place, all yet known come from plunderers. So we at least know they are pre-Rameside. We have in this town & cemetery a most interesting problem of the date of connexions of large class of pottery, slate figs, & some strange burial customs with mutilated bodies and great burnings.

Have tapped another cemetery a little later than pervious. In this the jars with wavy handles [drawing] are developed [drawing] into pots with ornamented wavy line, later reduced to [drawing] cylinders with slight incised crescent pottery [drawing]. This explains the origin of these cylinders which usually also have a lattice pattern painted on them [drawing]. Like the wavy handle jars they always contain mud in the tomb. Chambers are developing in the later burials, in form of recesses at the side of the pit to contain the body. Whether there are the prototype of Egn tomb chambers, or any in the area S along existing tombs we cannot yet say. No proof of age has yet been found, not a single Egn object of usual type. Some drab pottery like IVth Dyn has been fd, & like the needles indicates very early period. 2 slate tablets occur. And in the latest type of tomb with recesses for the body the custom of cutting up the body gives way to entire burial. These entire burials are crouched with knees drawn up close on the left side, with head So, & [therefore sign] differing from Medum[?] burials with head N. An ivory spoon & some little saucers full of ivory & galena were two of special objects beside the slate tablets. The burial of jars of ashes is greatly reduced in the later tomb. We have certainly a good chapter in the history of Egn beliefs & races & so soon we can date it we may find that it is the development of the regular Egn burial.

16/I

Though we have now opened 140 of the strange tombs we as far as ever from any absolute date for them; so far not a single hieroglyph nor any datable object has been found in any of the tombs, nor in the large part of the town wh we have clears. On the other hand the slate tablets (used for grinding the malachite eye paint), the finely chipped flint knives, the little stone vases, the black-topped pottery, the pebble-burnished pottery, the wavy ledge handles, the cylindrical jars, the red pottery with white line patterns, the galena & malachite eye paint, & the red line "Libyan" pottery – all quite unfixed & puzzling in Egp hitherto – are no linked together, & belong to the people who mutilated the dead & buried with the head to the S. in scarcely a single tomb has the head been found on the body. Though many tombs have been opened, yet such cases as the head being placed on a pile of big stones in a recess, a neck vertebra being found inside a jar apart, on both arms being place while 1 should blade was removed & no trace remained of a single bone of wrists on hand – such cases as these prove beyond ? that the people cut up the dead to some extent

As for the greater number of the tombs only pottery is found; but a few have contained other things. In one large tomb was a copper adze & 2 fine flint knives. In several tombs more gazelle's heads & bones. In one was a cow's head & bones. In a very large tomb was [drawing] again child's bones with a fine flint knife 8 inches long, 2 large lanceheads of flint [drawing], some small stone vases & a puzzling lot of 9 circular objects [drawing] 4 stone [drawing] balls, 2 pieces [drawing] & a larger one same shape. The only use we can guess is that being a child's tomb these are pieces for some game [drawing] a set of 9 pairs, the balls being played at the 9 men, things a little dolmen-like gate-way the upsetting of which wld throw the player out. In another tomb was a duck-shaped jar [drawing] of stone. Beside the strange tombs we fd several brick arched tombs with bodies buried full length in the usual Egn. way, & with them jars of the regular [drawing] XIIth shape & colour. But nothing of the strange people was in these. One case of a brick oval tomb with pottery & stone vases of the strange type links the unknown people & the XIIth, but as to whether before or after we are currently in the dark. We have at least 200 more graves before us & hope & still hope to get something dateable out of them. We are drawing & recording the bones in every tomb, and keeping all the bones except fragments, & mostly all. I am out reproducing [?] the arrangement of special tombs entire.

We have just come on 2 large tombs of importance. In one everything was undisturbed, the vases in groups about the floor, & the skulls between the vases; 5 skulls all apart from bodies. Scattered upon the floor were many human bones all broken up at the end for marrow, & scooped out. Near the middle was a large heap of long bones, ribs, hands, vertebrae etc, many broken up. At the S side was an earth heap on which was 1 skull & parts of another with several large bones all broken up for marrow & one ground. These bones conclusively prove cannibalism. This tomb is the earliest that we have fd of this people, as the wavy handle vase one of the most perfect form, further from the formal & far degraded from which they afterwards had. Also instead of containing the mere mud that all the other had, these have an aromatic unguent or fat in them, ten jars full in all. The mud must be ceremonial substitute for the valuable unguent. The burning is in full force, 8 large jars being full of ashes. But thought these people were thus cannibals they were not savages. In the tomb was quantities of beads of carnelian, glazed stone, garnet, lazuli, & gold foil on a paste. Also several fine stone vases of synite, basalt, [?] & breccia, beautifully made. The other tomb is 11 x 7 & contains several burials. The main one was in a wooden coffin, & the body was quite perfect with head on; but a later burial across it has disturbed the legs.

From the objects I think this may have been a priest or medicine man, & [therefore sign] left complete out of respect. Immediately at the head of the coffin were 3 stone vases, one 6 in. high, a little one in it, & a double one [drawing] in alabaster. Next were several very fine red & blk jars, & at the end by a bowl with a broken ostrich egg, an ivory object partly hollow [drawing] 8 inches long; & another solid ivory two eyes on it. Near this were 3 weird little slate figures [drawing] with eyes inlaid. The whole outfit looks [?] for it contains 0 nothing else. 2 of the usual slabs of slate one fish, the other a gazelle, were in the same tomb. 2 pots bear on the age. These tombs are the earliest of the cannibal people, yet they are in the group with a brick-covered tomb with cannibal pottery. 1 brick made tombs are known of the xii here, wh implies that theses are dated xii. Also of the stone vases, ain pottery namely some of the xviii. So theses favour the view that the cannibals were contemporary with the Hyksos. It seems unlikely that they are the Hyksos, being in such exclusive power so far up the country: they rather seem to be some other people (Libyan?) who entered Egt from the W. We must grab up a few more of them, & see.

25th. We have gone on with varying success in our cannibal cemetery. Yesterday we had a find day of it. First a tomb with a slate [drawing] reminding me much of the puzzling Etruscan ornament [drawing] which is quite unexplained; also a mace-head [drawing] of grey granite, 2 flint lances one of very fine work [drawing] & an alabaster cup. There is another region I cleaned a tomb & came down on the most exquisite flint knife I ever saw [drawing] 8 ½ x 1 ½ x 3/16 thick. It is almost transparent, quite so on the edge, clouded like horn, of a delicate fawn colour. Both faces are work with the long s flaking, & the flakes in some parts turn into one another from opposite sides so as to see as if some were planed across with a gauge. It is it too beautiful for the profane--- too [?] long in material as well as work. Then I next found a perfect black bowl with incised pottery [drawing] of the [?] style. Meanwhile another such bowl was found; another one in another region with the above pottery [?], & astride this [drawing] which is very characteristically [?]. These strongly link the place to the XIIth, before or after. Both are quite perfect & very good. Mr Price came in with a lot of [?] pottery, red-faced with white line stags [?] & [?], & of the [?] forms [drawing], hollow through & others. We are altogether getting more [?] stuff, in stone vases, flints etc.

9 Feb. We clear 15 or 20 tombs a day, sometimes 30, but so far not a single Egn thing has been found. The principle pots lately do not help us on much. In one tomb I found

4 small animal figures, a bird, lion and hippo (?) in stone, & an animal [?] (of wood ? now decayed) covered with thin sheet lead. The style of these is exactly like the larger figures in hard stone found near the [?] at Gebelein, & of the same family as the bird & lion at Koptos. So these belong to the cannibals, & we are relieved of the difficulty of such crude inartistic figures being by the same people who did the [spirited outlines?] on the Min statues.

In one tomb was a slate in the form of an elephant, a bird (goose?) jar not opening at the beak [drawing] and an ivory comb with a mans head. This is very valuable as showing the types: the beard is long & pointed, & agrees well to Lybia-Amomite type. It is certainly not Egn, nor negro of any kind.

Well worked flints continue to come in, but there is no new types. [?] model boats [drawing], one with a row of boatmen painted along the side. In 2 tombs figures of ivory horns, one solid one hollow have been found like those known before. These are full of salt & much split. Some of the black incised [?] bowls have turned up, 5 in all now. Many marks are found on the pottery, but none of the [drawing] & [drawing] style, & no true hieroglyphs. I have sent copies of the marks to A. Evans.

20 Feb

Q has no time to write, is dissatisfied, yet has [?] some of our most important prints. And as we have pretty well solved the general puzzle of the history, IX-X dynasty, & probably got connections with Europeans works of the age, we have done about as good a strike this season as was possible. We have cleaned many mastabas of the IVth with peculiar staircase tomb opening to the N. quite a new type. The pottery & alabaster show that they were O.K., probably IVth. Then in the staircase of one of them were 5 cannibal burials, & at the top of all a regular burial with beads & pottery of XIIth. So the cannibals are clearly between IV & XII, & therefore between VI & XII. Also in a cannibal tomb at Zowaydeh more brick vaulted tombs of the XII, cut through town remains. In another tomb – cannibal – he found 2 seated female figurines, of which I enclose sketches. There is [work & ?] one clearly of the same family as the so-called 7 Cabiri found in the so-called Phoenician temple Hagar Kim in Malta. The 2 legs being turned out to one side – well crossed – the great thighs, the nude body, the stumps for arms, & the style of cutting are all the same. So these figures may well be put down to the Libyan civilisation, & Hagar Kim may be Libyan as I suspected. Then Q. found a lot of glazed beads & a hawk of crystal [drawing] glazed, of the regular cannibal type without legs. No Egyptian ever made a bird thus. Being glazed it seem that the cannibals had the craft of glazing; & it clears up the glazed beads which are not of Egyptian types, but which I had hesitated about as we did not know the cannibals had glaze.

Then I cleaned a tomb & found a large quantity of beads, including large [?] of agate, which I had not dated before. On the hip of the man was a splendidly formed copper dagger, handle disappeared, but in perfect [drawing] condition. The deeply fluted side & ribs of it are just like the Mycenaean type & unlike any Egn. Next day I found a fine flint dagger over 8 in long, with saw tooth edge & fine flaking. An excellent eg of the mutilation of the body before burial was shown by one spine .. ended at the 17th vertebra from the bone, the top being missing. The 17th was under a big bowl which filled the space where the head should have been. As the bowl contained 2 small jars, & had the foot of another larger resting on it, it cannot have been disturbed by plunderers. And the skull lay above the body. I intend to spend a few days in Italy on my home to examine things connected with this place

[drawing of figurine with note 'from watercolour drawing of W.M.F.P']

25th Feb 95.

Every day something of interest turns up, though usually of course, duplicates. 2 flint knives in 1 day, of wedge section [drawing] with a wind in the place, one a simple flake worked on the back, the other finely worked all along the edge. These are 9-10 inches long. Also a black [syenite?] mace head. Q's wok is very flourishing, more being found there than here, but he is unable to attend to it as he has to do his planning. So Duncan goes over and notes the tombs, & has done 96 in 3 days – plans, marking, everything. He is a great acquisition, has settled down to full-sized work, & does his tombs & skeletons as thoroughly as I should myself. G is better & able to look after some of my men. P does the surveys & marking the things found. At noon & night the front wall of our courtyard is loaded with pottery & skeletons of a length of some 40 ft, & all these have to be numbered & checked every 2 days. Another of the black incised bowls was P here, & 1 at Q's. I must [?] of Florence & Bologna to compare the Italian pottery as that is identical as far as I remember. A large drawing of an elephant was found sketched on a big jar. The [?] & lack of artistic feeling in these drawings is strikingly different to figures of animals on the Min statues. Though the lions & bird figs of Koptos doubtless belong to the cannibals they do not at all [copy?] the Min figs with them, as they are of very different work. We have not found here any of the Min [?] or of the R-S. shells in the figs & the difference of work is very clear.

9 March. After 10 days or 20 more I left Nubt. I bought a few things at Luxor, including some cannibal things, probably from Abydos, .. on the way down a dealer bought a fine flint lance [drawing], a bull's head weight, & a lot of stuff.

Concluding Remarks

Digging in the archives is a time consuming, yet rewarding task. The sources are certainly not objective and, like all archaeological evidence, needs critical consideration and evaluation for biases, inconsistencies and absences. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the overview provided here is encouraging enough for renewed interpretation of a site that has been largely taken for granted, but which has considerable potential for re-examination.

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