

Famous Ancient Egypt Cities - Part III

Hierakonpolis

The ancient site of this city, called Nekhen by the Egyptians, its Greek name Hierakonpolis meaning 'city of the falcon', was long venerated by the ancient Egyptians as the early capital of the Kingdom of Upper Egypt.

Just as Naqada or Nubt was the city of Set, Hierakonpolis or Nekhen was the city of the Falcon, first called Nekheny the Nekhenite and represented with two tall plumes on its head.

He was assimilated very early with the falcon Horus, patron god of kingship, and Nekhen remained a cult center for Horus even after it was supplanted by Edfu as both provincial capital and temple center.

This may have led to one of several outbreaks of strife during the First Intermediate Period. Edfu was taken over for a while by the governor of Hierakonpolis, who was named Ankhthify.

Nekhen

lay in Upper Egypt, south of Naqada, and Thebes, and across the Nile from El-Kab, which became the city of Nekhbet the vulture deity and one of the two Ladies who guarded the kingship. It lay north of Aswan and just north of Edfu.

Nekhen's

history begins around 4000 BCE, when local hunter-gatherers were joined by farming and herding "colonists." Recent explorations have shown that by 3500 BCE Hierakonpolis was the most important settlement along the Nile, a vibrant, bustling city stretching for over 2 miles along the edge of the floodplain.

At about that time, the population of Hierakonpolis seems to have

increased by large bands of people migrating into the Nile Valley from the outlying areas.

This may have been the final days of the old Nekhen, Greek Hierakonpolis nomadic hunting way of life exchanging for the settled life of plenty in the Valley as climactic conditions and the fertility of the floodplain for agriculture pushed the people into the Valley.

The town remained important into the early part of the Old Kingdom, and though it declined as a settlement, its temple to Horus of Nekhen was rebuilt in both the Middle and New Kingdoms.

Three or four known tombs dating from the New Kingdom have been found here, including that of Hormose. This tomb gives evidence that the temple of Horus had been renewed by Rameses XI, who had followed the building efforts of Thutmose III five centuries earlier.

A title with Predynastic significance was iri-Nkhn, "keeper of Nekhen". Perhaps "keeper of Nekhen" had prestige when Nekhen was a power center, but by the Early Dynastic period, the meaning of the title may have been lost, leaving it merely an honorary designation, for example, it was a title held by Nedjemankh in the reign of Djoser.

At its greatest growth Nekhen contained perhaps 7500 inhabitants, already equipped with many features that would later come to typify Egyptian culture and form the basis of its economy.

Stretching for over 2 miles along the edge of the floodplain, the city held many neighborhoods, filled with farmers, potters, masons, weavers and other craftsmen, and officials. Signs of the outbuildings of a large farm have recently been discovered, including flint figurines of animals.

On

the north side of the town stretched a large installation of pottery vats for brewing wheat-based beer stretched here. It is estimated that this brewery could produce about 300 gallons per day, a ration for 200 people.

A

potter's house was discovered at Hierakonpolis, consisting of a man-made rectangular house, surrounded by a wall, with an oven. One particular house and workshop was uncovered in 1978.

It belonged to a potter, who signed his pots by impressing a crescent-shaped thumbprint into the wet clay just below the rim. Some 300,000 fragments of these pots were found littering the ground. The house was rectangular and semi-subterranean, measuring 13.1 X 11.4 feet, built of posts and mud-coated reeds.

A

fire must have swept from the kiln to the house, 16 feet away, and hardened the soil and mud bricks, reducing the posts and mats to charcoal and ash. The house was then rebuilt in stone.

Hierakonpolis

increased in population as it benefited from close contacts with Lower Nubia, giving the Hierakonpolis chieftains control of or at least access to trade routes to sub-Saharan Africa. Evidence has also been recently uncovered indicating mining and trade access to the mineral resources of the eastern desert.

The

first discovery a hundred years ago of rich caches of discarded temple furnishings on low mound within the modern village seemed to confirm these ancient traditions of this settlement being the early center of the 3rd Upper Egyptian nome. Since a century ago, more recent work has been uncovering objects that slowly expand the knowledge of how these people lived and died.

The macehead of Scorpion and the palette and macehead of Narmer were found in 1898 by J.E. Quibell and F.W. Green at the "main deposit" of the temple of Horus in Hierakonpolis.

The Two Dog palette, possibly dating earlier than that of Narmer, a number of small ivories inscribed with the names of Kings Narmer and Den, two statues of King Khasekhemwy of the 2nd Dynasty, and inscribed stone vessels dating to his reign, have also been found.

A seated red pottery lion and the great gold plumed falcon representing Nekheny or Horus have also been found. Many ivory objects such as seals, human and animal figurines in the shapes of scorpions, baboons and dogs, and vessels, wands, plaques and inlays were found at Nekhen, prompting scholars to intimate the perhaps the city was a center for ivory carving craft.

One area excavated within the town yielded almost 4000 flint pieces including a tool kit of scrapers, microdrills, bifacial knives, serrated sickle blades, crescent drills, all for the production of stone vessels.

At the same level were found more than 30 carnelian nodules. Carnelian is not a local stone, it has to be imported from the Eastern Desert, so here is more evidence that Nekhen may have been a trade center for exotic goods.

Hierakonpolis remained an important cult center for the god Horus, symbolic of the living king. A large ceremonial center was excavated out on the low desert, which dates back to early Naqada II. It has been interpreted as a temple, closely resembling shrines depicted on seals from the First Dynasty.

At the end of Naqada II, religious activity locally was apparently relocated to the center of the walled town. This so far is Egypt's earliest temple, occupying about one-sixth of the entire town area.

A circular stone restraining wall and adjoining paved area of compacted earth reinforced by rough sandstone blocks have been found, as have the remains of limestone column bases or pedestals for statues.

In the large oval courtyard probably stood a solitary pole displaying the image of the god, while at its base, on makeshift platforms, the early kings of Upper Egypt viewed their bounty and the sacrificial slaughters for the falcon god: cattle, goats, crocodiles and even fish.

Around the courtyard, in little workshops, trained craftsmen transformed raw materials from all parts of the region into luxury goods such as ivory boxes, polished stone jars, jewelry and ceremonial weapons.

The central shrine consisted of three rooms, its façade made up of four huge timber pillars that may have stood at least 20 feet high. With colored mats for the walls, the shrine must have dominated not only the temple complex, but the town itself.

Some scholars believe that Nekhen had contact with the city of Uruk in Mesopotamia. The wall enclosing the temple off from the rest of the city is but more similar to the style in Mesopotamia.

Mesopotamia and the Gulf were the only two other places at this time or since that had this Temple Oval, which in both the Near East and in Nekhen was a semi-circular walled structure which contained virgin sand on which the earliest shrines were raised.

Also, elements similar in Mesopotamian reliefs and paintings are first seen here at Nekhen. Examples of these are "the master of beasts", and the niched

facades on the walls. An elaborately niched mud-brick façade within the town has been interpreted as the gateway to a palace, or at least an administrative center of the early state.

The gateway wall was no less than 34 feet thick in places and consisted of a double skin of mud brick. Both as a defensive structure and a piece of urban development, the gateway shows the same niches and recessed and buttressed paneled walls that were used on the serekhs.

Tomb

100, called "The Painted Tomb", now lost, contained wall murals that showed similarity to Near Eastern themes. The confronted animals, the bovine turning back its head, the whirling birds, horned beasts, the two warriors with bucklers, all typical of the Gulf and Elam and the Arabian mainland.

It showed

scenes of hunting and the mastery of animals, fights between small groups of men, a sacrifice and several boats, including a rather non-Egyptian looking one. The figures engaged in hand-to-hand combat held maces of a type used by later culture, and in fact the Naqada II culture brought in the pear-shaped macehead which replaced the flat disc-shaped macehead used earlier.

Work

progressing on the cemetery 6 burial area out in the desert show that this cemetery was used and reused. Between 1979 and 1985, Cemetery 6 was found to contain twelve tombs from the Naqada I and early Naqada II period.

The tombs

belonged to members of the local elite. Some of the tombs still contained valuable goods despite being heavily disturbed. This site was abandoned during the later Naqada II period, when the burials of later elite nobles were moved closer to the cultivated areas. The Painted Tomb, or Tomb 100, was found herein.

During Naqada III, the ending of the Predynastic period, burials of the local elite were moved back to Cemetery 6, within massive rock-cut tombs with offering areas. Excavations at cemetery 6 reveal several large tombs containing Naqada III ware.

Tomb 11, looted, still contained beads in carnelian, garnet, turquoise, faience, gold and silver, fragments of artifacts in lapis lazuli, ivory, obsidian, and crystal blades, and a wooden bed with carved bulls' feet.

These indicated elite burials but not quite of the quality of the royal burials at Abydos. Tomb 1 in locality 6 has a sunken pit surrounded by triple-coursed mud-brick walls, with wooden planks overlaying it.

The walls were plastered, and the pit was surmounted by a replica of a temple or palace made from wooden posts and surrounded by a wooden fence. This may have been a precursor of the mastaba tombs of the First Dynasty and later.

In 1998, two more tombs were discovered at Cemetery 6. Bones within one of the two latest tombs found proved to be a mixture of bones from two human males and seven dogs. In the second tomb were also found the bones of a young savanna elephant.

Other
intriguing finds here include two pottery masks with cut-out feline-shaped slanted eyes, aquiline noses, and mouths. Near one mask was found a tuft of twisted human hair, perhaps part of a headdress. The second mask had a beard colored plum red and human ears attached.

Part of a third mask have also been uncovered. Masks may have been drawn on the hunters inscribed on the Two-Dog Palette and the Ostrich Palette. To date, the earliest use of human-faced masks dated back to the Fourth Dynasty. Perhaps further work on this tomb will provide more information on the ritual useage of masks, and how early that useage began.

Charcoal
samples found in this tomb helped identify the original wood as cedar of Lebanon, the first time that imported wood was discovered at Nekhen, though it is possible that the temple may have also made use of cedarwood for its pillars.

In another tomb a figurine of a cow was found buried with human bodies, while in yet another tomb, a cow's skeleton was found laid out with a human figurine. The cow's bones as well as the human bones were impregnated with resin, a precursor to mummification.

To date, 150 burials have been found in another cemetery area, called cemetery 43, belonging to the working class inhabitants of Nekhen, as indicated by a general lack of grave goods and the robust physical nature of the bodies. Seven of these bodies show evidence of decapitation and grave goods such as copper pins and linen matting. Although these burials contained finer grave goods there was a marked absence of disturbance or robbery, unlike many of the other burials

Memphis

The Name we use today derives from the Pyramid of Pepy I at Saqqara, which is Mennufer (the good place), or Coptic Menfe. Memphis is the Greek translation.

But the City was originally Ineb-Hedj, meaning "The White Wall". Some sources indicate that other versions of the name may have even translated to our modern name for the country, Egypt.

During the Middle Kingdom, it was Ankh-Tawy, or "That Which Binds the Two Lands". In fact, its location lies approximately between Upper and Lower Egypt, and the importance of the area is demonstrated by its persistent tendency to be the Capital of Egypt, as Cairo just to the North is today.

Memphis, founded around 3,100 BC, is the legendary city of Menes, the King who united Upper and Lower Egypt. Early on, Memphis was more likely a fortress from which Menes controlled the land and water routes between Upper Egypt and the Delta.

Having probably originated in Upper Egypt, from Memphis he could control the conquered people of Lower Egypt. However, by the Third Dynasty, the building at Saqqara suggests that Memphis had become a sizable city.

Tradition tells us that Menes founded the city by creating dikes to protect the area from Nile floods. Afterwards, this great city of the Old Kingdom became the administrative and religious center of Egypt. In fact, so dominating is the city during this era that we refer to it as the Memphite period.

It became a cosmopolitan community and was probably one of the largest and most important cities in the ancient world. When Herodotus visited the city in the 5th century BC, a period when Persians ruled Egypt, he found many Greeks, Jews, Phoenicians and Libyans among the population

Frankly,
our concept of Memphis
today is very artificial. The city must have been huge, judging from the size
of its necropolises which extend for some 19 miles along the west bank of the Nile.

These include Dahshure, Saqqara, Abusir, Zawyet
el-Aryan, Giza
and Abu Rawash, who's names derive not from their origins, but from modern
nearby communities. Very few people can imagine the age of this city, as no
European cities have yet to attain the span of Memphis'
existence, and it is completely outside the comprehension of people in the Americas.

Rome may eventually outlast Memphis,
but as with any city that remains active for thousands of years, the city
center, and various areas of the city shifted over the years, so today, what we
think of as Memphis
is rather artificial. Some scholars believe that the city may have shifted
first north, and then back south though its three millennium history.

But there is little left of the City today, at least that can be seen.
Originally, the city had many fine temples, palaces and gardens. But today,
other than the scattered ruins, most of the city is gone, or lies beneath
cultivated fields, Nile silt and local
villages. What we do know of Memphis comes to us
from its necropolises, mentioned above, text and papyrus from other parts of Egypt and
Herodotus, who visited the city.

For
example, we have a number of papyruses from the time of the mysterious
Akhenaten concerning Memphis on such mundane matters as bread
baking. And we know that the royal decree rejecting the Cult of Akhenaten
issued by Tutankhamun after the earlier king's death originated in Memphis, indicating the cities importance, even over
Thebes, in the New Kingdom.

What
happened to the city to cause its complete demise is somewhat unclear. In later
Dynasties Thebes became the capital of Egypt,
but we know that Memphis
retained much of its religious significance and continued to prosper during
this period.

Actually, Thebes was never exactly
the administrative center of Egypt
which Memphis
was, its significance being more religious. In fact, by the 18th Dynasty, the
Egyptian Kings had apparently moved back into the Palaces of Memphis.

But when the Greeks arrived, and moved the Egyptian capital to Alexandria, Memphis suffered, and with the entrance of Christianity and the decline of Egyptian religion, Memphis became a mere shadow of the former great city.

But the actual demise of Memphis probably occurred with the invasion of the Muslim conquerors in 641 when they established their new capital not at Memphis, but a short distance north of the city at Fustat, which is now a part of Cairo called Old Cairo, or Coptic Cairo.

Still, in the 12th Century AD, one traveler wrote, "the ruins still offer, to those who contemplate them, a collection of such marvelous beauty that the intelligence is confounded, and the most eloquent man would be unable to describe them adequately".

But during the Mameluke period of Egypt, the dikes which held back the Nile floods fell into disrepair, after which Memphis was apparently and slowly covered in silt.

The fraction we can see of Memphis today is located principally around the small village of Mit Rahina. We believe that Ptah was the principle pagan god worshipped in Memphis, who was identified with Hephaistos and Vulcan.

The remains of the god's temple bordering the village of Mit Rahina was at one time probably one of the grandest temples in Egypt.

Today, only a fraction of the temple remains, which was originally excavated by the famous Egyptologist, W.M. Flinders Petrie between 1908 and 1913. Ramses II is well represented here, with a colossus of himself near the Alabaster Sphinx along the southern enclosure wall.

Other remains include an enclosure with a ruined palace of Apries to the north of the Temple of Ptah. Tanis

Whether Tanis is considered to be the most important archaeological site in Egypt's northern Delta or not, it is almost certainly one of the largest and most impressive. Nevertheless, it is

characterized by an eclectic reuse of materials that were usurped from other locations and earlier reigns.

Tanis was actually its Greek name. We are told that its ancient Egyptian name was Djanet. Tanis was built upon the Nile distributary known as Bahr Saft, which is now only a small silted up stream that discharges into Lake Manzalla.

Napoleon Bonaparte had the site surveyed in the late 1700s, but afterwards, in the early 1800s, most of the work at Tanis was concerned with the collection of statuary. Jean-Jacques Rifaud took two large pink granite sphinxes to Paris, where The Processional way leading up to the Temple of Amun at Tanisthey became a part of the Louvre collection.

Other statues were taken to Saint Petersburg and Berlin. Henry Salt and Bernardino Drovetti found eleven statues, some of which were also sent to the Louvre, but also to Berlin and Alexandria, though those sent to Alexandria are now lost.

Auguste Mariette was the first to really excavate the site between 1860 and 1864. It was he who discovered the famous Four Hundred Year Stela, as well as several royal statues, many of which were dated to the Middle Kingdom.

A plan of the main Temple of Amun and that of Mut, Khonsu and Astarte. However, he mistakenly identified it as the ancient Hyksos capital of Avaris (Tell el-Dab'a). He also thought that it might have been Ramesses II's residence city of Piramesse (Pi-Ramesses).

Mariette was followed by Flinders Petrie, who excavated here between 1883-86. Petrie made a detailed plan of the temple precinct, copied inscriptions and excavated exploratory trenches. Roman era papyrus discovered by Petrie are now in the British Museum.

Pierre Montet, excavated at Tanis between 1921 and 1951, and the site is still being excavated by the French today. It was Montet who conclusively proved that Tanis could not have been Avaris (Tell el-Dab'a) or Piramesse.

Montet also discovered royal tombs of the 21st and 22nd Dynasties at Tanis in 1939, but his discovery resulted in little recognition. An overview of some of the ruins at Tanis because of the outbreak of World War II.

The tombs were all subterranean and built from mud-brick and reused stone blocks, many of which were inscribed. Four of the tombs belonged to Psusennes I (1039-991 BC), Amenemope (993-984 BC), Osorkon II (874-850 BC) and Sheshonq III (825-733 BC). The occupants of the other two tombs are unknown.

However, the hawk-headed silver coffin of Sheshonq II was also found in Psusennes' tomb, as well as the coffin and sarcophagus of Amenemope.

The sarcophagus of Takelot II (850-825 BC) was found in the tomb of Osorkon II. The artifacts from the Tanis necropolis are the most important source of knowledge covering royal funerary goods of the Third Intermediate Period.

During the Old and Middle Kingdoms, the region was known as the Field of Dja'u, which was a good fishing and fowling preserve. Today, the area is often called San al-Hagar, which actually refers to the northern tell (or hill) where much of the site is located.

San al-Hagar is actually the largest tell in Egypt, encompassing some 177 hectares of land, and rising about 32 meters. However, there is also a southern mound known as Tulul el-Bid. San al-Hagar is also the name of the local village, which was built upon the western quay of ancient Tanis.

Originally, the region was a part of the thirteenth nome (province), but Tanis became the capital of the nineteenth Lower Egyptian nome in the late period (747-332 BC).

The earliest mention of the town is known from a 19th Dynasty building block of Ramesses II discovered at Memphis. However, nothing at the site itself suggests an existence prior to the 20th Dynasty.

20th Dynasty burials lie under an enclosure wall, which indicates a settlement, but the greater metropolis was probably not founded until the reign of Ramesses XI, the last king of the 20th Dynasty, when Egypt

was divided between two rulers. It became the northern capital of Egypt during the 21st Dynasty.

It was probably the home city of Smedes, the founder of that Dynasty and, since one of his canopic jars was found in the vicinity, probably the location of his tomb. Though there were rival cities, we believe it remained Egypt political capital during the 22nd Dynasty.

By the Roman Period, the port of Tanis had silted up, and Tanis became a fairly minor village. Most of the temple limestone was burned for its lime at that time.

During Byzantine times, Tanis became a small bishopric, but it was eventually abandoned during Islamic times, and was not resettled until the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha.

Presumably (Khonsu is clear), the Tanis Triad rest next to a pharaoh wearing only the White Crown, associated with Upper or Southern Egypt. There were a number of temples, seven according to the Egyptian government, located in the area of Tanis.

The chief deities worshiped here were Amun, his consort, Mut and their child Khonsu, who formed the Tanite Triad. Note that this triad is, however, identical to that of Thebes, leading many scholars to refer to Tanis as the "northern Thebes".

The earliest recorded building at Tanis dates to the reign of Psusennes I, Smedes's probable successor during the 21st Dynasty. He was responsible for the huge mud-brick enclosure wall surrounding the temple of Amun between four ranges of hills on Tell San el-Hagar.

which he erected in a depression of virgin sand some eight meters above the flood plain using earlier blocks quarried from structures at Piramesse. The wall measures 430 by 370 meters 10 meters tall, and was 15 meters thick. Within the outer wall is a mud-brick interior wall. Joint inscriptions of Psusennes I and Pinudjem I within the temple indicate a reconciliation between the thrones of Tanis and Thebes.

However, rulers from the 21st and early 22nd

Dynasties added to the temple complex, and Nectanebo I (380-362 BC) used stone from earlier building projects of Sheshonq and Psamtek to construct the sacred lake.

Tanis

is shewn with blocks, obelisks and columns that are difficult to project into any sort of structure Today the site is full of inscribed and decorated blocks, columns, obelisks and statues of various dates, some inscribed with the names of rulers such as Khufu, Khephren, Teti, Pepi I and II and Senusret I.

However,

the majority of inscribed monuments are connected with Ramesses II, though these items must have been brought in for there is no evidence that the site dates from before the reign of Psusennes I.

He is positively attested by foundation deposits in the sanctuary in the easternmost part of the great temple. Other later kings are also attested to through foundation The tip of an obelisk sits upright at Tanisdeposits.

Egyptologists believe that the artifacts of Ramesses II were probably imported from ancient Piramesse, which we today identify with the modern town of Qantir.

Near

the southwestern corner of the main temple complex are smaller temples dedicated to Mut and Khonsu. Astarte, an Asiatic goddess, was also worshiped in these smaller temple, which were originally built under the reign of Siamun (984-965 BC).

This construct therefore completed the ensemble of structures fashioned after Karnak, and thus making Tanis into a northern replica of Thebes.

There

were other structures within the enclosure wall, in particular a sed-festival chapel and a temple of Psamtik I, but these were some of the stones used by Nectanebo I in his building efforts. Osorkon II usurped many of the earlier monuments of the Amun Temple to built an East Temple, using granite palmiform columns dating to the Old Kingdom that were re-inscribed first by Ramesses II prior to their reuse, and then once again by himself.

Sheshonq III built the West Gate

of the temple precinct from reused obelisks and temple blocks, some from the Old and Middle Kingdom. It was fronted by a colossal statue usurped from Ramesses II.

A

procession of nome gods at Tanis During the Late Period, the Nubian king Piye of the 25th Dynasty conquered Tanis and King Taharqa, a successor made it his residence for a short time. Some reliefs from that dynasty have been found reused in the Sacred Lake's walls.

Afterwards, Tanis passed back and forth between Nubian, Assyrian and Saite rulers until the 26th Dynasty, when Psamtik built a kiosk at Tanis. It featured a procession of nome gods, but this structure was later dismantled and reused in other structures. During the First Persian Occupation of Egypt, no further building seems to have taken place at Tanis.

Necktanebo

I, during the 30th Dynasty, probably was responsible for an enormous outer wall built of brick, as well as a temple to Khonsu that was annexed to the northern side of the old Amun temple, near the Northern Gate.

However, it was not completed until the Ptolemaic period. There was also a temple of Horus, near the East Gate, that was begun during the 30th Dynasty, but it too was completed by the Ptolemies. Ptolemy I built the East Gate of the precinct, and Ptolemy II and Arsinoe dedicated a small brick chapel, while Ptolemy IV built a temple in the southwestern Mut enclosure. However, by this time, the Amun temple was almost certainly abandoned, as there were Ptolemaic era houses built over the structure.

The

Pylon of Sheshonq III Today, the site of Tanis mostly consists of large mounds of occupational debris. The temple precinct lies in the middle of these mounds. The huge enclosure walls are now mostly gone, and one may enter the site from several directions, though the classical route is through the ruined pylon of Sheshonq III.

Within, the site is littered with fallen statuary, reused columns ranging in date from the Old through the New Kingdoms, around fifteen reused obelisks of Ramesses II, and reused temple blocks from all periods.

At the center of the Amun temple are two deep wells

The Nilometer Well at Tanis that once served as Nilometers. The northern corner is the site of the ancient Sacred Lake, while at the southeastern corner, outside the main temple precinct, is the smaller precinct where the temples of Mut, Khonsu and Astarte were located.

Tanis is probably not one of those sites one would wish to visit on a one time, short tour of Egypt. However, for those on a second trip, or with a little additional time, it is a very nice tour through Egypt's Delta, including perhaps a stopover at Tell Busta, further south. Such a tour would usually only take one day.