CHAPTER 5

The Rise of Complex Society and Early Civilization

Contents

Predynastic Egypt
5.1 The Predynastic Period: Egypt in the 4th Millennium BC
5.2 Lower Egypt: Buto-Ma‘adi Culture
5.3 Upper Egypt: Naqada Culture
5.4 Lower Nubia: A-Group Culture
5.5 State Formation and Unification

The Early Dynastic State
5.6 Organization and Institutions of the Early Dynastic State
5.7 Early Writing and Formal Art
5.8 The Expanding State
5.9 Who Were the Ancient Egyptians? Physical Anthropology
Introduction

With the introduction of farming and herding in Egypt, and successful development of a Neolithic economy in the lower Nile Valley, the economic foundation of the pharaonic state was laid. But the Neolithic did not mean that the rise of Egyptian civilization was inevitable. Communities in Upper and Lower Egypt became more dependent on farming in the 4th millennium BC, but only in the Naqada culture of Upper Egypt did social and economic complexity follow the successful adaptation of a Neolithic economy. By the mid-4th millennium BC Naqada culture began to spread northward through various mechanisms that are incompletely understood, and by the late 4th millennium it had replaced the Buto-Ma‘adi culture in northern Egypt.

Egyptian civilization had emerged by the first two dynasties (Early Dynastic Period), when the newly formed state was unified from the Delta to the First Cataract at Aswan, under one king and his administrative bureaucracy. The Early Dynastic Period was a time of consolidation of this large territorial polity, when state institutions became established, along with the complex economic and political relationships of the kingdom.
Predynastic Egypt

5.1 The Predynastic Period: Egypt in the 4th Millennium BC

With the spread of Neolithic technology to Middle and Upper Egypt in the 5th millennium BC, hunting and gathering as the main subsistence were gradually replaced by farming and herding. Although very little archaeological evidence survives, especially in Upper Egypt, agricultural villages began to appear by the 4th millennium BC, which is called the Predynastic Period. The Egyptian Nile Valley was an almost ideal environment for cereal agriculture (see 3.4), and eventually farmers would have been able to accumulate surpluses. Agricultural surpluses were probably used to feed farmers and their families throughout the year, and some seed would have been kept for planting the next crop. But surpluses beyond the necessities of subsistence could be used to obtain goods and materials not available in farmers’ villages. Although there is evidence of long-distance trade/exchange of exotic materials from before the Predynastic Period, this greatly increased in the 4th millennium BC, when craft production also increased – especially of artifacts such as jewelry, and carved stone palettes and vessels, which are found in elite burials of the Naqada culture in Upper Egypt.

Archaeologists have defined two different Predynastic cultures, the Buto-Ma’adi culture of Lower Egypt, and the Naqada culture of Upper Egypt, based on the distribution of two very different ceramic traditions of the 4th millennium BC. In the north settlements are better preserved, while the southern Naqada culture is mainly known from its cemeteries, which are found in the low desert beyond the floodplain. Cultural differences went well beyond pottery types, however: the Naqada burials may symbolize increasing social complexity through time as the graves became more differentiated, in size and numbers of grave goods, whereas at Buto-Ma’adi sites burials are of a fairly simple type and seem to have had much less socio-cultural significance.

5.2 Lower Egypt: Buto-Ma’adi Culture

The prehistoric site of Ma’adi is located in a suburb to the south of Cairo, while Buto is a site in the northern Delta with early remains in the lower strata. Sites of the Buto-Ma’adi culture are found in northern Egypt (with some local variation), from the northern Delta to the Faiyum region, and are distinctly different in their material remains from the Naqada culture of Upper Egypt (see 5.3). While the origins of the Buto-Ma’adi culture are in the earlier Neolithic cultures in northern Egypt (see 4.8), there is also evidence of contact (especially trade) with southern Palestine.

Ma’adi was excavated by Cairo University archaeologists from 1930 to 1953, and was later re-examined by archaeologists from the University of Rome. Calibrated radiocarbon dates range from ca. 3900 to 3500 BC. The settlement covered a large area about 1.3 kilometers long, but this area was never completely occupied at any one time. The village relied on cereal cultivation and animal husbandry, of cattle, sheep, goats,
Map 5.1 Predynastic sites in Egypt
and pigs, with little evidence of hunting. Bone harpoons, indicative of fishing, were found there, as were catfish bones.

Evidence of house structures (originally made of wood and matting) at Ma’adi consists of pits in the ground, post-holes, and hearths. Four large subterranean structures, thought to be similar to houses of the contemporaneous Beersheba culture in the Negev Desert, were found in the eastern sector of the site. A large subterranean, stone-lined structure (8.5 m × 4 m in area), possibly a store house, was excavated in the western sector in the mid-1980s by Egyptian archaeologist F. A. Badawi. The floor of this structure was 2 meters below the surface. Further investigations in the western sector in 2001 revealed a subterranean cave dwelling, with a stone-lined entrance corridor and vaulted oval room dug into the bedrock.

At Ma’adi pottery consists of globular jars and bowls of Nile clay wares (smooth red or black-polished), as well as some large storage jars sunken into the ground in the settlement. Imported pots from the Beersheba culture as well as locally made imitations of these are also found. The imported pots were containers for materials, such as oil, wine, and resins. Locally made stone vessels, mostly of basalt with lug handles and a ring base, have also been excavated. With relatively few bifacially worked tools, the Ma’adi stone tools are quite different from the Neolithic industry in northern Egypt. More common are large circular scrapers and some long blades, of types which were probably introduced from Palestine. But copper is also found at Ma’adi in different forms, including tools, three large ingots, and ore, which was probably used for pigment (and not for smelting and tool production as was once thought).

Ma’adi provides the earliest evidence of the domesticated donkey, which would have been useful in the overland trade with southern Palestine. Analysis of the Ma’adi copper indicates a Near Eastern source, either mines at Timna or in the Wadi Arabah (in southern Jordan).

Only the burials of stillborns or infants were found within the settlement at Ma’adi. Two cemeteries were excavated nearby, one about 150 meters to the south of the settlement (76 graves) and another ca. 1 kilometer away in the Wadi Digla (471 burials, 14 of which were animal burials). Half of these burials were without grave goods. Burials with grave goods usually had only one or two simple, undecorated pots; the richest burial contained eight pots. Orientation of many burials was random, but the later burials in the Wadi Digla were contracted ones, placed on the right side and oriented with the head to the south facing east, unlike those recorded at Naqada, which had the head to the south facing west.

Beginning in 1983, remains of an early settlement at Buto (modern Tell el-Fara‘in, i.e., “Mound of the Pharaohs”) were excavated by the German Archaeological Institute, Cairo. Because the prehistoric levels at Buto are below the modern water table, the earliest settlement (in area A) could only be excavated with an expensive water pumping system. Significantly, these excavations have revealed stratified evidence of the transition from the earliest layers (Layers I–II) with local Buto ceramics of the same Lower Egyptian culture as found at Ma’adi, to a “transitional” layer (III) dating to ca. 3300–3200 BC with artifacts of the Naqada culture (Naqada IId phase). Architecture changes from houses of wattle and daub in the earliest layers to the use of mud-brick
in Layer III. In Layer V, which is Early Dynastic in date, large mud-brick buildings appear for the first time.

Occupation at Ma’adi came to an end in the later 4th millennium BC (equivalent to the Naqada IIIC phase), when the site was abandoned. At Buto, the stratigraphic evidence suggests the assimilation of the Lower Egyptian Predynastic Buto-Ma’adi culture in Layer III, and the continuation into Dynastic times of a material culture that had its roots in the Predynastic Naqada culture of Upper Egypt.

5.3 Upper Egypt: Naqada Culture

The Naqada culture of Upper Egypt is named after the largest known Predynastic site, Naqada, excavated by W. M. Flinders Petrie in 1894–95 (see 1.4). Occupation spanned most of the 4th millennium BC, from Naqada I to Naqada III times, according to the relative chronology (see Box 5-A). The Naqada culture originated in Upper Egypt, with major centers at Abydos, Naqada, and Hierakonpolis. Naqada culture sites are also found in southern Middle Egypt in the el-Badari district, and in Naqada II times in the Faiyum region (Gerza). By Naqada III times, Naqada culture pottery is found in the northern Delta. Unlike the Buto-Ma’adi culture sites, most of the Naqada culture evidence is from cemeteries, and settlements have been poorly preserved or buried under later alluvium or villages.

At Naqada (ancient Nubt) Petrie excavated two settlements (North Town and South Town) and three cemeteries (with over 2,200 burials). At nearby Ballas his colleague James Quibell excavated an estimated 1,000 burials. In the settlements, mud-brick architecture was found only at South Town, where Petrie recorded the remains of a thick wall which he thought was some kind of fortification. It has also been suggested that this structure was a temple. South Town may have been much larger than what Petrie recorded, with an eastern part extending into the floodplain.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Naqada settlements were reinvestigated by an American team led by Fekri Hassan (now at University College London) and T. R. Hays. They recorded remains of small villages on the low desert consisting of post-holes for huts of wood and matting or wicker, sometimes covered with mud clumps. Inside the huts were hearths and storage pits. Emmer wheat and barley were cultivated, and cattle, sheep/goats, and pigs were herded. There is also significant evidence of fishing, but much less for hunting. South Town was also reinvestigated in the late 1970s by Italian archaeologists, including Rodolfo Fattovich (University of Naples “l’Orientale”), who found evidence of mud sealings, possibly placed on storeroom doors to secure their contents. This suggests more specialized economic activity at South Town, the largest known settlement in the region, where goods and/or materials were probably collected and stored for trade or exchange.

The largest cemetery at Naqada, which Petrie called the “Great New Race Cemetery,” was located to the northwest of South Town. Petrie first thought the pottery in these burials represented an invading “race” in Egypt after the Old Kingdom because it was very different from the Dynastic pottery that he had excavated. He later recognized that
Placing ceramics (or other types of artifacts) in a relative sequence from early to late is one way in which archaeologists date sites. Radiocarbon dating helps to confirm the range of dates of the ceramics, obtaining ranges of absolute dates BC or AD (see Box 4-B), but before its invention Predynastic sites could only be given relative dates based on artifact types, which changed through time (see Figure 5.1).

Relative ceramic sequences are usually based on excavated strata, with earlier ceramics in the lower levels and later ceramics in the upper levels, as was demonstrated by Gertrude Caton Thompson’s excavations of Predynastic remains at Hammamiya (see 4.9). But Flinders Petrie did not have a Predynastic stratigraphic sequence to make use of in the late 19th century, when he recognized the need to give relative dates to the thousands of Predynastic (Naqada culture) burials that he had excavated at Naqada and later at Abadiya and Hu.

To date his Predynastic burials, Petrie devised a system which he called Sequence Dating (SD), published in 1901. This was an important contribution to archaeological method, and Petrie was the first to recognize the chronological value of ceramics (see 1.5). Petrie also placed other grave goods, such as stone palettes and vessels, in a relative sequence, but his dating system was based primarily on a seriation of “classes” of pottery. Petrie’s classes of Predynastic pottery are not true wares, a classification of pottery not known in Petrie’s time, but represent his typological divisions of the pottery from Naqada culture graves.

In a numbering system from 30 to 79 (leaving out the sequence of numbers 1–29 and 80–100 for pottery types that might be discovered later), Petrie placed the pottery in three relative phases: Amratian (SD 30–39), Gerzean (SD 40–52), and Semainean (SD 54–79), named after Predynastic cemeteries that he had excavated. The earliest Naqada ceramics (Amratian) were what Petrie called “Black-topped red” class, “Red Polished” class, and “White Cross-lined” class. In the Gerzean phase “Wavy-handed” class (with wavy handles) and “Decorated” class (with red-painted decoration) were found for the first time. A utilitarian ware called “Rough” class (tempered with straw) became more common in burials, while the black-topped and red-polished pottery decreased. In the Semainean phase, many of the ceramics were what Petrie called “Late” class; these have a direct connection to the pottery that he excavated in the royal 1st Dynasty tombs at Abydos.

Petrie’s Sequence Dating system was subsequently revised, first by Walter Federn, an Austrian émigré working at the Brooklyn Museum in 1942, who introduced the concept of fabric in the classification. Ceramic fabric refers to the type of clay/paste and temper used to make a pot (temper is added to prevent the clay from cracking when fired). Petrie’s system was later refined in the 1950s by Werner Kaiser, using the ceramics excavated in the 1930s by O. H. Myers at Armant Cemetery 1400–1500, the best preserved and recorded Predynastic cemetery in Upper Egypt. Kaiser’s seriation modified Petrie’s placement of ceramics into 11 stages (Stufen, in German) within three main phases, which he called Naqada I, II, and III.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Petrie</th>
<th>Kaiser</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amratian = SD 30–39</td>
<td>Naqada I = SD 30–38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerzean = SD 40–52</td>
<td>Naqada IIA, IIB = SD 38/40–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semainean = SD 54–79</td>
<td>Naqada IIc, IID = SD 40/45–63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Predynastic (and later Egyptian) ceramics can also be used to establish relative sequences at sites outside of Egypt, by a technique called cross dating. When found in A-Group burials in Nubia, imported Naqada culture pots could be classified, and the A-Group burials could then be given a relative date from the Naqada culture phases. Cross dating of imported ceramics found at Dynastic Period sites in Egypt is also a very useful dating technique.
the Naqada pottery was Predynastic, and his original name for this cemetery became irrelevant. Petrie’s seriation of the Predynastic pottery (see Box 5-A) was published in 1901, in a system that he called Sequence Dating.

To the south of the Great New Race Cemetery was Cemetery B, probably associated with a small farming village, and to the south of this was Cemetery T, which has been called the burial place of Predynastic chieftains or kings because of its high status burials (see Figure 5.2). All of the Naqada burials were contracted ones in round or rectangular pits in the low desert. Petrie recorded a standard orientation for about 200 of these burials, resting on the left side facing west, with the head to the south. This burial orientation is the opposite of what was recorded for the Ma’adi burials, and is another type of evidence demonstrating differences between the northern and southern Predynastic cultures.

While the archaeological evidence at Naqada is not sufficient to demonstrate the growth of an urban center which controlled a regional polity, its burials suggest increasing social complexity through time – and the major ideological significance of burial. In the Great New Race Cemetery, Naqada I burials are small and contain few grave goods, whereas from Naqada II times there are a few larger burials with more grave goods (up to 85 pots). Cemetery T, which mostly dates to the Naqada II phase, was the high status cemetery at Naqada. With 69 burials, it was a cemetery for only a small elite group, set apart in space from the other Naqada cemeteries. The Cemetery T graves were large and three had elaborate structures that were lined with mud-brick. Most of the Cemetery T graves had been disturbed by robbing, but the undisturbed grave T5 contained many artifacts such as carved stone vessels and jewelry made from exotic imported materials. Although the political status of those buried in Cemetery T (kings or other political leaders?) cannot be specified, the burials there are very different from those in other Naqada cemeteries, symbolizing a special status in the Naqada society.

In Naqada III times the number of burials at Naqada decreases, and there are fewer grave goods in exotic materials. But with the decline in high status burials, an altogether more elaborate tomb appeared. In 1897 Jacques de Morgan excavated an elaborately niched mud-brick superstructure at Naqada, which he called the “royal tomb,” along with small graves of Early Dynastic date. A second poorly preserved structure similar to the “royal tomb” was also recorded. In the royal tomb were clay sealings of King Aha, the first king of the 1st Dynasty, and the name of Aha’s mother Neith-hotep was also found on tomb artifacts. This tomb represents a truly monumental type which appeared at Naqada at the beginning of the Dynastic period.

At Hierakonpolis (ancient Nekhen) in the far south settlement evidence is better preserved than at Naqada. Predynastic evidence there was first investigated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by French and English archaeologists, when the well-known Decorated Tomb (Tomb 100) was excavated along with four other large rectangular tombs similar to those in Cemetery T at Naqada. With artifacts of Naqada Iic date, the Decorated Tomb is the only known Predynastic burial with scenes painted on a plastered wall (see Figure 5.3).

Modern investigations, including archaeological survey, began at Hierakonpolis in 1967, directed by Walter Fairservis (Vassar College), and beginning in 1978, by Michael
Figure 5.2  Plan of the Naqada cemeteries excavated by W. M. Flinders Petrie.
In 1971 Louis Binford published a study of mortuary practices of 40 societies, taken from the Human Relations Area Files, a research agency of Yale University for the cross-cultural study of human behavior, society, and culture. Binford’s study of mortuary practices ranged from hunter-gatherers with minimal social complexity to settled agriculturalists with more complex social organization. From the results of this study, Binford proposed that “the structural complexity of mortuary ritual” should be directly correlated with “status systems” within a society. His study influenced a number of processual archaeologists analyzing burials, some of whom hypothesized a direct correlation between the complexity of an ancient social structure and its burial patterns.

Binford’s study was later criticized because it correlated economic, not social, organization with burial practices. Post-processual critiques of processual mortuary theories also pointed out that burial practices show great variation among cultures. Burial symbolism and forms of burial reflect a society’s ideologies, especially concerning death and an afterlife, which are culture specific. While burial evidence may indirectly reflect past social organization, this is not universally true. For example, because of Muslim beliefs the king of Saudi Arabia, who is one of the wealthiest men in the world and at the apex of Saudi socio-political organization, is buried in a simple grave with his body covered only by a shroud.

Unquestionably there are patterns in the burials of any ancient society, which usually change through time. Such patterns can be quantified and analyzed with statistical methods, and this is an important contribution of processual archaeology to mortuary studies. Sometimes these patterns provide evidence of the deceased’s position in society, but not necessarily. Patterns in cemeteries, however, are more difficult to demonstrate when graves have been robbed, which is more often the case than not, and cemeteries may also be disturbed through different natural processes.

Although burials can provide much information for archaeologists, burial is only one means of disposing of the dead. How this is done and the form it takes reflect a number of beliefs in a society, especially some form of afterlife in a sphere (hopefully) apart from the living. Other beliefs that influence burial practices include how to honor the dead, and how the living react to death, in which social bonds with the deceased are permanently broken. The issue of how to deal with a decaying corpse is both a pragmatic and an ideological one.

Egyptian mortuary beliefs of the Dynastic period probably evolved in Predynastic Upper Egypt, where there are large cemeteries in which some burials become increasingly elaborate through time. As the Naqada culture moved northward so did its afterlife beliefs, as reflected in their burial practices. In Dynastic times, burial continued to be important, as is clearly evident from the thousands of burials throughout Egypt from all periods. Burial was directly related to Egyptian beliefs surrounding death and an afterlife, as is known from mortuary texts in tombs. Sometimes tomb inscriptions give specific information about a person’s socio-political status, and his/her economic means are often reflected in the burial type. Burial could include a tomb provided with all sorts of goods, and an offering chapel or niche where living persons provided for the deceased in a mortuary cult, but there is no simple correlation between wealth of grave goods and tomb type. For kings, the mortuary cult was practiced in temples, the most elaborate of which were built in western Thebes in the New Kingdom. Reflecting his socio-political position and his control over state resources – as well as his ideological relationship with the gods – the Egyptian king was buried in a significantly different manner from everyone else in the society.

**Box 5-B Mortuary analysis**

In 1971 Louis Binford published a study of mortuary practices of 40 societies, taken from the Human Relations Area Files, a research agency of Yale University for the cross-cultural study of human behavior, society, and culture. Binford’s study of mortuary practices ranged from hunter-gatherers with minimal social complexity to settled agriculturalists with more complex social organization. From the results of this study, Binford proposed that “the structural complexity of mortuary ritual” should be directly correlated with “status systems” within a society. His study influenced a number of processual archaeologists analyzing burials, some of whom hypothesized a direct correlation between the complexity of an ancient social structure and its burial patterns.

Binford’s study was later criticized because it correlated economic, not social, organization with burial practices. Post-processual critiques of processual mortuary theories also pointed out that burial practices show great variation among cultures. Burial symbolism and forms of burial reflect a society’s ideologies, especially concerning death and an afterlife, which are culture specific. While burial evidence may indirectly reflect past social organization, this is not universally true. For example, because of Muslim beliefs the king of Saudi Arabia, who is one of the wealthiest men in the world and at the apex of Saudi socio-political organization, is buried in a simple grave with his body covered only by a shroud.

Unquestionably there are patterns in the burials of any ancient society, which usually change through time. Such patterns can be quantified and analyzed with statistical methods, and this is an important contribution of processual archaeology to mortuary studies. Sometimes these patterns provide evidence of the deceased’s position in society, but not necessarily. Patterns in cemeteries, however, are more difficult to demonstrate when graves have been robbed, which is more often the case than not, and cemeteries may also be disturbed through different natural processes.

Although burials can provide much information for archaeologists, burial is only one means of disposing of the dead. How this is done and the form it takes reflect a number of beliefs in a society, especially some form of afterlife in a sphere (hopefully) apart from the living. Other beliefs that influence burial practices include how to honor the dead, and how the living react to death, in which social bonds with the deceased are permanently broken. The issue of how to deal with a decaying corpse is both a pragmatic and an ideological one.

Egyptian mortuary beliefs of the Dynastic period probably evolved in Predynastic Upper Egypt, where there are large cemeteries in which some burials become increasingly elaborate through time. As the Naqada culture moved northward so did its afterlife beliefs, as reflected in their burial practices. In Dynastic times, burial continued to be important, as is clearly evident from the thousands of burials throughout Egypt from all periods. Burial was directly related to Egyptian beliefs surrounding death and an afterlife, as is known from mortuary texts in tombs. Sometimes tomb inscriptions give specific information about a person’s socio-political status, and his/her economic means are often reflected in the burial type. Burial could include a tomb provided with all sorts of goods, and an offering chapel or niche where living persons provided for the deceased in a mortuary cult, but there is no simple correlation between wealth of grave goods and tomb type. For kings, the mortuary cult was practiced in temples, the most elaborate of which were built in western Thebes in the New Kingdom. Reflecting his socio-political position and his control over state resources – as well as his ideological relationship with the gods – the Egyptian king was buried in a significantly different manner from everyone else in the society.
Hoffman (see 1.5). Fieldwork has continued there under the direction of Barbara Adams (Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London) and now Renée Friedman (the British Museum). Coring under the Dynastic town of Nekhen revealed earlier Predynastic remains, and evidence of other Predynastic settlements has been located, including the remains of a rectangular semi-subterranean house in a large desert-edge settlement (Locality HK29). With one calibrated radiocarbon date of $3435 \pm 121$ BC (Naqada II), the house had lower walls of mud-brick. Hoffman also excavated the remains of a Predynastic temple with pottery of Naqada IIb–IId (Locality HK29A). The temple consisted of a large, oval courtyard which had been plastered over several times with clay (demonstrating reuse and restoration). At the northern end were post-holes for a gateway, and evidence of later reuse and new construction in Naqada IIIa. Industrial areas have also been identified within the town and at localities in the desert, for the production of pottery, beads, stone vases, and beer.

About 2 kilometers from the desert edge in the Wadi Abu el-Suffian (Locality HK6) is a large elite cemetery with transitional Naqada Ic–IIa pottery in the earliest graves. A number of tombs also contained the remains of animals. Both domesticated species (dog, donkey, goat, sheep, cattle, and pig) and wild species (auroch, baboon, crocodile, elephant, gazelle, hare, hartebeest, and hippopotamus) have been identified, with human remains in some, but not all, of these tombs. Tomb 24 contained the remains of a bull and a male elephant, placed on its left side on a layer of fabric, with large pieces of skin still preserved.

Three unusual Naqada III tombs lined in mud-brick have also been excavated in this cemetery. The earliest of these tombs, Tomb 11, contained the remains of a wooden bed with carved bull's feet, and beads and amulets of exceptional wealth – in gold, silver, carnelian, garnet, copper, turquoise, and lapis lazuli. The largest of these tombs, Tomb 1 ($6.5 \times 3.5$ m in area and $2.5$ m deep), had a superstructure of wood and reeds, surrounded by a fence. Tomb 10 contained fragments of a ceramic coffin and a clay sealing with two hieroglyphic signs for “town” and “god.”

At another Predynastic cemetery (Locality HK43) with pottery of Naqada IIa–IIc, a number of well preserved burials have provided information about human behavior, grooming, and mortuary practices. Some people buried there had died violently: two with slit throats, and another from a blow to the cranium. Well preserved human hair
from the head, face (a beard), and body (pubic and underarm) was also examined. One
woman’s natural hair, which had been dyed to cover grey hairs, had been augmented
with long curled extensions of false hair. Methods to preserve the body in some of
these burials included wrapping bones with tree bark, and the use of linen padding and
wrapping (on the hands and lower arms).

At el-Amra in the Abydos region, where the royal burials of Dynasty 0 and the Early
Dynastic Period are located (see 5.5 and 5.6), another large Predynastic/Early Dynastic
cemetery, with over 1,000 burials, was excavated in 1900 by English archaeologists David
Randall McIver and Arthur Mace. Other Predynastic cemeteries are also known in the
region. Remains of Predynastic settlements were also investigated in the Abydos region
in the early 1900s, and in 1982–83 Diana Craig Patch (Metropolitan Museum of Art)
conducted a large-scale regional survey on the low desert for both settlements and
cemeteries. Patch located the remains of small farming villages, 1–2 kilometers apart.
In later Predynastic times, there may have been population nucleation within the larger
settlements, and sites in the low desert were abandoned for villages within the flood-
plain, for which no evidence has been recovered. At two late Predynastic sites which
were excavated in the early 1900s there is evidence of industrial activities. Beer-
brewing facilities, first thought to be pottery kilns, were later identified at el-Mahasna,
and in a large Predynastic settlement outside the New Kingdom temple of Sety I stone
tools, as well as debris and the raw materials for bead-making, were found.

Other Naqada culture cemeteries and less well preserved settlement evidence have
been excavated in Upper Egypt at sites such as el-Adaïma, Armant, Hu and Semaina,
and Naga el-Deir (see Figure 5.4). None of these sites, however, became a major center.
Geography – and access to trade routes and raw materials – may have played a part in
the rise of the centers at Hierakonpolis, Naqada, and Abydos. From Abydos there are
important desert routes leading into the Western Desert and from there south into Nubia.
Across the river from Naqada was the Wadi Hammamat, which led to quarrying
and mining sites in the Eastern Desert. In Dynastic times the significance of Naqada’s
location is probably reflected in its name, Nubt, the “city of gold.” Hierakonpolis was
the southernmost Naqada culture center, and probably benefited from increasing trade
with the contemporaneous Nubian A-Group culture. But geography does not explain
the socio-political forces within these centers in later Predynastic times, which are very
difficult to ascertain archaeologically. Regional polities with increasing control over their
economies (agriculture, craft production, regional and long-distance trade of goods
and materials, and human labor) were undoubtedly developing at Abydos, Naqada, and
Hierakonpolis in later Naqada II times. And such polities were the precursors of the
much larger state of Egypt which was forged in Naqada III times.

5.4 Lower Nubia: A-Group Culture

First identified by George Reisner (see 1.4), the A-Group culture in Lower Nubia was
contemporaneous with the Naqada culture of Upper Egypt. Like the Naqada culture,
the A-Group is known mainly from its cemeteries, and Naqada culture craft goods,
obtained through trade, were found in a number of A-Group burials. But A-Group burials also have distinctly different pottery from that of the Naqada culture, including painted “egg-shell” beakers that must have been a type of luxury ware. Together with other archaeological evidence, especially the distribution of sites, the pottery demonstrates the existence of a different culture group. Unlike Naqada burials, A-Group people were sometimes buried with fringed leather garments, bags, and caps, and some A-Group cemeteries also contained a large number of animal burials (goats, dogs). Such distinctly different burials, with grave goods which symbolized important beliefs concerning death, also represent a different culture.

In Dynastic times Nubia was the major route through which exotic raw materials from Punt were obtained (see 3.9) and this trade probably developed in Predynastic times, especially as the Naqada culture became more socially and economically complex. Naqada culture burials contain very few Nubian craft goods, which suggests that while Egyptian goods were exported to Nubia and were buried in A-Group graves, A-Group goods were of little interest further north. Only the raw materials that were

---

**Figure 5.4** Egypt: Predynastic (Naqada culture) burial from Naga el-Deir. Gifts of the Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Egyptian Expedition, 1921; the Egyptian Research Account, 1895; and the Egypt Exploration Fund and Chicago Woman’s Club, 1899 OIM 11488 (body). The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago
transformed into craft goods, such as elephant ivory ornaments, were desired A-Group imports in Egypt.

Mainly excavated in the 1960s Nubian archaeological campaign (see 1.4), A-Group habitations consisted of reed huts and rock shelters; only a few sites had houses with stone foundation slabs. Evidence of agriculture is not found until the Terminal A-Group (contemporaneous with Naqada IIIb/Dynasty 0 and 1st Dynasty), when there are grinding stones and chert blades with sickle sheen. Lower Nubia has a narrow floodplain and, unlike Upper Egypt, was not a good environment for extensive cereal agriculture (see 3.2). But trade with Egypt is definitely attested there by the mid-4th millennium BC, at the site of Khor Daud. No house structures were found at this site, which consisted of almost 600 storage pits with much pottery, two-thirds of which was Egyptian (Naqada II). It is likely that much of the Naqada pottery in Nubia was used as containers for agricultural products imported from Egypt, such as beer, wine, and oil.

A-Group sites extend from the area of the First Cataract at Aswan to the Second Cataract. A few A-Group sites of the later 4th millennium BC are located to the south of the Second Cataract, in the Batn el-Hagar region. Three large Terminal A-Group centers are known, mainly from their burial evidence, at Sayala, Dakka, and Qustul. At
this time Egyptian copper tools and carved stone vessels are found in elite A-Group burials, and in Sayala Cemetery 137 one burial contained two maces with gold handles. It has been suggested that such wealthy burials were those of A-Group chieftains, who would have benefited economically from the trade with Egypt.

Bruce Williams (University of Chicago) has proposed that a fragmented stone incense burner from Qustul Cemetery L has iconographic evidence of the earliest king, who was Nubian. Part of the scene carved on the incense burner is of a seated ruler in a boat holding a flail and wearing the White Crown (two symbols of Egyptian kingship). The more recently excavated evidence by German archaeologists, at Cemeteries U and B at Abydos, however, suggests that the earliest royal burials were there – in Egypt. The Qustul incense burner was probably imported into Nubia, where it was buried in a tomb that belonged to a very high status Nubian.

5.5 State Formation and Unification

Unification of Egypt into one large territorial state, from the Delta to the First Cataract, occurred in late Predynastic times, although there is disagreement as to whether this process was completed by late Naqada II or late Naqada III times. The processes by which this occurred are also not well understood.

Naqada culture expansion northward began in Naqada II times. Petrie excavated a cemetery at Gerza in the Faiyum region with Naqada II grave goods. By Naqada IIC times the (Buto-Ma’adi culture) site of Ma’adi, just south of Cairo, was abandoned. At Buto in the northern Delta the stratigraphy shows the replacement of Buto-Ma’adi ceramics by Naqada culture ceramics. This is also demonstrated at other sites in the eastern Delta, including Tell el-Farkha (first excavated by Rodolfo Fattovich, and more recently by Marek Chlodnicki), where the earliest strata have Buto-Ma’adi ceramics, after which there is evidence of a transitional phase (Phase 2, Naqada IID2) when Upper Egyptian ceramics began to be produced.

At the site of Minshat Abu Omar in the northeastern Delta an early cemetery has been excavated by Dietrich Wildung and Karla Kroeper 1978–91. The earliest burials...
(MAO I), which date to Naqada IIc–d, are in shallow pits with only a few grave goods. Later burials (MAO III), which date to Naqada III/Dynasty 0, show abrupt changes in mortuary practices. These graves are rectangular and larger than the earlier ones, and are often lined with mud plaster and roofed with matting. Orientation of the contracted burials changes as well in this group, with the dead resting on the left side, facing east/southeast. The MAO III burials have many more grave goods than the earliest ones, not only a large number of pots, but also carved stone vessels, jewelry, cosmetic artifacts, and copper tools. The latest burials (MAO IV), which date to the 1st and 2nd Dynasties, are even larger and with more grave goods (up to 125) than those of MAO III. In addition, the eight largest of the MAO IV graves are built with mud or mud-brick and internally divided into two–three rooms. The richest of these burials was of a nine-year-old child, which suggests status ascribed from birth and not achieved through life.

Thus, archaeological evidence points to the northward expansion of the Naqada culture of Upper Egypt in later Naqada II times, possibly as Naqada traders moved north and were followed by colonists. It is unknown why Ma‘adi was abandoned, but one possible explanation is intimidation by Naqada culture peoples. Later, in Naqada III times, when only Naqada ceramics are found in the north, control by a Naqada culture polity may have been established over all the region.

The socio-political processes of the expanding Naqada culture are also difficult to characterize from the mainly mortuary evidence. The highly differentiated Naqada II graves at cemeteries in Upper Egypt, and not in Lower Egypt, are probably symbolic of an increasingly hierarchical society. The highest status burials, such as in Cemetery T at Naqada, may represent competition and aggrandizement of local rulers, whose control and wealth increased as economic interaction and long-distance trade developed in Naqada II times (as evidenced in grave goods). Control of the distribution and production of prestigious craft goods, made of exotic imported materials (especially different stones from the Eastern Desert for beads and carved vessels), would also have reinforced the power of rulers in Predynastic centers in Upper Egypt.

Later Predynastic “statelets” (a term used by Bruce Trigger) may have existed at Hierakonpolis, Naqada, and Abydos. Barry Kemp (University of Cambridge) has suggested a model of Predynastic settlement development in Upper Egypt, from small egalitarian communities, to agricultural towns, to incipient city-states (based in part on evidence from Naqada’s South Town). According to Kemp, “proto-states” formed in Upper Egypt at Hierakonpolis, Naqada, and Abydos/This, with a hypothetical “proto-kingdom” of all of Upper Egypt followed by unification of the north and south by the 1st Dynasty. Such a model is logical, but there is very little archaeological evidence to demonstrate its validity. In Lower Egypt there is no evidence for a proto-state controlling all of the north, and such a polity is unlikely to have existed.

Names and seated kings carved in the broken top part of the Palermo Stone, a 5th-Dynasty king list (see 2.9), suggest a tradition that there had been rulers before the 1st Dynasty. Egyptologist John Baines (University of Oxford) has pointed out the long iconographic evidence for kingship, beginning with the form of what later becomes known as the Red Crown found on a Naqada I pot – long before kings or a kingdom/small state could have existed. But the paintings in the later Naqada II Decorated Tomb at Hierakonpolis may represent a “proto-kingship.” Developing along with complex
society in later Predynastic times was the institutionalization of kingship. The later unification of southern and northern Egypt was a creation of this kingship, the institutionalization of which helped maintain a well organized state with long-lasting control over a very large territory – that might otherwise have quickly collapsed.

Warfare may have played a significant role in the final stages of Egyptian unification, although sites in the Delta with destruction layers are lacking. But several carved artifacts that date to the late Predynastic/Dynasty 0 have scenes of warfare or its aftermath. The most famous (and latest) of these is the Narmer Palette, which dates to the end of Dynasty 0 (see Figure 5.5). Excavated at Hierakonpolis, this palette has scenes of the victorious king, dead enemies, and vanquished peoples or towns. There is some disagreement as to whether a specific historical event is represented by the scenes on the Narmer Palette. Günther Dreyer suggests that one scene on the palette, of Narmer in the White Crown of Upper Egypt smiting a bearded enemy, is the same as one on an inscribed ivory label from Cemetery B at Abydos (see below). Three scenes on this label possibly make up a “year name” from Narmer’s reign, during which the king won a victory over the Libyans. The subject matter depicted on the ivory label and the palette, which was probably donated to the Horus temple at Hierakonpolis, suggests the importance of warfare in the final phase of the Predynastic, especially for the consolidation of the early state.
In the Western Desert at Gebel Tjauti, John and Deborah Darnell (Yale University) have found a rock drawing of a scene of conflict, of a man wielding a mace and holding the rope of a bound captive. Dating to Naqada IIIA1, the rock drawing provides further evidence for the prevalence of warfare in late Predynastic times. Signs associated with this drawing possibly identify King Scorpion of Dynasty 0.

Alliance building would also have been important in warfare. The lack of very high status burials at Naqada in Naqada III times may suggest that Naqada’s power waned as Hierakonpolis, possibly the power base of the so-called “Followers of Horus,” and Abydos/This forged some kind of alliance. Except for the Royal Tomb at Naqada, Naqada became an insignificant site in Early Dynastic times, while Hierakonpolis and Abydos/This remained ideologically significant. Hierakonpolis was the cult center of Horus, the falcon-headed god symbolic of the living king. Abydos, which was the cult center of a local necropolis god, Khenitementiu, was the burial place of most of the Early Dynastic kings – and later became the cult center of the god Osiris, symbolic of the dead king.

Tombs excavated by Günther Dreyer at Abydos in Cemeteries U and B may be those of some of the rulers preceding the 1st Dynasty. Cemetery U contained mainly unlined
The Rise of Complex Society and Early Civilization

graves of Naqada II–III in the eastern section. Although robbed, one large tomb (U-j) in this cemetery still had much of its subterranean mud-brick structure, as well as wooden beams, matting, and mud-bricks from its roof. The tomb pit was divided into 12 chambers, including a burial chamber with evidence of a wooden shrine and an ivory scepter. Several hundred ceramic jars were excavated in this tomb, with the residue of (imported?) wine still in some of them.

Almost 200 small labels in Tomb U-j, originally attached to goods, were inscribed with the earliest known evidence in Egypt of writing (see Figure 5.6). Dreyer has hypothesized that some of these signs refer to royal estates, administrative districts, and towns, such as Buto and Bubastis in the Delta. The labels may have been attached to goods and materials coming from royal estates or other places associated with a ruler named Scorpion, who was probably buried in this tomb. Tomb U-j did not belong to the well known King Scorpion, whose decorated macehead was found at Hierakonpolis, and the tomb is at least 100 years earlier in date than those of the Dynasty 0 kings buried in Cemetery B at Abydos. Cemetery B, to the south of Cemetery U, is where Werner Kaiser identified the tomb complex of Aha, the first king of the 1st Dynasty, as well as double-chambered pit tombs of three kings of Dynasty 0: Iri-Hor, Ka, and Narmer. Kaiser’s identifications were confirmed by seal impressions and inscribed artifacts associated with these tombs.

Egypt was undoubtedly unified by the time of Dynasty 0, and the Abydos burials of the Dynasty 0 kings are the earliest clearly royal burials in Egypt. On the eve of the Dynastic period, kingship had emerged with control over a very large territorial state. Writing had already been invented by this time, as the Tomb U-j labels demonstrate.

Figure 5.6 Tags from Tomb U-j, Abydos. German Archeological Institute Cairo
The Early Dynastic State

5.6 Organization and Institutions of the Early Dynastic State

In his important article, “The Urban Revolution” (1950), archaeologist V. Gordon Childe listed traits of early civilizations, most of which characterize what had evolved in Egypt by ca. 3000 bc. Central to the Early Dynastic Egyptian state – and all subsequent dynasties – was the institution of kingship. The king ruled through an administrative bureaucracy, and writing was an important invention which greatly facilitated state administration. The capital of Memphis was founded at this time, although there was a concentration of sites in the general area before the 1st Dynasty. Administrative centers would also have been founded throughout the country – to facilitate governing the large territorial state. But urbanism of the type found in contemporaneous Sumer (in southern Mesopotamia), where there were competing city-states, was not characteristic of Early Dynastic Egypt. This was a moneyless society, and taxes were paid to the state in the form of agricultural surplus, which supported the king, his government, and full-time specialists, including court-sponsored craftsmen. Formal art styles developed, and court-centered art from this time onward becomes distinctively Egyptian in style.

Ancient Egyptian society was highly stratified. Such a society was legitimized by ideology, including the ideology of a king with a divine role – a form of state religion in which he was dependent on the gods. In Early Dynastic times there were cults of both state and local gods, which did not become syncretized with state religion until later. Perhaps most ideologically important from Early Dynastic times onward was the mortuary cult. Although large cult temples are well preserved from later times, in the Early Dynastic Period the most impressive monumental architecture of the state (and its highest officials) are tombs, at Abydos and Saqqara. Conscripted labor, as a form of tax payment to the state, was probably used to build such monuments. There is a lack of evidence for slavery until later, in the 2nd millennium bc, and even then slaves were not employed for large construction.

The stability of the Early Dynastic state suggests that institutions of control had been successfully implemented during Dynasty 0. Although there is no evidence for a full-time standing army until the Middle Kingdom, the king must have controlled a military that could be used when needed, internally as well as externally, the latter including expansion into neighboring regions (see 5.8). Evidence of increased long-distance trade is seen in Early Dynastic Egypt, and was probably controlled by the crown. Important for such trade was large-scale boat-building, to control communication and movement of goods and materials on the Nile, as well as long-distance trade that did not use overland routes. For such boats, cedar was imported from the Levant, which required state logistics.

Royal palaces have not been identified archaeologically for the Early Dynastic Period and the best evidence for kingship, symbolized in the mortuary cult, is the royal cemetery at Abydos, in the area called the “Umm el-Qa’ab,” which means “mother of
pots." First examined by Émile Amélineau, seven tomb complexes were later excavated by Flinders Petrie at the beginning of the 20th century. More recent investigations of the 1st-Dynasty royal tombs have been conducted by Günter Dreyer. Although for some time it was thought that North Saqqara was the burial place of the Early Dynastic kings, because of the large, niched mud-brick tombs there, Werner Kaiser and Barry Kemp have convincingly argued that Abydos was the real royal cemetery (see Figure 5.7). Stelae with royal names are found only at Abydos, and the combination of tomb with royal funerary “enclosure,” located closer to the edge of cultivation at Abydos, is much larger than any tomb at North Saqqara.

To the southwest of the three large chambers of Aha’s tomb complex (Cemetery B) at Abydos in the Umm el-Qa’ab cemetery are the large subterranean tombs of six kings (Djer, Djet, Den, Anedjib, Semerkhet, and Qa’a) and one queen, Merneith, Den’s mother who probably served as regent. Although the tombs were originally covered with
Box 5-D  State formation

Ancient Egypt is an important example of an early state, and as such it is often discussed in anthropological theories of socio-cultural development. Beginning in the mid-20th century, a number of theoretical works to explain the rise of complex society and early states/civilization appeared, including Julian Steward’s *Theory of Culture Change* (1955), Karl Wittfogel’s *Oriental Despotism* (1957), and Leslie White’s *Evolution of Culture* (1959). Steward’s and White’s books were particularly influential in the subsequent development in the 1960s of theory in processual archaeology.

A major theoretical issue of processual archaeology was state formation, which was neo-evolutionary – differentiated from earlier explanations of 19th-century anthropologists such as Lewis Henry Morgan, who proposed that human cultures had developed from a state of savagery to barbarism to civilization. Following the theory of Louis Binford (Southern Methodist University), a number of processual archaeologists sought to reconstruct social organization from archaeological data, especially according to Elman Service’s (neo-)evolutionary stages of bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states.

Morton Fried, a cultural anthropologist, proposed that there was a difference between pristine states, the earliest known ones which developed on their own out of simpler antecedents, and secondary states, which developed later in response to already existing and increasingly predatory states. Although city-states may have arisen somewhat earlier in southern Mesopotamia, the Early Dynastic Egyptian state is unquestionably an example of a pristine state – and one of the earliest known states in the world.

State formation in Egypt has been discussed by Michael Hoffman, whose excavations at Hierakonpolis uncovered evidence of craft specialization (pottery and bead production). Hoffman identified long-distance trade and exchange of goods as prime movers of socio-political complexity – significant factors in the formation of the Egyptian nation-state. Kathryn Bard’s analysis of burials at Naqada and Armant suggested increasing social complexity in the Naqada culture as a factor in the rise of the early state. While disagreeing with Wittfogel’s hypothesis that management of (large-scale) irrigation works provided the political structure of the early state, Karl Butzer wrote that the primeval (Predynastic) nomes, with their economic base of hydraulic agriculture, provided the political infrastructure for military ventures that led to state unification. Another perspective is offered by Fekri Hassan, who proposed that in later Predynastic times ideology and ritual systems, especially of a female-goddess cult, became increasingly important along with expanded political authority.

Since the 1970–80s, generalizing theories of state formation and socio-political change have been challenged by post-processual archaeologists (see 1.6), especially for their ecological and demographic determinism, and their tendency to ignore factors that cannot be quantified – such as ideology, social values, and the actions of individuals (agents). Whether generalizing theories from the social sciences can explain Egyptian phenomena has also been questioned by some Egyptologists. With more excavated data, much more is known at present about the particular circumstances of the rise of complex society and the early state in Egypt than in the mid-20th century, when generalizing theories for these phenomena in Egypt and elsewhere were being developed, and such theories may now be seen as having less universal explanatory force. But important insights may still be obtained from cross-cultural and comparative studies of early civilizations, as Bruce Trigger’s (2003) book, *Understanding Early Civilizations. A Comparative Study*, so elegantly demonstrates.
Figure 5.7  Plan of the Early Dynastic Royal Cemetery at Abydos. Source: W. M. Flinders Petrie, The Royal Tombs of the Earliest Dynasties. London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1901. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.
mounds, they had all been robbed in antiquity. Renovations were made during the Middle Kingdom, when Djer’s tomb was converted into a cenotaph for the god Osiris.

All of the 1st-Dynasty royal burials, including Aha’s in Cemetery B, were associated with small rectangular burials of men and women, who were probably palace retainers sacrificed at the time of the king’s burial, to serve him in the afterlife. In these subsidiary graves were burial goods, such as pots and carved stone vessels, but many also had crudely carved stelae with the names of the deceased in hieroglyphs. Dwarfs, who may have been royal attendants, and dogs were also found in some of these burials. Associated with Aha’s tomb complex were the burials of 33 young males, 20–25 years old, near which were the burials of seven young lions. Covering an area of ca. 70 meters × 40 meters, Djer’s tomb has the most subsidiary burials (338). After his burial the number of human sacrifices decreased and the practice disappeared in the 2nd Dynasty.

The earlier royal tombs in the Umm el-Qa’ab cemetery (of Djer and Djet) consist of large pits lined with mud-brick, with short walls perpendicular to the pit’s inside walls, which formed storage chambers. In the central part of these and the later royal tombs was a large wooden shrine for the burial. By the time of Den’s reign an external staircase was added, which made it possible to construct the entire tomb, including roofing, before the king’s burial. To prevent grave robbing, the staircase was blocked off by a portcullis, and slabs of black and red granite from Aswan lined the burial chamber – the earliest use of this very hard stone in a royal monument. In this tomb, which has recently been restored, the German archaeologists found the debris of many grave goods, including pots and their seal impressions, stone vessels, inscribed labels, carved ivory and ebony artifacts used for furniture and box inlays – and hundreds of huge wine jars.

In the later tomb of King Semerkhet, entered by a ramp and not a staircase, Petrie found the ramp saturated “three feet” deep with perfumed oil, still strongly scented after 5,000 years. The oil was most likely imported from Palestine. That such a large quantity of imported oil would be consumed in a royal burial suggests the importance of luxury goods for royal burials and long-distance trade on a large scale. Other examples providing evidence of such trade include the bracelets in gold, turquoise, lapis lazuli, and amethyst that Petrie found on a human forearm hidden in a wall of the tomb of Djer. Craft goods manufactured from exotic imported materials in these tombs, as well as a number of beautifully crafted grave goods which were better preserved in 1st-Dynasty tombs at North Saqqara, are also evidence of craft specialization, centered around the royal court and its highest officials.

The last king of the 1st Dynasty, Qa’a, also built a tomb at Abydos, but only two more royal tombs are found there, built by Peribsen and Khasekhemwy, the last two kings of the 2nd Dynasty. The location of the other royal burials of the 2nd Dynasty remains unknown, but the tombs of Hetepsekhemwy, Raneb, and Nynetjer may have been built at Saqqara, where their seal impressions have been found associated with two huge underground galleries to the south of Djoser’s Step Pyramid complex (3rd Dynasty). The third royal burial may have originally been in an underground gallery now within Djoser’s complex, where thousands of stone vessels of Early Dynastic date have been found. Why these 2nd-Dynasty royal burials were at Saqqara and not in the royal cemetery at Abydos cannot be explained. But perhaps it is better to ask why the tombs of Peribsen
and Khasekhemwy were at Abydos, when the evidence points to their 2nd-Dynasty royal predecessors, and 3rd-Dynasty successors, being buried at Saqqara.

One possible explanation for Peribsen’s burial at Abydos is political disruption during the reign of a king who only controlled southern Egypt, or perhaps Peribsen was a southern usurper. The writing of Peribsen’s name has been also been cited as evidence for such conflict.

The earliest convention of writing the royal name is in the format of the serekh, a rectangular design perhaps symbolizing the niched façade of a palace, with the king’s name in hieroglyphs above (see Figure 5.8). The serekh is usually surmounted by the Horus falcon, but Peribsen’s serekh is surmounted by a “Seth” animal/god (a fantastic animal with a broad tail), which suggests some change in the symbolism of kingship. Although specific events of this period can only be hypothesized, resolution of some kind of political conflict may have occurred under the next king, who first used the Horus name Khasekhem. Later this king’s serekh was surmounted by both the Horus falcon and the Seth animal, with his name changed to (the dual form) Khasekhemwy, which means “the two powers have appeared.” His epithet, “the two lords are at peace with him,” may symbolize a reunited country.

**Figure 5.8** 1st-Dynasty limestone stela of King Djet with his name framed by the royal serekh and surmounted by the Horus falcon, from his tomb at Abydos. The Art Archive/Musée du Louvre Paris/Dagli Orti
Khasekhemwy’s tomb at Abydos is very unlike the royal 1st-Dynasty tombs there. Consisting of a long “gallery,” it had 58 storage rooms along the sides and a burial chamber made with quarried limestone. Grave goods removed from this tomb by Amelineau included many copper tools and vessels, stone vessels (some with gold covers), and chert tools. Some pots were filled with real fruit and grain.

At Abydos the best examples of monumental architecture in the Early Dynastic Period are the royal funerary enclosures, called “fortresses” by earlier archaeologists working there.

Khasekhemwy’s complex, known as the Shunet el-Zebib, is the best preserved of these enclosures, which have been investigated since the 1980s by David O’Connor (Institute of Fine Arts, New York University). Built of mud-brick, the Shunet el-Zebib covers an area 124 meters × 56 meters, and has 10–11 meter-high walls still standing. Evidence of cult activities within this enclosure include the remains of a chapel, in which incense has been retrieved by the excavators, and beer jars left as offerings near the north gateway. A similar enclosure, also associated with Khasekhemwy, is located at Hierakonpolis, but its function is unknown. Given the scale of such monuments, conscripted labor (corvée) was probably used in their construction.

Djoser, whose reign followed Khasekhemwy’s, also built a niched enclosure for his Step Pyramid complex at Saqqara, which, like Khasekhemwy’s Abydos enclosure, had one entrance on the southeast. In the Umm el-Qa’ab cemetery at Abydos, Khasekhemwy’s tomb mound was enclosed in stone; it may have been the model for Djoser’s first tomb structure at Saqqara. Thus, the architectural evidence suggests the evolution of royal funerary monuments from the tombs and funerary enclosures at Abydos to the 3rd-Dynasty Step Pyramid complex at Saqqara. But Djoser’s complex represents a new order of royal power, controlling vast resources, both human and material, to construct the earliest monument built entirely of stone.

Fourteen boat burials were also discovered at Abydos by O’Connor’s team, just outside the northeast wall of Khasekhemwy’s enclosure. Buried in pits were shallow wooden boats 18–21 meters long, with mud-brick placed inside and around the outside of the hulls. Associated pottery is Early Dynastic in date. As these boat burials had no functional purpose, their meaning must have been symbolic, perhaps for the afterlife journey of the king.

At Abydos the paramount role of the king and the ideology of kingship are symbolized in the royal mortuary architecture. Located in a special cemetery that would later have cultic significance for the god Osiris, the royal 1st-Dynasty tombs symbolized a new political order, with a state religion headed by a king to legitimize this order. Widely held beliefs about death had resulted in the evolution of a mortuary cult, which first developed in Middle and Upper Egypt in the 4th millennium bc. By the 1st Dynasty the king was accorded the most elaborate form of burial in this mortuary cult, which was a politically motivated transformation of the belief system.

In terms of social organization, the Dynastic state was highly stratified, the best evidence for which is in the stratified classes of burials from the 1st Dynasty onward. In the Memphis area the burials also symbolize the administrative hierarchy, which formed the centralized government of the early state. The highest state officials were buried at North Saqqara, where English archaeologists, including Walter Emery, excavated a
number of large 1st-Dynasty tombs with elaborately niched mud-brick superstructures before and after World War II. Tomb 3357, of an unknown official of the reign of Aha, has a niched superstructure surrounded by a double mud-brick wall, 48.2 meters \times \ 22 \text{ meters} in area (see Figure 5.9). The inside of the superstructure was divided into 27 chambers, below which was the tomb pit with five large chambers. To the north of the tomb was a “model estate,” where small-scale rooms, three granaries, and a boat-grave, all in mud-brick, were found. With other large burials, North Saqqara continued to be the highest status place of non-royal burial in the 1st Dynasty, with much smaller contemporaneous tombs to the north in the Wadi Abusir. But in the 2nd Dynasty there is a much greater variety of tomb sizes at North Saqqara, from tombs as large as those of the 1st Dynasty to quite small ones, sometimes wedged in between the larger tombs.

Across the river from Saqqara is the Naqada III and Early Dynastic cemetery at Helwan, where more than 10,000 burials were excavated by Egyptian archaeologist Z. Y. Saad in the 1940s and 1950s and subsequently by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization. Excavations in what remained of this cemetery resumed in 1997 under the direction of Christiana Köhler (Australian Center for Egyptology, Macquarie University). Significantly, the Helwan tombs are smaller than the largest ones at North Saqqara; some had a carved offering scene over the entrance. Helwan was probably another cemetery for Memphis officials, but of lower status than those buried at North Saqqara.

A number of Early Dynastic cemeteries are found throughout Egypt. At Minshat Abu Omar in the Delta, eight large “elite” burials of the 1st and 2nd Dynasties have been excavated, as well as smaller graves of the period (see 5.5). Early Dynastic graves that were excavated by Petrie at Tarkhan contained contracted burials in pits that were roofed and lined with mud-brick or wood. The simplest burials of this period were in unlined pits, such as those in the Fort Cemetery at Hierakonpolis, and contained only a few pots. Such a variety of tomb and superstructure size and design, and number and type of grave goods, suggests many social levels in Egypt in the Early Dynastic Period, as well the importance of the mortuary cult for all social classes.

The large number of Early Dynastic burials in the Memphis area is also the best evidence for the emergence of a capital city there, and indirectly for urbanism, as settlement evidence at Memphis from most periods is not well preserved. In 1996 David Jeffreys (University College London) drilled cores in the ground to the east of the North Saqqara cemetery, where the early city would probably have been located. Results suggest that although there may be undisturbed layers of Early Dynastic occupation, they are buried under the water table, requiring expensive excavation techniques.

As the Early Dynastic state consolidated its control throughout Egypt, administrative centers would have been founded to facilitate state control. At Hierakonpolis, in the ancient town (Kom el-Ahmar), an elaborately niched mud-brick gateway
was excavated in 1969 and interpreted as the gateway to an Early Dynastic “palace.” Possibly this was a royal administrative center, and this type of architecture was symbolic of the early state. At Elephantine a fortified wall was built in the 1st Dynasty, while the settlement was later surrounded by a fortified wall. This was an Egyptian town, which by then had become the state’s southern border.

Cult centers of deities were undoubtedly located within Early Dynastic towns, but, like the towns, have not been well preserved. Scenes of temples or shrines are found on inscribed labels from 1st-Dynasty tombs, and some inscribed stone vessels found in Djoser’s pyramid complex were taken from earlier cult centers. There is also some archaeological evidence of early cult centers, of both local and state gods. In the Delta at Buto mud-brick buildings excavated by Thomas von der Way have been identified as an Early Dynastic royal residence complex next to which was some kind of a cultic building dating to Narmer’s reign. At Coptos in Upper Egypt Petrie excavated three limestone figures of a local fertility god (Min?), which probably date to late Predynastic times (Naqada III), beneath the floor of the later temple of Isis and Min. From pieces in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford a statue originally over 4 meters high can be modeled: its size alone suggests a ceremonial context. In the far south at Elephantine another cult center of a local deity was excavated by German archaeologists. Beneath an 18th-Dynasty temple of the goddess Satet was a very simple early shrine, consisting of several rectangular mud-brick walls within an enclosed space formed naturally by granite boulders. Some of the votive figurines found beneath the later temple were Early Dynastic in style.

Evidence of an Early Dynastic state cult center comes from Hierakonpolis. In the late 19th century British archaeologists James Quibell and Frederick Green excavated within an 18th-Dynasty temple complex at Hierakonpolis, where they found several ritual deposits of earlier artifacts, probably removed from an early temple. In or near the so-called “Main Deposit” (see Figure 5.10), were the Narmer Palette and macehead, the macehead of King Scorpion, and inscribed stone vessels and a statuette of Khasekhem. Small votive figurines, of humans and animals, were also found along with hundreds of decorated ivories (mostly of hippopotamus canines), including one inscribed with Narmer’s name and another with Den’s. Also located in the same area were the remains of an early temple, consisting of a low oval revetment of sandstone blocks, ca. 42 meters × 48 meters, filled with sterile sand brought from the desert. Although in Dynastic times Hierakonpolis/Nekhen became less important as a place, it was the cult center for the god Horus, associated with the living king. It is significant that Narmer’s Palette and macehead were found there: they most likely were royal donations to a cult center that was ideologically associated with the state from Dynasty 0 onward.

### 5.7 Early Writing and Formal Art

Hieroglyphic writing was invented in Egypt long before the 1st Dynasty, but its earliest stages are unknown (see 2.2). The earliest known writing is found on labels from the late Predynastic Tomb U-j at Abydos (see Figure 5.6). Early Dynastic writing is greatly developed in relation to the earliest hieroglyphs, and it was an innovation that must have been of much use to the early state for economic and administrative purposes.
Figure 5.10 Location of the "Main Deposit," Hierakonpolis. Source: J. E. Quibell, F. W. Green, *Hierakonpolis II*. London: Egyptian Research Account, 1902, plate 72.
Hieroglyphs appear on royal seal impressions, labels, and potmarks, to identify goods and materials of the king or state. Titles and names of officials are also recorded. Most of the evidence for early writing comes from a mortuary context, and its use was mainly associated with the king and state.

Inscribed labels from the Abydos royal tombs of Dynasty 0 and the 1st Dynasty contain the earliest evidence of recording “year names” of a king’s reign, and it has been suggested that this represents a royal annals system. While there is no archaeological evidence of state taxation based on an agricultural surplus, such as state granaries, recording years by a king’s reign would also have been useful to officials who collected taxes and levies. Beginning with Dynasty 0, inked inscriptions on pots from the Abydos tombs imply tax collection (of cereals) from Upper and Lower Egypt, and in the 1st Dynasty the treasury is named (first the “white house” and later the “red house”). The king also directly owned large land-holdings throughout Egypt, and the names of these agricultural estates are preserved in seal impressions and on inscribed vessels. Although this evidence is from the royal tombs, these estates or others probably provided for the king in life as well as in death.

Early writing also appears with scenes on royal commemorative art, such as the Narmer Palette, and from the beginning writing is integrated with representational art. In the royal commemorative art of Dynasty 0 a formal art style is also seen, which in its most formal manifestations was centered on the works of the king and his court. Specific conventions developed in royal art: the king is always shown in a larger scale than all other humans, scenes were arranged in rows (called “registers” by Egyptologists), and the human torso was drawn frontally, but with the head, arms, and legs in profile.

Writing (and graphic art) that expressed beliefs in the mortuary cult later achieved a much fuller expression in tombs and pyramid complexes of the Old Kingdom. Administrative documents are not known until the Old Kingdom, and the use of writing in administration in the Early Dynastic Period can only be implied – mainly from labels, inscriptions, and sealings on tomb goods, and the invention of papyrus.

5.8 The Expanding State

Military control of the unified state did not stop at Egypt’s borders, and there is evidence of expanding Egyptian control to the south (Lower Nubia) and northeast (northern Sinai and southern Palestine) in Dynasty 0 and the early 1st Dynasty. One Egyptian motivation was economic, to control the trade of desired raw materials from Palestine and regions to the south of Lower Nubia (see 3.9).

Egyptian serekhs of Dynasty 0 (mostly Narmer’s) and the 1st Dynasty have been found on jars, most of which are made of Egyptian clays, at camp sites in the northern Sinai located by Israeli archaeologist Eliezer Oren. Similar potmarks are also found in southern Canaan, such as the site of Ain Besor. In stratum III of the Ain Besor excavations, 90 fragments of hieroglyphic seal impressions of Egyptian kings were found in association with a mud-brick building. The seals were impressed in local clay by officials of 1st-Dynasty kings (Djer, Den, Anedjib, and probably Semerkhet). Pottery in this
stratum was mainly Egyptian, especially fragments of ceramic molds for making bread. Such evidence suggests Egyptian officials of the state who occupied what may have been a kind of trade emporium through much of the 1st Dynasty. Alan Schulman, who analyzed the seals, suggested that in the 1st Dynasty Ain Besor was an Egyptian border-control point, such as those known there from much later times (recorded in two Ramessid papyri). But Egyptian control of southern Palestine did not last into the 2nd Dynasty, when such evidence is no longer found there. Egyptians were probably unable to continue to assert their authority there as the fortified Early Bronze Age cities of indigenous Canaanite peoples expanded their control over the region.

In Lower Nubia, the indigenous A-Group culture disappears in the archaeological record by later in the 1st Dynasty, which most likely coincided with Egyptian military penetration there. Rock art at Gebel Sheikh Suliman near Wadi Halfa (the Second Cataract) of later Predynastic times claims an Egyptian military victory. Intimidated by Egyptian forces, A-Group peoples eventually left this area of the Nile, but where they went is unknown. Although evidence is lacking for Egyptian settlements in Lower Nubia during the Early Dynastic Period, their presence there at Buhen (at the Second Cataract) is well attested in the Old Kingdom. Indigenous peoples did not occupy Lower Nubia again until late in the Old Kingdom, when the earliest C-Group burials are found – coinciding with loss of direct Egyptian control over the region (see 6.12).

5.9 Who Were the Ancient Egyptians? Physical Anthropology

Archaeological evidence of Egyptian prehistory and the Early Dynastic Period has shown much interaction between Egypt and Nubia (and farther south), and Egypt and southwest Asia. Interaction probably took several different forms, such as migrations of people, inter-marriage, movements of goods and materials, and movements of ideas – all difficult issues to sort out for explanations of changes in the past. Thus, there is no simple answer for “Who were the Egyptians who founded the early state and created Egyptian civilization?” This question was first asked by archaeologists working in Egypt in the early 20th century and continued to be debated by others in the late 20th century, including African-Americans.

Physical anthropology does not classify human remains by “race,” and there are no good criteria, observable or genetic, that can be used to separate all individuals of one “race” from another. Labeling the ancient Egyptians as “white” (Caucasoid) or “black” (Negroid) is therefore not useful. In Egyptian texts from later periods foreigners from countries and regions outside of Egypt are named, and in art they are depicted with different styles of dress, hair, beards, etc. Thus, it is perhaps best to consider who the Dynastic Egyptians were from their own perspective, which was cultural: peoples of the lower Nile Valley under the political authority of the pharaonic state who probably spoke a single language. The ancient Egyptians were adapted, both culturally and physically, for life in this unique environment, with its great agricultural potential. The longevity of pharaonic culture is testament to its successful adaptation there – as well as its ability to adapt to changing conditions through time.