



The year began for **Bruce Williams** with the publication of an early incised vessel in The Oriental Institute Museum in *Essays in Ancient Civilization Presented to Helene J. Kantor*. The vessel shows a series of hunting animals and a ship, a series of images much like the Hierakonpolis Painted Tomb and the Turin textile. However, although it dates to the Naqada I period, the procession is labelled with the standard of the goddess Neith and a pair of falcons which must indicate the pharaonic ruler. The crudity of the incised decoration appears to contrast with the exalted theme of the composition until it is remembered that even humble objects could be given high-flown stamps and labels if their function required the protection of the gods and universal order. This was particularly true of containers of life-sustaining or protective contents (oils). This magical function explains why the pottery of early Egypt often has decoration of far lower quality than some of the best-made objects; the beauty of the painting or incision was not as important as its presence.

Fragmentary as they are, the pieces of Egypt's early assays into historical culture are easier to find and interpret than its daily life. Millennia of accumulating Nile sediments and the use of nutrient-rich occupation debris for fertilizer have left only fragments of Egypt's earliest sites to be studied. Lying on the fringe of the most promising land, these cannot be assumed to give a fair or accurate portrait of the original towns. However, great walled places, some with the names of known cities appear on documents from the time of the earliest recorded rulers. An effort in this year's personal research was to trace these representations backward in time, connecting them with a clay model of a walled place dating to the Amratan or Naqada I period. This tradition of representing towns in a period many have assumed to be pre-urban in Egypt can be related to fragments of an actual early town at Elephantine to produce a tentative reconstruction of an early urban landscape in Egypt.